

MISTRESS NANCIEBEL



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Endpapers.



“Come and see, daddy.”



**MISTRESS
NANCIEBEL**

◦
BY

◦
**ELSIE JEANETTE
OXENHAM**

◦
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NOTE

To the best of my knowledge, the family of the Madryns of Madryn has been extinct for about two hundred and fifty years. If any descendants should remain, I can only apologize for the liberties taken with their name, which, of course, exists to this day in mountain and estate. But the original owners were still in possession certainly within twenty-five years of the date of this story.

ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER THE FIRST	
A GREAT DAY	<u>13</u>
CHAPTER THE SECOND	
ILL NEWS FROM LONDON	<u>26</u>
CHAPTER THE THIRD	
THE LADY OF THE GREY HORSE	<u>35</u>
CHAPTER THE FOURTH	
MY LADY'S TIDINGS	<u>45</u>
CHAPTER THE FIFTH	
'JOHN-O'-PEACE' COMES HOME	<u>62</u>
CHAPTER THE SIXTH	
CONCERNING PETTICOATS	<u>80</u>
CHAPTER THE SEVENTH	
A NIGHT WITH A NIGHTMARE	<u>93</u>
CHAPTER THE EIGHTH	
A LONELY SHORE	<u>105</u>
CHAPTER THE NINTH	
BLACK COWS AND PRISON WALLS	<u>118</u>
CHAPTER THE TENTH	
STRANGERS IN THE LAND	<u>128</u>
CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH	
DISAPPOINTMENT—AND HOPE	<u>144</u>
CHAPTER THE TWELFTH	
MARSLI MADRYN	<u>158</u>
CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH	
THE MASTER OF MADRYN	<u>171</u>
CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH	
THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD	<u>183</u>
CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH	
ALL AMONG THE BARLEY	<u>199</u>
CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH	
ONE NIGHT AT MADRYN	<u>212</u>
CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH	
THE GREAT FROST	<u>221</u>
CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH	
MARSLI'S GARDEN	<u>234</u>

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH	
NANCIEBEL'S FEAST OF JOY	<u>242</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH	
GILBERT'S OPPORTUNITY	<u>255</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST	
ONE NIGHT AT SEA	<u>265</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND	
THE TERROR	<u>278</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD	
FACING THE TERROR	<u>288</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH	
FIGHTING THE TERROR	<u>295</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH	
THE LADY AT THE DOOR	<u>305</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH	
MY LADY GOES HOME	<u>316</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH	
AFTERWARDS	<u>327</u>
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH	
THE END OF THE WAR	<u>339</u>

CHAPTER THE FIRST

A Great Day

It was the twenty-ninth of May, and therefore a most important day. Not only was it Restoration Day and the King's birthday, but—of vastly more consequence to all at Summerton—it was also the day which had been honoured by the first appearance in the world of Mistress Nanciebel. And Nanciebel was such an important little person in every way, that the fact of her birthday was not likely to be outweighed by any number of later events on the same date.

One birthday, four years ago, she and her little maid Constancy—one resplendent in cherry-coloured silk, the other a demure little figure in soft grey and white—had led the babies up the hill to see the bonfires on all the heights around, because the King had come to his own again. But Nanciebel, at that time only twelve years old, had hinted that there might be some connection between the celebrations and that far more important date, her birthday, and was not at all inclined to allow the rejoicings which she expected as her right to lapse in any way, because his Majesty happened to have chosen to be born upon that same day also. In fact, she had thought at one time that some other date should have been chosen for Restoration Day, so that the two great events should not clash, but had now become reconciled to the position, and considered that those other matters which so deeply concerned far-away London did but shed additional brilliancy on the celebrations at Summerton.

So now Nanciebel was sixteen, and determined to have as merry a birthday as she could contrive under the circumstances. For with father and brother away in London—a very unusual state of affairs—Nanciebel found the whole burden of preparation and entertainment thrown upon her own shoulders. She was more than ready to rise to the occasion; was enjoying it, in fact, mightily; but there was no denying that Gilbert was useful in many ways on birthdays, and Daddy was always missed if he had to be away for a single night. So it looked as if this particular birthday was to be shorn of some of its gaiety, though nothing which depended on Nanciebel or Constancy would be lacking.

The cousins were to ride over from Ryde Park in the afternoon for tennis on the lawn. The girls would willingly have invited half the neighbourhood, but Sir John, before leaving home, had restricted them to relations, for some reason unknown to Nanciebel, but sure to be good and sufficient since it came from him. Later in the day, there would be the usual gathering of tenants and servants, and dancing in the house and on the lawn.

And after all, now that the great day had come, it was quite a sufficiently serious business to be entertaining Katherine and Fred. For Kate, several year's Nanciebel's senior, was inclined to be critical, and even scornful, of the household management of such a child as Nanciebel, and could not understand that little cousins must grow into big cousins, and that sixteen was very nearly "grown-up." They did say that away in London girls of that age were thinking of marriage, but Nanciebel in the country could hardly believe that, and did not mean even to dream of such things for years yet. On that point, indeed, Cousin Fred had his own opinions, and so had Constancy, but her ideas differed greatly from his, in this as in everything, and Nanciebel neither knew nor cared what either thought, and put such serious matters into the very far-away future.

It was a thousand pities Fred could not have had the sense to decline the invitation, since he knew Gilbert was not at home to talk to him; and what he was going to do all the afternoon she had no idea. But no doubt he would make himself useful at tennis, and for the rest of the time—"He can talk to the children!" she laughed.

Constancy was helping her to dress, for the great occasion demanded a new gown, and new gowns required careful arrangement at first. This gown was of rich pale blue, slashed and strapped with white satin and laced with white ribbons, cut low to show the smooth white neck, and finished with wide white collar and turned-back cuffs of richest lace. Nanciebel looked at it as it lay on the bed.

"The prettiest I ever had! Kate herself will have to admit it. 'Tis a gown fit for the King's Court, I do believe! Connie, *aren't* you sorry you're a Quaker?"

Constancy laughed, and set her smooth white collar straight.

"Nay, I would not give the memory of my father for all these pretty things of mine."

"Ah, well! Of course you're glad to do what he wanted! I'd wear whatever my daddy asked me to, if it was only white sheets. But—oh, I am so glad he doesn't think pretty gowns are wicked!"

"They are saying he's not far from becoming one of us now-a-days."

"Only in the matter of peace!" Nanciebel said quickly. "He does hate wars, and so do we all, but in nothing else——"

"I have heard them in the village call him that name again—since he began to speak against this new war."

"What, 'John-o'-Peace'?" Nanciebel laughed. "Well, and a very good name too! He might have many worse. I wonder what was his errand up to London just now! Something mightily important, or he would not have left us alone to-day. But 'tis idle to wonder. We have done enough of that. Help me to dress, Connie, my dear, and then I must run out into the garden again. I have forgot to cut flowers for the tables to-night. You shall set them in order in the dishes while we are playing on the lawn."

"'Forgetful Jenny'! That's my name for thee, Nanciebel."

Nanciebel laughed, as she unlaced her morning gown.

"Don't scold, Connie! It's my birthday, and——"

"And here is thy necklace never threaded yet! 'Tis a week since thee broke it——"

"Is it not done? Now that's a pity, isn't it, for I had thought to wear it——"

"Pity!" cried Constance indignantly. "Pity! And thee said thee would thread it at once, or I would have had it done in half-an-hour! And all thee can say is 'Pity!' when 'tis thyself has left it undone! Nanciebel, 'tis time thee did begin to grow more heedful. Art nearly a woman—sixteen!"

"Only just sixteen, Connie dear! My birthday is not many hours old yet. And I am not going to be a woman for a long time——"

"Nay, verily, that is true!"

"Come, Connie, my dear, help me lace my gown, and say no more about it."

Constancy sighed ruefully. "I do my best to teach thee wisdom, mistress, but 'tis a thankless task as yet——"

Nanciebel nodded sympathetically. "And I fear is like to remain so! I was born a heedless lassie, my dear, so if you love me, Connie, you must just try——"

"Yes, yes! Thee has tried that trick before—to wheedle me out of my scolding by soft words, when thee knows thee has very well deserved it!"

Nanciebel laughed again, and arranged the heavy brown curls which framed her face so that they covered her bare neck but did not fall across her cheeks. Constancy laid the little lace hood lightly on the back of her head, and gave a final touch to the soft, thick locks. Then she sighed.

“Nanciebel! Nanciebel! Here is that hole in this lace never mended yet, and thee did promise——”

“Dearie me! ’Tis not for nothing my brother calls me ‘Heedless Nan,’ and my father his ‘Careless Lady’! And even my dear Constancy calls me ‘Forgetful Jenny’! Well-a-day! I did forget it quite! I’m sorry, Connie, my dear! But, indeed, no one will see it. I am not going to stand on my head——”

“Thee will just stand now while I stitch it!” Constancy said severely. “Verily, ’tis well I am here to dress thee, Mistress Nanciebel.”

“If you do find so many things at fault, I will bolt the door next time,” laughed Nanciebel.

“Then shall I fetch a ladder and enter by the window. Thee is not yet fit to dress thyself,” Constancy rejoined promptly. “Thee should wear a plain grey gown like mine, then all these many trifles would not trouble thee.”

Nanciebel sniffed. “No Quaker dresses for me! I am too fond of pretty gowns, and gay colours, and lace, and ribbons, and jewels—though I have not many of them yet——”

“Thee has too many for so young a maid——”

“Thanks, my dear! I know ’tis very neatly stitched. ’Twas pity to find it out just at this moment, was it not?” and Nanciebel, with this parting shot, opened the door to escape.

“Pity! Thee did know very well——” Constancy was beginning again, but Nanciebel was running down the corridor, holding up her long velvet skirts and calling to the children.

These had always been their relations, since Constancy came to Summerton eight years before. The child of Quaker parents, who had died for their faith—the father of fever in prison, the mother a year later—Constancy had always been a thoughtful child, too old for her age, rather prim and precise, till daily companionship with Nanciebel taught her to laugh, and play, and sing as became her years. She had been a sad-faced, soberly-clad girl of twelve when Sir John, having known and respected her father in London, brought her to Summerton after her mother’s death, and presented her to his little daughter as maid, companion, and friend.

Nanciebel was then only eight years old, and the difference in their ages, with the natural results of their upbringing, had determined their relationship at once. Constancy took up an elder-sisterly position towards her little mistress, and, though loving her with all her heart and delighting in her growing beauty, was fully alive to her shortcomings, and lectured her severely on her faults, in the hope, as she had often explained, of curing them. And Nanciebel, returning her love with interest, respected and looked up to her in everything, and took her scoldings in good part, but forgot them as soon as they were spoken.

Constancy was now a tall, sweet-faced girl of twenty, with deeply-thoughtful blue eyes, and a firm little mouth and chin which hinted that her father’s resolution was not wanting in her also. She kept rigidly to her grey gown and her quaint, strict forms of speech, and was proud of these distinctive marks of her faith. But she had come to see, from her residence with the Seymours, that these things were not necessarily right, any more than Nanciebel’s silks and velvets, lace and jewels, were wrong in themselves. She delighted in rich and dainty clothing for her mistress, though she could not be tempted to discard her own simple garments, because of the memory of the mother who had worn them and the father who would have wished her to do the same.

In everything Nanciebel relied upon her, and very many things which would have been left undone by the careless little mistress were remembered by the maid, who, however, never failed to make such occasions the subject of a scolding, which, Nanciebel was assured, was all for her good. And though Nanciebel nominally ruled the house, it was Constancy who supplied the necessary forethought, and much of the actual housekeeping devolved upon her.

“Where I should be without you, Connie, I really do not know!” Nanciebel had said many times.

“Thee would go dinnerless and supperless for a day or two, and then thee would remember such little matters next time. ’Twould verily be good for thee to think for thyself for a while,” Constancy would retort.

She stood listening as Nanciebel ran laughing down the corridor, then turned back into the bedchamber, to pick up the fallen garments and to thread the broken necklace.

Nanciebel went gaily down the big staircase, holding up her wide skirts and singing an old song at the top of her voice.

“*‘Wee bee souldiers three,
Pardonnez-moi, je vous en prie,
Lately come from the Low Countrie,
With never a penny o’ monie.’*”

“Come, children! Joyce! Charlie! Where are you? Come and be ‘souldiers three’ with me, and help to carry my flowers,” and Joyce came running to meet her, while Charlie followed more slowly.

For there had been trouble that morning, when Master Charlie discovered that, just because it was Nanciebel’s birthday, he was required to present himself with clean hands and face, well-brushed curls and best suit, to do his share in welcoming the guests. He was only ten, and would much have preferred remaining out of sight, with the dogs about the stables, or catching snails among the cabbages, and was not at all consoled by Nanciebel’s reminder that he was the only man she had to help her, so that he must come and talk to Cousin Fred.

Joyce, of course, was only too pleased to put on her best gown, and was quite prepared to sit in state on the lawn and talk company talk with her best company manners, as if she had been twenty-five instead of only five without the twenty. When Nanciebel had deplored the fact that she was left quite alone to do the honours, Joyce had promptly reminded her, “There’s two of us. There’s me,” and was distinctly looking forward to the occasion.

She had never lacked confidence in herself and her own powers. When she had hardly learned to speak, she had one day announced to a visitor who asked her name, “I’m Joyce. I’m ‘Sweet Joy,’”—this being a quotation from the remark of some indiscreet elder. And though she would not have been quite so outspoken now that she had learned the meaning of the words and the propriety of silence in such matters, her assurance and self-confidence suggested that she had not changed her opinion. She was deeply ashamed of “that baby talk,” which, as is the way in families, had never been forgotten, and Charlie could not tease her more than by reminding her of her indiscretion.

“You’re Joyce. You’re ‘Sweet Joy.’ At least, you *say* you are, you know!” he would cry mockingly, and Joyce would hurl herself upon him and thump him with little clenched fists, till Constancy had to separate them.

“You’re only a great long-legged boy, and nobody could *want* to call you anything nice!” would be Joyce’s parting shot.

But Joyce was sweet enough, with her round baby face and short fair curls clustering under a little silk hood, to excuse any one who would have echoed her baby speech, and the elder folk could not forget it.

“Where’s my baby? Where’s Sweet Joy?” Sir John would cry, as he entered the big doorway, and Joyce would stamp a tiny foot as she ran to greet him.

“Come along, Joyce! Come along, Sweet Joy! What kind of flowers can we find?” said Nanciebel, as they crossed the lawn. “Bring the basket, Charlie! Now what shall it be to-day?”

“Daffies,” said Sweet Joy.

“Aren’t any, silly. They’re all done years ago. Haven’t been any daffies for a month now —”

“Then why did you say——?” began Joyce sharply.

“Have pansies, Nanciebel. They’re so like cats.”

“No, no, Charlie, they’re too small. I want something to fill the bowls and tall dishes.”

She paused by the tulip bed, but that was no use, for of course the tulips were over.

But it was natural for a Seymour of Summerton to pause by the tulip bed, for the fortunes of the house rested largely upon them. Sir James Seymour, grandfather of Nanciebel, after purchasing his baronetcy from the King, had sought some means of augmenting his already considerable wealth. It was the time of the tulip mania, when Dutch bulbs were just beginning to receive attention, and fortunes were being rapidly made, and as rapidly lost, in speculation in the sale and purchase of tulips. Sir James had been very successful in his merchandise, and had not allowed himself to be carried away by the prevailing excitement. He had succeeded in withdrawing before the newly-made fortune was lost again, and had handed on to his son not only his title, but the very practical results of his shrewd bargaining.

John Seymour, at that time only a youth and studying at Oxford, had taken no part in his father’s speculations, and had not been greatly interested in them. He had, indeed, somewhat disapproved of some of Sir James’s methods, but had felt himself too young and inexperienced to make any remonstrance. When, some years later, the gathered wealth became his, it was too late to determine whether any wrong had been done in the making of it, so he had accepted it and had done his best to turn it to good purpose.

The gardens at Summerton and Ryde Park had been enriched by Sir James with specimens of the finest varieties Holland could produce, and the collection of tulips, hyacinths, and narcissi was a great sight in the spring. Nanciebel was very proud of her garden, and loved the plants, from dry bulbs to pale shooting leaves, from white rootlets to glorious finished flowers, with a devotion Sir James had never known. To him they had only been merchandise; to her they were treasures and friends. She loved them all, but the hyacinths came first in her affections, because of their sweet scent; then the early narcissi because they came first in the year; then all the daffodils, because of their beauty of form and freedom of growth; and last of all she loved the tulips for their rich colour, but found them too prim and stately to be favourites.

“But I could never cut them,” she said, as she stood with the children looking at the green tulip bed. “It seems to me wicked to cut from a plant which only bears one flower. One, and then it is over for the year! I could never cut that one to wither in the house—not even if it were the sweetest of the hyacinths. And, anyway, there are no tulips now. So come, children, find something else!”

Her choice fell at last upon the lilac bushes which surrounded the tennis lawn and were weighted with flowers. It would be kindness to relieve them of a few branches! So she filled

the children's outstretched hands, and sent them off to Constancy.

“And bring back my big green bowl, Charlie, and, Sweet Joy, you bring a jug of water to fill it, and we'll set it on the table over there, where we shall want to sit.”

The cousins from Ryde Park arrived ten minutes later, and Fred Seymour, as he crossed the lawn, saw a sight which repaid him for his ride—a stretch of velvet turf, a wall of flowering hedge, a low garden table, and Nanciebel, in her pale blue gown, bending over a green bowl, her bare arms lovingly surrounding the flowers as she arranged sprays and branches of white lilac, her curls falling across her cheeks from under the little lace hood and covering her forehead and bare throat, her eyes intent upon the flowers—and Sweet Joy, in her long white gown, and Charlie, in his velvet suit, standing by, watching, advising, and criticizing.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

III News from London

After all, Kate refused to play tennis. She had intentionally chosen to ride over to Summertown, and to play in her riding-habit was out of the question. She reclined in a big chair, her great plumed hat on her knee, and insisted that her brother and Nanciebel should play while she looked on.

Joyce promptly seated herself in a prim high-backed chair by her side, and, assuming her best company manners, prepared for polite conversation. Charlie set himself to gather up the balls when they fell beyond the lawn, and to wait upon his sister, like the little courtier he was trained to be.

“’Tis very warm for the time of year, is it not, Cousin Kate?” remarked Joyce demurely. “’Tis a fine season for the farmers, I have heard them say. Will the hay harvest be good, do you think? The fields should be ready for cutting in a month, or even less, maybe, if this weather holds.”

Kate had been watching Nanciebel with deeply thoughtful eyes. She awoke from her dream, and smiled slightly as she glanced at the prim little figure in the high straight chair.

“Yes, they say it is a good year, Joyce.”

“Nanciebel and your brother are well matched, are they not?” proceeded the five-year-old, quoting from the speech of one of her elders.

“Very well.”

“Is not that a fine new gown of Nanciebel’s? ’Tis quite new to-day,” volunteered Joyce, and Kate smiled slightly again.

“So I see. ’Tis very pretty, and suits her well.”

“Yes, does it not? And what is the latest news from London, cousin? I—I—er—do not trouble to read the newsletter every week, and then you do have it sooner than we do,” and Joyce felt that she had rescued herself skilfully from an awkward predicament.

Kate began to laugh, and then, the game being over, Nanciebel came up, racquet in hand, to rest.

“Well, Mistress Joyce, how goes the world with you?” queried Fred.

“Oh, very well, I thank you, cousin! And with you?” she asked politely.

“She’s still ‘Sweet Joy,’ you know,” cried Charlie cruelly.

This was too great a strain for Joyce’s company manners, and they deserted her instantly. She sprang down from her high chair and flung herself upon him, pummelling him with her fists, fuming, almost crying.

Constance appeared suddenly, and bore them away to fight it out in private. She made it her business to be always close at hand, though out of sight, for fear her mistress should call her, and was often able to appear as if by magic at critical moments such as this.

“What news do you hear from your father, Nanciebel?” Katherine asked, when the disappearance of Sweet Joy in Constance’s arms had restored peace.

“None at all. I greatly wish he would send a letter! Or at least Gilbert might do so.”

“And what do you think of it all?”

“Think of what?” and Nanciebel turned to her quickly.

"This errand of his to town. Do you mean to say, child," as Nanciebel began to look startled, "that you do not know what he is at? Did he not tell you before he left home?"

"He told me nothing. He said I should perhaps know when he came home," and Nanciebel looked troubled.

"When he comes home! Yes, truly, if he ever does come safely home. Sometimes I do think he scarcely deserves to! He will bring us all into trouble one of these days."

"I do not know what you are speaking of," said Nanciebel, looking rather frightened. "I think I ought not to listen, since he did not tell me himself. And yet—what do you mean by what you say? You have no right to speak of him so."

"If he has not told you himself, I am going to tell you now," Kate said, with decision. "You ought to know, and if I tell you, then you can be thinking what you will say to him when he does come. Maybe he will listen to you."

Nanciebel, leaning on the table, drew the bowl of lilac towards her, and bent over it to hide her frightened face.

"I am not sure if you ought to tell me. But—is he in any danger?"

"Like enough. All London must be talking of him. He is even spoken of in the newsletter, which came to us to-day. You have not seen it yet, of course. My father is most desperately angry."

"But what is it all about? We knew nothing——"

"This new war, to be sure! You have heard talk of it? And you know very well——"

"I know he hates the very thought of war, and holds that it is wrong and wicked, as of course we all do——"

"Oh no, we don't, fair cousin! There you are very far wrong," said Fred quickly.

"All that I care for or respect at all do think so!" cried Nanciebel. "And there is not going to be another war! We have naught to fight about just now."

"Oh, have we not? Many of us think these Dutch fellows are grown over proud and impudent, and do need a lesson, and we long to give them one. We are not all half Quakers, Mistress Nanciebel."

"Nor am I! Nor my father! Nor any of us! But we know that a needless war is a wicked thing."

"That is what the Quakers say. We shall see you in a grey gown and white hood one of these days. 'Twill not become you half so well as that blue velvet dress, Nanciebel," mocked Kate. "Shall you say 'thee' and 'thou'? That girl of yours will teach you. Maybe she has taught you already."

Nanciebel rose suddenly, her face rather white, for it cost her an effort to speak out.

"I cannot talk with you if you must sneer at the Quakers, Kate. All of them that I have known have been very good people, and Constance Browne is one of the very best of them, and has been like my sister these many years. I cannot hear you mock her or her people."

"Nay, now, do not get so hot, cousin!" laughed Fred.

"But, Nanciebel—sit down, child! Do not be foolish! You know what this Constance's father was. He died in prison."

"Yes, and she is proud of it, and so am I. He was there because he did not fear to speak out against the Lord Protector's wars abroad. He made protest against them, and——"

"And he taught Uncle John to do the same. 'Twould have been better if he had never heard of the people."

“My father thought John Browne a good man and brave—as he proved himself, by the way he upheld what was right. But my father would not speak against those wars, because they were needful, he believed, for the sake of those poor suffering folk abroad. But this Dutch war is very different. It is needless and wicked, and there is only pride and greed as the reason for it. I have heard him say so many times.”

“’Twas that man Browne who taught him to think so, most assuredly. And now he is like to follow him to prison, if he is not there by this time.”

“You have not yet told me what it is all about,” said Nanciebel, sitting down again and bending her pale face over the bowl of lilac, as she waited to hear the worst.

“Why, child, he has gone up to London to make protest against the war. You know he has many friends there, both at the Court and in the Parliament, and he has gone to try to make them hear him. He has been making every one talk of him and these foolish things he is saying—speaking of war as wicked and sinful and needless, and suchlike folly, when every one is hot against these upstart Dutch, and they say the Court is mad for war! The newsletter even doth write of him—you have not seen it yet. ’Tis written there—‘There is much talk in the city of one Sir John Seymour, who doth speak much against the Dutch war as needless and sinful, and many do say he is of the Quakers.’ He will have himself into trouble, and perhaps us all also.”

Nanciebel looked up. Her eyes were very bright, and there was sudden colour in her cheeks.

“But he is right! And he does not fear to speak out what is right. The war is needless, and therefore wrong. He has the courage to say it, and I am proud of him. If—if there should be trouble—if he should go to prison, like Connie’s father, I shall go to London and join him there. He is in the right in this matter, and I will stand beside him, whatever it may mean.”

“You’re a little fool,” said Kate roughly, while Fred looked at her amusedly and then began to laugh. “See now, Nanciebel, this is what you must do. If he comes home—and like enough they will send him home to shut his mouth——”

“If they can!” cried Nanciebel defiantly. “If I know him at all, he will not be silenced. He will stay there, and speak out.”

“You must talk to him,” said Kate, with decision. “Maybe he will listen to you. For all our sakes, you must try, Nanciebel. He will ruin us all. You must beg him, for your sake and the children’s, to give up this foolishness. Think a moment! What is to become of you all? If he goes to prison, all this”—with a glance round the quiet gardens and old grey house—“will perhaps be confiscated and you turned out. You must make him be silent, for your own sake, Nanciebel.”

“And do you think I would ask it? Haven’t I said I’m proud of him? Do you think it’s likely——”

“But,” cried Kate, hastily beginning again on another tack, “but it’s so useless, Nanciebel! Who is going to listen to him? What good can he do?”

“He must do what he can, whether ’tis of any use or not. And surely people have listened already, from what you have said.”

“Only to mock and laugh! They will not pay any heed to him. Why, every one has been expecting war for weeks, and a month ago both the Lords and the Commons voted for war! Uncle John did always uphold the Parliament. That should be enough for him.”

“This Parliament is not like that other one. ’Tis not the name of Parliament he does uphold. If the Parliament does what is wrong, he will no more be silent than if ’twere the King

who did it. He will judge for himself what is right, and no one can do it for him.”

“ ’Tis his duty to be loyal to his king,” remarked Fred.

“Not if the King does wrong, and would have him do wrong! The King is no judge of what is right for us.”

Fred laughed this to scorn, and Kate said hastily, falling back upon her argument,

“But he can do nothing—one man against the country.”

“He must do what he can, and he is not alone, for Gilbert will stand by him, I know, and so will I.”

“You will all find yourselves in the Tower together.”

“Well! So that we are together, and have done what is right!” said Nanciebel stoutly.

Kate rose in anger. “You are too absurd, child! You do not know what you speak of. Wait till you have thought it over—wait till you begin to understand—and we shall see what you have to say then. You had better sit and think about it for a while. Perhaps you will come to a better mind. Bid them bring the horses, Fred. We will leave this silly child till she can look at matters more wisely.”

“You are not going so soon?” cried Nanciebel, her duties as hostess coming back to her suddenly. “But you have partaken of no refreshment! Sit a while, and I will——”

“Nay, I pray you, do not think of it! Give your thoughts rather to your father’s folly, and to how you can help us all in this trouble he is bringing upon us. I have no mind for tennis, or any other foolery, when next week we may all be in the Tower, or maybe turned out of doors to beg our bread.”

“Perhaps you had better go, then, for I cannot do what you wish,” said Nanciebel sturdily, but her face was rather pale. “I think my father has done well and bravely, and I will help him if I can.”

Kate turned as her brother was helping her to mount.

“If your father is arrested and brought to trial, you can perhaps foresee the result, Nanciebel! You know the law. You know he breaks it. You know how many matters could be proved against him. I will not talk of it, but I know, and you know, and we all know—every one knows. That he has gone so long unmolested he owes to my father, who will not interfere with him, even though he be the magistrate. But if Uncle John brings himself into trouble in London, my father can no longer help him, and he will have to take his chance. You can perhaps foresee what it will be. If he is brought to trial, ’tis not this matter of peace only which will be brought against him; those other matters of which I speak can be proved with greatest ease. I trust he does not ruin us all with himself. Certainly in all these matters we are blameless, save only that my father has allowed him to go his own way so long. ’Tis a pretty return he is making to us now! You had better think of all these things, Nanciebel, and perhaps you will think it well to try to make him be silent, after all. Good-day to you! I trust reflection will bring you wisdom, Nanciebel.”

CHAPTER THE THIRD

The Lady of the Grey Horse

Constancy, drawn to the window by the sound of the horses, saw the guests riding down the avenue, and was much puzzled by their early departure. She went in search of her mistress to ask its meaning, but for a time could not find her. At last she searched the garden, and found her on the lawn, in Joyce's high-backed chair, her head dropped upon her arms beside the bowl of lilac on the table, her face hidden. For it was one thing to receive bad news with a brave face, and to show a stout heart to curious and unsympathetic outsiders, and quite another to meet the thought of trouble and danger for one she so dearly loved, and he so far away, and almost alone in hostile London.

Before she knew herself discovered. Constancy's arms were about her.

"Nanciebel, my dear, what is it? What have they said to thee? What is the matter? Child, thee should have come to me. 'Tis ever worse to sit weeping all alone. Now what has troubled thee, Nanciebel?"

"I am not going to cry any more," Nanciebel sobbed, "not another minute! I have naught to cry about, but—I did not know. I did not understand. Now I am going to be brave, and you must help me, Connie. You will understand."

"Thee must tell me, then, my dear."

"'Tis father," said Nanciebel, struggling to speak steadily. "He is striving to do as your father did, and is in danger of prison or exile, perhaps even is risking his life, because he must speak out what he knows to be right."

"Has he, then, gone to London to speak against the war?" Constancy asked quietly. "I thought it might be so, but I would not speak of it to thee till we were sure. Well, mistress, thee will not weep because he does prove himself a brave and fearless man?"

"No! I know 'tis wrong, but—we are so far away! I would like to be there with him. I would like to know more—how he fares, what is happening now, if he is in danger at this moment——"

"Thee cannot know. Thee can only wait, and that is what we women always have to do, Nanciebel. But thee must not cry. Thee must think of the children——"

"I know. But Kate did trouble me with her talking. She has gone away in anger, because I will not try to tempt him to be silent for our sakes—as if I could think of it! But she is angry——"

"If thee does what is right, thee will surely anger some folk. That is certain, Nanciebel. But their anger is not worth thy tears."

"I am sorry, nevertheless. And she did mock, and laugh, and sneer, and ask me—but never mind that, Connie dear!"

Constancy laughed. "Did ask if thee would turn Quaker, like me? Never heed her, Nanciebel. But thee must look for that, and thy father also. There will be plenty of folk eager to mock, and if thee is called nothing worse than 'Quaker' thee will do well. What of this evening, mistress? The people will wish to see thee at the feast and dance, as is thy custom. Will thee join them? Or must I say thee cannot come? And the children—shall they know of this?"

“No, of course not. And the people must not know till there is need. Perhaps in some way things will go well, and they need never know we have been anxious. I must see them as usual, though, to be sure, I do not feel like rejoicing! I know what you mean, Connie. I must not let them see I have been weeping. Well, I’ll do my best. . . . I will carry these flowers to the house. They must not be left out here.”

She took up the great green bowl and carried it carefully away across the lawn, holding it high so that it might shield her tear-stained face, till she reached her room in safety. When the door was shut against Sweet Joy and Charlie, she repeated to Constancy every detail of the conversation and of Kate’s information, and they discussed the probabilities and possibilities of the situation fully, Constancy feeling it was better to let her talk of the matter for a while. Very soon Nanciebel’s naturally buoyant spirits began to assert themselves and to recover from the shock, and under Constancy’s guidance and suggestion, her pride in her father’s fearless action possessed her entirely, and gave her courage to face the possible consequences.

It occurred to them both after a time that, in their anxiety over the father away in London, they had forgotten the children in their care, and that nothing had been heard of Charlie and Joyce for a suspiciously long time. These two were never idle for very long, but their busyness sometimes took forms disapproved by Constancy. It was well to look them up occasionally, so this hour in which they had been left to themselves held possibilities.

Constancy hurried off at once to find them, calling up and down the corridors and searching through the rambling old house. Nanciebel went out into the garden, thinking to find them playing with the tennis-balls.

From a far corner came the voice of Sweet Joy, raised in indignant outcry.

“Don’t! Don’t! Charlie, don’t do it! Go away! Go away! Oh, Charlie, go *away!*!”

Her voice rose into a shriek, and Nanciebel, gathering up her wide skirts, ran to the rescue.

At the far end of the garden was a stream, widening into a shallow pool. This was a favourite hunting-ground of Charlie’s for frogs and tadpoles, for any living thing attracted him, and whether it had four, or six, or a hundred legs, was winged or creeping, shiny or slimy, he must try to catch it, and add it to what he considered his collection—a disused outhouse, with a tank, which was aviary and aquarium in one.

It was no scientific craving for knowledge which led him to this pursuit, but a mere lust of catching and keeping the living things. They usually escaped immediately from their prison-house, but Charlie had been satisfied in catching them, and, moreover, had conveyed so many beetles and spiders and crawling things to his hut that he could keep no count of them, and never knew whether any had disappeared or not. Those that did not manage to escape by the broken window or to crawl under the rickety door, preyed upon one another, so that the smaller and more defenceless were always needing replenishing, but Charlie was quite unconcerned as to their fate, and cheerfully toiled to supply the larger creatures with a living store of food and amusement. As to their feelings in the matter, he cared nothing at all.

Joyce loathed that little outhouse, and would have liked never to go near it. But it had a dreadful fascination for her, and when Charlie was busy there she could not keep away, but would stand at a distance and watch and wait, her little round face crumpled up into an expression of intense disgust, her dress drawn tightly back, lest any of the creeping things should escape and make for her. She insisted on being Charlie’s companion in everything, but was always intensely unhappy when he chose to be what she described as “snaily and beetly.”

Nanciebel made straight for the pool, whence the piercing shrieks were coming. She broke through the bushes, and saw the whole trouble in a moment.

Charlie, with a long, curly worm in his hand, was wading across the pool, his feet bare, his little velvet pants tucked up above the knees, sundry muddy patches and splashes on his best suit and lace collar. Sweet Joy stood on a big stone in the middle of the pool, to which he had helped her, but from which she could not escape alone, holding up her long white skirts, and fairly jumping with distress as he approached, holding out the wriggling worm.

“Go ’way, Charlie! Go *away*, I tell you! Oh, you horrid boy! Don’t bring it near! Oh, Nanciebel, make him take it away,” and Joyce nearly went backwards into the pool in her distress.

Charlie had not seen his sister coming. At sight of her, he came hurriedly out of the water and began to rub the splashes of mud off his coat.

“ ’Tisn’t much, Nanciebel, truly! ’Twill all come off——”

“You bad boy! Let it be till it dries! Maybe ’twill brush off then. Leave it, Charlie, you will but make it worse. How could you make yourself so dirty, when we told you——”

“But they’ve gone, Nanciebel! We saw them go. I thought it didn’t matter——”

“There is still this evening to be thought of. Come away, and let Constancy see what you have been at, and hear what she has to say to you.”

“Don’t want to hear. Don’t want to go near Constancy.”

“I can very well believe that, but you are going to her, nevertheless. Help Joyce across the stones again, you bad boy. How could you let her go away out into the middle there!”

“She wanted to. I only helped her——”

“He was digging worms on the bank, Nanciebel, an’ I wanted to get away! He’s been most horrid wormy and beetly all day.”

Charlie laughed scornfully. “ ’Fraid of a long, clean worm! I wouldn’t be ‘Sweet Joy’ and ’fraid of worms!”

“Charlie, you must not tease so!” as Joyce lurched unsteadily on a stone in her effort to strike him, but thought better of it when she nearly fell.

“You’d best be careful, Sweet Joy!” grinned Charlie. “The water’s full of tadpoles.”

“I’ll tell Constancy, I will!” panted the indignant Joyce. “And she’ll scold you well, you know she will.”

“Come, children, you must not quarrel like this. Charlie, you should not tease her. You ought to be ashamed. Remember how much older you are than she. Nay, do not run off now, but come back to the house with me.”

She took Joyce by the hand and led her away. Charlie followed, a trifle sulkily, to face Constancy’s scolding.

They crossed the lawn and went round to the front of the house to enter by the big doorway.

But on the wide steps, as Constancy came hurrying to meet them, they all paused, and turned in great surprise. For up the avenue from the gates came a lady, riding a great grey horse.

She was a stranger, and that was unusual. She was beautiful, and dressed with a richness and extravagance of which they had never dreamed.

Even in London, with its crowd of Court beauties, my Lady was acknowledged one of the loveliest of her day. To Nanciebel and Constancy, in the heart of the country, she was like a vision, a dream-figure, come suddenly out of the dark avenue on the great grey horse. As for her dress, even though it was a riding-dress and, to my Lady’s mind, rather plain and simple,

as was wise for travelling, to them it was a revelation, for the extravagances of the fashionable world were quite unknown to them.

Her great white hat, with its drooping feathers and wide brim, was set well back on her dark hair, flowing loose over her shoulders according to the careless fashion of the time. She wore a dark green riding-coat, fitted to show her fine figure, with deep lace ruffles at the wrists and a cravat of costly lace at her throat, and the long green skirt hung down over the grey horse nearly to the ground. She was not tall, but sat very erect, holding the reins lightly, and, drawing up before the doorway, surveyed the group of children on the steps with amused eyes and a smile on her lips.

They returned her gaze with interest. Joyce, traces of tears still on her round cheeks, grasped Nanciebel's skirt in both hands and peeped at the stranger. Charlie, shoes in hand, stockings slung over his shoulder, stood with bare feet well apart and stared with sturdy curiosity, utterly forgetful of his muddied clothes. Nanciebel stood between them, too startled at first to speak, and my Lady's eyes fastened upon her—the round childish face, so like little Joyce's, fearless blue eyes, heavy brown curls clustering round her face and on her bare neck and shoulders, rounded throat without jewels, and the dainty blue gown, obviously new, yet very simple, according to London fashions.

Quaker Constancy, in her plain grey gown, waited in the background till her mistress should recover her wits enough to speak. But the stranger was not one to wait for anybody, and it was she who broke the silence.

"Is this where John-o'-Peace dwells, child?"

Nanciebel's eyes grew rounder.

"'Tis Sir John Seymour's house, madam."

"Are you the little daughter I have heard of?"

"We are his children, madam."

"So! Then I am come to visit you. I have a word for you from his Majesty."

"For me?" gasped Nanciebel.

"The King?" cried Charlie in delight. "Did he send a message to us?"

"So perhaps I am welcome, eh? Come, I will only give my tidings in exchange for supper and lodging for the night. My people are at the inn, but the look of it did not please me. My woman will follow me when she has supped. Well, then! Am I welcome?"

All this had taken away Nanciebel's breath. But now she found her tongue and said hesitatingly—

"We will do our best to make you so, madam. But"—she thought of the crowd of tenants expected very soon now, and the feast spread for them in the big dining-room, and found herself in a difficulty.

Constancy came to her help. "If madam will enter we will set before her the best we can do with so short notice." And to Nanciebel, "Thee must beg her for this night to be content in the Lady's Chamber, mistress."

The stranger caught the words.

"Is the girl a Quaker?" she asked, frowning. "I am my Lady, girl. I am Lady Llety. Maybe you have heard of my husband and me."

The proud defiance of her tone meant nothing to them. Kate would have understood, but Nanciebel and Constancy never read the newsletter, by Sir John's express desire, as he preferred that he or Gilbert should give them such of the news as he deemed fitted for their ears. So her name was quite unknown to them, and Nanciebel dropped a curtsey, as she bade

her welcome and begged her to enter, and Charlie ran to call a man to the big grey horse, and Sweet Joy, rising instantly to the occasion, piped eagerly—

“Do you go and help Constancy see to the supper, Nanciebel, and I will talk to the lady till you’re ready.”

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

My Lady's Tidings

Nanciebel led her guest across the wide hall.

"There is no need for you to entertain my Lady, Joyce. Constancy does not need me just now."

"What is your name, child?"

"Nanciebel, my Lady."

"What, Nanciebel out of the ballad? Lord Lovel and fair Nanciebel?"

"Yes, my Lady, I think so."

"You shall sing it to me after supper. Why, what is this? Are you feasting in here?" for the dining-room door stood wide, and the tables were spread for supper.

Nanciebel explained shyly. "And they will bring the dishes to us before carrying them in to the people, so we shall fare well enough, my Lady, if you will pardon me if I lead you to another room where we can be alone."

"Very good! And the reason for this feast? Ah, but it is his Majesty's birthday, to be sure! So you are loyal——"

"Pardon, my Lady, but 'tis my birthday also," Nanciebel explained, with reddening cheeks.

Lady Llety laughed. "And that, no doubt, is of greater moment to your people here than any number of kings' birthdays away in London! That is very right and proper!"

Nanciebel led the way into a small room opening out of the dining-hall by big doors, at present closed.

"If you will be so good as to enter here, my Lady, we will do our best to give you every comfort, and supper will be served shortly."

It was a quaint little room, this Lady's Chamber, as it was called, with small diamond-paned lattice windows high up in the walls, a great stone fireplace set deep in one side, polished wood floor and carved ceiling, and each wall covered with old oak panelling of Tudor times, reaching from the floor as high as Nanciebel's chin. Above hung paintings by Van Dyck, Lely, and others—Sir James, the first baronet, with a pot of gaudy tulips at his side; Lady Seymour, his wife, with two fair-haired boys at her knee, the fathers of Nanciebel and Cousin Kate; Sir John's pretty young wife, who had died when little Joyce came into the world; and a portrait apparently of Sweet Joy and Charlie, but which was actually Nanciebel and Gilbert ten years before.

The furniture was of massive dark oak to fit the room—big square table, straight-backed chairs, high settle, and solid chests or coffer, all covered with intricate carving. Some delicate needlework lay on the table, books on the chairs and window-seat, a lute lay on the settle, and the children's toys were scattered over the floor.

Nanciebel gave an exclamation of dismay.

"I did forget to set it tidy this morning! 'Tis well Constancy is not here to see! Pardon, my Lady if you will sit here," and she swept a pile of dolls and their clothing out of a big chair.

My Lady laughed at her dismay, and held out her hand to Joyce.

"Come and speak to me, little one! What is your name?"

Joyce had seated herself primly in a high chair, ready to do her duty. She glanced apprehensively at Charlie, for this question was always a dread to her if he was present.

"I'm Joyce," she was beginning, when he, wickedly unable to resist the temptation, broke in—

"She's 'Sweet Joy,' you know——"

"Charlie, go at once to Constance, and say we will sup in here as soon as she can manage it."

Charlie winked at Joyce, who was climbing down from her chair with determination in her eye, and fled to find Constance. Joyce was after him in a moment, and Nanciebel had to explain the incident as she set the room to rights.

Lady Llety sat watching her, as she put her work into one great oak chest, the toys into another, and the books in a pile on a shelf. Nanciebel was thinking hard as she moved quietly about, a sober look on her face, a great fear at her heart. For my Lady's first question, combined with the statement that she brought a message from the King, could only mean that her father had made himself heard at Whitehall, and had attracted the attention of the Court, and that might mean the worst. She was afraid, terribly, desperately afraid, but she would not show it.

The big table was presently covered with a fresh white cloth and laid for supper, and the great bowl of white lilac was brought and placed in the centre. Candles were set round it and lighted, and the curtains were drawn. Then my Lady suggested that the small fire laid on the hearth should be kindled, not for warmth, for it was a mild night, but to add its cheerfulness to the scene. Even a tiny fire, she said, looked bright and comforting, and it was not yet too hot when the sun had gone down. So Nanciebel, saying to herself that this lady knew how to make herself at home, set a light to it, and Constance brought in the supper.

By my Lady's request, the children were bidden to sup with them, so no questions could be asked by Nanciebel during the meal. She sat very silent, save when courtesy forced her to address her guest, far too troubled and anxious for light talk and laughter. But Joyce and Charlie had no understanding of her distress, and were quite equal to the task of entertainment. They talked without ceasing, and Lady Llety listened and laughed and questioned, and led them on to tell more and more. Joyce gave vivid descriptions of Charlie's "snaily and beetly" tastes, and he retaliated by enlarging upon her silly fear of worms and tadpoles.

The guests were assembling in the dining-hall, but the doors and curtains between shut out all sound. Nanciebel explained that she would have to go in to them for a few moments later in the evening, if my Lady would excuse her, as they would wish to see her, but as they knew she had a guest they would not expect her to stay long.

It seemed to her, in her anxiety, that the meal would never be over. Lady Llety took full time to it, and laughed and joked with the children, as if fathers and brothers were never in danger and there was no reason for haste. Nanciebel longed to know everything, and yet was afraid of what she might hear. She was not sure whether she most dreaded or wished for the moment when she would know all.

But it came at last. The children were sent off to bed, with parting salutations from my Lady, "Good-night to you, Master Charlie! Good-night, 'Sweet Joy'!" which sent Joyce flying after her brother to give him a further piece of her mind on that matter. The dishes were removed, and my Lady seated herself in a big chair by the fire.

"Come, child, take your lute and sing me the ballad that gives you your name——"

*'Lord Lovel stands at his stable-door,
Mounted upon a grey steed;
And by came Lady Nanciebel,
And wished Lord Lovel much speed.'*

Come, sing it to me. I am sure you have a pretty voice."

Nanciebel turned to her, looking white and tired.

"I pray you pardon me, my Lady. I cannot sing to-night. Another time, maybe. I pray you, my Lady, tell me of my father! You did promise it after supper. The little ones do not know he is in danger, but Connie and I know, and I can wait no longer. I pray you tell me all."

"He is a strange man, is your father," said Lady Llety reflectively. "I like him, oh yes, I like him! But he has been saying most wild and curious things to us in London, and, truly, he is a strange man."

"Then he is not in danger at this moment? He is safe and well?" cried Nanciebel, her voice sharp with prolonged anxiety.

Lady Llety glanced at her. "Why, child, did you think I came to tell you he was dead? Well, then, to set your mind at ease at once, he is in the Tower, a prisoner, but no harm will come to him—that is, his life is in no danger."

Nanciebel sank down in one of the high-backed chairs by the table, and bent over the bowl of lilac once more to hide her great relief. Lady Llety continued.

"But assuredly, if he do not mend his manners a little, he must take the consequences. I am come to tell you what those consequences will be. Have you any influence with him, Mistress Nanciebel?"

Nanciebel looked up quickly. "No! Yes! No, I think not. No more than a daughter ought to have. He would not alter what he knew to be right for anything I could say. But I can make it hard or easy for him, I know that very well. Other influence I would not wish to have. I could not respect him as my father unless he knew better than I. But I can help, or I can add to his difficulties, as I choose."

"His Majesty bids you use your influence with him, to turn him from his foolish ways. He is sending him home, that you may reason with him and persuade him to be wise. He gives him a week to decide whether or no he will serve against the Dutch."

"*Fight? My father fight?* In a wicked war like this? Nay, that will be a wasted week! It is a thing he could never do," cried Nanciebel, without a second's hesitation.

"It will be your chance to beseech him to wiser ways," said Lady Llety calmly.

Nanciebel looked at her with startled eyes.

"I won't do it," she said.

"You have not yet heard the consequences of refusal."

"Please tell me."

Lady Llety glanced at her tense white face, and anxious eyes cast down upon the lilac twigs, and hands clasped tightly round the green bowl over which her head was bent.

"You are so strange, you Puritans! I suppose you *are* of the other party, although you do still allow yourself something better than a grey gown?"

Nanciebel looked at her. "My father upheld the Parliament. We—yes, assuredly our hearts are with the Puritans, as you put it. I am proud to say it is so. Why are we strange?"

"You make so great a trouble out of such little things!" said my Lady, with a laugh. "In my country there are none of you. You were a new discovery to me when I came to England two

years ago.”

Nanciebel knit her brows. “I do not understand. Are you not English?”

“Faith, no! Not I!”

“What do you call a small thing?” asked Nanciebel, refusing to be turned from the argument into any side track. “To do what one knows to be wrong? To slay other men in an unjust quarrel, because a king wishes it?”

“Pshaw! Your father has been teaching you.”

“I hope so!”

My Lady laughed. “Then we will leave argument, for ’tis useless, if you are his true daughter, and I will give you facts instead.”

“That is what does always happen when Kate or Fred will try to argue,” Nanciebel said composedly. “They cannot defend their position, and they dare not try. Methinks we have the best of it.”

“And who are they?”

“Our cousins at Ryde Park, not many miles away. My Lady,” she said, looking up quickly, “they are not with us in these matters. ’Tis only fair to them to say so. I pray you, do not let them be drawn into this, for it would not be just. There is not even sympathy between them and us. They have been here to-day, very angry over some words they have read in the newsletter. I pray you remember they have no part with us.”

“They are wiser than you,” was Lady Llety’s only comment.

“I pray you, give me those facts concerning my father, my Lady! I am more than eager to hear.”

“Well, then, your father—and that young brother of yours is just as bad! He hath infected him as well as you. Your father hath spoken and written against the Dutch war till all London has been talking of him, and it has even come to his Majesty’s ears. So the King did send for him to Whitehall, to hear his strange doctrines for himself. It seems that he holds that for a man to kill his fellow in any quarrel is wrong—even if it be at the bidding of his King.” Nanciebel nodded, and smiled faintly at the friendly lilac. To her it all sounded very familiar. “He will have it that no man should fight at all with other men, and he does argue that a man can find enough to fight with in life without fighting his fellows. This he said because the King reminded him that it is man’s nature to wish to fight. John-o’-Peace—you see we have learned his name, and it fits him well!—he will have it that a man can find others to fight than his fellows, and that to fight with them is wrong, and he does instance such things as ignorance, and disease, and poverty, and—for those who must have adventure—nature, and wild beasts, and the difficulties of unknown lands. All this he said boldly to the King, and surely it is a strange and curious doctrine, and one that is new to us all. There is some little truth in it at times, to be sure, as when he did say we should fight the plague, which is growing so mightily among the Dutch at Amsterdam and elsewhere, rather than the Dutch themselves. That was not unreasonable, but, faith! he goes too far in condemning war altogether.”

“I think he is right,” said Nanciebel quietly, but with shining eyes. “And I am proud that he had the courage to speak out so boldly to the King. The plague is a foe which is always at our doors, and in fighting that we should yet be saving life. I pray you, my Lady, tell me what is like to be the consequence to my father of his fearless words?”

“Well, now, I was there when he did speak thus to the King, and I saw that his Majesty was inclined to anger. I liked John-o’-Peace, I do assure you I liked him greatly. He is undoubtedly fearless, as you say, and I liked him for it. But the pity of it, that he is not a

soldier! He would make such a gallant fighter. He is so big—he would look so fine in a gay soldier's coat,"—Nanciebel's lips curled at this argument, but she kept her eyes fixed on the bowl of lilac and said nothing—"and I am sure he is strong and hardy and quick, with all the qualities of a good soldier."

"Yes, he is all those things. But he will never fight."

"So it seems. Well, as I tell you, I liked him, and it seemed a pity that so big and strong a man should waste his life in prison, as seemed likely, or perhaps even die, as was not impossible."

With a quiet knock at the door, Constancy entered, and my Lady paused abruptly and frowned.

"Pardon, madam! Mistress, could thee come to the feast for a short time? The people wish to drink some toasts, and they are asking for thee."

Nanciebel looked up, her face white with the strain of Lady Llety's last words and of anxiety as to what would come next. It seemed impossible to go and meet the merry people and appear to take part in their rejoicings. At sight of her face, Constancy, with sudden fear, said quickly, "Shall I say thee cannot come?"

But this was a duty, and Nanciebel, without reasoning upon the matter at all, felt that to shirk it would be cowardly, and therefore unworthy of her father.

"Nay, I'll come. My Lady, I pray you excuse me for a few moments. These folk look for me to go, and I must not disappoint them," and she resolutely put suspense and anxiety behind her, and, drawing back the curtain, opened the doors and went into the noisy lighted hall beyond.

Lady Llety sat waiting in the quiet little room. She heard laughter and talking from behind the big doors, then silence, then cheering, as the toasts were drunk, and she wondered, as she waited and listened, how the girl would receive the final proposal which had yet to be put to her, and whether it would shake her resolution. She began to feel doubtful of the wisdom of sending "John-o'-Peace" home to think over his decision.

Nanciebel, in the crowded dining-hall, listened to compliments and congratulations upon her birthday, good wishes for the future, and laudatory references to her father, with the feeling that it was all a dream—the noise, the crowd, the lights, the speeches—and that all the important things in life lay in the quiet little room she had just left.

It had been a day of great strain for her, for at midday she had been utterly ignorant of the trouble overhanging them all. The crowded room was hot, and the great bowls and dishes of lilac on every table had scented the air till it was sweet and heavy and oppressive. When she rose to thank the spokesman for his kind words, she turned so white that Constancy slipped her arm round her in dismay, and begged her to withdraw.

But Nanciebel had never fainted in her life, and was only conscious of very great weariness and a slight touch of giddiness also. She steadied herself against her chair, and bravely spoke the few words necessary in a low voice, which was put down to girlish modesty and shyness, and therefore much applauded. Then she withdrew, with Constancy watchfully beside her, and once out in the quiet, cool entrance-hall, sank down on a settle and resting her head against it, broke into a storm of sobbing.

Constancy, greatly frightened, put her arms round her and tried to soothe her. But it was only for a moment, and was only the inevitable result of the previous strain. Struggling back to composure, she said brokenly—

“Connie, it’s all right. I am only tired. There is naught to weep over—yet. He is safe enough, she says so. . . . This will not do! Twice in one day—and you know I never do cry. I think I must be becoming a baby again! Now I shall have to wash my face, or she will see. I would not have her know for anything. Connie dear, don’t look so frightened! I am well again now, truly! But that room was so hot. I think you should open the windows, or some of them will be ill.”

“Must thee go back to that lady again?”

“Yes, my dear, I must. She has much more to tell me. Indeed, she has told me very little yet. That was the trouble—she was just about to tell me what I did greatly desire to know when I had to go. So I am in haste to return and hear it all.”

She hurried upstairs to her room, and Constancy followed watchfully, and refused to lose sight of her till she had entered the room where Lady Llety was waiting.

My Lady looked at her curiously, for her eyes were bright and her cheeks glowing.

“Why, child, what have they been saying to you?”

Nanciebel sat down by the table again, and turned to her, her face very resolute.

“I pray you, tell me what the King will do to my father. I can wait no longer to know.”

“So! Well, then, I told him what he must do, so if it does not please you, you may blame me, if you wish. But it is needful for us there in London to silence John Seymour, or, if we cannot, to rid ourselves of him in some manner. These strange doctrines of his are dangerous, and we cannot leave him to speak them as he will. He is teaching men that if the King’s wishes do not please them, they must disobey—that it is not needful to obey the King! We cannot safely allow such teaching, so he must be silenced. But I did plead with the King that he should not die, nor yet be thrown into prison, perhaps for years. It seemed such pity, as I have said. So at last the King did say this to him. ‘You say,’ he said, ‘that man may fight many things, but not his fellow-men, and you speak of poverty, and difficulty, and the dangers of nature and unknown lands as fit and proper foes for him to fight?’ ‘Yes,’ said John-o’-Peace, ‘I do.’ ‘Ay!’ said the King. ‘But ’tis very well for you, who have all your life known riches and comfort, and have never felt what it is to be in want. You do not know these things, and should not speak of them. If you will not fight the Dutch for me, you shall fight these foes of your own choice,’ said the King, ‘and we will see if you find the choice a good one. I shall see to it that you have the opportunity you ask for, and if you tire of fighting your own chosen foes, you can come to me and fight mine instead.’ So this is what the King will do—and I think it pleased your father better, at least, than prison. He will send him to some wild and unknown land, with no money in his hand nor sword at his side, and he must make his way as he can. It means leaving home, friends, and everything, and facing unknown dangers and difficulties. If he shrinks from it, or if he tires of it when he has given it trial, he can have a position in the fleet which will shortly sail against the Dutch.”

“He will never accept that. And to what land will the King send us?” asked Nanciebel thoughtfully, her mind flying at once to the colonies across the Atlantic, where already so many had fled in search of freedom.

“I may not tell you that. And you think, child, that he will take you with him?”

Nanciebel looked up sharply. “I hope so! Do you know if the King will permit it?”

“And are you ready to go to such a wild life, with none of the comforts you have known here?” and Lady Llety eyed her curiously.

“My only fear is of being left behind. I must go! I will make him take me with him.”

“He intends to take you, so ’tis well if you can bring your mind to it,” Lady Llety said quietly. “When he heard what the King would have, he said that he would choose rather to begin life anew in a strange land than to spend it in prison, but that he must take his little daughter with him. No doubt he had his reasons. I thought from what he said that I should find you still a child. Now I have told you the worst of the matter, Mistress Nanciebel. You will have the chance in this next week to persuade your father to be wise before it is too late. You are concerned in the matter also, you see. He insists that you go with him wherever he goes, and the King has consented. If you do not succeed in turning him from his purpose, you have before you exile among strangers, in a strange land, where they speak a strange tongue, and where you will have to face untold difficulties and hardships, and, like enough, dangers also. You cannot make light of these things. Be wise in time, and do your utmost to plead with your father and turn him from his folly. Now we will talk no more to-night. Lead me to my chamber, and send my woman to me. Then go to your own bed and sleep, for assuredly you need rest, child. And in the morning think of all I have said, and plan how you can best turn your father from his foolishness.”

“But ’tis not foolishness, ’tis right,” said Nanciebel soberly, as she rose and stood looking down at her guest. “I cannot try to turn him from his duty. But assuredly this that you tell me of is better than prison. I know my father will say so. I will rather follow him into strange wild lands than to the Tower.”

“Then, if you think so, you may thank me for it, for ’twas I did turn the King from his first thought. He would have sent your father to prison and made an end of it so.”

“I thank you very greatly, my Lady. Then you are the King’s friend, so that he does listen to what you say?”

Lady Llety looked up and met the straight, childish gaze fixed thoughtfully upon her.

“Yes,” she said shortly. “My husband is a good friend of the King’s, and, as you see, his Majesty heeds me when I speak. But it may not be for long. They are always quarrelling, and I am constantly thinking that some day we shall be friends no longer.”

“It must be pleasant to know that the King is your friend, so that you can give help to folk who need it,” said Nanciebel, and my Lady looked at her sharply again.

“You talk of things you do not understand, child! You had better come up to London for a month! Truly, I think your father is right to take you as far away as he can. Perhaps the wild life he offers you is better than London, after all. Now go to bed, child, without more words, and do not think of me, but of yourself and your father and his folly.”

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

'John-o'-Peace' comes Home

While the guests were dancing country dances on the lawn, and the lively music rose from the windows of the dining-hall, Nanciebel and Constancy sat on the window-seat of the bedroom upstairs, and talked over Lady Lley's tidings. When the last of the excited crowd had disappeared, and the house and garden were quiet at last, they still sat there talking and planning for the future. To go to bed and forget it all would have been impossible till they had at least exchanged ideas on every point.

Constancy was determined that where her mistress went she must go also. Nanciebel had no hesitation as to her own course. She would gladly go with her father, let that mean what it might. But such a life would surely be impossible for Joyce and Charlie, and how could they be left alone at home?

"'Tis useless to talk of it," she said wearily at last. "We do not know enough yet. We must wait till we see father and Gilbert, and hear more."

"But thee cannot go away alone——"

"It is after midnight, Connie, my dear! Let us get to bed, whether we can sleep or not. Matters may look very differently in the morning."

It was a couple of hours before she slept, so it was hardly to be wondered at that she lay late next morning. She was hurriedly putting finishing touches to her toilet when Sweet Joy came hammering at the door.

"Nanciebel! Aren't you 'wake yet? She's going away, Nanciebel, an' she told me to tell you she's Lord Lovel, an' she's mounted on her grey steed, and it's time for Lady Nanciebel to come and wish her much speed, for she's going off at once, Nanciebel."

And Nanciebel, hurrying down, found my Lady indeed mounted and waiting at the door.

"I must needs make an early start, so you must pardon me, Mistress Nanciebel, if I ride away and leave you now. Yes, I thank you, they have given me everything I desired. That Quaker girl of yours does know her duties, at least. I think you will see your father home to-day." Charlie gave a shout of surprise, and Joyce began to skip with delight. "He was to start from town soon after I left. I am on my way to our house at Bristol, so I told the King I would stop here and give you a word of advice. You have a pleasant home here, child. These little ones have shown me every corner while you have been sleeping—yes, even the Spider-House, eh, Charlie? Concerning which, Sweet Joy and I are of one mind, and that to keep as far from it as we can! So, Nanciebel, see that you are wise and make your father wise also, for your own sake, for the sake of this your home, and for these little ones. Now fare you well, and good luck to you in your dealing with your father."

They had walked down the avenue towards the gates to be out of hearing of the little ones. My Lady paused by the big gates, and turned sharply to Nanciebel.

"Mistress Nanciebel, this that the King has chosen for your father is, of course, not according to the law. He has had no fair trial, which, if he does so choose, he can demand. 'Tis the King and I, and no one else, who have acted in the matter. But, if I am right, John-o'-Peace will do well to accept what is offered, and have naught to do with the law. Tell me, am I right in thinking there are other matters which could be brought against him?"

Nanciebel looked straight at her.

“My father has done no wrong, my Lady.”

“Tut! That will surely raise the question of what is wrong. I have no doubt we should not agree as to the answer. If I must be more exact—has this house of yours sheltered any of the fanatic clergy who left their duties two years ago? Does your father attend their secret conventicles? And how often has he done so? You know the law and the penalties.”

Nanciebel looked back at her, her face first white, then flaming indignantly.

“Do you ask me to answer?—to betray him? We have done nothing but what is good and right——”

Lady Llety laughed. “I guessed as much! I taxed your brother with it, and he could not deny it either. So see to it that your father, if he will not yield, does at least accept what is offered to him, for the law will help him little.”

Nanciebel said nothing, but stood looking down, anxious to defend her father, but doubtful of the wisdom of returning to these difficult subjects, on which it was impossible they could agree.

My Lady looked at her and laughed. “Farewell, Mistress Nanciebel! See you teach your father to be wise! What is it your ballad says?—

*‘O I am going a far journey,
Some strange countries to see.
But I’ll return in seven long years——’*

But you may not return at all, you know, if you once say good-bye to all your friends and your home. And even so—

*‘O seven, seven, seven long years,
They are much too long for me.’*

Be wise in time, Nanciebel, and teach your father wisdom also. Stay here where you have every ease and comfort, and be content to obey the King, as others do. So farewell!”

She waved her whip and rode away, and Nanciebel went thoughtfully back to the house.

“Now, Connie, my dear, if they come home to-day we must be ready for them. What can we do to give them more than usual hearty welcome? What would please them most to eat? A man is always happier after a good hearty supper. So what shall we prepare? Shall we make tarts and puddings?”—and she spent the morning in the kitchen concocting dainties to tempt the travellers when they arrived, tired after their journey.

She did not sing, as was her custom, as she went about her duties that day. Constancy, thinking of her breakdown of the night before, and their long talk in the dark afterwards, glanced at her anxiously now and then, but found her face always bright and cheery, though deeply thoughtful. The discussion was not renewed, for Nanciebel, when Constancy approached the subject, said quickly, “’Tis useless, Connie, my dear, till we have heard what father has to say.” So she kept herself busy all through the day, and thought much, but said nothing.

Sweet Joy and Charlie had, of course, no inkling of the state of matters. They also were working hard, and were out in the garden all day, for Charlie had set himself to some rearrangement in his Spider-House, and Joyce, though she would take no part, would not be left quite out in the cold. So she skipped about at a safe distance outside, and occasionally flung scornful remarks through the tiny window.

“How are you getting on, Old Snaily?” “How many nasty beetles have you got to now?” “Don’t get eaten up by those spiders, you Wormy Boy!” “*Do* get finished an’ come out an’ do something clean!” “Oh, Charlie, here’s a huge long worm! Do come an’ take it inside! I know it’s ’scaped. It’s coming after me! Oh, Charlie, come quick, *do!*” “You’ll turn quite altogether into an earwig or a cockroach some day, an’ when I come to tell you dinner’s ready, there’ll only be a thing all shiny an’ crackly, with heaps of squirmy legs. *I* wouldn’t be an old black beetle!”

It was sunset before the travellers arrived. The evening meal was being cleared away, and Nanciebel had almost ceased to expect them till the morrow.

They were all three out on the lawn together, Charlie having at last consented to drag himself away from his beloved Spider-House. The little ones had been in high spirits all day, ever since Lady Llety’s hint as to their father’s speedy return. Nanciebel had been thoughtful and quiet, but gentler and more indulgent towards them even than usual, for so far as she could see the near future must hold separation and the breaking-up of the home, and this was very hard to face. All day she had been looking at them, at Constance, at the servants, the house, and all her treasures, with new eyes, and one constant thought,—“ ’Twill mean farewell to this—and this—and these!” and so she began to understand what lay before them all. But it was useless to speak of it till more was known.

“Where’s my baby? Where’s Sweet Joy?” cried Sir John, from the terrace by the house.

They had not heard the horses. All three made a rush for him, and Joyce and Charlie flung themselves into his arms to receive his embrace, and did not notice that he hugged them a little more warmly even than usual, and gave Sweet Joy a kiss for every year of her age and then began again and gave her five more.

Then Nanciebel threw her arms round him and clung to him for a moment, whispering in his ear.

“Daddy, I’m so glad to have you safe! You shall never go away again without me. You should have told me, daddy.”

“Who has been doing it for me, my Nanciebel? How much do you know, child?” he asked quickly.

“I think everything,” she said, looking up at him bravely, then, as her lips quivered, hiding her face against his breast. “I wish I had been with you in London. Kate told me—and others. I’ve been so proud, and glad, and—and frightened for you, father. But I am going with you, and ’tis all I care about.”

He kissed her gratefully, glad that the telling was not left to him after all, and she, looking at him anxiously, noticed signs of the strain of these last few weeks.

“You are tired! How far have you come to-day? Come and rest, daddy, and Constance will bring in the supper. Have you made a long day of it?”

“Yes, we had no time to lose, so made good speed. Our poor horses will feel it. Ah, Gilbert is seeing to them. Good boy, that is right! Come along, then, Sweet Joy. There is some candy in my saddle-bag for you. Well, Charlie man, how goes it with the snails and beetles now? Have many crept out through that crack in the door, as I said they would? Come, we will sup here, in the Lady’s Chamber, Nanciebel. ’Tis to me always the very heart of our home, more than any other in the house, and I am so very glad to be home again. Well, Sweet Joy, what shall I tell you first? Of the King’s grand house, and big rooms, and——”

“The King? Did you see the King?” cried Charlie.

“And the Queen?” piped Joyce.

“Poor Queen! Yes, I saw them both, and all the fine ladies and gentlemen.”

“There’s been a fine lady here, did you know?”

“Here? No, Sweet Joy, I didn’t know. Who was she? And where did she come from? And why?”

Constancy was laying the table for supper, while Nanciebel made it as pretty as she could with glass and silver dishes, and great bowls of flowers ranged round the candles. Charlie and Joyce, on their father’s knees, broke into an excited account of their visitor, just as Gilbert came in from the stables.

“And what was her name, this fine lady of the grey horse? And why did she so honour us?”

“ ’Twas a hard name to say,”—began Sweet Joy.

“She said she was called Lady Lety, with a ‘th’ in front—Thlety, like that. She said that was the nearest we could get to it. And when we tried she laughed,” said Charlie, in an injured tone.

His father had given a sharp exclamation of dismay, and Gilbert an angry whistle.

“The wife of that rascal Llety? *Here?* Are you sure, Charlie? Tell us again what she was like. I would not have wished——”

“She came to bring me tidings of you in London,” said Nanciebel, pausing in the doorway.

Her father glanced at her anxiously. The thought of any connection, or even mere conversation, between Nanciebel and Lady Llety, or any other lady of the Court, was repugnant to him. The close intimacy between Lord Llety and the King, and the reports of their doings which were current in the country, did not raise that nobleman or his wife in Sir John’s esteem.

“I am sorry—and angry, Nanciebel. She had no right to come here in my absence.”

“We found her a very pleasant lady, and she gave us no trouble beyond what was needful for her fit entertainment. And surely, father, she has spoken a good word for us to the King. I thought you would be grateful to her.”

He sat frowning, then at last with a sigh said—

“I wish she had not come. And when was this?”

“Last night. She was on her way to Lord Llety’s house at Bristol.”

Gilbert frowned again. The thought of Lady Llety talking with Nanciebel, fondling Joyce, was intolerable. But Nanciebel said again, “We found her a very pleasant lady, save for the tidings she brought, which she could not help.” And Charlie exclaimed, “She wanted to see my Spider-House, an’ she talked about tadpoles and worms for bait just ever so, and told us tales about conger-eels while we went round the garden. What are conger-eels, Daddy?”

“So she came to frighten you, Nanciebel?”

“She came to try. And she wanted me to frighten you. But I told her I would not. Come to supper, father, and we will talk of those things afterwards.”

Sweet Joy and Charlie chattered away without stopping to take breath while he and Gilbert supped. The good things prepared during the morning disappeared without comment, but with a haste which made words of appreciation unnecessary. Nanciebel sat with her chin in her hand, and looked from one to the other of them.

Her father was tired out with strain and anxiety and the long day’s travelling. It would be better if he could be persuaded to rest, and leave all talk and discussion till the morning, so she must hide her impatience for news if she could. Gilbert was unusually quiet too, and she half understood that all he had seen and heard, and risked and feared, in London, had given him

much to think about, and had made him more of a man than before. He was five years older than she, so was just over twenty-one, and was taller even than his father, who was sometimes called by his tenants "Big Sir John." Joyce sat by his side, steadily eating candy unchecked by any one, while Charlie discussed beetles and cockroaches with his father with much enjoyment, and John-o'-Peace seemed to find the subject a relief after the more serious matters in London.

The children were carried off by Constance at last, and Nanciebel made her proposition that they should all go to bed and allow no talking till the morning.

But Sir John would not hear of it.

"We have now no time to lose. We have but a week. Did you know that, Nanciebel? I am not sure how much you know."

"I'll tell you, if we must talk of it to-night, but I thought you ought to rest," she said, seating herself on a stool at his feet. "In a week, if you do not promise to fight for the King, we are to be sent away to some wild new land, among strange people, to make our way as we can. I am to go with you. That is the best part of the whole matter! It would have killed me to be left behind. Gilbert goes too, I suppose?"

"Of course. And are you not going to ask me to reconsider it all and yield to the King, so that this may not be needful?"

She shook her head sharply. "I can't. I know you could not do it. I told them so, both Kate and my Lady. I know you are right, and I am glad and proud that it is so, and that you were not afraid to speak out. Tell me, father,"—as he bent suddenly and kissed her—"is there going to be war with the Dutch after all?"

"I think so. They are all set on it."

"And we know the reason," Gilbert said shortly. "If there is war, the country must give money for it. The King wants money for—well, for his pleasures. Pleasures like his are expensive. He will plunge us into war, but the money will go to Whitehall, to be spent in what we have seen there. 'Twill not go to his soldiers and sailors."

"You have no certainty of that, Gilbert. 'Tis only what to us seems likely. There are very many reasons behind the war, but none of them are good. But you cannot protest against the war on that question of the money alone."

"Well, you will see that is what will happen. The money will go to the King and his—friends."

"There is no need for war just now, Nanciebel," said her father soberly. "There is pride and greed behind it, but no necessity. If they fight, 'twill be a sin, and I can have no part in it. Nor can I be silent."

"No," Nanciebel said quickly, "I know that very well. Now let us leave that and turn to the future. I suppose there is no other way out? We must go away?"

"The only other way is to call upon the law and demand a trial, and that——" and Sir John pursed his lips and shook his head.

"No," Gilbert said bitterly. "The law won't help us. We have talked of that. We have had no trial, and are illegally condemned by the King, but the law cannot help us. There are reasons. We have done no wrong—we have done right!—but not before the law."

"I know," and Nanciebel looked up quickly. "We spoke of that. First Kate and then my Lady reminded me of it."

"I am satisfied that we have done only what is right," Sir John said, with quiet decision. "In sheltering those brave men who left their homes for conscience' sake, and in allowing

them to hold their meetings here, I know I have done no wrong. You both know very well that we have all been present at these meetings, and found them to our liking. The laws are unjust, and I have helped those upon whom they press so heavily to the best of my power. But, of course, in so doing I have broken the law, and might well find myself in trouble on that count. So we will not call the law to our help. And therefore, Nanciebel, we must go where the King will send us.”

“And where——?”

“They do not tell us where it will be. Art afraid, Nanciebel?”

“I? Afraid?” she laughed. “Not if I go with you. And the children?”

“They must go to Ryde Park. I think they will take them in. Then, if it is possible, if we can make a home for them later on, we can send for them to join us.”

“I am glad of that! I thought perhaps it meant good-bye for ever. If ’tis only for a few months, or a year or two—oh, that is very much better. And Constance?”

“She must stay to care for them. We three go alone.”

Nanciebel nodded. “I am so very glad you let me go, and do not leave me with the children! I am so proud that you trust me. I will help you all I can. Surely I can do something.”

“You can do very much,” Sir John said quietly, but thought it well not to enlighten her as to all his reasons for taking her with him.

But he dared not leave Nanciebel, with all her promise of coming beauty, unprotected by either father or brother. To leave her at Ryde Park meant that she would sooner or later be taken to London, and without himself or Gilbert to watch over her that was impossible to think of. He would not have known an easy moment if she had been left alone in England. In the state of morality at that time, he could not leave her in such danger. But he could not discuss all this with Nanciebel herself, who had not yet given many thoughts to the question of her own looks, though a glance in her glass now and then might have hinted that the baby prettiness she had shared with Joyce was growing into something different.

“So we go out from home to begin the world again, we three,” he said quietly, “taking little with us but clear consciences and stout hearts.”

“My Lady said we were to take no money. But what shall we do for clothing and the like? And how are we to live?” asked Nanciebel doubtfully.

“As to living, we shall see. As to clothing, I told the King he must grant me leave to take a box of clothing for my daughter, and he granted it without demur.”

“Only for me? What about you and Gil?”

“At first we were to take nothing at all. But I did argue that matter with the King, saying that if he set us down in a strange land, where we cannot speak with the people, with nothing at all in our hands, we should only starve. I further said that he had bidden us fight for our living, since we would not fight his foes, but that every soldier has a right to weapons, and he must allow me something in my hand to fight with. He, being in an easy humour at the time, did but laugh and bid me say what I would have. So I asked at once if we should be sent to town or country, and when he said ‘country,’ I asked for my crossbow—a musket would need constant supply of powder, you see—also an axe, and, if I might have more, lines for fishing. So the King did but laugh and grant me all those things, but nothing more—no money, for that would make our way too easy, nor aught which could be sold for money. You must take only what is needful in the way of clothing, child.”

Nanciebel nodded soberly. “I will talk to Constance about it. And is there anything more?”

Sir John nodded, and sat frowning at the floor.

"I am afraid it will not please you. It did not please me, but 'tis a small matter in face of this greater one of leaving home. Gilbert is angry, and I have been laughing at him, but 'tis both useless and needless——"

"That is what I say!" growled Gilbert.

"Nay, I mean your anger, and you know it, boy. Nanciebel, the King does not trust us. He thinks we shall make our escape from the place to which he will send us, or seek revenge against him in some treasonable way——"

"You? Seek revenge?" Nanciebel cried indignantly.

"Or be untrue to our principles, by taking service with some one who would have us fight for him, and so ease matters for ourselves but be false to what we have spoken in London. So that we shall do none of these things, he will send with us one of his soldiers as our guard, our jailer, if you will, to watch us, and make note of all we do and report to him."

"To spy upon us all the time, and watch our every act, and be a constant trouble to us. Our word is no longer good enough for his Majesty," Gilbert said wrathfully.

Nanciebel sat thoughtfully considering the matter.

"Truly, it would have been pleasanter to be spared that. We would rather have gone quite alone. But no doubt we shall be able to endure it. I suppose I shall not have to speak to the creature?"

Her father laughed. "We will see to it that he does not trouble you. Like enough he will want as little to do with us as his duty will allow. If he is a soldier, as the King did suggest, he will no doubt assume, as so many do, that Gil and I will not fight because we are afraid, and therefore——"

"Has any one said that?" cried Nanciebel, in quick indignation.

"Oh, many! Those who opposed us in London were divided about us. Some said we were cowardly, and therefore worthy of all contempt, others that we were mad, and so beneath it. But I, at least, went prepared for that. Gilbert did not like it, and allowed it to anger him at times, but that is very useless."

"Nevertheless, one does not easily learn to be called coward and say nothing!"

"It's foolishness!" cried Nanciebel hotly. "For any one who judges fairly must admit that in speaking out before the King you did more bravely and risked more than in fighting in the war. Gilbert, you should not care if people are so unjust and foolish. But I know it is not easy, and I have small right to advise," she added ruefully, "for when Kate did call me Quaker I was very angry."

They both laughed, and Sir John said quietly—

"That was very needless on Miss Kate's part. Now, Nanciebel, my dear, we have told you all, I think. As this week's grace is useless to us for thinking over the question, as we were meant to do, we will spend it in preparation instead. Do not tell the little ones, but make all ready quietly. We may look for this gentleman a week hence, to receive our answer. If that is still refusal, we are to be ready to start at once."

"Then the King trusts you to await his coming quietly? 'Twould be very easy, if we were so minded, to ride down to the coast and there take ship for Holland, where no one would molest us."

"I gave my word that I would not run away. Otherwise we should have had a troop of soldiers home with us," her father said gravely. "And then, Nanciebel, there are the Ryde Park folks. If we ran off, the trouble would fall on them. At present they are not drawn into it. The

King is satisfied that they are not with us in these matters. I could not go without leaving them in danger.”

She nodded. “Kate was very much afraid. I think she fancied herself on her way to the Tower already. Very well, Daddy, I’ll be ready when the creature comes. You don’t know his name?”

“The King did not say.”

“You will have to keep the peace between him and me, Nance,” said Gilbert abruptly. “I hate the very thought of him watching us and following us everywhere. I can’t take it quietly as father does.”

“We will not speak to the wretch, nor look at him, nor heed him at all, Gil, that is all. He is sure to be a hateful creature, so we will just leave him to himself. Well, my dears, I am more glad than I can say to have you both safe home again. Now good-night to you both, and do not dream about this odious creature of the King’s. A soldier—ugh! He is sure to be a great, rough, ugly bully!—swearing all the time, perhaps, and rude and boorish in his manners. So we know what to expect. I did not mind the thought of going away with you, but I did not know we were to take a nightmare with us! Don’t look so cross, Gil! Laugh and make the best of it! If we cannot get rid of our Nightmare, we must endure him as easily as we can.”

Gilbert followed her from the room, and caught and kissed her on the stairs.

“Nanciebel, you’re splendid. You will help father more than anything else could do. He has had a desperate hard time in London, without any one to speak a good word for him. ’Tis always hard to stand alone. But he was splendid too, Nanciebel, utterly fearless of any one or anything. Not a day but I was proud of him. But he has been greatly troubled for you. ’Twill help him mightily to find you so brave and willing also.”

“Make him go to bed. He is tired out, as any one can see. I am glad he is home again, so that we can take more care of him,” said Nanciebel, and ran away upstairs.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

Concerning Petticoats

Nanciebel stood at her bedroom door and called for Constasy.

She had told her everything early that morning, and Constasy's distress at thought of the parting had been so acute that Nanciebel had been forced to call in her father to explain the necessity for it. Constasy would have refused to leave her mistress, but Sir John insisted that she must stay to care for the children. Nanciebel, though deeply distressed also, was able to draw such a piteous picture of Joyce and Charlie alone at Ryde Park, that Constasy cried for their sake also, and at last accepted the duty set before her and promised to do her best to mother them.

"But how thee will manage without me, mistress, I do not know," she said over and over again, and Nanciebel looked grave at the prospect.

"I know I am heedless and forgetful, Connie, but I shall try to do my best. I can see a great many things I shall have to try very hard to do, but I am going to do them all. I am going to make father and Gilbert glad I'm there—I am going to help them both, so that they will feel they could not have done without me—I am going to make them feel this parting from home as little as may be. After all, home is where we are all together. I have been thinking in the night what I could do. Don't you think I could help to cheer them at times, and keep them bright and merry? Don't you think so, Connie?" she asked, looking eagerly at Constasy. "I will never, never let them hear me make complaint, or think I am sorry I am there. I will never let them see me anything but cheery and content. Of that I am determined."

She had been thinking of other things in the night also, and it was to put one of these into execution that she called Constasy into her room.

At the door Constasy stopped in surprise, for on the bed were spread all her mistress's dresses—silk, velvet, satin, and finest cloth, for nothing had been too good for Nanciebel, to Sir John's mind—costly lace, ribbons, scarves, great plumed hats—and the little casket in which she kept her store of jewels.

"Come in, Connie, my dear! I am not crazy, nor yet amusing myself. This is a serious matter," and Nanciebel seated herself on the bed in the midst of her finery. "I have been looking over these gowns, to see what garments shall have the honour of going with me—'some strange countries to see!' you know. And truly, there are very few that can be so honoured. This is the kind of occasion, Constasy," and she looked up with mock solemnity, "which betrays at once whether a petticoat is for use, or only for ornament. Without a crisis such as this, these pretty petticoats might pass themselves off as good and useful articles of clothing—I mean, as good and useful members of society! But such a time as this will at once betray them, and declare in a moment which are for use and which only good for show. Have you ever heard anything a little like that in a sermon, Constasy?"

But Constasy had no laughter in her to-day. She smiled faintly, to please Nanciebel.

"Thee and thy petticoats! And is this upsetting going to prove thee is like a good and useful petticoat?"

Nanciebel pouted. "That does make my sermon too personal at once! I do not like such sermons. But, joking apart, Connie, I hope so! Now, my dear, I can take scarce any of these things with me. These"—taking up the casket—"are those jewels which I never wear, which

were mother's. They have always been too fine for me. Father has sometimes said they must wait till I was married. They will have to wait a very long while now, for I am not likely to marry any one in those same 'strange countries,' and I am not likely to marry our Nightmare, whom we do take with us! I cannot take jewels with me, Connie. They would say we might sell them for money, or food, or some of the things we are like to want. These, daddy will take over to Ryde Park, where uncle will keep them for me. I know Kate would give her ears for some of them, but she must not have them while Joyce and I live. Uncle will keep them, and if we should ever come home we will take them back again. But these"—she took up a handful of trinkets of less value—"these are for you, Constasy."

Her eyes danced merrily at Quaker Constasy's consternation.

"For me?" said she, and gazed at her in amazement. "But—thee does know very well —"

"Yes, and I'll tell you why. See here, now, Connie! We are going to some wild country, to live maybe in a cottage, maybe in a hut, maybe in a farm—we shall find some place, or build one, never fear! But *can* I live in a cottage in a gown like this? *Can* I now, Connie, my dear?"

She stood, and shook out her wide skirt, so long that it touched the ground on every side—stretched out her arm, with its little puffed sleeve and wide lace cuff, reaching only to the elbow—touched the deep lace collar hanging over her shoulders and across her breast—thrust out one little foot in a white silk stocking and tiny slipper.

"You know I can't, can't possibly, Connie. A country road would laugh at a shoe like that, and perhaps there will be no road at all. Could I cook a dinner in a gown like this? Could I light a fire with this skirt on? 'Twould be absurd——"

"'Tis impossible thee should do those things in any gown whatever," began Constasy distressfully again.

"Then must I do them in my petticoat," Nanciebel retorted, "for I am not going dinnerless because I have to cook it myself. I hope I shall do all those things, and do them well, but I must have clothing fit to wear. Father and Gilbert can dress in their travelling suits and be well prepared for anything, but I have not a gown in all this number which is just the thing I want. My morning gowns are more in reason, but they are all white, and I cannot be washing them every day, and I will not wear them soiled. No, Connie, my dear, there is but one thing for it. You must give me of your dresses."

"Mine!" said Constasy slowly, and gazed at her. "Truly . . . my gowns would be what thee does want, but—will thee wear them, Nanciebel? Maybe folk will call thee Quaker——"

"Let them! Your gowns are short, and dark, and plain, and sensible," Nanciebel said vigorously, "and they always look well on you. Whether or no I shall make a pretty Quaker is yet to be seen. But that matters little. Father will like whatever I may choose, and Gilbert is a boy, and will never see what I have on, and I am not going to dress to please our Nightmare! Now, Connie, my dear, you will give me of your grey dresses, and you will take these trinkets to Kate, and she will give you money in exchange—I shall speak to her—and you will buy yourself more gowns, so that I shall not be robbing you. With all these others"—nodding contemptuously at the finery on the bed—"you will do what you like. They are not nearly wide enough in the waist for Kate, not without very much work, and no doubt she would not care to wear them. But I cannot take them with me. Now, Connie, is not that for the best? You will give me your grey dresses?"

"If thee will wear them. Thee can take anything of mine, Nanciebel, but—I do not like to think of it."

"Tut! Do not be a silly girl! You will not cry again over what cannot be helped? Connie, I have no time for crying. Now fetch one of your gowns and let us see what it will need to make it fit me. . . . Quite so! Two inches, at least, turned up at the foot, and something of the same at the wrists. 'Twill want some work to make it fit a little person like me, when it was made for a great tall girl like you."

"I will do that easily," said Constancy, finding relief in the prospect of work. "And in my chamber there is a roll of grey cloth which I did buy for a new gown, but have never yet made up. It would make a gown for thee, Nanciebel, and we have time if we work hard."

"Now that is very good of you! And, Connie, my dear, one thing! You—you won't tell Kate? For she did mock me once already, and say she would soon see me in a grey gown, and I would rather she did not know. And one other thing, Connie! These"—touching the white Quaker collar and broad cuffs—"are very neat and clean, but how will they look after a long journey, or a few days of hard work? They will be all tumbled and soiled, and then will spoil the look of my gown. I do not want to go into these wild countries looking dirty and slovenly, and assuredly I shall not be able to keep my collars clean and fresh as you do here. Put some of these in my box, Connie, my dear, and when we have a house and I can wash and starch them as often as I wish, I will wear them, but not before. I would rather go without than wear them crushed and soiled. My gown will not look so well, but will be more useful. I wonder now!"—and she paused thoughtfully and considered the question—"I wonder if you could not make me some kind of collar that would serve and yet not soil? I would like to look well, if only to please father! Let me see! . . . This would be pretty!" and she took up a scarf of soft blue silk. "Could you not fashion me collar and cuffs out of this, Connie, my dear?"

"Blue?" said Constancy, raising her eyebrows, but Nanciebel only laughed.

"Yes, blue! *I* am not forbidden to wear colours, my dear! Blue and grey are pretty together. I declare, there is quite a touch of blue in that grey cloth of yours, whether you think it or not. 'Twill make my grey gown look a trifle brighter, and it will not soil too quickly."

So Constancy shaped a broad blue collar and wide turned-back cuffs, and stitched them on to the grey gown, and Nanciebel was greatly pleased with the result.

"'Tis quite pretty, I declare! That will serve till I can wear the white ones and keep them fresh and clean," she said, in delight.

The cousins from Ryde Park came over during the day, to ask if the rumour they had heard through their father was true. But Nanciebel, fortified by Gilbert's presence and assistance, received them as if nothing had happened, cheerfully admitted the truth of the reports, and told them anything more she could, and enlarged upon the interest and excitement of their journey, and the prospect of adventure in the new life.

"I have always longed to travel, and see new lands, and strange peoples, and beautiful places! And we shall see the sea, and even sail across it, and hear new tongues, and perhaps see people strangely dressed! Oh, I am eager for it, I do assure you! And, you know, the King is so thoughtful for our enjoyment that he will send one of his soldiers with us for company, so that Gilbert will have some one for a friend, and father some one to talk with, and I a gentleman of my own nation and standing for a companion, and not be left with only foreign folk, who will be hard to talk to! Don't you wish you were going also, Kate?"

Gilbert had turned hastily away, and was taking a sudden interest in the fastening of the tennis-net. Kate knit her brows and stared at her.

"'Tis very well to make light of it thus, but you will not like it so well as you think, child. Are you not afraid?"

“Not a bit!” said Nanciebel cheerfully. “Have another cake, cousin.”

Fred was listening with a mocking smile on his lips. Gilbert had turned again, and was looking on, his face grave and a trifle stern, as it had been since his return from London. Fred turned to him.

“And you go also? Had you any choice in the matter, or does John-o’-Peace drag you all with him without your consent?”

“I had my choice. I am offered a place in one of his Majesty’s ships of war, if I will take it.”

“And you choose rather to ruin yourself thus?”

“I prefer to go with my father.”

“You are all fools together,” said Kate angrily.

Nanciebel laughed. “I am well content to be such a fool as my father is! See that you are kind to Joyce and Charlie, Kate, and do not let them forget us.”

Fred Seymour sought, and obtained, a few moments’ private talk with Sir John before he rode away. John-o’-Peace looked troubled when he had gone, and at night called Nanciebel to him alone.

She was leading Joyce up to bed, for every moment with the little ones was precious now, and was singing her old song as she went—

“*‘Wee bee souldiers three,
Pardonnez-moi, je vous en prie,
Lately come from the Low Countrie,
With never a penny o’ monie.’*”

“That will fit us strangely well,” she said to herself, as she led Joyce up the staircase, “though ’tis soldiers of peace we are, and not of war.”

Then she heard her father calling, so sent Joyce off to Constancy, and followed him into the Lady’s Chamber.

“Singing, Nanciebel? Then you are not cast down at the prospect before us?”

“Not now,” she said cheerily. “At first, till I knew all, I was distressed. That day, when first Kate and then my Lady frightened me, and before I understood, I was troubled and afraid, and—well, I cried twice, like a big baby. But now I know, and am no longer afraid. We shall do very well, and we shall be together.”

“You have no fear of this journey we are to take, and the new life before us, Nanciebel?”

She looked at him with startled eyes.

“Not if I go with you. Nay, I have told you, father, I am not afraid.”

“I had thought there was nothing for it but to take you with me. But to-day a choice has been offered me, and ’tis only just to tell you of it, and let you choose. Your cousin Fred asks me to give you to him for his wife.”

Nanciebel stared in wild astonishment, then broke into a laugh.

“I—marry Fred? I never could! Father, you do not wish it? I—why, I do not like him!”

Sir John laughed, in some relief.

“That is enough! Nay, I do not wish it. I should not like it. But if you had wished it, I would not have carried you off against your will. But I was wellnigh sure what you would say.”

And Nanciebel laughed again at the very notion of such a thing, and kissed him and ran away upstairs, calling Constancy into her room to hear the preposterous proposal.

One afternoon, several days later, she and Constancy packed the little chest which was to carry her garments. That is to say, Nanciebel sat on the bed and gave directions, while Constancy folded, and arranged, and fitted everything neatly in.

“Those thick, clumsy boots, Connie, my dear! They will be very useful, I have no doubt, but they are not pretty! And those little petticoats—they always make me want to laugh, they are so short, but no doubt they are best so——”

“Thee could not wear long petticoats with a short gown.”

“Very true, Connie, my dear! And now my one pretty dress, Connie.”

For in spite of her decision that her own gowns were worse than useless at the present crisis, she had not found her resolution equal to the thought of parting with them all, and going away with nothing but the simple dresses so eminently suitable to the occasion.

“I must have one pretty gown, Connie! Do you think it would be very foolish?—or wrong? We *might* find ourselves in a land where there would be need for such a gown! We *might* meet folk who would understand. Don’t you think I could make room for one of my pretty gowns?”

And Constancy, who could not reconcile herself to the thought of her mistress lacking all her pretty things, had applauded the suggestion, and carefully folded the blue velvet birthday gown, with all its accompanying trifles of lace, and slippers, and silk stockings, and packed them among the simple gowns of rough grey homespun with which the box was filled.

That night, their last night at home, when Joyce and Charlie were sound asleep, and Sir John and Gilbert were talking earnestly downstairs, Nanciebel called Constancy to her room again, and laid aside her dainty dress, and proceeded to array herself in her first grey gown, to see the effect—on her own feelings, as well as on her father and brother.

“Why, I like it, I do declare! ’Tis all so neat, and the short skirt is very much to my mind,” and she surveyed with keen satisfaction the short grey skirt, which left her ankles free. Constancy had protested in horror that it was too short, but Nanciebel had insisted. “ ’Tis years since I had so short a gown! I am not sure if I ever did before. I feel I can do anything in this,” she said, and walked up and down the room for the satisfaction of feeling the skirt swing about her ankles, instead of trailing on the ground. “Truly, if I had known there was so much comfort in a short dress, I would have stolen yours before this, Constancy! Now we will see what father says.”

“He will not like it,” Constancy said doubtfully.

“Nay, but I think he will.”

Into the quiet Lady’s Chamber, where Sir John and Gilbert sat, there crept the prettiest little Quaker who ever wore a short grey gown, broad blue collar and cuffs, and little white hood.

“How do you like my travelling gown, daddy?”

It was such an astounding change from her gay dresses, and ribbons, and lace, that for a moment they gazed without a word. Then Gilbert rose suddenly, turning away from her, and Sir John held out his arms.

“Child, come here! Who taught you this courage and wisdom? Nanciebel, my child——”

“Do you like it? Is it not a wise kind of gown for a journey? I am fairly in love with my short skirt,” she said, turning round with naïve satisfaction to show it off.

“ ’Tis the prettiest gown you have ever had, Nanciebel,” said Gilbert, turning again.

Her brave acceptance of the situation moved them both deeply. They had feared its effect upon her, and had never thought it possible she could take the news as she had done. She

laughed at his speech.

“The prettiest! The plainest, you silly boy! But——”

“Well, then, you never before had a gown which made you look so pretty, my dear!”

“That is more like it, boy,” and Sir John drew her down upon his knee and kissed her again.

“I knew you would not mind if I wore a gown which was more for comfort than for show, and, as I told Constancy, I am not going to dress to please our Nightmare——”

“Ah! We have a letter from the gentleman, Nanciebel. We were talking of it when you came in.”

“From the Nightmare?”

“Yes. He will be here to-morrow about midday, and we are to have our answer ready. If we are still determined not to yield, we are to be ready to mount and ride away at once without delay.”

Nanciebel’s lips pursed indignantly.

“He seems a most impatient Nightmare! At midday to-morrow! Well, we must be ready, I suppose. Then we shall have to tell the little ones in the morning. That is what I fear. I am ready to-night, if need be, father. I have but to put on my cloak and hood. I can start in ten minutes, if you wish.”

He kissed her again, and they sat talking for a while.

“Our last night in the old home!” Nanciebel said, without faltering. “I hope we soon find as happy a one elsewhere. I think we will. I am very sure we will.”

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

A Night with a Nightmare

Joyce and Charlie were sent off to Ryde Park during the morning, bewildered, protesting, and heartbroken when the moment of parting came. Constancy had begged so hard for the longest possible time with her mistress, that she had been allowed to stay, and was to follow them in the evening.

About midday, when Nanciebel, with forced cheerfulness, for the parting with the little ones had been very hard, declared herself keeping watch for "the Nightmare," a man arrived from the village inn, bringing a message. Captain Morgan was there, and would come to Summertown when he had dined. If Sir John Seymour was not prepared to yield obedience to the King's wishes, he must be ready to set out in two hours from that time.

"A most impatient Nightmare! A most boorish Nightmare!" was Nanciebel's comment. "Why does he not come here and dine with us?"

"We are to be his prisoners. We have gone against the King's wishes. We are to be treated like naughty little children in disgrace," Gilbert explained.

"Well then, if Captain Morgan—since that is the creature's odious name!—has the bad taste to prefer to dine at the inn, when he might be here, we will not trouble ourselves about him any more. But we also must dine. Connie, my dear, what will you give us for dinner? We do not want to start hungry."

At two o'clock precisely Captain Morgan rode up to the door. He was, to their surprise, quite young, not more than five years older than Gilbert, dark-faced, with keen black eyes and dark hair, dressed like a soldier ready for foreign service, in stout leathern suit and great riding boots. He was not a big man, but there was no excuse for Gilbert's comment, as he stood with Nanciebel at an upper window, "Tut! Father or I could put that little man in our pocket, if need be!"

"A smaller Nightmare than we looked for! And what a very black one! He has been to the Indies, surely, to get his face so brown," said Nanciebel, for the occasion was too trying for silence, and any comment was better than none.

But they were hardly just in their remarks, and were quite aware of it, and that they were blinded by prejudice at the moment. It was only by comparison with Sir John and Gilbert that Blaise Morgan looked small, and they were both above ordinary height. He could look down upon Nanciebel, who took after her mother and was still quite a little person, and, moreover, looked smaller and younger than ever in her short gown.

"We must go down, Nanciebel. Father is alone."

"And the Nightmare will want to be off at once," and she tied on her cloak and close round hood, and cast a last look about her room before following.

The Captain had asked and received his answer from Sir John when they appeared. The horses were waiting, and Morgan, after a sharp question to Gilbert, looked sourly at Nanciebel, a little grey figure in short skirt, hood and cloak.

"Is the child to go too?" he asked, strong disapproval in his tone and face.

Nanciebel had gripped her father's hand, knowing how he must feel this moment of departure. For herself, she dared not think of it. But at this speech she coloured in sudden vast

indignation, and forgot her distress. Child, forsooth! The odious creature! The—the Nightmare!

“My daughter goes with me. We have the King’s consent,” Sir John said shortly.

“She would be better at home. You will be sorry if you take her.”

“Nevertheless we go together.”

“Then mount. We go at once.—What is this?”

A man-servant, a stranger to them all, rode up, carrying a letter.

“Captain Morgan?”

“Yes?” and the Captain’s dark face grew darker as he read the message.

“We wait till to-morrow,” he said curtly, his voice and face full of annoyance. And after a moment, as they stood in surprise, he added, “My cousin—Lady Llety—is returning to London, and will lie here this night. She bids us wait. We can do naught else.”

He threw himself from his horse, plainly in a very bad humour. Sir John turned to Nanciebel.

“Reprieve! Another night at home! We will not grieve over that. You, child, had better run to Constancy with these tidings, and help her in her preparations for these guests. And, Nanciebel, slip into a pretty gown once again! We shall have to welcome this lady, and I will not have her mock you, child.”

And Nanciebel, nothing loth, put aside the thought of to-morrow’s journey, and determined to make the most of this unexpected reprieve.

One thought was in her mind as she ran upstairs to Constancy.

“That man! I will show him—child, indeed! I verily believe he thought me only twelve or thereabouts. I’ll let him see! Child! He will perhaps be more courteous to-morrow.”

She threw aside her grey gown with distinct enjoyment, and arrayed herself in a crimson dress, with low-cut bodice, hanging lace, long full skirt, wide sleeves to the elbow, silk stockings and dainty slippers, and added even the jewels which she had given to Constancy—necklace, rings, bracelets, and chain of pearls in her hair. Her curls had been tucked away out of sight inside her hood, but she shook them loose again, and surveyed herself in the glass with much satisfaction.

“Just for one more night! I could not have received my Lady in that gown. And she, it seems, is our Nightmare’s cousin! Strange! But he said so. And why does she want to see us again, I wonder? Well, I am glad enough. I wish we had not sent the little ones away, but ’tis better not to bring them back and go through it all again to-morrow.”

Captain Morgan was tramping moodily up and down the lawn. Gilbert and Nanciebel watched him from the windows, and commented upon his evident ill-temper. He did not seem pleased at thought of meeting his cousin. Perhaps there was some quarrel between them. That was very likely, said Gilbert.

Lady Llety was expected during the afternoon. Constancy busied herself with the necessary preparations in the house, and Nanciebel, taking a basket, went across the lawn in search of flowers, as if no trouble was in the air, and no black-faced jailer trampling the grass right in her path.

She sailed past him, her skirt caught up in front and sweeping the grass behind, and disappeared behind the lilac hedge, without a glance in his direction. If she afterwards peeped through the bushes, and laughed at sight of him standing in surprise and gazing after her, he was not meant to know that.

There were rose bushes here, and the early roses were ready. She went from bush to bush, cutting and dropping into her basket, and singing cheerily.

*“ ‘When he was gone a year away,
A year but barely ane,
A strange fancy came into his head
That fair Nanciebel was gane.*

*It’s then he rode, and better rode,
Until he came to the town;
And then he heard a dismal noise,
For the church-bells a’ did soun’.*

*He asked what the bells rang for,
They said, “It’s for Nanciebel;
She died for a discourteous squire,
And his name is Lord Lovel.” ’ ’ ”*

Her basket full of yellow roses, she startled him again by her sudden appearance, as she passed on her way back to the house. She gave him as slight a nod as she could contrive, on meeting him face to face, and he hastily raised his cap, and bowed and stood aside. She gave him the briefest possible glance, scarcely indeed seeming to see him at all, but managed in that moment to read in his eyes his doubt as to whether she could be the little grey girl of the front steps.

He resumed his walk, a trifle less sulky, and more thoughtful even than before, and caught occasional glimpses of the crimson gown through the windows as she arranged her roses in the dining-room.

“A maid of spirit! Her ladyship does not like me, or I have offended her already in some way. She is scarce more than a child, as I thought, but, faith, in that gown she almost looks a woman. ’Tis a sin to drag her off into the wilds. The man must be mad—as I thought.”

He met Sir John and Gilbert during the afternoon, and attempted a remonstrance on this point.

“Is it needful, sir, to force your daughter to accompany you? ’Tis not fit for a lady——”

“My daughter goes with me of her own choice.”

“ ’Tis folly. It will kill her——”

“Kindly leave my daughter out of your conversation, sir,” and Sir John cut him short and would have no return to that subject.

Blaise Morgan shrugged his shoulders.

“As you will. The whole business is a foolish one. But ’tis hard on the girl——”

Sir John walked away, and Gilbert went inside to tell Nanciebel of the Nightmare’s sudden solicitude for her.

“That’s my red gown,” she said, with deep satisfaction. “I thought it would teach him better manners. There is great comfort in a gown, which you, poor boy, can never know.”

My Lady arrived at sunset. Sir John and Gilbert received her with the necessary courtesy but with no warmth of welcome, rather a distinct touch of disapproval, which she noted at once. They did their best not to leave her alone with Nanciebel, and Nanciebel, watching them all, said to herself—

“Daddy doesn’t like her. Neither does Gilbert. I wonder why? We thought her a very pleasant lady. And the Nightmare could not speak more coldly, nor look much sterner, if she was his enemy instead of his cousin. Assuredly they have some quarrel.”

Sir John had smiled at sight of her altered costume, and seemed well pleased to see her presiding over the table. They all supped together, but relations seemed strained in several directions, as Captain Morgan would speak to nobody, but paid severe attention to his supper, and Sir John and Gilbert, when occasionally addressing my Lady, spoke in so frigid a tone that each remark was almost a rebuke. Most of the conversation was, therefore, left to Nanciebel, who did her part bravely, and wondered a little at the electrical state of the atmosphere.

After supper, she retired to the quiet Lady’s Chamber, by her father’s desire, and very soon he and Gilbert joined her there, and left Lady Llety and the Captain alone in the dining-room. Apparently when they were left to themselves, Captain Morgan found his tongue, for through the closed doors came the sound of voices, in animated discussion, which indeed seemingly grew so hot, by the raised tones and sharp voices, that Nanciebel, sitting quietly between her father and brother, suggested that some one should go in and separate them, since they seemed to be losing their tempers.

“’Tis some foreign tongue they are talking, I declare! What can it be? French, maybe, or Latin? ’Tis never English, I am sure of that. I would like to go and listen,” she said naughtily.

“’Tis no matter for us. We will let them be,” Sir John said quietly, and they sat there talking, till my Lady entered suddenly from the dining-hall.

“So you are all determined to go on your travels?” she said, and stood looking at them. “You go also, child?”

“Assuredly, my Lady.”

“Then I have a word for you alone. Take me to your chamber, Mistress Nanciebel,” and Nanciebel, wondering, led the way, while Sir John and Gilbert looked at one another, and frowned in annoyance.

“Have you packed the box of clothing the King allowed you, child? Then where is it? Let me see it. Nay, do not look so astonished, but I must know what you have put in it, you know. For all we can tell, you may have much money hidden away, or jewels, which are just as good. The King allows you only clothing for yourself alone. So if you have aught else secreted there, it will be forfeit to me. Some one must see to it that you are not cheating us, and you would not wish to have my rough cousin Blaise turning over your gowns, I suppose? So open your box and let me see.”

“I am glad my conscience is clear,” said Nanciebel, as she obeyed. “We are honourable folk, my Lady, and have had no thought of cheating you. But look if you will.”

“I must. ’Tis only reasonable.”

She laughed at sight of the grey woollen gowns and stout boots and short useful petticoats.

“A wise girl, truly! Did your Quaker maid advise you thus?”

“Nay, ’twas I myself. I needed no advice——”

“But what is this?” as she came on the blue velvet birthday dress, and looked up questioningly.

Nanciebel reddened. “I could not bring my mind to going without one fit and proper gown. ’Tis foolish, maybe, and you will laugh at me, but I might chance to want it, and even if it never comes out of my box, I shall be glad to know it is there.”

Lady Llety laughed indeed, but with understanding.

“Well, I will leave you your one pretty gown, though perhaps I have no right to. And you give me your word you carry no money, Mistress Nanciebel?”

“Not a penny, my Lady.”

“As to your father and brother, Blaise will see to them. But I will tell him I will answer for you, and he will not question you. Child!”

“Yes?” said Nanciebel, looking up surprised.

“Some—very many—folk blame my husband and me for many things. Have they spoken against us to you?”

“No,” she said slowly, “no one has said anything. But I judged from their manner they had some quarrel with you, and most of all your cousin the Captain.”

“As to Master Blaise’s feelings, those are very easily explained. He does not want to go away into the wilds, any more than you do yourselves. He wants to stay and fight the Dutch. ’Tis not London he desires, or its pleasures and ease, I will say that much for him. He is soldier all through, and he wants to be on hand when the war shall come. But I have asked the King to send him with you. I think a while in the country will be good for him. He does not know when to hold his tongue, any more than your father, and he has made me very angry away in London. So he goes with you, and he is angry. If he, or any one, speaks ill of me to you, Nanciebel—though I do not think they will—remember that in this matter I have done my best for you and your father, and have spoken a good word for you to the King. And if Blaise is rude, remember that his heart is fighting against the Dutch, and make excuse for him. He will not be rude to you, but to your father he may. You see, he is a soldier, and would have all the world soldiers also. Where are ‘Sweet Joy’ and Charlie?”

“We sent them over to Ryde Park this morning, and thought it best not to bring them back again. But the house is strangely quiet to-night,” and Nanciebel turned from her to gaze out at the garden sleeping under the stars.

“Well, good fortune to you in your journeying! And remember, if you find life too hard out in the wilds, you have but to prevail on your father to accept the King’s orders. This your house will be forfeit to the King, but he will restore it if you choose to be obedient at any time.”

Nanciebel shook her head.

“My father is ‘John-o’-Peace,’ and proud of it, and so are we,” and she led my Lady to her chamber.

Captain Blaise called for an early start in the morning, and they were miles away before Lady Llety awoke, to her intense vexation.

The morning was bright, with clear sky and sun and a high wind. The country was looking very fresh and sweet, with standing hay in the fields, and roses in the hedges. But Captain Morgan looked too black and sulky to notice these things, and Sir John was too thoughtful, and Gilbert too gloomy and stern. Nanciebel felt that every step of her horse was a fresh good-bye, and was glad when the ride was over, and they reached a little seaport town, where a ship lay waiting.

She had never been to sea before, and there was interest and excitement in the prospect. The sea was very dark blue, with white crests everywhere, in brilliant sunshine and a high wind which tore at her curls and dragged them out from under her hood. She stood close to her father to watch the bustle of the start, then followed him below to inspect the very limited accommodation offered them.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

A Lonely Shore

Those few days at sea were the most miserable of Nanciebel's life up till that time. Very many times she wished herself dead, and even almost repented that she had accompanied her father. She lost all count of time, and as Sir John and Gilbert had never been to sea, and suffered almost as much as she did, they could form no very clear idea as to the length of their journey.

Captain Morgan left them to themselves, and offered no information or help. He did not seem to feel any inconvenience, and Gilbert asserted that he had heard him say "they were all sailors where he came from." The ship's accommodation for passengers was so very limited that they would all have felt much discomfort from their cramped quarters if they had been in a condition to care about any such trifles. As it was, none of them cared for food, and Nanciebel lay and wished to die, and it was only when the ship put into port, as she did continually, that they could rest or eat at all.

On the first of such occasions, Captain Morgan requested them to remain below, and thereafter they were only too glad to rest, without troubling to question at all as to their whereabouts.

But early one evening he summoned them on deck, and they learned, with infinite relief, that the voyage was at an end.

The sun was still high above the sea, for it was the middle of June. Before them lay a lonely coast, with jagged, broken cliffs, and a long arm of fierce black rocks reaching out to welcome them. Above were hills, and later, when these grew familiar, they remembered that they had noted their varying outlines—the two great peaks of one, which fell sheer into the sea, the round pimple on the crest of another. But at the moment they only glanced at these, and paid more attention to the small boat into which Nanciebel's box had already been lowered.

Blaise Morgan turned sharply to Sir John and Gilbert.

"You know the King's commands. Do you carry any money?"

"No."

"Nevertheless, I must be sure. I must search your clothing."

"We have no desire to cheat you, Captain," said Seymour, in quick remonstrance.

Gilbert had not been too ill to resent the very suggestion, and cried out against it in fierce anger.

"I have to do my duty," Morgan said coldly. "You have not shown yourselves over loyal to the King. As to your honesty, I know nothing. But I have my orders, and must carry them out."

"Very well," Sir John said quietly. "Gilbert, boy, are you not glad enough to go ashore on any terms? I think I heard you say so last night."

"Anything to get off this horrible ship!" said Nanciebel, and between them they brought angry Gilbert to the point of sulky submission.

"Now to the boat!" said Morgan, when he was satisfied that they carried only the articles permitted.

“One moment, Captain. Thanks to the rolling of the ship, no one of us has cared to eat to-day. You will scarcely set us ashore starving. I know the King’s commands and accept them, but it is evening, and we have no immediate means of finding food. Either give us a meal before going ashore, or let us take sufficient for to-night.”

“I cannot eat anything on this horrible boat,” said Nanciebel wistfully. “May we not take our supper on the shore yonder, Captain?”

He hesitated, then said curtly, “I have no right to grant you anything to take ashore with you, but if you have not dined to-day, I will let you carry enough bread for one meal, if you wish.”

“Good! That is better than nothing,” Sir John said cheerfully.

The wind was high, and the salt nip of it was refreshing. The waves were breaking on the black rocks of the headland in a long line of foam, and flying up the face of the low cliffs, which were broken into chasms and arches and bays by their constant force. The boat was tossed from breaker to breaker, and Nanciebel gasped and clung to her father in terror.

The ship was lying directly off a break in the cliffs, where a shingly beach ran up into a little glen. To this beach the boat carried them, and the men sprang ashore gladly, and John-o’-Peace turned and lifted Nanciebel on to the pebbles at his side. Her box was set down on the beach, and, with cries of farewell, the sailors pushed off and sped away back to the ship, with many curious glances at the little party left behind. For the story was known to most of them, and there were many opinions among them of the probable fate of the castaways, and of the foolishness of a girl’s presence in such a matter.

Nanciebel and her father stood looking after the boat, feeling the sudden desolation of their position. Where they were they did not know. This might very possibly be an island, in which case the boat represented their last link with home. Uncomfortable as the ship had been, it was hard to see it go.

Gilbert was tramping about on the shingle, grateful for the feel of solid ground under his feet once more.

“Thank Heaven!” he said fervently. “Once or twice, Nanciebel, I truly thought we would not bring you off that ship alive. No more sailing for me if I can help it. Dad!” and he paused beside his father and spoke quietly, “what are we to do with that fellow? Does he expect us to find lodging for him also, or will he see to himself? If he looks for me to help him find a bed, ’twill be nowhere but on that wet seaweed over there.”

Sir John laughed, and turned to face the future.

“Never heed him. We will ask him presently. For the moment, children, we have only a few more hours of daylight, and we have to find our own lodging. Let us see what kind of place this is.”

Captain Morgan had seated himself on a rock, with the evident intention of watching their proceedings. They left him there, and turned to explore the beach and see what possibilities it offered.

“A stream!” said Sir John, well pleased. “We could not begin better. At least we shall not lack water.”

The stream ran down to the sea through a winding glen, with green cliffs on each side, covered with bushes ablaze with gorse and tufts of green heather and long straggling arms of bramble. Marshy ground, with stiff wire grass and tall reeds, stretched from the banks of the stream to the cliffs, and here were clumps and beds of leaves dotted everywhere with brilliant

yellow iris. Nanciebel cried out at sight of the flowers, but her father and Gilbert were in search of something more practical at the moment.

"There is no house to be seen anywhere, and, if we found one, no doubt we could not speak to the folk. They promised us a foreign tongue," Sir John reminded them. "We have not a great while of daylight now, so, Gilbert, we must make some kind of shelter for this child. 'Twill be a fine night, by the look of the sky, but she must have some covering, if 'tis only a tent. I have been thinking perhaps our coats—or mine alone——"

"My cloak would help to make a tent!" Nanciebel cried eagerly. "Or—better still—in my box I have another great cloak. I am sure 'tis almost large enough to make a tent for us all."

"That sounds good. Let us have a look," and they went back to the beach, where Captain Morgan still sat moodily, aiming stones at the seagulls and failing to hit them every time.

To him, also, the retreating ship meant the severing of all connection with the world he cared for, at least for a time. He had not in any way deserved this exile, and he felt distinctly ill-used. Sir John was too busy to speak to him, and Gilbert turned his back on him whenever he could, and seemed to derive some pleasure from ignoring him completely.

Nanciebel demanded their help in getting her box open, and quickly produced a big blue cloak, whose voluminous folds had often covered her wide gowns in the evening at home.

"There! That will help us, surely."

"Ay, that's what we want! Did you bring it for this reason, Nanciebel? It could not be better."

"I brought it only because I thought it would be warm. 'Twas the biggest and warmest I had. Now what will you do with it?"

"Find some nook in the rocks which only wants a roof, and cover it in, and we shall have our house," John-o'-Peace said promptly.

She laughed. "I might well say I did not fear to go away with you! I am very sure you will carry us safely through any difficulties, father. Shall we search together?"

They separated, however, and went different ways to find a suitable spot. Before long Gilbert called them to the shore, where he had found a corner where two walls of rock were cleft apart. There were seaweed and driftwood on the shingly floor, and just sufficient space for them all to crouch together. But the walls of rock approached so close overhead that they gave absolute shelter from the wind and promised warmth and safety.

They set to work to clear the shingle and collect driftwood for a fire. Blaise Morgan had followed them from the little glen to see what they were at, and stood watching, a curious look on his face.

"I could kick that fellow. I shall do it, too, before we are done with him," Gilbert murmured to Nanciebel, as he threw down a handful of chips.

"Do not heed him. He is only a nightmare," she returned. "This is going to be cosy, father."

"I wish it had been nearer the stream. We have to walk each time we wish to drink. Gilbert, we will fetch the box down here in a moment. But first I will speak to the Captain," and he turned to Morgan.

"Let us understand one another, sir. Do we have your company night and day, or will you find lodging elsewhere?"

"My supper and bed are awaiting me. I do but wait to see where you will spend the night."

"You are very thoughtful," Seymour said coolly. "Our arrangements are made, so we need not keep you longer from your supper. No doubt we shall see you in the morning?"

“I shall have somewhat to say to you then.”

He stood, apparently hesitating, then raised his cap to Nanciebel, and strode away across the shingle.

“I am glad to see the back of him!” she said fervently. “Truly, he is a nightmare when he stands, and stares, and scowls like that.”

Gilbert was giving vent to his opinions concerning the King and all his soldiers, and Blaise Morgan in particular, in rather more forcible language, when they heard steps upon the shingle again, and, looking up, saw that he had come back, that curious look of hesitation on his face once more.

“’Tis only fair to tell you,” he said abruptly, “that this your camp is below highwater mark, and the moon is new. You had better move farther up the glen,” and he turned and tramped away again.

Nanciebel was the first to recover from her consternation. Sir John and Gilbert were still looking at one another, when she ran past them, and sped lightly across the shingle.

“Captain, we do thank you very heartily!” she cried after him, and he turned and raised his cap again.

“Beyond the grass you will be safe. Good-night to you, little mistress.”

She forgave him the adjective for the sake of his help, and hurried back to her father.

“Now that was truly good of him! We might have waked to find the sea creeping in upon us, and our retreat cut off.”

“He could hardly do less,” Gilbert remarked. “He could scarcely leave us here to be caught and drowned in a trap.”

“Give him credit for his help, boy. He is not forced to give us even a word of aid.”

“I do not like him,” Gilbert grumbled, and they laughed.

“Come and find another house. ’Twill soon be dark. On the grass, he said.”

They found another corner at last, at the foot of one of the cliffs, where a cleft, something wider than the last, could be roofed over with the big cloak, and where the ground was dry and hard. The box was dragged to this new camp, and placed across the entrance of the little tent, and a big fire of driftwood was built just outside. There were plenty of flints on the beach, and the axe gave them steel, so the fire was soon burning cheerfully. Gilbert tore up handfuls of heather roots, and Nanciebel carried them into the tent and spread them out, so that, when covered with coats and cloaks, they would make very good beds.

Thoroughly tired at last, they sat round their fire and shared the bread brought from the ship. All were hungry, thanks to their long fast on board and the keen salt wind and hard work ashore. The fact that they were freed from Captain Morgan’s presence was so great a relief that they were all inclined to cheerfulness, and Nanciebel even to high spirits.

“What do we do for breakfast?” she asked, as the last of the bread disappeared.

“Gilbert and I will see to that. We would have been wiser to save a little of our bread, but they were not too liberal in the supply, and we were hungry.”

“Hungry! I was starving, after that horrible ship—ugh! What was the sea made for? ’Tis a horror.”

John-o’-Peace laughed. “Only when one is afloat. See those waves breaking on the beach! They are very grand. Hear the crash—and the long drawing in—and the fall again. ’Tis like thunder—or the roll of guns, as our Captain would no doubt say. We should sleep well to such music.”

“Oh, I am willing to *see* it, and to *hear* it! But to *feel* it any more—I think not! Our Nightmare seems a good sailor.”

“What did he mean by saying the moon was new? What matters the moon to us?” queried Gilbert. “Or was he laughing at us?”

But they were all inexperienced in these matters, and no one could enlighten him.

“I wonder where he has gone to now? He seemed in no doubt of his supper and bed.”

“We shall perhaps learn that later on. I wonder where we are?” Seymour pondered. “Not so very far from home, in spite of all those days at sea, for each day we touched at some port. We have not crossed the ocean. But that also we shall learn later, when we have seen more of our neighbours. ’Tis a wild, lonely coast we have seen so far.”

“I like it,” said Nanciebel. “It smells so good, after that hot, airless ship,” and she sniffed the salt wind appreciatively, and then drew close to her father, and nestled cosily inside his arm. “Isn’t it quiet, but for the waves? And look up, father! Did you ever see such stars? I am sure there were not so many at home—or else I never looked at them.”

“That is more likely. ’Tis a very dark night, also, and the air is very clear. See the White Path across the sky!”

“Yes, isn’t not strange? And Charles’s Wain, I know, I have seen that at home,” and Nanciebel lay back against his arm, and gazed up into the dark blue dome. “See that very bright dancing one, to which the horses of the Wagon seem galloping! And this circle close by, with a diamond in the centre! See this very white one in the east—and there in the middle of your White Path is a big W! How strange!”

“Yes, I have seen that often, but have never thought to learn its name.”

“There is a bright red beauty rising right out of the sea,” said Gilbert.

“That must be due north—by the sunset. A north shore! ’Twill be cold in winter. Now where can we be, that makes us look due north?” Sir John mused.

“France, maybe, or Spain. We will see when we find some one to speak to.”

They sat silent, listening to the crashing breakers at the mouth of the little glen, and looking up at the silent twinkling stars. The stream ran swiftly, but without a sound, between its turf banks, washing through weeds and grass and iris-beds. The unknown country beyond was very quiet, and the silence suggested its loneliness.

“’Tis all too silent. I am going to wake it up a little,” and Nanciebel began to sing.

Very often at home her father had asked for a song, and though he had not suggested it to-night, she guessed that it would not displease him.

“I am going to sing my song,” she said, and began the ballad of Lord Lovel and fair Nanciebel.

“*‘O where are you going, Lord Lovel?*

My dearest, tell to me.’

‘O I am going a far journey,

Some strange countries to see.

But I’ll return in seven long years,

Lady Nanciebel to see.’

‘O seven, seven, seven long years,

They are much too long for me.’”

But when she had come to the end of the tragedy—

*“Lady Nancie died on Tuesday’s night,
Lord Lovel upon the next day.
Lady Nancie died from pure, pure love,
Lord Lovel for deep sorrow——”*

Gilbert remarked—

“ ’Tis very pretty, Nanciebel, but now give us something more cheery,” and she laughed.

*“I read that once in Africa,
A prince that there did reign,
Who had to name Cophetua,
As poets they did feign.
From Nature’s works he did incline,
For sure he was not of my mind,
He caréd not for women-kind,
But did them all disdain.
But mark what happened by the way;
As he out of his window lay,
He saw a beggar all in grey,
Which did increase his pain.”*

“Yes, now, that is much more to my mind!” laughed Gilbert.

“I marvel that you can sing so bravely, Nanciebel,” said John-o’-Peace, deeply moved. His arm tightened about her. She looked up at him quickly.

“I am so very happy to be out of that horrible ship! And, indeed, now that we are here, I see no need for distress, father. We are together, and we have done right, and the Nightmare is not here! I like this place, by what we have seen so far, and we will see more and like it better to-morrow. We will soon find a home, or build one, and then we will send for the little ones and be very well content. ’Twas hard to leave home, but now that is over, and we are going to be very happy here. I am more content than I have been since my birthday, when I first began to understand.”

“And you do not blame me for bringing you to this wild place?”

She laughed. “Do I look like it? I cannot be sufficiently glad that I am here with you.”

He kissed her, without more words. “Come, then, and see how our tent serves for this night. I trust we shall soon find lodging more fit for you, Nanciebel,” and they left the silent stars, and the rising tide, and the heavy crashing waves, and the thin new moon, and sought the shelter of the cleft in the rocks, where the flying spray could not reach, and the cold night wind passed over and left them safe and warm.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

Black Cows and Prison Walls

For a time Nanciebel lay, wrapped cosily in her cloak and hood, watching the dancing flames outside and listening to the music of the waves, which was so new to her. Then she fell asleep, and woke in the morning to find herself alone in the tent.

She was up in a moment, very much refreshed, and feeling ready for anything and distinctly hungry—a trifle nervous also, till she should find how far off her natural protectors had wandered. But Gilbert was just outside, sitting on the bank of the stream, watching a couple of fishing-lines. So, calling out a cheery greeting to him, she turned to the shore, and soon found a big pool so sheltered among the rocks that she was able to make an extensive toilet.

“Now! I feel the better for that! I am sure I needed it greatly. ’Tis well there was no one here to see. My hair has not been fit to be seen since first we went on board that horrible ship,” she said to herself, and stood looking about the shore.

The tide had fallen again, leaving a long stretch of wet shingle and shining seaweed, brown, green, red, yellow, and white. The sun had risen from behind the long black headland, and was already hot and high. The wind had dropped to a light breeze, full of that fresh salt nip, which, to a girl bred in an inland county, was so new and invigorating.

“I think I could walk twenty miles, and I am sure I could eat half a sheep! I wonder if there is to be any breakfast?” and Nanciebel went back to the tent, singing the song of the evening before—

“*‘What your name?—go on, ’ quoth he.
‘Penelophon, O King, ’ quoth she;
With that she made a low curtsey;
A trim one, as I ween.*

*And when the wedding-day was come,
The King commanded straight
The noblemen, both all and some,
Upon the Queen to wait.
And she behaved herself that day
As if she had never walkt the way;
She had forgot her gown of grey,
Which she did wear of late.”*

Nanciebel laid her cloak and hood in the tent, for the day seemed likely to be hot, and went out bareheaded to join Gilbert.

“I am that same ‘beggar all in grey!’” she laughed. “Where is father, Gilbert? And you have caught some fish! I never thought you would.”

“I have been working while you were dreaming,” he retorted. “Father is gone up to the marshes.”

“The marshes?” she questioned, looking pitifully at the shining trout.

“’Tis all marsh-land up the river. He has his bow, in the hope that he should find wild birds to shoot. Can you cook these without an oven, Nance?”

“Oven!” she mocked. “Oven! Oh, you ignorant, silly boy! ’Tis well for you I am here. A frying-pan, you mean. I shall find some way to cook them, never fear. Poor things! I am sorry, but I am hungry also, most desperate hungry.”

The fire had been rebuilt, and was giving out fierce heat. She propped the fish up with stones close to the blaze, and withdrew hastily, lest she should be scorched. Then, leaving them to roast in the heat, she wandered down to the water’s edge, and was grateful for the stout boots she had mocked at before.

When Sir John presently arrived empty-handed from the marshes, he found his breakfast ready and a very impatient pair of young people waiting for him. With congratulations to Gilbert on his good luck, and to Nanciebel on her skill in cooking, he bade them fall to at once.

“We would be the better for bread, to be sure, but castaways cannot have everything, and we are doing very well. These fish are delicious, Nanciebel.”

“I am glad there are so many, for I feel as if I could eat half-a-dozen. I never knew such a place for hunger.”

“That is the wind from the sea and hills. It blows right across the bay from the mountains yonder.”

“Hills? Mountains?” Nanciebel cried eagerly. “I have always longed to see a mountain _____”

“You shall see one very soon now. But, Gilbert, we cannot all go and leave these our things for the first passer-by. And as we cannot leave this child in charge, I think you must stay, while we go to see what we can find of this new place.”

“Is it needful? I would like to go too. But I will stay, of course, if it is best.”

“Do you come with me now up the cliff, and I will show you how we will go. Then you must, I think, wait here till we return. I wonder when our friend the Captain will appear? He said he would come in the morning.”

“Perhaps we shall have set off before he comes,” said Nanciebel, with delighted anticipation. “Then he and Gilbert can have some friendly conversation together.”

Gilbert grunted expressively, and Sir John laughed.

“I am not going to wait for him, but Gilbert can send him after us, if he likes. Come along, Gil, and I will show you which way we shall take. We will be but a few moments, Nanciebel.”

“Very well,” she called after them, and busied herself at her box of clothing.

The close hood which she had worn for travelling was too warm for such a fresh morning, but she could not go walking over the countryside bareheaded. So she took from the box a little light cap, to match the broad white collar and cuffs which properly belonged to her gown, and this on the back of her head left her curls free and was so slight that she scarcely felt it, yet was enough to satisfy her sense of propriety. Then she folded her travelling cloak and hood and laid them in the box, singing away to herself as usual.

“*’O seven, seven, seven long years,
They are much too long for me.’*”

A sound made her look round, thinking to see her father returning. Then, with a scream, she fled up the glen.

From the opposite bank, across the stream, and straight towards her, came a great horned monster, with wild eyes staring out of its shaggy black hair, and fierce rough hide. Behind it came a crowd of others, swinging tails like bell-ropes, all black, and fierce, and shaggy, and evidently intent upon inspecting the little camp.

Neither John-o'-Peace nor Gilbert was in sight. Nanciebel fled up the glen without a glance behind, and ran full into Captain Morgan.

"Why, what is this?" he cried, startled out of his usual gloomy silence. "What has frightened you, little mistress? Surely no one has molested you?"

"Oh, it's some great beasts—monsters! I do not know what they are, but I was all alone—"

"Let us see," and he strode round the corner.

Then he stopped, and laughed.

"Have you never seen cows before, Mistress Seymour?"

"Cows? Never cows like those!" She shivered. "I did not stop to see if they were cows. I thought them wild bulls at the least. Are you sure? They look so fierce. Our cows at home are gentle creatures, and mostly white or brown—not like these black monsters."

He laughed again. "Our cows here are black. You will soon grow used to them. They come from some farm. They are quiet beasts enough, I do assure you, save, perhaps, when they have young ones, and these have none. We are very proud of our black cattle. I will drive them off for you, however. Where is your father?"

The cows retreated before him without any remonstrance, and retired to the farther bank of the stream. Nanciebel thanked him gratefully.

"Will you do a small thing for me, Captain?"

He knit his brows. "I do not know, little mistress. I may not help you or your father——"

"Oh, but this you may do!" she laughed. "I pray you, do not tell them I was afraid, that is all! I would not like Gilbert to know I ran away from a cow! And here they come."

"Good-day to you, Captain!" Sir John said courteously. "Do you wish anything of us? Our plans for the day are made, and we were just about to set out."

"I will not trouble you greatly, but must ask you to come with me a little way. I have that to show you which there was no time for last night."

"Very good! Will it content you if my daughter and I go with you? Gilbert is remaining here."

"I have no desire for Master Gilbert's company," said Morgan. "'Tis enough if I do make matters plain to you."

"Very well. Which way?"

"Up the cliff, the road you have just come."

"Come, then, Nanciebel," and her father helped her up the narrow cliff path.

"I am thankful for my short gown!" she whispered, as she climbed the difficult pathway. "Also for my stout boots, though I did laugh at them before! I was wiser in my choice than I knew."

At the top of the path was wide, open moorland, with the cliffs, and breaking waves, and open sea on the left. The turf was short and springy, and the wind sweeping across was like a strengthening draught. She drew a deep breath with keen delight.

"Think of that horrible ship! Oh, I am so thankful to be on shore once more!"

To east and south were glimpses of hills. The wild, broken coast stretched away to the west. They walked quickly on towards the long black headland, then, following Morgan,

turned their backs on it and apparently left the sea behind.

On their right had been a low stone wall, enclosing fields of young corn and barley. Through a gap in this wall they entered a great hayfield, with hay nearly ready to be cut, but yet, as they noticed, not so ripe as in the fields round Summertown.

“The season is not so far advanced here as at home,” Sir John commented. “The hay wants another two weeks before cutting, and the corn is not near so high as ours when we left.”

Captain Morgan did not answer, but led them by a broad path across the hayfield to the opposite wall. The field was on the slope, and the path rose gradually before them. Beyond the bank and bramble hedge which enclosed the field at the top of the slope, they could see nothing of the inland country.

But here in the bank were stones left jutting out as steps and a break in the hedge of brambles, and the Captain climbed quickly to the top, and then, instead of descending on the other side, waited till they stood beside him.

A cry of sheer delight broke from Nanciebel. He had been about to speak, but paused.

A wide view lay before them. The whole country seemed spread out below that point of vantage.

It was a long, narrow land, between hills and sea, and enclosed completely at the eastern end by a great mountain, with three sharp peaks, rising right out of the sea. There were not many trees, save at the foot of the hills, where were dark masses of woodland. The country stretching from the hills to the sea was marsh, or field, or pasture land, with hedges of bramble, and thickets of gorse, and a plentiful covering of heather. Near the hills, also, were scattered farms, white or grey, surrounded by fields, which at a distance gave the country something the look of a chessboard run crazy. Under the shelter of the hills, towards the east, was a cluster of grey houses, seemingly a small town. Save for this and the few farms, the scene was very lonely, thanks, no doubt, to the stretches of marsh between the little town and the rising ground on which they stood.

But the beauty of it all! Nanciebel had never seen a mountain, and had been inclined to deny any charm to the sea. But now she stood entranced.

The country lay smiling back at the sun. The sea was very deep blue, and every dancing wave held a separate sunbeam. There were light clouds driving before the wind, and these threw constantly shifting shadows across the hills. The ragged outline of the range against the sky was a lasting delight, and she could have sat all day to watch the changing lights and colours on the slopes.

And the sea! The headland lay behind them, and here, on its other side, was the wide stretch of deep blue water again, sweeping into a great round bay, with grassy cliffs and golden sands. Beyond the bay was a point of black rocks, and another bay, and another black point, and then a steep, bold headland again, and last of all the great mountain, rising right out of the sea and shutting out all the world.

“I could live all my life in this beautiful land, and be thankful,” Nanciebel said under her breath, clinging to her father’s hand in sheer delight. “And this is instead of prison! We did not know what we came to! I am more than ever grateful.”

“You see the hills all around?” Captain Morgan said abruptly. “I am bidden to tell you they are to you the walls beyond which you may not go. Within this corner of the land, go where you will, but you must not leave it. From the mountain, Yr Eifl, as you see, the wall is unbroken so far as Garn Boduan, the round hill yonder. The road runs through at its foot, but you are forbidden to follow it. Then here is Madryn”—he turned to the great straight-sided hill

with the round pimple on its crest—“these, from the mountain to the sea, are the Madryn lands, and they are the bounds of your freedom to the west. So you understand.”

“Very good!” Sir John said quietly. “You leave us a wide enough range, I think. May I ask where we are?”

“You may ask what you like, but ’twill not avail you. I am bidden to tell you nothing.”

“Nor to give us any advice, from your knowledge of the country?—for it certainly is not strange to you as to us.”

“I can tell you nothing.”

“Then we will ask nothing. Do you wish more of us at the moment?”

“No more. I have given my message.”

“Good! Then we will go on our way. Come, Nanciebel! We will visit yon little town, and see what kind of folk we are among. Perhaps, Captain, you would like to accompany us, to see that we do not wander out of bounds?”

“Perhaps ’twould be well,” and to Nanciebel’s dismay Morgan strode on at their side.

“Plague on him! He is in truth a Nightmare—save when there are black cows about,” she said to herself.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

Strangers in the Land

They walked in silence for a time, Captain Morgan gloomy as usual, Nanciebel and her father drinking in the new beauties around them. The marshy ground, stretching away towards the hills, was one blaze of golden gorse on every side. The banks at the foot of the rough walls and under the hedgerows were thick with wild pansies, yellow, blue, and white. Nanciebel gathered a bunch and placed them in the front of her gown.

They skirted the marsh, keeping to the firmer open ground on the edge of the cliffs, and so rounded the wide bay. Here a herd of black cattle was grazing, and Nanciebel drew close to her father and kept very quiet till they were safely passed. But they were only big gentle cows, in spite of their fierce appearance, and stopped cropping the short grass to gaze meditatively at the trespassers with sleepy eyes.

"If our Nightmare must go with us," said Nanciebel to herself, when this danger lay behind, "we may as well talk pleasantly with him. We need not walk thus like dumb folk all the way."

So she turned to him questioningly. "Is it true that you have been a sailor, Captain?"

"Nay, I am a soldier, Mistress Seymour. In truth, I have been familiar with boats all my life, but only for fishing, pleasure-sailing, and the like. I am a soldier, and serve the King."

"And what do you say of us, who will not fight?" Sir John asked curiously.

He frowned. "Any man would fight for his King, save for one reason only, unless he was a Quaker, and you say you are not."

"And that reason, because he was afraid? Nay, but we have still another reason, Captain. Perhaps in time you will judge us more justly."

Nanciebel changed the subject for a less difficult one.

"Do you know the stars, Captain? We were looking at them last night, but we do not know their names."

"Ay! I have often steered my way home by them."

"What is that red one that rises over the sea?"

"That is Capella, in Auriga."

"So long a name for one little star?"

"Its particular name is Capella, while Auriga is the whole group," he explained.

"So! Just as I am both Nanciebel and Seymour. I understand——"

"So long a name for one little person!" laughed her father.

"But if Capella rose very red last night, there must have been some mist over the sea, as is likely enough," added the Captain. "There are much redder stars than that."

"Would the mist turn it red?" she laughed. "I did not know that before."

"Even white stars rise red, and grow white again when they have risen beyond the mist."

"Strange! Capella! I will remember. And a very white one in the east?"

"That is Vega, in the Lyre."

"Good! Those are easy names. I shall tell these to Gilbert to-night. What is the bright star to which Charles's Wain is riding?"

He knit his brows, then laughed. "That is Arcturus. Now that one is truly red! And near it is the Northern Crown."

“Yes. We saw that. A circle, with a diamond centre.”

“Look well at it, for we shall lose it soon until next summer. There is no Crown in the sky in winter.”

“But why not? Where does it go to?” she asked in surprise, and he laughed again.

“It will drop into the sea. And between the first horse of the Wagon and that same red star,” he added, willing to talk for her amusement on so safe a subject, “is King Charles’s Heart, and so we say the King is heartless, because his heart is up there in the sky. You have much to learn, if you would read the skies, little mistress. Watch them month by month, and you will begin to understand.”

They had reached the farther point of the bay, and stood looking out over another, where the water was as blue, the sands as yellow, the cliffs as green, as in the first, while the mountain, Yr Eifl, rising right out of the sea, was closer and seemed even larger and more impressive than before. On the cliff, a little way inland, stood the grey cluster of houses, and they skirted this hay also and made their way towards it.

“It looks an old, old place,” said Nanciebel. “I wonder what ’tis called?”

“It is Nevin,” said Captain Morgan briefly.

“Nevin! Thank you, Captain! ’Tis easy enough to say.”

“It will not help you much to know its name,” he said, as if excusing himself. “It is old, as you say—four hundred years, at least, and perhaps more.”

So Nanciebel gazed with due respect at the low grey stone houses, as they went up the narrow, cobbled street. It was a tiny place, only four streets meeting at one spot, all alike grey and monotonous.

As they drew near to the town, they saw for the first time the people of this unknown land, and at sight of the women and girls Nanciebel cried out in delight, and then began to laugh.

For they wore small fringed shawls thrown across their shoulders, gaily striped or bright-coloured aprons over very short skirts, showing bare feet and ankles, or sometimes wooden shoes, snowy caps with full frills round the face and white strings tied under the chin, and above the caps tall black hats, with high crown and stiff brim. Under this double covering were healthy, wind-tanned faces and bright black eyes; a few were fair, but the prevailing type was dark, with a rather short stature in most cases. The men had no very distinctive costume, but for the most part wore blue sailing garb, for they were fisherfolk almost to a man—weather-beaten, sturdy and dark.

“But why do the women wear both caps and hats?” cried Nanciebel. “The hats are not unlike those I have sometimes seen at home. With wider brims they would be like the men’s hats among the Quakers, though still the crowns would be too high. But why a cap beneath the hat? I never saw the like before. And see the bare feet, father! I never thought to see grown women with neither shoes nor stockings. I never dreamed of such a thing! Surely ’tis a strange land we are in.”

The names on the houses and the signs of the inns were in an unknown tongue, though among the latter “The Ship” seemed popular, judging from the signs. The people were chattering volubly in the same foreign language, the women knitting, the men loafing about doors and corners. The girls made very evident comments on Nanciebel’s grey gown and white hood, and she, finding herself as much of a curiosity to them as they were to her, grew shy and shrank closer to her father.

“Our errand here is to find some one speaking English,” said John-o’-Peace. “Then we shall do very well.”

He addressed some men standing about a doorway, but received only blank looks and an unintelligible answer. All his attempts met the same fate, and at last Captain Morgan, who had kept beside them, and watched and listened in silence, said abruptly—

“You do but waste your time. There is no English in the place.”

“None at all? Are you sure?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Try again if you will. It matters nothing to me. Perhaps I should have left you to find it out.”

“Then we are but wasting time, as you say. Are you hungry, Nanciebel? ’Tis past mid-day, and we rose early.”

“Not so very hungry,” she said bravely, not seeing where food was to come from.

“We will try what signs will do. Surely some one will give us bread, and if we beg now we will repay them later.”

Nanciebel’s spirits revived instantly. “Oh, let me try! I am sure I can make them understand. There is a kindly woman at that inn. I will speak to her.”

Captain Morgan watched her attempts with amusement. With hands, face, and pleading tone she very soon made the woman understand, and showed her empty hands and her father’s. The woman smiled, and hesitated between generosity and refusal, then produced a big country loaf and a jug of milk. Nanciebel, in high delight, thanked her warmly, evoking more smiles from the onlookers, and shared the milk with her father.

“Will you drink also, Captain?”

He smiled grimly, and said a word to the woman.

“No milk for me, I thank you, little mistress! I will choose something different. I shall dine here. No doubt we shall meet again later.”

“We shall rest somewhere. Perhaps we will wait for you,” Sir John said quietly. “Come, Nanciebel, we’ll find some less public spot to sit in,” and she thanked the woman again and carried the loaf away in triumph.

A road ran from the town along the foot of the round wooded hill directly behind.

“We will go this way,” Seymour said. “We must not turn farther from home, I think. Beyond there the land looks very wild and lonely. We are more like to find what we want on this side.”

“Let us sit just here and rest. I am so very tired, but I would not say so before our Nightmare. What is it we want, Daddy?”

They sat on the bank at the roadside and broke some pieces off the loaf for dinner.

“We will take this home for supper. Gilbert will relish it as a change from fish. ’Tis this way, Nanciebel. I will not tell the Captain all my thoughts, for they may be wrong. But surely this is Wales or Ireland.”

“Wales?—Ireland? And why so, father? I know nothing of either. They would both be foreign lands to me.”

“We are on a north shore,” he argued, “and I judge from the shortness of the night—the late sunset and early dawn—and also from the lateness of the season here, that we have come north instead of south. Most certainly this is neither France nor Spain, by the talk and dress of the people, nor yet Holland. I scarce think we have gone so far as Germany, and in Scotland we should be understood—in the south, that is, and these people are not of the northern parts, by their dress.”

“Well reasoned!” she said eagerly. “Tell me more!”

“I only guess in saying Ireland or Wales. ’Tis possible we are on some island. But if my guess be right, we shall surely find some one to speak to soon. I thought to succeed in the town, but as that has failed, and as there seems no other, I seek now some great house or castle, where we may find educated folk. There must be owners of the land, and surely they will speak a little English, at least. So we will follow this road so far as we may, so far, that is, as our Captain will allow, in search of some such house, and try our fortune there. And ’tis perhaps worth noting that Morgan knows this place and can talk with the people. I judge it is his home. At least he knows it well. He must live somewhere, and it may be that if we find where he dwells we shall also find what we want.”

“Why not ask him? He has been courteous enough when I have asked anything.”

“Ay, to you, but ’twould scarce be the same to me, I think. I’ll ask him nothing.”

“I too am thinking of something,” and Nanciebel knit her brows and pondered. “Yes! My Lady told me she was not English—that she had only come to England two years ago.”

Sir John frowned. “What has she to do with us, Nanciebel?”

“Why do you look angry when I speak of her, Daddy?”

“I do not like her. I have my reasons, child. Why do you speak of her just now?”

“She said she was his cousin, you know, so he cannot be an Englishman either, so this may very well be his home, whatever country it may be. And again, when they talked together that last night at home, ’twas in some strange foreign tongue, and we wondered much.”

“I remember. Then ’tis the more likely our guesses are right. We shall find what we seek, though it may not be to-day. But we can camp on the shore very well for a little while. I think this good weather will hold for a time.”

They sat, resting gladly, and discussing the new country, the new people, their curious dress, the bare feet of the women, which had greatly scandalized Nanciebel, and the harsh babel of their talk. The beauty of the hills and distant sea entranced her, and her delight had to find some vent. She leaned back against her father, and began to sing.

“*O whaur hae ye been a’ the day,
My little wee croodlin’ doo?*”

‘*O I’ve been at my grandmother’s;
Mak’ my bed, mammie, noo.’*

‘*O what gat ye at your grandmother’s,
My little wee croodlin’ doo?*’

‘*I got a bonnie wee fishie;
Mak’ my bed, mammie, noo.’*

‘*And what did ye do wi’ the banes o’ t,
My little wee croodlin’ doo?*’

‘*I gied them to my little dog;
Mak’ my bed, mammie, noo.’*

‘*And what did your little doggie do,
My little wee croodlin’ doo?*’

‘*He stretched out his head, his feet, and deed;
Mak’ my bed, mammie, noo.’*”

Sir John laughed. "A cheerful choice, Nanciebel, when we breakfasted on bonnie wee fishies, and are like to sup on them also!"

"Oh, but there's no grandmother here! She had poisoned the fish, you know. I am always so sorry for the little dog."

"Why, what is this?" said John-o'-Peace.

They were sitting on a bank, round a sharp corner and so out of sight of the little town, but still close to it and well within hearing. Round the corner had come a group of the townsfolk, blue-clad men, women and girls in the strange tall hats and wooden shoes, and a number of children. But instead of passing on, they had stopped a few yards away, all faces turned towards the strangers, an eager look in the eyes of all. Now they spoke together in their curious tongue, and Nanciebel said with a laugh—

"One would think they were quarrelling, but seemingly they are friendly enough."

"They are speaking to us," said Sir John suddenly, as a woman from out of the crowd turned and addressed them.

They shook their heads helplessly.

"We are very willing to please you, if we can, friend," said Seymour, laughing. "But, indeed, we do not know a word you say."

She repeated her words, volubly insistent on something, and pointed to Nanciebel. Then she said a word to a small bareheaded girl, and the child, after some coaxing, came shyly forward, holding out a coin.

Nanciebel stood, looking at her father in amazement. He began to laugh.

"They would have you sing again. They think you were singing for money, Nanciebel."

"Oh——!" she broke into a dismayed laugh and reddened in confusion. "I don't want it, dear! Take it back to your mother," and she bent and kissed the child, who was fair-haired and reminded her, with a sudden swift pain of longing, of Sweet Joy.

But the small girl had been told what to do and was determined to do it. So Seymour took the penny from her and glanced at it curiously.

"'Twould please them if you would sing again, Nanciebel."

But she also had turned shy. "I do not think I could. I have never sung to people like this before."

"To pay them for our dinner," he suggested. "'Twill be well, also, to make friends," and she, seeing he wished it, stood bravely, and after a moment's hesitation began to sing again.

She gave them "Lord Lovel" and "Barbara Allen," and then, in response to their vigorous applause and evident appreciation, "Young Tamlane."

*“ O I forbid ye, maidens a’,
That wear gowd on your hair,
To come or gae by Carterhaugh,
For young Tamlane is there.’*

*But up then spak’ her, fair Janet,
The fairest o’ a’ her kin;
‘I’ll come and gang to Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave o’ him.’*

*She hadna pu’ed a red, red rose,
A rose but barely three,
When up and starts a wee, wee man,
At Lady Janet’s knee.*

*He’s ta’en her by the milk-white hand,
Amang the roses red;
And they hae vow’d a solemn vow,
Ilk ither for to wed.”*

Long before she reached the end of the forty verses, they were humming the simple tune, the women the air, the men an accompaniment of their own devising, but which fitted the notes admirably.

But when the long ballad was finished, she turned to her father. He had sat watching the growing crowd, and had noticed Blaise Morgan standing listening with the others, but had said nothing to disturb her. But now he rose.

“Well done!” he said quietly. “That is enough for this time. You must be tired, child. Here, little one, take this to your mother again,” and he offered the penny to the child, who had stood gazing up at Nanciebel while she sang.

The child shook her head, however, so Nanciebel took her hand and led her back, and put the coin into the woman’s hand.

“Indeed, I could not take it. I am glad if you liked my singing, but ’tis not worth money. I did not sing for pence, but to give you pleasure if I could.”

She smiled and shook her head, then laughed and pointed at their remaining half loaf, as if to say that this was payment enough. The people protested, then, finding that she would not take the money, sent the children running home, with a babel of noisy directions, and would not let the strangers depart till they returned, bringing another loaf and some small cakes wrapped in a bundle. Seymour laughed.

“Good! We will take those. We shall sup well to-night. Now come, Nanciebel! Let us get on!” and with smiles and nods and thanks they parted from the people, who crowded about Morgan, with many questions as to who they were and whence they came.

Nanciebel laughed as she walked by her father’s side.

“That is a thing which never happened before! I could have laughed to see them all listen to me.”

“They must be fond of music, and the tunes were new. Did you hear them joining in your song? And the men were singing other notes of their own, but which were in perfect accord

with yours. That surprised me greatly. They must have wonderfully quick ears for music. But the words must have meant little to them.”

“If we find ourselves like to starve, I can sing again for bread,” she laughed.

But Seymour did not like the thought. “I hope it will not come to that. I would not permit it. ’Twas well enough to take their gifts, but I would not like to ask for them, and I would not have you sing for money—not if we were all starving.”

“Why not? ’Tis honest. There’s no wrong in it.”

“A pretty thing ’twould be for you to sing for bread to feed two great men!”

Nanciebel laughed. “But just now they can understand a song when our words are nonsense to them. Here comes our Nightmare to watch where we will go,” and Morgan overtook them.

He walked in silence for a time, then turned suddenly to Sir John.

“And that is more pleasing to you than fighting for your King, as a gentleman should?—to let your daughter earn your bread! Faith, I find you more and more difficult to understand! I think you are all mad together. How you can call yourself a man, and yet——”

Seymour’s lips tightened, and he said nothing. Nanciebel flamed out angrily—

“You are unjust, and you know it! I did not sing for that! You are unfair—oh, how can you——you!”

“Hush, Nanciebel!”

“Well, father, he is unjust to you——”

“Let him be. If we know that we do right, we need not care for him. But you see there was reason for those last words of mine.”

Nanciebel walked on, vastly indignant, and refused even to glance towards Captain Morgan. Her father drew her attention to the bold cliffs of the hill at whose foot they were passing, and the dense trees which clothed its slope wherever they could find foothold, but she was too angry to respond.

They reached a road running from the marsh towards the wall of mountains, and followed it till they were among the trees, a great hill on each side. Here the road branched in two ways, and Morgan called a halt.

“You go no farther,” he said curtly.

Sir John turned to him. “Am I right in thinking there is some great house at hand? The road and these trees do suggest it, for the trees are planted, and not native to the place, I am very sure of that.”

“I am not here to answer your questions.”

His tone was so curt that Nanciebel was turning on him angrily again, when her father’s hand on her arm stopped her.

“’Twould not greatly hurt you to be more courteous, Captain.”

“Oh yes, it would! ’Twould be so great an effort that he cannot make it. Discourtesy comes most easily to him,” she said.

“Nanciebel! That will not help matters. We had best go home again. We cannot walk farther to-day.”

It was already late afternoon. By the time they had reached the cliffs again, making a long curve to avoid the marshes, the sun was in the north-west, and Nanciebel, leaning on her father’s arm, was tired out. No more words had passed between Seymour and Morgan since they left the cross-roads. But on the cliff the Captain paused.

“I will leave you here. Can you find your way?”

“Yes, I thank you.”

He hesitated, that curious look of the night before on his face again, his eyes on Nanciebel’s tired figure. Then he said suddenly—

“ ’Twould not have availed you to continue that road, so you can be easy about it. Boduan lies there, but the house is shut up. The Wynns are away. So you would have gained nothing,” and saluting Nanciebel he turned and strode away along the cliffs towards Nevin.

Sir John laughed quietly.

“Our Captain is not a bad fellow at heart, but he finds us hard to understand, and at present thinks me but a very poor creature. Be not too hard on him, Nanciebel. ’Tis chiefly for your sake he is angry.”

“I do not want him to trouble himself over me. And he has no need to be so rude and rough.”

“Yet he yields at the last, and tells us what we need. Last night also he came to our help,” and Nanciebel remembered the black cows and said no more.

“Look!” said her father suddenly.

They stood on the edge of the cliff above the wide sandy bay. Beyond the black headland the sun was sinking towards the sea and all the western sky was gold. The rich light touched everything with new radiance, and the quiet sea was a glowing pool, while the wet sands shone like golden mirrors. As they looked, the gold died to dull red, and sands and sea were crimson, and all the sky burnt and flamed with it from Boduan Hill to the horizon, while the mountains in the east grew dark and grey.

“Come, let’s get home,” said John-o’-Peace quietly. “We have had a good day, though a long one, and we will not allow so little a thing as Captain Morgan’s displeasure to trouble us.”

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

Disappointment—and Hope

A great fire was burning on the shingle. The little tent looked warm and restful. Gilbert was walking up and down, awaiting them impatiently.

“Come away, come away! Why are you so late? Supper has been waiting an hour or more.”

He displayed his preparations with much pride, for he had worked hard all day, with no one to speak to but the seagulls and the black cows.

A big pile of wood stood ready for the fire. The heather beds had been re-made and added to for greater softness. Round the tent and fire he had built a low wall of big stones, with thorny branches of gorse, still bearing golden blossoms, piled on top, and inside this shelter the little camp was very cosy and secluded.

The shingly floor was strewn with rushes from the stream, heaped up at intervals for easy seats. Before the fire were spread handfuls of broad, flat iris-leaves, with a few flowers here and there to please Nanciebel. On this primitive table lay freshly-cooked fish, carefully spread out to look tempting, and some white meat, at sight of which Seymour exclaimed in surprise

—
“What have we here, boy? We looked for nothing but ‘bonnie wee fishies.’ Have you killed a sheep?”

Gilbert laughed. “No, a rabbit! ’Twas a very little one, but at least there will be a taste all round, as a change from fish. The cliffs up there are full of them. I saw the holes, and waited my chance with the bow.”

“Good! You have done well indeed. We shall feast to-night. And we also bring some small addition to the meal.”

Nanciebel showed her bread and cakes with much pride, and Gilbert said eagerly—

“Now that is the only thing we lacked—unless something better than water to drink. I tried to catch a cow and milk her for you, but had nothing to hold the milk in, and when the brute put down her head and showed her horns, I thought that matter could wait for a little. Did you steal those cakes, Nance?” as she began to laugh at the thought of his attempt on one of her foes. “Have you found and robbed some shop or house? That is in return for father’s words about the sheep.”

“Oh, no!” said Nanciebel airily, her spirits reviving at the prospect of warmth, and food, and rest. “They come from Nevin,” she explained, sinking down upon the rushes. “We have been to Boduan also”—with exact imitation of Captain Morgan’s pronunciation, and throwing all the accent upon the *u*—“but the Wynns are away, and the house is closed.”

Gilbert stared. “Have you, then, found some one to talk with? Or has our Captain been in an unusually pleasant mood? He is not often talkative.”

Nanciebel glanced up at the darkening sky, but found it still too light for her purpose, so deferred the rest of her information till after supper.

“’Twas the Captain who told us,” Seymour answered, “and told us more than perhaps he meant. We are in Wales, children, so much is certain. For he spoke of the Wynns, and we all know the Wynns of Gwydir as Welshmen. And that was English money, Nanciebel.”

She laughed, and broke into an eager account of Nevin and its people, the women's caps and tall hats and bare feet, their evident delight in music, and Morgan's comment on the incident.

"So we have begun to make friends, you see, though we have not advanced very far towards our object," said John-o'-Peace. "Some way of speaking with these people we must have. You and I, Gilbert, are ready and eager to work for this child—we do not wish to beg from any one—and we have to make a home for the little ones. But first of all we must be able to speak with the people."

"We are quite in comfort here, save for a few little things we lack," said Nanciebel.

"Truly! And for a day or two's picnic we may do very well. But rain and storms may come, and we must have a roof over our heads. We cannot continue with only such food as can be cooked before a fire and eaten without a dish on our table——"

She laughed. "Just now 'tis a joke to eat with neither knives nor forks, but I suppose 'tis a joke we might tire of in time."

"And sleeping in a tent is another, and there are several others still! This is very well, but only for a time. But we shall yet succeed in our quest. There must be some one in the land who speaks English. We are not so far from home. It cannot be wholly given up to fisherfolk and farmers. So to-morrow we will try again. You, I think, had better try your luck and see what you can do, Gilbert."

"Good! I'll go. I want to see some of those pretty girls in big hats and bare feet. But will our friend the Captain think it needful to accompany me also? I fear we shall not keep the peace all day if he does."

"That will be for you to see to. He will not quarrel unless you provoke him. You must go carefully, Gilbert, remembering that I have trusted you in my place. Or else I must go myself."

"Well, then, I will not speak to him at all! That surely will be safe enough."

"Gilbert!" said Nanciebel, when they were sitting resting and the sky above them had grown very dark. "Do you see that bright white star in the east? That is Vega, in the Lyre. The Lyre is the group, you understand, and Vega is the star. This overhead is, of course, Arcturus, and that, near it, is King Charles's Heart. And the red star over the sea is Capella in Auriga—Capella in the group Auriga, you know. And this by Arcturus is the Northern Crown, but you must look well at it, for there is no Crown in the sky in winter, so it will soon have to drop into the sea."

Gilbert stared at her once more. "Now that all sounds very pretty! Did you make it up, my dear, or has the Captain been in a most unusually pleasing mood? And what is this great W in the north? And the red star in the south, away up the glen yonder, matching your Capella in the north—what is that?"

"I—I—did forget to ask him!" she laughed.

"So it is the Captain who has been teaching you! Truly, he must have been most strangely talkative to-day!"

"He varies—like the stars! Sometimes he has not a word to say for an hour together. And sometimes he offers his help, but to ask it is to make him refuse at once. He will do only what he pleases, and nothing that we ask. And he is very much at home in this place, that is certain. He could do all we want, if he would."

Gilbert was off very early next morning, with the avowed intention of avoiding Captain Morgan if he could, and Nanciebel and Sir John spent a quiet, restful day in and about the little glen, fishing, wandering on the shore and up the banks of the stream, watching the

rabbits on the open ground above and the black cows and sheep grazing in the fields. They saw nothing of Morgan, and began to suspect that he had met Gilbert and accompanied him.

"In which case I hope Gil has the sense to keep quiet and not make trouble," said Nanciebel.

"He has sense enough, but I fear he lacks something still more needful. He has resented Captain Morgan's presence from the first, and if they get to quarrelling 'twill be because he wants self-control, not common-sense. We will hope for the best and prepare his supper, for he will be hungry and tired when he comes," and Nanciebel laughed and watched the steaming fish.

The red star over the sea—"Capella in Auriga," murmured Nanciebel, mightily taken with the name—had risen before Gilbert came tramping down the steep cliff path, and threw himself exhausted down by the fire. They glanced at him and at one another, but asked no questions, but supplied him with fish and bread, and waited till he should be ready to speak. He attacked the food with vigour, but did not volunteer a word for some time, and they saw that they must let him eat and rest before they could look for his news.

But, man-like, as soon as his hunger was satisfied, he felt better and was ready to talk.

"No luck, dad! There's no English in the whole country, it seems."

"So! I am sorry," Seymour said, with some disappointment. "Have you been far?"

"Far! I should think so. What do we do, father, when our boots wear out?—for this kind of thing will soon finish mine."

John-o'-Peace laughed. "I cannot tell you, my son. That we have yet to determine. Perhaps we shall go barefoot, like the ladies of these parts. Which way did you go?"

"Very nearly every way, I think. But I must tell you all about it. And first of all, I tell you both I do deserve a compliment, at least, if not reward."

"And why?" asked his father, smiling.

Nanciebel looked up quickly. "Has the Nightmare been with you?"

"Well said, my dear! The Nightmare *has* been with me, and I have neither kicked him nor knocked him off his horse, which I had a great mind to do many times."

"Horse? Has he then stolen a horse from somewhere?"

"So it seems. He met me by the headland on a little black horse, and asked which way I went. I told him, very civilly, 'To Nevin first, and then to see what lay beyond.' So he said he must go with me, and laughed and added that he was glad he had thought to ride to-day. I said no more, but chose to walk along the sands of the bay, since he could not follow me there. So he had to keep to the top and I to the shore, and I thought I had escaped him nicely. But very soon I was sorry for my choice, for the tide came up and covered the sands, and I had to take to the shingle, and this was such rough walking that I found I was but wasting time. So I took a sheep-path up the cliff, and there at the top on the open land was Mr. Captain, waiting for me. Whether he was laughing at me or not I do not know, for I feared to look at him, knowing I should lose my temper, and thinking it but early in the day for that——"

"He said nothing to you? That was truly forbearing of him, and you might well give him credit for it," Sir John suggested.

Gilbert said nothing to that, but continued his story.

"All the way to Nevin we went without a word. I was angry with him for riding when I had to walk. He, seemingly, did not wish to talk to me. At Nevin, I found your friend, the woman of the inn, Nanciebel, and returned to her the cloth your cakes were wrapped in, to her very great surprise. She had not thought to see it again, and laughed much and talked away in

her strange tongue. Faith, what a babel it is! And how curious those tall hats are! But truly, the girls are pretty, with their bright eyes under the stiff black brims, and the white caps round their faces, but I wish they would show more of their hair. The bare feet, too, are strange, and how they can tread those cobbles without shoes, I do not know. I would not care for it myself. Well, then I continued on the road towards the mountains, as we did decide last night, for there seemed so great a distance still to go that there might well be another town or village. Our Nightmare-Captain rode stolidly beside, or behind, or before me, and did not offer a word. We went up a long, long hill, of a couple of miles, I should think, but still with a good road all the way, though stony, and looking back I saw the bays, and the head yonder, and this inlet of the sea, all spread before me. At the top was a very small village, and here I tried to speak to the folk, but failed, of course. So on I went again, by a very lonely winding road, with nought but gorse and heather in sight, and hills on each side, and always going up. By then it began to seem foolish to me that he and I should not speak, when we had no one else to speak to——”

“Assuredly!” said his father. “I wonder you had not thought of it before.”

“On that long hill I had no breath to spare, nor he, for he walked to save his horse, though ’twas a strong enough little beast—like himself.”

“Gilbert!”

Gilbert laughed enjoyably. “For a few moments to-day I fairly was happy! That is what I am going to tell you now. I turned to him and asked the name of the very small village, if it had one. ‘Pistyll,’ said he, making much of the ‘tyll’ and little of the first part, and adding some strange sound at the end which I could not say—as ‘Pystyllch.’ So I said, ‘I cannot say it as you do,’ being willing to make subject for talk. ‘I know you cannot,’ said he, and laughed. ‘At least,’ said I, ‘I am an Englishman. Not for worlds would I be a little black Welshman _____,’”

“Gilbert!” cried Nanciebel in dismay.

Sir John frowned. “That was entirely needless discourtesy on your part, and both unwise and useless, Gilbert. You should not have fallen to that——”

“I am not so sure of it,” Gilbert said stoutly, “and in any case I could not help it. But it served its purpose, and did no harm. I felt mightily the better for it. I verily believe he looks on us as too cowardly to fight for our King, and before we are done with him I will teach him ’tis not so.”

“I trust we shall all do that, but not by means of rude behaviour.”

But Gilbert was not at all inclined towards penitence.

“Father, I am not as old as you, nor as good. I could not bear to have him think me afraid to speak up for myself, and ready to take anything from him. And, as I tell you, it did no harm.”

“But was he not very angry, Gilbert?” cried Nanciebel.

“I waited to see what he would do. At first I verily believe he was too much astounded to speak, both at my answering so and at my saying ‘Welshman,’ for he had not known we had guessed that rightly. Then, as he remembered that I had said ‘little,’ he grew angry, and I, seeing it, asked what he would do, and if he wished to fight, since he had a sword and I had nothing. At that he laughed, and grew less angry. ‘You know yourself safe,’ said he, ‘so that you can say what you like. Some day,’ said he, ‘you and I will fight the matter out, Master Gilbert, and we will see whether a few extra inches add greatly to a man’s power, and whether a little black Welshman is not as good as a big yellow Englishman any day.’”

“Well said, Mr. Captain! And ’twould serve you well, my son, if you did not get the best of such a contest. But, Gilbert, you have to remember that if there is any reason at all for our being in this wild place, instead of in comfort at home, ’tis because we have taken a stand for peace. If we will not fight with Dutchmen, why with Welsh? I do not see how you could meet Morgan in such a way.”

Gilbert frowned. “As to war, you know that I am with you. But there is no harm in a simple trial of strength.”

“Can you keep it to that? Will either you or he be content with that?” Seymour asked quietly. “Fighting is an ugly game, and one it is not well to play with. Think before you enter upon it, my son, and do not forget what our presence here stands for. Now tell us the rest.”

“Why, there is proof that I did well to speak out to him, for we were better friends for the rest of the day. He asked if we were doing well in Abergeirch—this glen, it seems, is so named—and I told him we had great comfort and liked the place much.”

They laughed. “And did not add that we were growing weary of eating ‘bonnie wee fishies’ without knives or forks!”

“Assuredly not! We talked much as we went, but he was very careful to say nothing which could help us greatly. I followed your lead, and asked him no questions as to the present, but only as to where he had seen service in the past. He has been in the Indies, as we guessed, also through the last Dutch war. So we talked of war, and our beliefs on that point, and he listened and said nothing, but plainly thinks us strange folk, and perhaps even a little mad on that point.”

“Yes,” Sir John said quietly. “But what he thinks need not trouble us.”

“Oh, by the way, he asked how we had discovered what land we were in, so I said that very many things had helped you to the thought that it was so, and that there was little you would not discover if you wished, and then, to ease his mind, I explained that he had himself betrayed the secret and made the matter certain, by telling you of the family of the Wynns last night. He seemed annoyed with himself for that, and I was much inclined to laugh. So then I made him talk once more of the stars, Nanciebel, as being safe, and perhaps soothing to his feelings. Yon red beauty in the south is the Scorpion, it seems, or at least a little bit of him, and there in the east is the Swan, with outstretched wings and a long tail behind him. And somewhere overhead, he says, is the Dragon, curling round the Pole and close to the Wagon.”

“So you found no English spoken anywhere?” asked Sir John, bringing him back to more important matters again.

“No. We went so far as the mountains—Yr Eifl is the strange, mad name he gives them—but found no other town, but only scattered farms. ’Tis all very lonely up there. The hills are bare of anything but heather, and stones, and sheep, and these desolate slopes stretching away up and all around seemed to me very wild and dreary. But the mountains seen so close are a grand sight. I would like you to see them, Nanciebel. The road passes round their foot and so goes out of sight, but Morgan would not have me follow it past these three peaks we see from the coast here. So we turned and came home, and though I went far out of my way in visiting farms and seeking the big house you look for, I had no success anywhere.”

“Well! I am sorry. But you have done well, Gil, and fairly earned your bed to-night.”

“What do we do now, father? We have searched all through the land, and find no one to speak to. I begin to feel our difficulty,” Gilbert said despondently. “Till we can speak to them we can do nothing but beg. We shall not get far by signs. Must we beg or starve?”

Nanciebel, lying snugly beside her father, felt his arm tighten round her. She said nothing, but waited confidently, and presently he said very quietly—

“Gil, you are tired. ’Tis not the best time to judge of things. I do not think we shall starve. . . . Children! I came here in obedience to a Higher Will than my own. Home was good enough for me. I have faith enough to be assured that we shall not starve. We will do all we can—as we are doing. That is our part. But so far we are but running our heads against a wall. Till we can speak with these people we cannot make much advance. If we can make no way for ourselves, I believe one will be opened for us. When we have done our part and can do no more, we will look for help to come. Do those same constant stars give no message to you? They bring a very great one to me. And for the present, we have not yet been through all this land, and Gilbert is wrong there. Our wall on the south and east we know, but we have not yet visited the west. There is naught to be seen there but fields and marsh, and very many trees at the foot of the great hill yonder. I have no great hope of success there, when we have failed in the town. But we will try, at least. It may be that the trees over there hold the secret we need. So to-morrow we will journey towards this last hill and see if it has aught for us.”

“Good!” said Gilbert. “If there is still more to do, I shall feel better. He calls this hill Madryn,” he added.

“Madryn? I have heard the name—he said something about it to us——”

“He said these were the Madryn lands, and they should be our boundary westward,” said Nanciebel.

“That was it. The Madryn lands! Then surely Madryn is an estate, and must have owners. If ’tis not shut up, like the other——”

“Boduan.”

“Yes.—We may find what we seek, after all. Come, Gil, there is hope yet! Children, you are not afraid? You do not blame me——?”

Nanciebel laughed at the very notion. Gilbert said sturdily, “I will uphold you even if it means that I may not fight our Captain.”

“Come, then, to bed, and leave the stars to their wanderings. To-morrow we go in search of Madryn.”

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

Marsli Madryn

*“O Alison Gross, that lives in yon tower,
The ugliest witch in the north countrie,
Has trysted me ae day up till her bower,
And mony fair speech she made to me.”*

John-o’-Peace, inside the little tent, smiled. Gilbert was still sleeping off the effects of his long tramp. Nanciebel had begged her father to lie a while also, that she might go out and, as she phrased it, “set the house to rights.”

Her song died away and suffered interruption for a few moments, while she visited the lonely pool on the shore. But presently she was back again, singing from pure delight in the beauty of the early morning.

*“She show’d me a mantle o’ red scarlet,
Wi’ golden flowers an’ fringes fine;
Says, ‘Gin ye will be my lover sae true,
This gudely gift it sall be thine.’*

*‘Awa’, awa’, ye ugly witch!
Haud far awa’, and lat me be;
I never will be your lover sae true,
And I wish I were out o’ your companie.’*

She show’d me a cup o’ the gude red gowd——”

“Good-morning to you, father dear! Did you ever see such grand mornings as there are in this wild place? Smell the sea—and the air! ’Tis full of the gorse and iris, I declare! We shall need more ‘bonny wee fishies’ to satisfy Master Gilbert, father. If you will find worms and bait the lines, I will watch them, but I really could not touch the slimy creatures. I feel very like Sweet Joy there.”

She continued her work, straightening the rushes and smoothing the flat layer of flag leaves which served as table, fetching more of both from the glen, and adding a handful of golden iris for their cheery look. And her thoughts returned to the song of the witch.

*“‘Awa’, awa’, ye ugly witch!
Haud far awa’, and lat me be;
For I wadna ance kiss your ugly mouth,
For a’ the gifts that ye could gie.’*

*She’s turn’d her richt and round about,
And thrice she blew on a grass-green horn;
And she sware by the moon, and the stars aboon,
That she’d gar me rue the day I was born.”*

“ ’Tis a great noise you’re making, Nanciebel! Why can you not let a man rest?” and Gilbert came out of the tent with sleepy eyes and mock indignation in his tone.

“Because ’tis high time you were awake, to be sure! There is father wanting your help with the fishing.

*“Then out has she ta’en a silver wand,
And she’s turn’d her three times round and round,
She’s mutter’d sic words that my strength it fail’d,
And I fell down senseless on the ground.”*

“I have been thinking about that song,” she said, as they met over the freshly-cooked fish. “Father is like the man who said ‘no’ to the witch, and would not please her, no matter what harm she did to him. In our case, of course, the King is Old Alison Gross, the witch.”

“His Majesty would be flattered!”

“Yes, wouldn’t he? But we are not afraid of our witch, nor of what she can do to us, and in time, if there is no other way out for us and we cannot help ourselves, the Fairy Queen will come along and rescue us, as you said last night, father.”

“I did not put it quite in those words,” Sir John laughed.

“I have seen no Fairy Queen in this land so far,” said Gilbert. “Will she wear a cap and a tall hat, Nance? And will she have a short red petticoat and bare legs?”

“I think it very likely,” Nanciebel laughed, and returned to her song as she wandered on the beach in search of shells, while her father watched his lines and Gilbert set out in search of another rabbit, so that supper should be certain before the day’s work was undertaken.

*“She’s turn’d me into an ugly worm,
And gar’d me toddle about the tree;
And aye, on ilka Saturday’s night,
Auld Alison Gross, she cam’ to me.*

*But as it fell out on last Hallowe’en,
When the Seely Court was riding by,
The Queen lighted down on a gowan bank,
Nae far frae the tree where I wont to lie.*

*She took me up in her milk-white hand,
And she straiked me three times o’er her knee;
She changed me again to my ain proper shape,
And I nae mair maun toddle about the tree.”*

“Come hither, Singing-Girl!” called a high, clear voice from the cliff above.

Nanciebel turned with a start. The words had been in English, with just a touch of soft foreign accent, but still in clear, educated English—what they had longed for and sought so hard.

“Our opening way!” she said to herself, and then—“The Fairy Queen! Now, that is strange!”

Up on the cliff, where the turf was short and easy for riding, on a strong little white horse sat a girl, dressed in a long green riding-suit. Her big plumed hat hung from her saddle, her

uncovered hair was long and black and blowing in the wind. By her side raced three fine black-and-tan collies.

She reined in her sturdy little steed and sat looking down into the glen, at the tent with its little enclosure and big fire, at John Seymour, who had turned from his fishing, at Nanciebel on the beach, a demure little figure in short grey swinging skirts and close white hood.

From the moor came Gilbert, a dead rabbit hanging from his hand, and stood and gazed at the unexpected apparition. But this young lady was not one to hesitate or wait for any one. Springing from her saddle and taking her big hat in her hand, she threw her skirt over one arm, and, calling to the dogs, came down the cliff pathway.

Sir John and Nanciebel went to meet her. But she spoke first, with a certain masterful manner which became her well.

"I had meant to ask if you were the Singing-Girl of Nevin, of whom I have heard, but, indeed, there seems no doubt of it! I have heard much also of you from Blaise," and they exchanged glances. "He told me not to come near you, and for these two days I have stayed away to please him. But he has come home too much of a Captain to please me, indeed! We at Madryn do not obey him as his poor soldiers had to do," and they looked at one another again. "So I am come to see you to please myself. Where do you live in this glen? Let me see your tent. He told me of that also. Here, Rhodri! Rhys! Llevelys! Back, you rascals!" and cracking her whip, she spoke sharply to the dogs in Welsh, and they crept to her side, wagging their great tails and dropping their ears.

"Then you come from Madryn, mistress?" asked Seymour.

"I am Marsli Madryn. What is your name, girl?"

Nanciebel laughed. "She speaks as if I were in truth that 'beggar all in grey.' Perhaps she thinks I am. Perhaps she does not understand," she thought swiftly, as she told her name.

"'Tis a strange one. I suppose it is English," with a note of contempt in her tone. "Now show me where you dwell."

Nanciebel led her to the little tent and showed all their arrangements, with the remark, "We have had greater comfort here than we looked for." Mistress Marsli commented freely upon everything, and turned to Seymour when she had finished her inspection with the question—

"Is it true, as my cousin tells me, that you were set ashore here with naught but your axe and crossbow and this box of clothing?"

"And our lines for fishing! They have been of the greatest service."

"And this because you will not fight for your King, as a gentleman should?"

"That is as it may be. I say, as a gentleman should *not*, Mistress Marsli."

"Any gentleman would fight for his King."

"If he fights in a needless war—and most wars are needless—he does wrong, and if he slays his fellow-men he is a murderer, Mistress Marsli."

But this doctrine was so new as to sound absurd, and she said contemptuously—

"Indeed, you must be mad, as Blaise told me! If you will not fight, 'tis because, as he says, you are afraid to do so. And you"—turning to Gilbert—"you, I suppose, will make war upon rabbits, though you fear to fight like a man?"

Nanciebel looked at them in angry dismay. But to her surprise Gilbert laughed out.

"We do not quarrel with ladies, at least, no matter how uncomplimentary they be. Do we understand you, mistress, to claim our discourteous Captain for a cousin? He is well supplied with cousins, it seems."

She frowned. "What do you mean?"

Seymour interposed quickly. "If you come from Madryn, mistress, 'tis surely you of whom we were shortly going in search. Our plan for to-day was to go in search of Madryn, in hope of finding there some one who could speak our tongue and might be willing to help us a little. Captain Morgan will aid us in nothing, but perchance you will be kinder. Though we will not fight, 'tis only because we know it to be wrong. We are both strong, and willing and eager to work. We do not wish to beg, but we cannot say this to the people because we cannot speak with them. If you will help us so far as to take us to some farmer, or any other who would allow us to earn our food and a roof over our heads, and if possible some little comfort for Nanciebel, we would be most grateful. We should then soon learn to speak your tongue, at least so far as to make ourselves understood."

She knit her brows and looked at them. "You had better come to my father," she said at last. "He can give you work, if he will. We have always need of men at Madryn. The people here will rather trust to their fishing and all its risks than work steadily caring for the land. So there is always work for those who will do it. If he will have you, he can take you on, but whether he will or no I cannot say. He has been away these last few days, but will come home to-day."

"Good!" Seymour said, with great relief. "That is what we want. We have no money to give for the things we lack, but we are ready enough to give service. Will you tell us or show us the way to this Madryn, Mistress Marsli?"

"I do not say he will take you, you know! If Blaise has been talking to him already, he will perhaps refuse."

"Then we must argue the matter with Captain Morgan. We know he will not help us, but he must not hinder also. That would be unreasonable."

"I will take you to Madryn," she said, after a thoughtful pause, "and we will see. Girl!" turning to Nanciebel, "let me hear you sing again. I have heard how you sang in Nevin. Sing me some of these English songs, which are so new to us here."

Nanciebel began to laugh. She found Mistress Marsli's peremptory tone distinctly novel and amusing. This was a result of her change of dress which she had not foreseen.

"She verily thinks us quite poor folks, beggars perhaps by birth, as we are in fact. And of course if father does offer to work for her father, she will but think it the more. Well, but what of that? Yet, when one thinks of Summerton, it is truly funny to hear her. I am very sure her house of Madryn is no finer than ours at home."

Sir John and Gilbert had looked at one another, noticing her tone also. Nanciebel saw it, and to create a diversion, said quickly—

"I will sing if you will do your best for us with your father."

Marsli frowned. But Nanciebel broke into "Lord Lovel," and followed it with "King Cophetua" and "Barbara Allen," and Marsli's face lost its anger and softened, and she sat down on Nanciebel's box to listen, while the three big dogs lay at her feet.

"Yes," she said at last. "I do not wonder they listened in Nevin. You can sing, indeed. You have a good voice, and you use it well. Yes, I will speak to my father on your behalf. He will listen to me rather than to Blaise. So you would do well to pack all your goods in this box and leave it ready. Then you can fetch it without difficulty."

"Can we safely leave it, if we all go with you?" asked Sir John. "Or must Gilbert stay —?"

"'Twill not be stolen. I will tell them at the farm it does belong to you."

So Nanciebel packed her cloak and the garments which had helped to make their beds, and her father took up his axe and string of fish, and Gilbert shouldered the crossbow and slung his rabbit over his arm, and gave his hand to Mistress Marsli to help her to her horse again.

“We leave our little glen—Abergeirch, is it?—less empty-handed than we entered it,” Seymour said cheerfully, as they followed. “Nanciebel, there is one thing I have to say to this masterful little lady. She must speak in another tone to you. She does not understand. For Gilbert and me it does not matter, but she must be more courteous to you, and less free with her commands——”

“I hope you will say nothing at all to her,” Nanciebel said quickly. “What can you say? Will you go telling people that we are gentlefolks, that you are *Sir* John, that I must be treated as a fine lady, and at the same time ask if we may have a cottage to dwell in, and work to earn our bread? We shall but make ourselves ridiculous if we do so. Let them find it out for themselves, and they will think more of us; if you tell them, they will but laugh. If I am so little of a lady that you must tell folk ’tis so, I would rather be only the ‘beggar all in grey’ she thinks me just now. ’Twill not hurt me to hear her commands, or even to obey them, and she can help us much at this moment. She is very much older than I, also,—near as old as Gilbert, I should think. If she likes to think me only a child, as our friend the Captain did at first, that surely will not hurt me either. Do you and Gilbert mean to take any place her father offers you?”

“Certainly. We can do nothing else. A home and food and clothing we must have, and I would rather earn than beg for them.”

“Then you can say nothing to Mistress Marsli. Is’t not a curious name? Let her be, father, and if anything is told let it come from Captain Morgan and not from us.”

“Truly, I had forgotten him. He can tell what he likes. Well then, I will leave it to him, if you so desire it, Nanciebel.”

Marsli Madryn led them home by a road they had not discovered,—up the side of Abergeirch glen to a farm lying out of sight behind rising ground, then by a path through the fields to a tiny grey village in a hollow, whose existence so close to them they had not suspected, and where the women and girls, in their curious costume, came to doors and cottage windows to stare at Nanciebel, and so by a long white road, down and up, winding through the marshes, towards the bare straight hill behind. The stream of Abergeirch crept leisurely through the countryside, with many loops and bends, twisting and turning between banks of golden iris and beds of rushes. The flat country between hills and sea was all marshy, and very desolate and lonely, and it was only when they drew near to the hill that fields and hedges appeared, with sheep and black cows grazing, and dwellings among the trees. The farms and cottages were all much alike, low and built of stone, or even of mud, grey or whitewashed, or sometimes coloured blue or pink or drab, with high hedges, and almost invariably set down with their gable end turned to the road and their front door looking into a tiny paved courtyard, with a waterbutt and a low bench under the windows.

Less anxious about the future than on their previous journey, Sir John and Nanciebel looked about them and noted these characteristics, also the low overhanging roofs of thatch, without chimneys, the hens and ducks pecking about the yards, and the great trees and bushes of wild fuchsia in the hedges. The cows and pigs in the fields amused Nanciebel also—since there were low walls and ditches between her and them—for they were not all black, but white in parts, and the division of black and white provoked her laughter so that Marsli turned to see what was the matter. Here was one black cow with a broad white band around her body

in the very middle, for all the world like a big white sash—and another half black and half white, with a sharp dividing line between. One had a white face with a black body, and looked very much ashamed of herself, as if she thought the colour had run short when she was born; and another had a black head with a white body, and looked if anything more ashamed still. Nanciebel laughed outright at some of them, but Marsli, when she heard that it was only this which had amused her, shrugged her shoulders and turned to Gilbert again.

He was walking beside her horse and they had passed on in front to show the way, Nanciebel and her father following. From their talk and laughter it seemed that they were already good friends.

But presently Marsli turned in her saddle and waited till the others came up.

“This before us is Madryn farm. You had better wait there. I will speak to Mistress Eluned, and she will give you dinner. I must hasten on, for my father will be home very shortly, and I must be there when he comes. I will speak to him of you, and when he is ready he will send for you,” and she rode off at speed, leaving them to walk on to the grey farm a little farther up the road.

It was a well-built stone house of two storeys, presenting one shoulder to the road as usual, and looking into a paved yard, from which a great stone archway led into the big quadrangle formed by the farm buildings. A herd of handsome black cows was marching in through this archway, and Nanciebel clutched her father’s arm and clung to him till they had passed.

The goodwife was expecting them, thanks to Marsli’s warning, and greeted them with curious looks and many ejaculations in Welsh. She led them into the roomy kitchen, whose floor of red and blue tiles, old oak dresser, big stone hearth, and hanging sides of bacon and strings of onions from the roof were new to them all.

Nanciebel sank down on the big wooden settle with a sigh of appreciation.

“ ’Tis good to be within doors again, after all, and to sit on a seat instead of on the ground! Gilbert, what were you saying to Mistress Marsli to amuse her so greatly?”

“Oh, not very much! She rails at all things English—though I am not at all sure that she meant it all—so I in return mocked at things Welsh—the strange talk, the houses set so oddly looking away from the roads, the bare feet of the women, the big hats, and the small, short folk. I have not yet seen a single man as big as myself.”

“But you are big, even for an Englishman, so that is hardly fair. Captain Morgan is, I think, taller than most of his countrymen, so far as we have seen them yet.”

The farmer’s wife set food on the table, and they sat down to it with much enjoyment, and laughingly made much of their delight in tasting bread and milk and vegetables once more.

They had been sitting for some time in the big window-seat—having thanked their hostess as heartily as circumstances permitted—when a man came striding down the road, and putting his head in at the door, beckoned to them with words whose meaning was obvious. They rose and followed him, thanking Mistress Eluned again as they went, and he led them up the road towards Madryn.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

The Master of Madryn

The trees on the Madryn lands were well-grown and thick, overhanging the roads and giving shelter from the sun. Only at Boduan had they seen such trees since coming ashore. The fields were well cared for, with heavy crops of oats and barley or standing high with hay; and here, far from the sea and guarded by trees and hedges from the wind, the crops were more advanced than those on the coast and nearly as high as in the fields of Summerton.

Very soon they came upon stretches of long grass and a tangle of bushes, with big trees at intervals and a brown curving roadway leading to a great grey house. At the turn of the road Marsli met them, accompanied once more by the three big collies, Rhodri, Rhys and Llevelys, and her appearance was a vast surprise. For she had discarded her green gown and big plumed hat, and wore the costume of the country—short scarlet petticoat and black bodice, big striped apron, and brightly-coloured fringed shawl crossed on her breast, tall black hat with snowy cap frill around her face, and the customary bare feet in clumsy wooden shoes. But in spite of the strangeness of her attire she looked very charming, her dark hair showing softly under the stiff brim of her hat, her dark eyes very bright, but meeting theirs with a touch of conscious shyness at the moment.

“My father is waiting to see you,” she said abruptly, and turned to walk with them towards the house.

She talked on rapidly as they went up the roadway, as if to prevent any comments, which they would naturally not have dreamed of offering.

“He has been away at Brynodol, beyond Tydweiliog, these last four days. Blaise rode out to meet him this morning. That is why he did not go down to you in Abergeirch, as he has done these other days. So they have been talking of you, and at first my father was disposed to say he would have naught to do with you. But Blaise suggested that he should make some terms with you, as you must have some way to live here, since that is the King’s wish for you. I also told him that I had seen you, and begged him to let you stay here, and I think if you are careful he will do so—that is, if you will accept whatever service he offers you.”

“So that it is not military service, we will accept,” John-o’-Peace said quietly.

Marsli turned suddenly to Nanciebel. “Are you not going to ask why I have changed my gown?”

Nanciebel gave her a quick, surprised look.

“Surely not! How could I ask it?”

“Why not?”

“’Tis no business of mine. Also, I would be angry if any one asked me such a question.”

Marsli looked at her keenly. Then she said—

“I would have been angry if you had asked. Indeed, I do not like these things. I like to wear decent gowns and hats, as a lady should. All my friends do so—Myfanwry Wynn, and Gwyneth Edwards, and Nesta Griffiths, they all have pretty gowns,—and it angers me greatly to have to dress as a peasant girl. But my father will have it so. He will not see me in an English gown, so when he is at home I dare not wear one. He hates all things English, and will not even speak your tongue if he can help it. That was why he did not wish to have you live here. He said he would have no English on his land. But Blaise said to him that he could not

help it, since the King himself had sent you here. When he is away I dress as I like and feel fit to be seen. That was why I had to hasten home this morning, lest he should come before I had time to change my gown. Your brother laughs at our Welsh dress, and no doubt you will do the same, but you cannot dislike it more than I do——”

“We do not laugh at it,” Nanciebel said, interrupting her rapid flow of talk with difficulty. “’Tis strange to us, of course, but I should have thought you would be proud to wear the dress of your country.”

“’Tis only worn by the common folk. I like better to wear an English gown, as a lady should,” said Mistress Marsli again. “Now you understand, and here we are, so you must come in to my father.”

The great entrance hall of Madryn Castle was only dimly lighted by long narrow windows of thick glass. Beneath one of these, in a little recess, Captain Morgan and the master of Madryn were awaiting them, both dressed for riding, while a groom held their horses at the door.

Thomas Madryn was not tall, but broad-shouldered and sturdy, with sharp black eyes, and grey hair and beard which made him look older than he proved to be on closer inspection. His florid complexion suggested that he spent his leisure moments in the manner of most country squires of his day, but at the moment he was sober enough, with a quick stern note in his voice as he spoke to John-o’-Peace, which recalled and emphasized what Marsli had said of his dislike of things and persons English.

“Captain Morgan has spoken to me concerning you. You are sent here by the King, but are without means of life?” he asked, speaking English badly and with a strong foreign accent.

“That is so. But we do not desire to beg. We are ready to earn our bread, if you will help us a little towards it at the first. We cannot speak with your people, so they do not know what we desire. If you will let us work for you, or send us to some farmer, with Mistress Marsli to explain, we will be grateful and will do our best to satisfy you.”

“Is it true, as I am told, that in your own land you are a man of wealth and high position?”

Marsli flashed a look of surprise at Nanciebel.

Sir John answered quietly, “It is true.”

“With a house at home as large as this, or larger? And even a title to your name?”

“True, also.”

“And yet you refuse to fight for your King, as any gentleman would?”

“That is so. Do you wish me to give my reasons?”

“No!” said Madryn, with contempt. “Your reasons we can all guess very well. Your excuses we do not wish to hear.”

Sir John flushed a little, and said nothing. Gilbert’s resentment rose against Morgan once more, and he was breaking out angrily, “You have no right——!” when Nanciebel put her hand over his mouth, standing on tiptoe to do so.

“Be quiet, you foolish boy! Do you wish to return to Abergeirch and eat nothing but fish and drink only water? What does it matter what he says? I have had enough fish to last me a year,” she said in a low vigorous tone.

Madryn was addressing Seymour once more.

“And you, a gentleman, yet choose rather to earn your bread in such service as I can give than to serve your King?”

“Yes! In serving you we shall also serve a law higher than the King’s.”

This was utterly beyond Madryn, who shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“I am always in want of help on the land. The people here are fools, and will sooner fish, and starve when they can catch nothing, than work steadily in the fields. The hay is almost ready, and we shall want all the men we can get. If you are willing to work among my men, I will give you eightpence a day and a cottage. If you seem like to do well, I will keep you on till the later harvest, or perhaps altogether. But ’tis scarce possible that you, a gentleman, will accept such a place.”

“If you offer no other, we will certainly accept. We would rather work honestly than beg. But we could serve you better than in field-work, if you were willing. My son and I are able —”

“I offer no other. Field-work you may have, or none.”

“Then we will work in your fields.”

“Sir John, you are mad,” said Blaise Morgan sharply, speaking for the first time and so suddenly that Nanciebel jumped.

Marsli gave them a quick surprised glance again, and an eager look dawned in her eyes.

“If you choose to think us so, Captain, ’tis no matter to us,” Seymour said coolly. “I think I have heard the same from you before, and shall likely hear it again, but I do not know that it will turn me from my purpose, however often it may be repeated.”

“Certainly you are quite mad.”

“To me, Captain, a man who kills his fellows, with no quarrel of his own against them, is at least as mad as we.”

“And you, Master Gilbert, are you also mad?”

Gilbert turned on him. “I know my father for a good and brave man, and I know that in this matter he is right. I am proud to do what he thinks well.”

Blaise shrugged his shoulders and turned, with a meaning laugh, to gaze out of the window. Gilbert’s face flamed angrily, but Nanciebel pressed his arm and with a look begged him to be silent, for the lord of the manor, on whom their fortunes depended at the moment, was speaking again.

“’Tis perhaps unwise to take madmen to live on the land,” said Madryn, looking them up and down, “but they are both strong, and to be sure they are big enough, so they may work well in spite of their madness. So now, both of you, listen to me. I have room enough here at Madryn for good and useful settlers, who can tend the land and enrich it, but none for useless or ignorant idlers, who do not know the difference between oats and barley——”

“Or between bulls and cows,” put in Captain Morgan, and Nanciebel reddened indignantly.

“I suppose you know little or nothing of work on the land. Could you bind a sheaf?”

“I fear not,” Seymour said, with a laugh. “But I think I could very quickly learn.”

“Well, then, for a year, if you wish it, you shall serve me and learn these many things you do not know—if I am satisfied with you, that is, and if we do not find too many signs of madness in you. But if you live here you must also know something of fishing. Though I blame the folk because they leave the fields to go to waste, yet, after all, their great food is fish, and at times, as when the herrings come, they must all go to help, or much will be lost. So if you can please me in the first year, then in the second you shall go fishing in my boats and learn that craft also,—I suppose you know nothing of boats and nets?”

“Of nets nothing, and of boats very little, truly.”

“And that little, they do not greatly like,” Morgan laughed. “I think they had never set foot on a ship till they left England to come here. Truly, they have a little to learn there.”

"If I am still content to have you here, when you have learned something of farming and fishing," Madryn continued, "I will in the third year lend you a house and land, and you shall show what you can do with them. If you prove yourselves fit to remain, you shall do so."

"Good! We will show later that we thank you."

"And you really mean to accept this offer rather than the King's commission?" said Morgan abruptly, his tone incredulous.

"What need to return to that? We have said it often enough," said Seymour, as sharply.

"I can scarce think you are in earnest."

"We are."

"Humph!" said Blaise. "We will see what you think of it in a few weeks."

His tone of contempt was very galling. Nanciebel had already silenced Gilbert several times, and was now restraining him with difficulty. Marsli had been eagerly awaiting her opportunity, and now, seeing that the moment was dangerous, she broke in—

"Is it true, then, that at home you were a fine lady, Nanciebel?"

Nanciebel laughed. "At least I was not the 'beggar all in grey' you thought me at first."

"I had been wondering much at your speech and manner," Marsli said, with a frank disregard for conventional restraints. "Well, then," she went on eagerly, "will you not come here and live with me? I have no friends near, and no companion in the house, except only these dear dogs of mine, and, indeed, it would please me very greatly if you would come. I can give you far greater comfort than you will have in a cottage with your father and brother, and you can see them when you will. I pray you come! Indeed, it would make such a very great difference to me to have you here."

"Nanciebel," said Sir John, before the girl could speak, "do as Mistress Marsli asks you, and Gilbert and I will shift for ourselves. We shall do very well. 'Twill be good for us, and we shall like to know that you are living in comfort here."

But this, to Nanciebel, was merest nonsense.

"I would not leave you even if you ordered me to! Father, I have come so far with you that surely I have the right to stay with you now! 'Twas not for this I left home and suffered that horrible ship, to leave you now. You will need me more than you have done yet. I am going with you wherever you go. Marsli, I thank you for the kind thought, and I will be glad to be your friend, but I can live nowhere but with my father. Father, I did not think you could propose to do without me so easily."

"'Twould not have been easy, and you know it, Nanciebel. But Mistress Marsli's offer is so kind, and promises you so much more of comfort than you will likely have with us, that it seems pity to refuse."

"Comfort without contentment is not much, and I can only be content if I am with you," she said sturdily.

"Well! Then we will try it and see."

Madryn had been listening impatiently.

"I want no English in my house," he said roughly, "so, indeed, 'tis well she does not wish to come. Marsli, you will take them to Dafydd ap Lloyd and tell him my wishes. He speaks a little English, but"—turning to Seymour—"you will do well to learn Welsh as quickly as you can. Dafydd will find you a cottage—Tanyrallt is empty, and close at hand. I will speak to him as we pass. Come, Captain, we have wasted time enough on this business. Let us be off. In Porthdynllaen they will have begun to think we are not coming."

Morgan rose, "If you, Sir John, or you, Master Gilbert, do tire of farming and change your minds as regards your duty to the King, I shall be glad to hear of it and shall be ready to show you your way back to England. I will come along one of these days to see how you like this service Madryn offers you. Like enough, a few days of it will content you," and he followed his friend out to the waiting horses.

"They are off for a night's fishing. My father may blame the men, but he loves the sea himself," Marsli explained.

"If there is one thing more than another that would keep me from yielding to the King now, 'tis the knowledge that it would please that——" Gilbert was beginning, to relieve his pent-up feelings, when his father interrupted him.

"You will not blame my daughter because she could not accept your offer, Mistress Marsli? You will understand——"

"Yes; but, indeed, I am sorry—very sorry. Still, we can be friends. Tanyrallt is not so far away. Come, and we will go to Dafydd at the farm and tell him all about it, and then I will take you to see your house."

"What fine horses!" said Nanciebel, as, Madryn and the Captain rode away.

"Yes," Marsli said proudly. "Those came from Flanders, but father will have them kept for his own use, of course. When I ride, I have to be content with one of our own ponies. Here, Rhodri! Rhys! Come back, Llevelys, my dear! You cannot go fishing, you foolish dogs. You must stay with me. Come along to the farm with us, and be sure you do not chase the hens. Some day," she said to Nanciebel, as they went, "you must see the rest of the dogs. Branwen has a young pup, so she cannot be out with me to-day. Pryderi and Madoc are watching the sheep down on the Morfa—the marsh, you know. And Arianrod has pups also, while Kicva"—and she nodded meaningly—"she is not well enough to run just now."

"Surely you have very many dogs!" said Nanciebel.

"Yes, indeed, but I have no one else, you know."

"Neither sisters nor brothers?—and no mother?"

"No," said Marsli, a shadow crossing her face. "My only sister—well, never mind that! I have only the dogs for comrades now. That is why I would have been so glad to have you."

"I am sorry. I hope you will often come——"

"Oh, I shall, indeed! You may be very sure of that."

"Your dogs are strangely named—to our English ears, Mistress Marsli," said Gilbert.

"They are all princes and princesses in our old history of long ago," she laughed. "Here, Prince Rhodri! Leave those hens alone! Prince Llevelys, you rascal, come back! For princes and princesses you do truly behave very ill, but you are all I have for friends—indeed, yes! Except, of course, my ponies and the cows. Bryn and Peroc are my own—Bryn I rode this morning, and Peroc I have lent to Blaise. They are not princes, but very ordinary creatures. Now we will speak to Dafydd, and then I will take you up to Tanyrallt."

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

The Cottage in the Wood

“‘Tanyrallt’ means ‘under the trees,’ you know,” Marsli explained.

Not far from Madryn Castle, but higher up the hill, was a clearing in the trees, with a stream running through the woods just below. Here stood Tanyrallt, which, in spite of its high-sounding name, was a thatched one-storied mud cottage, with of course no chimney and no glass in the windows. The floor inside was of mud, stamped hard; outside, the ground was rough and broken, with an untended tangle of bushes and small plants everywhere. The cottage, inside and out, was dirty, with cobwebs in all the corners and dust on the shelves and window-ledges, but Marsli had arranged with Dafydd ap Lloyd that John-o’-Peace and Gilbert should have the next day free for house-cleaning, so, depressing as the cottage looked at first glance, its appearance daunted none of them.

Gilbert, indeed, whistled as he first glanced round, and Sir John, with sudden memory of home, looked anxiously at Nanciebel. She met his eyes bravely, and broke into a laugh.

“’Tis very much better than the tent, daddy. I shall make you and Gilbert work very hard to-morrow. But there is plenty of water in the stream down there, so we will soon have our house a little cleaner.”

“You will want very many things besides the roof over your heads,” Marsli said, sitting down on a tree-stump and stroking Prince Rhodri’s fine black head and pulling his silky ears. “My father thinks ’tis enough to say—‘There is your house! Now live in it!’—but Nanciebel and I know how many things you must have for comfort. You shall come back with me to Madryn, Master Gilbert, and we will see what we can find that will be useful.”

“You must not be too generous. We have nothing to give——”

“Nanciebel has something to give! Perhaps later she will sing to me again. I wondered at her singing this morning, for I was sure she had had good teaching, and I could not understand how she had come by it. We all like to sing here, but I have never been taught, and my voice is nothing wonderful. ’Tis not so high and clear as hers. And her English songs are a great delight.”

She was walking down the hill with Gilbert as she talked, the three big dogs racing by her side. Nanciebel called to her father to come to her. She had climbed to the top of a big rock sticking out of the hillside, and was looking out over the lower trees.

“Come and see, daddy! This is very beautiful. We will not mind our tiny house since we have this just outside.”

Straight before them was Boduan Hill, green with trees to the rounded crest, with seams of bare rock here and there showing the steepness of the cliffs. Between and below lay the valley, with the forbidden road buried in trees. To the left they looked out over the Morfa—the flat, marshy land—to the sea, but most of the surrounding wall of hills was shut out by the round crest just in front. And to the right, beyond Boduan, away to the south was a glimpse of the outer world which they might not enter—a wide, flat country, very green, and beyond it a blue range of sharp, high peaks.

“So we can look at the rest of the land, at least!” Sir John said quietly. “Those mountains must be very high, for they are very far away. Some day, maybe, we will climb one of these hills, and then we shall see still more. ’Tis a very fair land we are in, Nanciebel.”

“I like it! The hills are very grand. But ’tis a terrible land for hunger. I am sure I was never so hungry at home.”

He laughed. “Then let us earn our supper! We will build a fire inside our house, then it will feel better.”

When Marsli and Gilbert returned, the fire was blazing merrily, and Nanciebel, with a broom made out of a great bush of heather, was brushing down the dust and cobwebs from walls and ceiling, and laughingly showed hands which would not have disgraced any chimney-sweep.

Marsli carried a big basket, and Prince Rhodri had a small one, which he carried with conscious pride, holding the handle in his teeth. Gilbert had a bundle under one arm, and a pail, filled with various articles, in the other hand. When these burdens were opened and their contents displayed, Nanciebel found herself in possession of very many little things which would be helpful and even necessary in her housekeeping.

“I could not cook without any pots or pans! I am more than grateful. Now we shall have great comfort, and I shall have much enjoyment also in my cooking. I shall be able to play at housekeeping in earnest now.”

“Another thing I have been saying to your brother. They cannot go off all day and every day, leaving you quite alone up here. I cannot be with you all the time, and ’tis not safe for a young girl away in the woods with no one near. I do not think there are any robbers in these woods, but one can never be too sure. So I shall leave you Prince Llevelys to guard you. He will stay if I tell him, and no one will dare to approach while he is near. He will not hurt you, and you will very soon be friends with him and love him very greatly. ’Twill make certain also that I do come up to see you every day, for I could not let a whole day pass without coming to kiss my dear Llevelys! Of course, with Rhodri, and Rhys, and Pryderi, and Madoc, and Princess Branwen, and Arianrod, and Kicva, and two darling baby pups, I shall not be lonely, but I do not think my dear Llevelys would like it if he did not see me once each day.”

Nanciebel laughed, but Marsli was perfectly sincere and matter-of-fact in her tone. She sat down on the stump again, and began to explain the matter to Prince Llevelys in earnest Welsh, her face very serious, her eyes gravely down-bent under the brim of her tall hat. In her scarlet petticoat and with bare feet in the clumsy wooden shoes, she made a pretty picture, and Gilbert glanced at her continually as he carried wood and water up from among the trees. But Marsli had eyes only for the big dog at the moment, and paid no heed to any of them.

“And so,” she said, dropping into English, “so you understand that Nanciebel really could not be left quite alone up here all day, with no one to speak to, and no one to take care of her, could she now, Llevelys, my dear? And I will come to kiss you every day, indeed I will! I have promised that, you know. So you will be a good fellow, and take very good care of her, and not run away after rabbits or birds more than you can help, you know. Now, if you please, when you are ready, will you sing again, Nanciebel? Prince Llevelys understands very well, and will let no one approach who is not a true friend.”

Nanciebel, very grateful for her ready help, willingly sang “Young Tamlane,” which she had sung in Nevin, and then “Binnorie, O Binnorie,” and by special request repeated the song of the witch, which had greatly taken Marsli’s fancy when she heard it in the morning.

Then Marsli offered to return to Madryn for supper, but being invited to share the meal —“a simple one, but plenty of it,” said John-o’-Peace heartily, she remained gladly, with evident enjoyment of their company.

“I am all alone at Madryn, save for the dogs,” she explained again, and she and Rhodri, Rhys, and Llevelys declared themselves well satisfied with the freshly-cooked fish and rabbit set before them, and the bread and little cakes she had brought in her basket during the afternoon.

They sat round their fire in the bare little hut, Marsli in her high hat and short red skirt looking very witch-like in the light of the dancing flames. She sang some Welsh songs in a sweet, rather low voice, but without Nanciebel’s clear high notes and trained pronunciation, and then was for setting out for home with only Prince Rhodri and Rhys for escort. She laughed at Gilbert’s proposal to accompany her, but he insisted since it was now very late, so she laughed again and accepted his company, and they went off gaily through the trees.

She appeared early next morning, bringing more gifts to add to their comfort, and watched and laughed and gave directions and sometimes helped to carry them out. By night the cottage had been washed and scrubbed down, the floor sanded over and thickly strewn with rushes and grass, heather beds prepared, as being the most easily procurable, and the pots and pans set in order on the shelves. All was clean and neat, if very bare still, and Gilbert announced his intention of clearing the ground outside as soon as possible, so that Nanciebel might have something of a garden again. The woods were full of rabbits, so a very few moments of hunting gave them a plentiful supply of meat. Bread Marsli brought with her when she came to say good-morning to Prince Llevelys and incidentally to Nanciebel. Water was their chief drink, but they did not greatly desire beer, which was the only alternative, and Marsli the thoughtful went down to the farm during the day and returned with a can of sweet milk and some cheese and butter and honey, thus adding considerably to their bill of fare.

“To-morrow is the Lord’s day,” said Sir John soberly, in the language of the time, when she and Gilbert and the two dogs had gone off down the hill to Madryn that night. “What shall we do? Is there a church? Yes, we saw it in Nevin.”

“Marsli says there is a curate at Boduan, but he is away with the family just now. And the service is in Welsh, you know.”

“So! Then we will make our own Sunday.”

“Daddy! There is a thing I wish you would do to please me.”

“Anything, Nanciebel!”

She laughed. “Her father said he would ask you to go out in his boats next year. Father, I pray you, to please me, learn to swim! I shall never be happy when you are at sea if you and Gilbert cannot swim.”

“’Tis a good thought. Yes, truly, we must learn to swim—if we can make time for it, but I do not think we shall be very idle, Nanciebel.”

So, early on the Sunday morning, they left the cottage in the woods, and, carrying bread and honey in a basket, walked leisurely down the shady Madryn roads and across the sunny, breezy stretch of marsh—the Morfa—to the seashore, Prince Llevelys circling round them and racing after rabbits and waking all the silence with his joyful clamour.

They left Abergeirch on the left, being in search of a better shore, and found their way out on to the open, windy headland, with the sea breaking on the rocks on three sides and the hills behind and across the sea. Here in time they discovered a tiny bay among the rocks, with a white sandy beach and sloping green cliffs and black rocks reaching out at each side. It was all very silent, as even the waves were not breaking on the shore, but creeping gently up the sand. Beyond was the quiet blue stretch of the larger bay, and the great silent hills with noiseless

shadows sweeping across their slopes. Nanciebel seated herself on the edge of the cliff, looking down and out upon it all.

“I am content! I want no more! I am going not another step! We shall find no place more beautiful than this,” she said, and the little bay became their regular haunt on quiet Sunday mornings.

Among the rocks were sheltered corners where Sir John and Gilbert undressed and made their way into the water, which lay so still and cool, and yet sufficiently warmed by the sun, that Nanciebel often longed to join them, but could not quite bring herself to it. At first their efforts at swimming ended in hopeless failure, though Prince Llevelys, in frantic excitement and delight, did his very best to show them how to do it. But gradually it came to them, and once they had gained confidence for a few strokes they improved rapidly, and seemed likely to be strong and good swimmers before long.

While they were in the water, Nanciebel built a little fire in a corner among the rocks and cooked the meat or fish they had brought. So they were able to spend the whole day on the sands of the tiny bay, and these long, quiet picnics remained in their memories as the most restful times of those early days in Nevin. When they tired of resting on the sands or wandering among the rocks in search of rare shells and seaweeds or pools filled with red and yellow anemones, the open moorland at the top of the cliffs gave space for much variety of walking, with views of sea and hills and sky, and waves breaking wildly on the rocks away below.

Sometimes, to the enjoyment of all and the wild delight of Prince Llevelys, Marsli came down from Madryn and joined them in the bay, having discovered their favourite haunt. She was always accompanied by Rhodri and Rhys, the big collies, and sometimes also by Pryderi and Madoc, the rough-haired black-and-tan terriers. And when the ladies of her party, the Princesses Branwen, Arianrod, and Kicva, were able to come also, the first two with their funny little shaggy balls of pups, and Kicva with her equally funny, blunt-nosed, round-bodied little copy of Madoc the terrier, then indeed the sandy bay was no longer quiet, but merriest of the merry, and it was a large and very lively party that walked home across the Morfa at sunset for a big supper and then some music in the bare little room of Tanyrallt. The pups had to be carried in turns when their little legs could bear them no longer, and as they went Marsli would teach Nanciebel the long Welsh names she had given them, and would laugh at Gilbert's efforts to say them properly.

One Sunday they turned from the sea, however, and, making their way up among the trees, found themselves on the bare side of Madryn mountain.

For Sir John was curious to see what lay beyond their mountain wall. It was not enough to know that they were in Wales. He must know in what part, if possible. He had permission to do what he liked within the wall, so at the earliest convenient moment he must climb that wall.

They urged Nanciebel to be content at home, fearing the climb would be too much for her. But she laughed the idea to scorn, and insisted on joining the party.

To all but Prince Llevelys the climb was a hard task, and they were exhausted long before they reached the top. But to give up after having started was out of the question. So they toiled on up the bare, straight side, climbing from rock to rock till they stood on the open terrace at the top, and sank down there to rest before the final scramble up the big grey mound which crowned the whole.

As they climbed they had been sheltered from the wind, but on the terrace they met the full force of a strong south-west gale, and could not stand before it. Sir John threw his arm round Nanciebel and drew her down among the rocks. Gilbert threw himself flat on the stones, and they lay and gazed in dumb amazement.

For they had thought to look out at a stretch of green country, or perhaps many ranges of mountains. They had thought beyond their wall to see the whole land of Wales, with, perhaps, towns and villages and rivers, and perhaps the road home to England.

But here before them lay the sea, and all around them also.

“’Tis verily almost an island we are on!” cried Nanciebel, when she could speak.

Their Madryn mountain rose boldly in the middle of a long green strip of land, with sea on each side and sweeping round the western point, so that for three-fourths of the circle the horizon was unbroken sea. Only in the east was the land continued, and here was a great grey wall of mountains, far beyond the familiar Yr Eifl both in height and distance.

“England must lie beyond those mountains,” Sir John cried in Nanciebel’s ear. “Are they not grand?”

“I never saw anything like them before. They are more than worth the climb.”

They were pale blue-grey, a line of giants standing sentinel far away to the south, guarding the green land of which Nevin and Madryn were one corner. As the wind drove the clouds across the sky, first one peak fell into shadow, then another, while the first stood out in sunshine again, and the shadows as they passed and changed were like richest velvet. Yr Eifl, swelling up out of the fields close at hand, was a glory of purple heather nearly to the top of his three peaks, while Boduan lay below, an insignificant green mound.

Turning from the mountains and the quiet green country at their feet, they looked out over the lonely stretch of sea, sweeping into the bays and round the rugged western points, and filling all the view from south to north.

“Where are we, dad?” cried Gilbert, after a long silence. “What part of Wales is this which is so nearly an island?”

“Can you not see the map spread before you, lad?”

But Gilbert knew little of geography, and Nanciebel even less.

“I am not a seaman. What do I know of maps and charts?” said he.

“And I know nothing at all, but I am very sure you do, daddy,” said she.

“I will show you later where we are. While we are here, let us give our time to looking at this country we may not enter. See Nevin yonder, too!—and the bold arm of our headland, looking so small from this height!—and our little Sunday bay!—and Madryn trees at our feet!”

On the firm white sand of the little bay, the following Sunday, he drew a rough outline map for their instruction.

“There, Gil, that is the map, is it not? And is not *this* where we stood?—with the sea on three sides, and we on the mountain in the middle? Now do you see how the map lay at our feet?”

They acknowledged that he was right, and Gilbert said, with a laugh—

“I am glad we have one who knows everything for our father!”

“Truly, he is a wonder!” Nanciebel said fervently. “I have thought it always. So that is where we are, in that strange, far-away corner of the land! Well, ’tis good to know!”

“To be sure, it matters little enough to us. Yet I am glad to be satisfied,” said Sir John, as the tide swept in over his map. “And I am glad to have found it out for myself, without asking

questions of our friend the Captain.”

“Yes, a thousand times!” said Gilbert.

But these were rest-days, and those which could be spent thus were the more prized and remembered because sometimes Sunday, when it came, was wet, and the rain kept them pent up in the cottage, and that was dreary indeed until Marsli came up to keep them company, as she often did.

Of Captain Morgan they saw little. He spent much time with Thomas Madryn, riding, fishing, hunting when the season came, or visiting one or other of the manor houses which lay beyond the hills—Boduau, Brynodol, Nanhoron, and others. But more of his time he passed alone, riding up and down, shooting wild birds on the Morfa or sailing about the coast, and Sir John and Gilbert, at least, understood that he disliked certain of the habits to which Madryn was given and did not care to join in some of his pleasures. But he left them severely to themselves up at Tanyrallt, and they rarely saw him.

Sir John and Gilbert arrived home from their first day’s work in the fields too tired to stir when once they had thrown themselves down on the rushes to rest, and without a word between them beyond what was absolutely necessary. Nanciebel knew better than to tease them with questions, and she soon found by experience that all she could do when they came home in this state was to set food before them as quickly as possible, and wait till they were sufficiently rested to be ready for conversation. So she would move quietly about between hearth and cupboard, fetching bread and cheese and honey, or bending over the big pot on the fire, and would leave them quite to themselves till she could announce in a very few minutes that supper was ready.

This life of actual hard work and physical endurance was, of course, utterly new to them both. At Summerton Sir John had spent much of his time in his study among his books, and the rest in riding about his lands or visiting at Ryde Park and other neighbouring manors. While Gilbert had lived much at Oxford, his father wishing him to have the same college training he had had himself, and when at home had been given to riding, hunting, shooting, fishing, and learning something of the management of the estate. Of this last they both knew much, and were inclined to criticize Madryn’s methods at times, but of the actual daily work of the men under their control they had known almost nothing. So digging and ploughing, haymaking, and, later, the oats and barley harvest, were all new experiences which had their natural effect upon them. They were strong and well-fitted for the life, but, until they grew accustomed to it, every joint and muscle seemed to tell the tale of the unusual exercise. When at night they had rested sufficiently to recover their spirits and make light of such troubles, they would laughingly declare that they feared to move lest they should break somewhere, and that it was as much as they could do, even in the morning, to fetch Nanciebel’s water from the spring before leaving her to the company of Prince Llevelys for the day.

“I am *almost* too tired to chop you any wood, Nanciebel,” Gilbert would laugh, “and father is *almost* too tired to carry even one pail of water.”

“Leave it to me then. I can do it very well.”

“Oh, we are not quite come to that!” her father would assure her. “Things will be very bad indeed before we see you going down to the spring.”

So if Nanciebel had need of still more water during the day, she fetched it herself, but said nothing about it at night.

She had her own troubles and difficulties, but made light of them to herself and was careful to allow no whisper of them to reach her father or Gilbert. Even Marsli, who visited

her nearly every day, never heard of the times when the fire would not burn or smoked her out of the cottage—never knew of her severe struggle with herself the first time Gilbert forgot to skin the rabbit, or of her disgust when she first attempted to clean and cut up the fish for supper—never guessed how often she was lonely away up at Tanyrallt alone, and never knew of her frequent distress lest something needful to the comfort of her men-folk should be forgotten or turn out a failure when they arrived home tired and hungry—for she had been heedless and forgetful at home, and did not learn carefulness and forethought in a day. Only Prince Llevelys, dozing in the sun by the tree-stump, with a watchful ear for intruders and a wistful eye for Marsli, knew of these little troubles, and Prince Llevelys could no doubt have told many things if he would. What he whispered to Marsli, when the morning's greetings were over, and she sat pulling his long ears and talking in a low voice, her head bent so that he quite disappeared behind her tall hat, no one could say, for, of course, it was all in Welsh, but certainly he did not tell tales of Nanciebel.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

All among the Barley

Nanciebel found in Marsli Madryn an object for her pity. In spite of the apparent difference in their positions, in spite of Marsli's home in the big house of Madryn, where she had all the comforts which that corner of the land could give—though they certainly were not many, when compared with the luxuries of Summerton and Ryde Park—it seemed to Nanciebel that of the two she herself was incomparably the richer.

Marsli's loneliness, her lack of human comradeship, her host of friends among her dogs and ponies, the absolute want of sympathy and understanding between herself and her father, were to Nanciebel very pitiful. Madryn found his pleasures outside the house and was much away from home. Marsli's only companions, apart from the dogs and ponies on whom she lavished all her affection, were the servants about the house and garden, the farmers and cottage folk, and this society had ceased to satisfy her. Nanciebel felt that she, with her father and brother always at hand and so closely united to her in every thought and feeling—with Sweet Joy and Charlie and Constancy even far away, and very possibly in the near future in her arms once more—was infinitely the happier, and anything she could do to lessen the desolation of Marsli's position she was eager to discover and carry out.

She gathered that Marsli's mother had been English, and had been dead for many years. From the girl's own words, also, it appeared that there had been an elder sister, who, apparently, was dead also, since she was never mentioned again, and Nanciebel, fearing to touch on sad memories, asked no questions concerning her. There were evidently several families of cousins, but these never came to Madryn, so Marsli was very lonely.

She took Nanciebel up to Madryn occasionally, but these visits only deepened her pity. The house was large, and seemed very empty. After Summerton it looked very bare, as it lacked most of the luxuries which residence in the south of England could give. The servants occupied one portion near the kitchen; and far away, at the end of long cold corridors, where every step and sound and voice echoed and re-echoed, where the bare walls and floors were so chilly as to make a stranger shiver, where corners and recesses were filled with ghostly shadows and much accumulation of dust and dirt, was Marsli's room, to which she often retreated to escape from her father in certain of his moods—a state of matters utterly new and very terrible to Nanciebel.

The room, also, seemed to her very bare and comfortless. It shared the northern aspect with most of the chief rooms of the house, and so was generally cold and rather dreary. From the window one looked out over the trees to the flat, lonely Morfa, and beyond that to the sea, stretching all along the horizon, with here and there shadowy signs of hills and coast on the skyline.

Everywhere in the room were signs of the friends with whom Marsli consoled her loneliness. Princess Branwen, a magnificent collie, nursed her shaggy pup before the empty hearth. Pryderi, the Welsh terrier, was curled up in the middle of the bed, and a big chair by the window was piled up with cushions and was, as Marsli expressed it, "full of dog"—Princess Kicva, Prince Madoc, and their black-and-tan baby terrier. Rude drawings of dogs—say, rather, of Princes and Princesses—now unhappily dead, hung on the walls, among a fine collection of antlers, tails of foxes and squirrels, and other trophies.

The rooms downstairs were equally empty and cheerless, and Nanciebel, after her first visit, no longer wondered that Marsli liked to climb the hill to Tanyrallt, where she found always hearty welcome and comradeship, and where, especially at night, after work was done, the whole party often grew very merry, and spent the long hours of the summer evenings in lively talk and laughter, gay attempts at Welsh conversation which provoked much amusement, and always ending up with music, Welsh and English.

On these visits, Marsli's costume was an unfailing indication of her father's movements. The moment he rode out of sight, her tall hat and short red skirt disappeared, and she robed herself with much satisfaction in her green riding costume or some other of the English gowns which she kept hidden away in her own room, and took out the broad-brimmed plumed hat in which her heart delighted. But the moment she had news of his possible return these must all be put out of sight once more, and she would be ready to welcome him as a demure Welsh maiden, her mane of thick dark hair out of sight under her snowy cap and tall black hat, her bright dark eyes full of suppressed mischief, for sometimes the transformation was effected at extremely short notice and she was ready only just in time.

Nanciebel, considering this matter, confessed to herself that it was perhaps rather childish on Marsli's part; but Marsli was undeniably childish in many ways, in spite of her superior years. She had few interests beyond herself and her friends the dogs, and the high estimation in which she held both was characteristic of her and of her lonely life.

One morning, when the blackberries were ripe, and every thicket in the Madryn woods was laden with fruit almost the size of grapes, she came up the hill to Tanyrallt, with the collies, Rhodri and Rhys, and the terriers, Pryderi and Madoc, by her side, and with something tiny and warm in her arms.

"Nanciebel! Nanciebel! *Boreu da!* Good-morning to you! Ah, my beloved, my darling, my own dearest Prince Llevelys, how are you to-day? Just see what I have here in my arms, Llevelys, my dear! A little friend of yours, eh? Smell him, then, smell him hard, and then you'll be sure. Nice, isn't he, indeed! Yes, you beauty, he'll be as fine a dog as you one of these days, that he will," and Prince Llevelys reared himself up on his hind legs against her green dress and licked her cheek, then sniffed suspiciously at the bundle against her breast and gave vent to his feelings in a series of sharp barks.

Nanciebel came out of the cottage carrying a pailful of dirty water, which she sluiced away down the slope.

"Did you see the mist last night? We were down on the Morfa after wild ducks, and 'twas so thick we could not see a step before us—lying all along the ground like soft white blankets, and all the hills clear above it. I never saw anything like it—the hills clear as if in sunshine, and all the low land disappeared. This Madryn looked like a great island in a cold grey lake of mist, and from Yr Eifl to Boduan one might almost have thought the sea had swept in over the cliffs right to the foot of the mountains. We had some difficulty in finding our way home. 'Twas a most strange, weird, curious thing to see."

"Oh, that is nothing. We often have it so. That means good weather. You may always look for a hot day after the mist has been lying on the fields."

"It came sweeping in from the sea. We watched it swallow up point after point."

"And you found the grass dripping wet, I'll be bound."

"Truly, yes! My skirts were soaked, as if I had stepped in a stream."

"Yes," said Marsli, "of course. Now come and see what I have here. 'Tis a little gift for you."

Nanciebel came eagerly, and gave a cry of delight at sight of the finest of the collie pups lying curled up asleep.

"He is Prince Peredur. I chose an easy name for him for the sake of your poor English tongue. Princess Branwen is his mother, and she will be looking for him and crying to-night when she cannot find him. But 'twas time for him to leave her. He was far too big for her. Look at his fine sharp teeth! And my dear Prince Llevelys is his father, so that is the same as saying he will be a good dog, and big, and handsome. Eh, Llevelys, my dear? He is your own little son, and very like you, is he not? Indeed, he will be just you over again, I am sure. Very soon he will be big enough to guard you, Nanciebel, and then my dear Llevelys will be able to come home with me. That will be very joyful, will it not, Llevelys, my darling? Now, Nanciebel, let us go down to the barley field and see how our reapers are getting on!"

They found the men in the big barley field which lay from the headland right down into the hollow which holds Edern village. It was midday, so all were resting in the shade of the hedge. Sir John and Gilbert were sitting a little apart from the others, for their Welsh, though making progress, was not yet sufficiently advanced to allow of easy conversation at a time when it was necessary to give full attention to the business in hand, that of dining and resting thoroughly. They were very willing to practise their Welsh, but such exertion was not for the dinner hour. So the girls saw them as soon as they reached the top of the slope by which the field is sheltered from the sea, and waved their greetings long before they were within earshot.

Along the cart track at the bottom of the hill came Captain Morgan, riding on a sturdy Welsh pony. He turned into the barley field and drew up in front of John-o'-Peace and Gilbert. Seymour put down his bread and cheese and sat up, since the Captain evidently had something to say. Gilbert lay under the hedge and gazed back at him, coolly continuing his meal. They both instinctively felt the antagonism of Morgan's mood, and Gilbert's resentment, which smouldered when the Captain was out of sight, rose instantly in response to it.

"So, Sir John! What kind of life is this for a gentleman?"

"A very good one, Captain. 'Tis very much healthier than the life I led at home."

"You find it good?"

"Certainly! I was never so well in my life as I have been these last three months."

"And you are content to sink to this?"

Seymour laughed. "'Tis not for all time. You will see us farming our own land in two years from now. I have Madryn's promise of it."

"And in the meantime you are content to toil thus as a common labourer?"

"I do not like the words," Sir John said, thoughtfully considering them. "I think they are foolish. Why—common? I would not wish to be an uncommon anything, unless an uncommon good one," and he laughed at the Captain's angry face.

"Tut! That is trifling. Are you not ashamed to find yourself in this plight?"

"Ashamed? Heavens, no! What have I to be ashamed of, Captain?"

Morgan shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"So you are still mad! I thought a spell of hard work might cure you. Have you no wish for the comforts of your home?"

"If I had, I should not hold it worth a second thought. We are not children, to cry for the toys we have given up."

"And you have no thought of yielding to the King's wishes?"

"If I had meant to fight, Captain, I would have done it long ago. I am grieved to disappoint you," he said, with a touch of sarcasm, "but I have not the slightest thought of yielding to the

King, in that matter. I am as loyal as any man—until he asks of me that which is wrong. But murder is wrong, and I will have naught to do with it. I would very much rather slay weeds and thistles than men. I am very much more content to till the ground than to be a butcher.”

Morgan shrugged his shoulders again in sheer contempt for this, and turned to Gilbert. The girls had come up and stood listening, Marsli round-eyed and wondering at these strange new doctrines, Nanciebel quietly understanding and confident.

“And you, Master Gilbert! Are you still afraid to take your sword and fight, as any man would do? Have you not yet found your courage?”

Gilbert sprang up, with an angry exclamation. His father rose quickly before he could speak.

“Gilbert, boy, this is only his anger venting itself because he cannot understand. Do not heed him—he is not worth it while he can stoop to that. Captain, you have no need to insult us. Also you have perhaps not perceived that there are ladies here. ’Tis scarcely seemly, in their presence——”

“Indeed, he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that is what I say,” Marsli remarked.

Morgan said no more, but offered no apology. Gilbert stood raging, but silenced by the presence of the girls.

“Some day,” said the Captain abruptly, after an awkward pause, “we will speak of this again, Master Gilbert.”

“Very good! I shall be overjoyed——”

“At the moment”—and he turned to Seymour—“I am off to London. You can come with me, if you so choose. You have but to say the word, and your house and lands and wealth are yours again.”

“I can’t say that word, Captain.”

“Then you remain here. Remember, if you leave this place while I am gone, your friends at home will pay for it.”

He turned and rode away, and they looked at one another in surprise.

“Off to London! And why? What does that mean, pray?” queried John-o’-Peace.

“He goes to report to the King concerning you—how you are faring, and that you are still obstinate, you know,” Marsli explained. “He says he is to go twice in every year.”

“So! I did not know. Then perhaps we shall hear how the rest of the world is going. And that is how we will send for our little ones when we are ready for them—not before the winter, though. Perhaps in the spring.”

“I hope so!” Nanciebel said wistfully. “I am hungry for Sweet Joy and Charlie.”

“Now we must get to work again. If you will wait for us down on the shore, ladies, we will all go home together later.”

They laughed, and led the dogs up the hill and so down to the beach for a swim, and spent the afternoon visiting friends of Marsli’s in a cottage in Porthdynllaen, the grey village of fishermen’s huts on the sand under the cliffs. Such visits were good for Nanciebel’s Welsh, which was progressing very slowly. But now on their walks together Marsli often refused to speak any English at all, so she had to do her best at the difficult language, and at length began, as she said, to hope that by the time she was seventy-five she might at least be able to make herself understood.

“You knew the Captain’s meaning in those last words he spoke to you, Gilbert?” Sir John said gravely, as they bent together over the barley.

“Oh yes! I knew very well.”

“What are you going to do when the time comes?”

“What I’d like to do, I know very well.”

“You cannot fight him if you have any conviction at all that to fight is wrong.”

“How can I refuse?” Gilbert asked hotly. “He will challenge me,—I will not be the one to provoke it—but if he does, how can I refuse to fight? ’Twould confirm his thought that we are both cowards. I am not afraid of him. I think I should be more than a match for him, and I should rejoice in striking a blow in return for all he has given us.”

“But if it be wrong to fight? How can you separate public and private war? Life is concerned in both. You have often agreed with me that to take life needlessly is wrong.”

“Father, how can I refuse to meet him, if he asks it? I cannot bear the thought.”

“You will do more bravely in refusing than in fighting him,” Seymour said thoughtfully, “because you will have the harder task.”

“Infinitely! ’Tis too hard for me. Father, I cannot do it.”

“If you are honest, you cannot fight him, Gilbert. . . . And if you fight him because you are afraid to refuse, you will be a coward indeed.”

Gilbert said no more, but worked on with dissatisfied face and gloomy, knitted brows, his lips set tight over the conflict within him. His father said no more, but watched him anxiously, longing to help but knowing he had said enough. But at last Gilbert shook off the burdening thought with a sigh of relief.

“At least ’tis not at once. We are clear of him for a month or so, for sure. ’Tis something to be grateful for—indeed, as Mistress Marsli would say,” and they talked of lighter matters till the sun had set, and the girls came down the cart track between the standing barley, and they all set out for Madryn together.

That night again they watched the rising of the good-weather mist—saw the horizon grow thick and hazy and disappear into the sky,—saw the white advance-guards steal softly up to the bold cliffs of Yr Eifl, the mountain standing with its feet in the sea, and enwrap all its lower slopes, leaving the peaks clear,—saw the delicate white cloud stream into Nant Gwrtheyrn, the hollow in the lap of the mountain, and lie like a snowy pall over the Bird Rock and Nevin Point, till it had crept along the foot of the hills to Boduan, a dense white covering to all the fields and marsh and common land and woods, leaving the craggy outlines of Careg Lefan and Nevin Mountain rising above it sharp and distinct against a clear sky. And, turning, they looked over the same white sea to Madryn, raising his bold head high above the mist, all his trees and meadows lost to sight.

Looking at themselves, they found Nanciebel’s curls and Marsli’s streaming hair beaded with dew as if with rain, while the plumes in Marsli’s hat drooped disconsolately, and all the curl had come out of the silky coats of Rhodri, Rhys and Llevelys. The terriers, Pryderi and Madoc, were covered with shining drops, and everywhere the grass and heather and gorse were as wet as after a heavy shower. The thin wreaths of mist floated between them and the nearest trees, and one or other of the Princes was continually disappearing and getting lost, but always came bounding back presently, shaking great drops out of his coat and spreading small showers around him. Marsli, at three paces’ distance, was unrecognizable, and at six invisible. She laughingly threatened to go off and leave them to find their way home alone, but relented, and guided them, by instinct and without hesitation, across the Morfa, from which the mist was now rising in clouds, straight to the Madryn road and so home to Tanyrallt.

“To-morrow will be as hot as to-day. This is the harvest weather I love. Look at the moon, just rising above the mist! Did you ever see one so large, or such a colour? Pink, is it, or

orange? Nanciebel, we had better go inside and wring our hair dry, and did you ever see anything funnier than those poor dogs? They look for all the world like half-drowned cats. Never mind, Llevelys, my dear, they shall not laugh at you any more. Never heed them, Rhys, my darling. Pryderi, come to me, and I will dry you. There, my dear, is that better? Indeed, I think it is," as she rubbed them down with the skirt of her green gown. "Now you do begin to look like handsome dogs once more, you do indeed, and not so much like pussy-cats. Cats, Llevelys! Cats, Rhodri, Rhys!" and she laughed as they pricked up their ears, and then followed Nanciebel into the cottage to see to the supper.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

One Night at Madryn

It was some weeks before Captain Morgan returned from London, and when he did arrive he did not come near Tanyrallt. Sir John and Gilbert saw him occasionally as they worked in the fields, but had no speech with him. Each time he passed in silence, Gilbert drew a long breath of relief, as if he had dreaded something.

From Marsli they heard the news he brought from England, but it was not much. War was not yet declared against the Dutch, but preparations were being made with all haste by both sides. It was rumoured that the English fleet was not ready for war, now that the time had almost come, and that more ships would perhaps be built.

"They say that the City has lent the King a hundred thousand pounds, on the security of his own word alone," said Marsli, repeating what she had heard from Morgan.

"The word of a Stewart! They will never see a penny of it again."

"Come, Gilbert! That is rank treason," cried his father.

"'Tis true, nevertheless. Treason is often true——"

"And they say that the plague is growing terribly among the Dutch. A great ship was cast ashore somewhere with all its men dead on board."

"That is horrible. Is there any of it in London?"

"Oh no, I think not. 'Tis only among the Dutch, and they are our—nay, but I forgot! That will not please you, I know."

"Foes or not, the plague is a terror, and if 'tis so hot among them we must surely be grieved for them."

"There is not much grief about my cousin Blaise," said Marsli, very truly.

"I hope it does not come to London to punish us."

One night late in November, while the good weather still lingered and before the great frost of that winter set in, Gilbert, having taken Marsli home through the trees, was starting out from Madryn on his way back to Tanyrallt. They had been very merry as they came down the hill together, and the quiet woods had echoed with Marsli's laughter over his struggles with her language. She had also been teaching him, at his request, the names—in English, of course—of some of the stars which they had not seen in those first nights on the shore at Abergeirch, but which were now high in the sky, so that he might repeat them to Nanciebel and astonish her with his sudden acquisition of knowledge. He had proved an apt pupil, and could point out the Twins, the square of Pegasus, the misty patch of the Pleiades, and all the stars of Orion without a moment's hesitation.

He looked up at the dark sky again as he set out, and smiled at remembrance of Marsli, and was beginning to go over his lesson once more when Blaise Morgan came riding up the road, and pulled up sharply at sight of him.

"Well met, Master Gilbert! I have been waiting to catch you alone. Come in with me. I want to speak with you."

He called a man from the stables and gave his horse into his charge, then led the way into the big entrance hall. Marsli had disappeared to her own room, and Thomas Madryn was away in Pwllheli, so the house was very lonely.

“Here is our chance. We could not have a better,” Morgan said cheerfully. “Now we will see whether Welshman or Englishman—we will leave out the epithets you were good enough to add—is the better swordsman. You have no sword—take one of those on the wall. They are all good, I tried them the other day. Or take mine, if you like, and I will take one of Madryn’s.”

Gilbert had been seized with a momentary wild desire to run away from this difficulty, but he knew that would be worse even than to stay. He had foreseen this ever since that day in the barley field. If it had to be, perhaps it would be better over.

“Come, take your choice!”, said Morgan quickly. “We need not waste time. I will call in a couple of the men to see fair play. They’ll be delighted——”

“There’s no need,” Gilbert said slowly, and walked over to the big fire and stood beside it.

“No need? What do you mean? We cannot fight without witnesses.”

“I—cannot fight at all.” Certainly no actual conflict, however desperate, could have cost him so great an effort.

Morgan stood and looked at him.

“What do you mean?” he exclaimed, as if doubting that he had heard aright.

Gilbert faced him, his cheeks flushed, and spoke out vehemently.

“I cannot fight, and you know it. Why do you ask it? How could I fight you? Why do you suppose I am here, instead of at home, if I could fight you thus? You know what we hold with regard to war, and this is as bad, or worse. If nations should not fight, then neither should single men. If one is wrong, the other is wrong also. I know it is the custom, and done by every one, but it is wrong none the less. Also I know what you will say and think if I refuse, but it is false. I am *not* afraid. I would like to fight you. I feel very much as you do yourself, and as every one else does, and I would like to meet you and fight the matter out. But I can’t. It’s not possible. That is all.”

He drew a long breath, as if bracing himself for what would follow, and waited.

The Captain had listened in sheer amazement, gazing at him incredulously.

“You—won’t—fight?” he asked at last, doubtful now if he could have understood.

“I cannot.”

“Or—dare not? All your excuses are so much nonsense. Your talk is sheer foolishness. Of course you have learnt it from your father, but I did not think you would go so far. Come, be reasonable! ’Tis not a great matter, like a war, if you must stand out on that point. What is a duel? There’s not a gentleman in London but has fought, and would fight again in a moment. How else can we settle a dispute? And ’twill harm no one but ourselves.”

“I cannot be false to my father. To fight would show I thought him wrong. I know him to be right. I must be true to him. Duel or war, it is all the same, and custom will not make it right,” Gilbert said, striving desperately to convince the other of his sincerity and make him realize the position.

But to Morgan it was all, as he had said, sheer foolishness, an utterly incomprehensible argument.

“I thought better of you. I thought you had some spirit,” he said roughly. “Well, then, if you will not be reasonable, at least be honest. If you are afraid, say so, and spare me your excuses, which are only so much waste of breath. Are you both afraid and afraid to own it?”

This was what Gilbert had feared, and what, in prospect, had seemed more than he could bear. But now that the crisis had come, he found himself curiously able to meet it. He straightened instinctively and faced Morgan bravely.

“I am very much more afraid of your words than of your sword. If I were what you think, I should be fighting you now. It would be very much easier to fight than to refuse. I am not afraid, but I cannot fight. Captain!” he said with sudden hope, “I am honest in all I say. I ask you to believe me. If you do believe, then put away your sword and let us simply try which is the stronger. That I may do without any wrong. There is no sin in a mere trial of strength. If you will wrestle with me——”

“We are not children,” Morgan said scornfully. “Take your sword and fight like a man.”

“I can’t.”

“You know what I must think of you if you refuse.”

“If you condemn me as a coward you are unjust,” Gilbert said, sturdily holding to his point.

“You have yourself to blame. All your excuses are nothing to me. If you will not fight, I know you for a coward.”

Gilbert set his lips tight.

“Very well. Think what you please.”

Morgan gave a sharp exclamation. “I had thought that would be enough! This will be a pretty tale to carry to Mistress Marsli to-morrow. ’Twill make her laugh, I am very sure.”

Away up the dark staircase, among the shadows of the upper corridor, a little figure was watching, with wide, dark eyes bright with interest, and a cloud of black hair falling all about her as she leaned over the balustrade, her cheek pressed excitedly against the railing, her breath coming quickly as she watched the men in the lighted hall below. Now she stood up without a sound, shaking back her hair and gripping the rail with both hands, but waited still, her eyes on Gilbert.

He had crimsoned suddenly at mention of her name. With very great difficulty he kept his self-control, and, turning away, stood with his eyes fixed on the fire, his hands gripping his belt as if he dared not loose his hold of it. He would have liked to go, now that his duty was done, but could not escape without some opportunity. To run away was hardly possible under the circumstances.

He said nothing, and Morgan, eyeing him incredulously, exclaimed—

“Even that will not bring you to it? Faith, I’d like to fight with you! I’ll make you fight—if I have to strike you. I suppose you will scarcely refuse after that?”

He took a step towards him, with what intention he hardly knew himself, for his anger had passed his own control. But it seemed plain enough to Gilbert, who turned sharply and looked at him, amazement, unbelief, and dismay in his face now. He had not looked for this, and was not prepared for it.

Morgan paused. Then he laughed and raised his hand.

From the dark staircase came Marsli’s voice, shrill with fierce anger.

“Blaise, you are a brute, and I hate you. I will never speak to you again,” and she came flying down the staircase, her green gown caught up in her hand, and flung herself between them, pouring out a torrent of angry, scornful Welsh, English being utterly inadequate to the expression of her feelings.

They had started back in surprise at her sudden tempestuous appearance. Morgan, his anger checked, had time to think and to be ashamed—of having been overheard, at all events. He began to make excuses, to which she utterly refused to listen, but found himself helpless before the fury of her speech.

Gilbert, understanding none of the words, but every one of her tones and gestures, leant against the side of the big hearth and waited, feeling as worn out as if he had fought and been beaten. Suddenly she turned on him.

“Shake hands, both of you, at once!”

But that was too much for either of them.

“I won’t,” Gilbert said sharply, before Morgan could speak, “not while he calls me coward.”

“*You* won’t?” Morgan’s tone was unmistakable. “*I* won’t!”

“Then go home, Gilbert, at once. Go and tell your father you are as faithful as he could wish. Blaise, you’ll wait here. Oh, you’ll be wise to do as I bid you. You have to stay here, and I can see to it that your stay is most unpleasant if I wish. There’s not a man or woman or child from Tydweiliog to Llanelhaiarn who will speak to you or do anything for you if I tell them not to. Go away, Gilbert. Be off to bed, quick. I should think you have had enough of Madryn for one night. Blaise, you fool,” she said vigorously, when Gilbert had obeyed with some relief and disappeared, “if you had made him fight after that, he’d have killed you, sword or no sword. Don’t you know when you’re playing with fire? I never knew till to-night that you were such a fool—or such a brute either. To lose your temper like that! Couldn’t you see it was nearly killing him to refuse? I’d advise you to keep two or three fields between you and him for a while. I didn’t know he had it in him either. I wouldn’t have believed he could hold himself in so well. He’s stronger than I thought, and infinitely—a hundred thousand times—stronger than you. *You!* You didn’t know what you were doing. You were mad with anger. Indeed, you ought to be ashamed—as I am of you.”

All of which, if somewhat exaggerated at times, was very characteristic of Mistress Marsli, and put the matter before Blaise Morgan in a new light in several directions.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

The Great Frost

Instead of climbing the hill to Tanyrallt, Gilbert turned down the road and strode away across the lonely Morfa to the cliffs. Here for an hour he tramped up and down, treading Captain Morgan under foot at every step, and working off the anger he had struggled so hard to keep down while there was need.

It was very quiet out there between marsh and sea, with only the screaming of seagulls or the cry of an occasional wild bird to break the silence, for the fall of the waves on the beach was so regular that it seemed no interruption, but almost a part of the stillness of the night.

He felt better at last, and more able to face his father, but, turning homewards, he yet took the way by the Penrhos fields, Nevin, and the Boduan road, and in the long lonely walk left behind the last of his resentment against the circumstances which had exposed him to so hard a trial—though not his bitter anger against the Captain. That would remain for a very long time.

As he went slowly up the Madryn road at last, he remembered Marsli's lesson, and looked up at the dark sky. The stars had changed greatly since she pointed them out early in the evening. The stars of Orion and the cluster of the Pleiades, which had been low in the east, were now riding high overhead, while the great square of Pegasus, and Vega and all the stars of the Lyre, had dropped out of sight in the west. The Sickle had risen, and he recognized it at once from her description, and the Big Dog and the Little Dog, the Big Bear and the Little Bear, the Big Lion and the Small, the Bull, the Whale, the Dragon, and the Swan were all vividly brilliant in their various quarters of the sky.

And, looking up, he had his first sight of a strange new object in the sky—a brilliant moving something, larger than any star, brighter even than Sirius itself—with a long shining tail behind. He stood and gazed up at the wonder, then went thoughtfully up the hill to the cottage, for in those days such appearances were looked upon with a touch of superstitious awe, and were thought to portend great events, and perhaps even misfortunes in the future.

Tanyrallt seemed asleep, but Sir John was waiting for him, dozing before the dying fire, with Prince Llevelys at his feet and the baby Peredur lying in the corner of his arm. He woke with a start at Gilbert's quiet entrance.

"Where have you been, my son?"

"Walking on the cliffs. I'm tired out, father. Let's get to bed. I am sorry you waited for me."

Seymour looked at him quickly, but saw in a moment that it was no use looking for anything more that night. Something had happened, but whatever it was, Gilbert was not prepared to discuss it. Perhaps in the morning he would be more willing to talk.

"Do you not want another supper if you have been so far, lad?"

"Yes. I believe I'm starving. I had not thought of it."

But in the morning he was still unwilling to speak of it, or to account to Nanciebel for his long absence. In thinking it all over, he wondered now that he had been able to refuse Morgan, and almost regretted his steadfastness as he foresaw its inevitable result in the Captain's mind. He knew that his action had been, and would continue to be, misjudged because misunderstood—that Morgan could see no reason for his refusal of the duel but one, and that,

though no more might be said, he was finally condemned in his eyes. The thought was intolerable, and he could not yet discuss the matter even with his father.

"I saw a strange new thing in the skies last night," he said, to stop their questioning, and his description of the comet so fascinated Nanciebel that she declared her intention of keeping awake till two o'clock in the morning also, or all night if need be, so that she might see it too.

But during the morning Marsli came up to talk over what she had seen, and, finding to her amazement that Nanciebel knew nothing about it, she gave a vivid and eager description of the few strenuous moments which had cost Gilbert so much, and added her own opinion both of his conduct and of Blaise Morgan's.

Sir John heard the story from them both when he came in alone at night, for Gilbert, foreseeing her visit, had accepted the suggestion of one of his comrades and gone off for a night in the boats, as the herrings were still being taken in great quantities, and a few as his share of the catch would be very acceptable at Tanyrallt. The next day, being Sunday and a holiday, he arrived home late in the morning and went to bed at once, and this course of action made it very plain that he desired no discussion of the earlier incident. He felt very sore about it still, and they loved him well enough to sacrifice their own desire to praise the stand he had taken. So, but for his father's glad look and hearty grasp of his hand when he first came home after the story was known, the matter was allowed to rest, though not forgotten by any of them, and least of all by Gilbert himself.

Then the great frost of that winter set in, and lasted for close on three months. The marshes were frozen for weeks at a time, the hills covered with snow till late in the spring. All outdoor work was out of the question, but much time had to be given to the cutting down and bringing home of fuel, and the protection and strengthening of barns and cottages against the snowdrifts. It was hard to keep the cows and sheep alive, and very hard to feed them. All the cottages were snowed up, and some, in the lower parts, were buried, and their inhabitants had to be dug out by the neighbours.

Tanyrallt suffered with the rest, but, standing higher, was above the drifts, and gained some protection from the woods around and the great head of Madryn mountain behind. The cold was intense, and Sir John and Gilbert had hard work to keep the fire supplied with fuel. They begged Nanciebel to go down to Madryn, where Marsli would have welcomed her, and had, indeed, offered her half her bed, as being warmer for them both. But she would not go, and sturdily insisted on sharing this, as all other discomforts. She took baby Peredur to bed with her, and let Prince Llevelys lie across her feet, and during the day managed to keep so busy that she had no time to think of the cold.

Captain Morgan found the time hang heavily on his hands. Riding was the only amusement left to him, and the roads were in such a state that to go far afield was out of the question. He had little in common with Thomas Madryn, who, having always lived in that lonely corner of the land, had no interest in the subjects which were of vital importance to a soldier and man of the world. Marsli was often out now-a-days, and was not by any means always in a pleasant humour when at home. He found himself both lonely and dull and much in want of companions, or, at least, of some one who could talk reasonably and intelligently on subjects of interest. Madryn had his own methods of amusement and of banishing thoughts of the cold outside, but they did not appeal to Blaise, and he found the big house very empty and cheerless, and at last came to a step which at one time would have seemed impossible.

Madryn was shut up in his room, sleeping off the effects of certain proceedings of the night before. Marsli was out, as usual. Her little harp was gone from its place. If she and it had

both been present he would have asked for some music. As it was, he sat gloomily by the fire for a while, turning over an idea which had occurred to him the evening before, when he had been as lonely, and dull, and gloomy as he was to-night.

With sudden resolution he rose at last, and, wrapping himself in his big cloak, went out into the snow and turned up the hill towards Tanyrallt.

Doors and windows were closed and barricaded against the wind, but through chinks and cracks came the cheerful glow of firelight and the sound of singing, sweet and clear and high.

*“Hearken to me, gentlemen,
Come and you shall hear;
I’ll tell you of two of the boldest brethrén
That ever born y-were.*

*The one of them was Adler young,
The tother was Kyng Estmere;
They were as bold men in their deeds
As any were farr and neare.*

*As they were drinking ale and wine,
Within Kyng Estmere’s hall:
‘When will ye marry a wife, brother,
A wife to glad us all?’”*

And then Nanciebel’s song came to a most abrupt ending as Captain Morgan appeared at the door.

The bare little room was warm and cheery, with a great fire burning on the hearth. The table was laid for supper with bread and cheese, bacon and honey.

Nanciebel was busy with some knitting while she sang, sitting on the floor beside Prince Llevelys and Baby Peredur. Marsli, witch-like in her scarlet petticoat, held her little harp and picked out an accompaniment on its strings. Gilbert sat watching her and playing with a knife and a piece of soft wood, strewing the ground with chips under the impression that he was carving, but paying so little attention to his work that the results were poor. Seymour was sitting in the corner, at work with a pile of willow-twigs on a small basket, for they had picked up a smattering of several crafts by this time.

Captain Morgan’s entrance caused momentary consternation, because it was so very unexpected. Gilbert scowled. Marsli laughed. Sir John rose quickly.

“Do you wish anything of us, Captain?”

Morgan hesitated. Then,—“I came to beg the favour of a friendly chat,” he said awkwardly. “I haven’t had a soul to speak to for days. Madryn is,—I beg your pardon, Marsli.”

“Oh, I know what he is,” she said, her face clouding over. “You are very wise to come here, Blaise. ’Tis the only enduring spot in the neighbourhood. I discovered that long ago, but I would not tell you till you found it out for yourself. I come here every night.”

“I know you do. May I come in?” he asked, looking at Seymour.

“To be sure. We are very greatly honoured,” Sir John laughed, somewhat amused at the situation.

Gilbert quietly took his coat and went out.

It was a clear, cold night without a moon. The comet was blazing overhead every night now, and every one had seen and admired and discussed it, but without much of the consternation it was causing in London. It was less brilliant than at first, and had lost its fiery tail, but was still a large and very conspicuous object among the stars. Sirius and Procyon, and the belt and sword of Orion, were brilliant and beautiful, and there were few among them now which he could not name.

He had avoided Morgan ever since that night at Madryn, and they had scarcely met. To stay in the same room with him meant to be forced into conversation, friendly or otherwise, and for that he was not prepared. Thereafter, as soon as the Captain appeared, which he did often, finding himself kindly received, Gilbert disappeared and went out to the company of the stars and the comet.

His father would have liked him to stay, but, finding him unwilling, did not press the matter. He had hesitated for a moment before welcoming Morgan, feeling that on Gilbert's account he had some ground for resentment, and he would not force his son's presence unwillingly. Blaise himself understood Gilbert's action perfectly, but made no reference to it, knowing that by all present he was considered to have been in the wrong, and not feeling any too well satisfied over the matter in his own mind.

"I hope my coming will not spoil the song, Mistress Nanciebel," he said, finding her silent and very busy over her knitting.

But she was shy, and it was some time before they could coax her to continue.

"How shall I sing before a Nightmare?" she whispered mischievously to Marsli, and it was only when he declared that he felt himself one too many and rose to go out into the snow again, that she relented, and shyly continued the ballad to the accompaniment of Marsli's little harp.

*"Then bespake him Kyng Estmere,
And answered him hastilee:
'I know not that ladye in any land
That's able to marrye with mee.'*

*'Kyng Adland hath a daughter, brother,
Men call her bright and sheene:
If I were kyng here in your stead,
That ladye should be my queene.'*"

And so through all the story of the "Kyng of Spayn's" sudden appearance and hurried marriage with the bride, of the disguise by which the two bold brothers were able to enter at the wedding feast—

*“ ‘And you shal be a harper, brother,
Out of the north countrie;
And I’ll be your boy, soe faine of fighte,
And beare your harpe by your knee.*

*And you shal be the best harpèr
That ever took harpe in hand;
And I wil be the best singèr
That ever sung in this land——’ ”*

then of the lady’s sudden recognition of her lover—

*“Then Kyng Estmere pulled forth his harpe,
And plaid a pretty thinge:
The ladye upstart from the board,
And would have gone from the kyng.*

*The ladye looked, the ladye blushte,
And blushte and looked agayne,
While Adler he hath drawne his brand,
And hath the paynim slayne.”*

And so to the happy wedding at the end—

*“Kyng Estmere took that fayre ladyè,
And marryed her for his wife.
And brought her home to merry Englànd,
With her to lead his life.”*

This happy result being reached, the applause made Nanciebel blush as deeply as the “fayre ladye” of the song, and she escaped gladly to make final preparations for supper, leaving Marsli to sing in her turn.

Seymour and Morgan fell to talking after supper, and the Captain went home at last less dissatisfied than he had been for weeks. For he found in Sir John a man able to talk with him on any subject, and on several of which he himself knew nothing, with strong and carefully formed opinions on all points—opinions which generally differed greatly from his own, but were none the less worth hearing and all the more interesting for their novelty. Sir John would yield no jot of his convictions, and was able to state them clearly and to defend them well, and Morgan, though often surprised and puzzled, could not deny that he had right on his side at times. To him such independence of thought and belief was new and astonishing, for he was a soldier, and would have been content to obey orders without questioning them to the end of his life. He found Seymour quite incomprehensible, but, now that he had consented to try to understand his position, was forced to yield him a certain respect.

Of the debatable subject of war they did not at first speak, John-o’-Peace thinking there was nothing more to be said on that point, Blaise hesitating to approach it. But they came to it at last, and Seymour spoke out very definitely and with a strength of conviction which told the Captain, once and for all, that he need never look for submission from him. And he was now thoroughly assured of Gilbert’s position also. But of course on this matter there were many

points on which he could and did argue well, and the discussion often grew very hot as they sat over the fire.

“In case of invasion?” said the soldier one time. “Would you see your country overrun by Dutch—or Spaniards, as seemed possible less than a hundred years ago—or French?”

Seymour laughed. “Now you raise a new point—that of self-defence. I have never spoken against that, though I know some do. What I do, and must protest against, is the eagerness for war, the lust of it, the pride in it, which does so possess our people. In olden times perhaps it was needful. At least ’twas natural. They were like children, and mostly knew no better. But we have surely passed that stage, and can take pride in peaceful things. And I hate—a thousand times I hate!—I will cry out against it all my life!—the doctrine that no occupation is good for a gentleman but the slaughter of his fellows, that a gentleman must fight, or is unworthy of the name! ’Tis an utterly false and foolish idea—the very name is proof of that. I am not a Quaker, but in this matter they have seen right and wrong before any one else, and I honour them for it. They have spoken out bravely and well and some of them have suffered for it, and for that also I honour them.”

“You would fight in case of invasion?” Morgan persisted, and Sir John gazed long at the fire before answering.

“I think so,” he said at last, “but I do not pretend to perfect wisdom, and ’tis a difficult matter. I would defend those dear to me. But—mind you this!—there ought not to be invasion. In very many cases it is brought about by wrong, and could be avoided. Last time, when the Spaniards came, the invasion was only the end—the last step in war of many years. Our part in that war had not been all glorious. Our great sea-captains, our English ‘gentlemen’—what had they been at out there on the Spanish main, but fighting, robbing, plundering the Spaniards when they could?—very bold and brave, no doubt, but ’twas piracy nevertheless.”

Morgan cried out in protest at that. “They fought for their religion. Do you want the Inquisition——”

“Nay, in most cases their religion was in no danger. They fought, not for their own, but against another religion,—a very different thing. There were cases of defence, no doubt, but very often below the excuse of religion there lay the longing for adventure, the eagerness for war, and the hope of plunder. The Spanish galleons were full of untold wealth; so were their cities. I am not at all sure that the case would have been so very different if they had been Protestant. Again, a religion is not a matter to fight over.”

“And you say war can never be right?”

“I did not say that. There may be cases where resistance to a tyrant or an evil government is necessary—I am not talking politics, Captain, nor speaking of our own country! But most usually I think some other way could be found than to take to the sword. Also there might be need for defence, as I have said, or for the relief of the oppressed. But such cases are few. It is generally needless, and when it is needless it is wrong, and the cruelty of it is terrible.”

“What would become of military glory under your teaching?” Morgan asked another time.

“I would let it go. We would be better without it. We should have more time for greater matters. The courage a man needs in battle is not always the highest kind of courage, but is largely excitement and the hope of praise and reward. I would let it all go, and we might have something better in its place.”

“I cannot agree with you,” the Captain would say at last. “All this that you say is new and very strange. Perhaps in a thousand years men may think as you do. I do not think they will do

so before. You are too early in the day. I am content to serve my King, and fight if he asks it, leaving the right or wrong of the quarrel to him.”

“Perhaps he is not fit to decide such a question. You place a great weight of responsibility upon one man, in thus escaping it yourself. And again, no man but yourself can decide what is right or wrong for you.”

But this also was as yet going too far for Morgan, though in discussing the matter thus thoroughly and earnestly, he had taken a great step in advance of his first position.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

Marsli's Garden

"I am off to London next week," said Captain Morgan abruptly, after one evening's discussion.

The frost had broken at last, after holding for nearly three months. The higher hilltops still had caps and streaks of snow, but Boduan was green again, and the lower lands were streaming with water. The Morfa, unfrozen at last, was a swamp, and work in the fields was in full swing. But Blaise Morgan, having found his way up to Tanyrallt, could not forget it again, and freely admitted, and showed it by his constant coming, that in Sir John he found a more congenial companion than in Thomas Madryn.

Gilbert still disappeared promptly as soon as the Captain entered, and turned his back upon him if he chanced to ride by the field in which he was at work. But Sir John was very willing for these evening talks, and found them a welcome change after the labour of the day. He would gladly have seen Morgan and Gilbert better friends, and had more than once suggested this to his son.

"Can you not forgive him, Gilbert? I think if you would show yourself more friendly——"

"No! I can't. He called me a coward, and still believes it. I want naught to do with him."

At first it had seemed that the Captain's visits must deprive him of his evening walks with Marsli, since it was only reasonable to suppose that they would return to Madryn together. But Mistress Marsli knew her own mind on most points, and had very definite opinions on this one. If she wished to tease Gilbert, she waited demurely in the cottage till her cousin was ready to go, but very often she was more agreeable, and when he rose and looked for her she had disappeared, having stolen out an hour before, hushing the dogs, to meet Gilbert at the corner and claim his escort home. She was teaching him the stars, as she explained to Nanciebel, and that could only be done in the dark. Moreover, the lessons must not be too far apart, for he was forgetful and would make no progress. Nanciebel would laugh and agree, and since astronomy lessons prospered best with no third person to come between teacher and pupil, she did not offer to accompany them, but stayed at home and sat on the floor at her father's feet, busy with her knitting, while he instructed the Captain in his "strange and curious doctrines."

Sir John looked up quickly. "To make report of our conduct to the King?" he laughed.

"I have no complaint to make. But I must go. 'Tis almost April, and I want to know how the world is going."

"Will you bring us back our children?"

"I will ask the King. 'Tis not likely he will refuse. Certainly if you never mean to go home they had better join you here."

Nanciebel looked up. "Then I shall be quite completely happy, when I have them again. And, Captain, you will see to it that the King allows them to bring some store of garments for the little ones? And of course you will bring Constancy also. Oh, I shall be so glad to see them all again!"

In preparation for this enlargement of the family, Nanciebel, considering that their quarters at Tanyrallt would be rather crowded, consulted Marsli. By her advice, and her father's rather grudging permission, the whole party deserted the cottage and moved to another on the shore,

built close up under the cliff, which was much larger and would be convenient for Sir John and Gilbert when they gave up farming in a few months and entered upon their apprenticeship in the fishing-boats.

“This is Tanybryn—under the hill, or cliff, you know,” Marsli explained.

“How do you like it, after living up among the trees so long?” she asked, when they had spent a few days in this new home.

“I would not have believed it could be so near and yet so very different! ’Tis more like those first few days at Abergeirch. The very air is new down here,” and Nanciebel sniffed the salt and seaweed with delight. “We hear the waves each night, and then every morning our first sight is of those grand old hills, Yr Eifl. ’Twas a pity we could not see them from Tanyrallt, but they lay behind Boduan. I could look at them for ever. They are magnificent.”

“You cannot see the eastern mountains from here.”

“No, but I like this, with just the sea and sand and cliffs, and the breaking waves, and all that stretch of sky, and the mountains beyond! Think how Joyce and Charlie will delight in this, to step out of the door on to the sand, and run right into the sea, if they wish! Marsli, you cannot know how I am longing to see them again! At night I dream that they have come. I wonder if they will have grown? And if they will find us changed? I know they will be greatly pleased with this new home.”

Her excitement, as time went on and Captain Morgan’s return became possible any day, grew to be intense, and Marsli laughingly said that she could talk of nothing else. But the others were just as eager as she, though perhaps they said less about it.

In view of the company he was likely to have on his return, the Captain had set out in a coasting vessel, since it would be so much easier to bring the children back by water than by land. So Nanciebel gave much thought to their probable misery on the voyage, recalling her own sufferings, and was full of pity for them all. She gave much time each day to scanning the horizon for first sight of their sail, and several times ran out in great excitement, only to find that she was welcoming a goods-boat, or to see her discovered ship pass cheerfully by on its way to Carnarvon.

She began looking for them long before it was possible for them to arrive, so suffered many disappointments and grew very impatient. As to the possibility that the King might not allow the children to join them, that, after all their hopes, was too dreadful even to be thought of, and they reminded themselves many times that the Captain had not thought it likely. They had calculated that he might not return for a month, but the month lengthened into two, and what could be the cause of the delay they did not know.

One new occupation she had in which she tried to forget her yearning for the children, and it arose out of her pity for Marsli’s loneliness.

Many months before, during the summer at Tanyrallt, Marsli, in her visits to the cottage, had noticed and admired the little patch of garden which Nanciebel was trying to cultivate with some help from her father and brother. They had cleared and dug the ground, and she had planted roots of primroses, pansies, violets, heather, forget-me-nots, and iris, and any other wild flowers she could find in the woods, arranging them neatly in beds and borders. They had not many flowers that first year, but the orderly arrangement of the little plot took Marsli’s fancy, and she was greatly interested.

The gardens at Madryn were not, to Nanciebel’s mind, gardens at all. In that wild country small attention was given to such entirely unnecessary matters, which were only for pleasure and of no great use. Marsli loved flowers, but had never dreamed of a garden given up to

them. Such a garden as that which Nanciebel had left at Summerton was beyond her imagining. The Madryn grounds about the house were enclosed for privacy, but were quite uncared-for, and given up to gorse and heather and grass much as outside the wall, while all beyond was field or woodland. Marsli watched the progress of the cottage garden, first with surprise, then with longing, and, entering it one September day, when the surrounding hedge was heavy with blackberries and the lower plants within it were bright with heather, pink and purple, and gay groups of bluebells and pansies and forget-me-nots, she said wistfully—

“Will you not come down to Madryn and tend my garden also, Nanciebel? I will give you men and boys to dig the ground and search the woods for roots and seeds, if you will but come and tell them what to do. Indeed, 'tis all rough and ugly and untidy, and the dogs tear up the ground and bury bones everywhere, and the hens wander about and scratch up the soil and lay their eggs among the bushes; but I will see that both dogs and hens are kept out if you will come and tend it for me. Do you hear that now, Llevelys, my dear? You are to bury no more mutton bones inside the walls. Outside you may bury a hundred thousand, if you like, and if the sheep will give them to you, but inside not another one, no, Prince Rhodri, no, Prince Rhys, not one! Indeed, now, see you remember that!”

So Nanciebel, anxious to give her pleasure if she could, accepted the trust, though rather diffident of her own powers. At first Marsli had to act as interpreter between her and her Welsh assistants, but before very long she could make herself understood by the boys who were set to help her. By her advice they concentrated all their energies upon one little walled-in portion of the garden lying just under Marsli's windows, and, leaving the rest of the grounds in their state of native tangle for the present, reduced this little piece to order, dug and manured the ground, and planted roots of wild flowers. In the early spring, by her advice once more, Marsli sent with Dafydd ap Lloyd, when he journeyed to Carnarvon on business, and with her father, when he went over to Pwllheli to the market, orders for fruit-trees and bushes, a few roses, climbing plants and flower-roots which were new to that part of the country, but which could be sent for from Liverpool or Bristol. These arrived in time by ship, and were planted in the walled garden under Marsli's windows, to her intense delight.

Already, in those weeks of waiting for the children, when Nanciebel went up to Madryn early in the morning, and only crossed the Morfa to the sea as the sun was setting, the little garden had bright rows of primroses and wild hyacinths, the hawthorn and gorse were in flower, and the grass of the small round lawn, about which the flowerbeds lay, had been mowed and rolled till it looked like velvet. Marsli would have refused the primroses and hyacinths as weeds, but Nanciebel was filled with delight at this her first sight of the woods and fields in spring, and insisted that these flowers should have a place. Earlier still there had been wild snowdrops and daffodils from the sheltered dells about the foot of Madryn mountain, and she declared that with so many native flowers there was almost no need to send to England for plants. But Marsli was eager for roses and for flowers which were strange to her, and even had dreams of seeing her garden as fine as that which Nanciebel had left at home. When the newly planted trees and roots began to show leaves and even flowers, her delight knew no bounds, and she looked eagerly for the fruit, the currants and strawberries and apples and plums, of which the only specimens in the neighbourhood were in her little walled garden.

“I shall send for Myfanwy Wynn and Gwyneth Edwards and Nesta Griffiths to see my garden one of these days,” she said exultantly. “Indeed, there is not one of them has one like it. They do not trouble over their gardens.”

So Nanciebel beguiled the time of waiting with visits to Madryn, where there was now plenty of work. Tanybryn, the cottage under the cliff, had no garden, as it stood on the sand, with its back right against the grassy cliff, so she put all her interest and energy into Marsli's, and at times almost forgot Joyce and Charlie in her devotion to the growing display of flowers.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

Nanciebel's Feast of Joy

As Nanciebel worked in the garden at Madryn one day, a boy arrived in breathless haste from Porthdynllaen, the village on the shore, bringing news that the ship had come at last. She dropped her knife and scissors and sped away down the road, without stopping to explain the matter to Marsli or Prince Llevelys, and ran most of the way across the Morfa, reaching the beach breathless, but in time to see the ship make a graceful curve before Pen Cim and glide to her anchorage in front of the village.

Sir John and Gilbert came striding down the cliff road as the small boat put off for the shore. Nanciebel, on the sand at the water's edge, could hardly be still for excitement and delight.

"There is the Captain lifting down Charlie! There is Joyce! And Constancy! Oh, how good it is to see them all again! In a moment they will be here."

"Mind this wave! You'll get wet, Nanciebel! Step back a pace or so."

"Oh, I do not mind! I shall run into the sea in a moment!"

Her father laughingly laid his hand on her arm, and she contented herself with eager waving of welcoming hands till the boat touched sand at last, and Captain Morgan, jumping out, gave Joyce into her arms. Charlie sprang to his father, and the children and Nanciebel laughed and cried for joy, while the Captain, turning away, saw to the unloading and carrying up to the cottage of a couple of boxes of clothing, and then, leaving them to themselves, strode away up the cliff road and across the Morfa to Madryn.

"Now, Sweet Joy! Where's my baby? Here's Charlie for you, Nanciebel! See the big boy he is growing! Well, Constancy! So thee did not fear to follow us into this far country?"

"Come, play fair, dad! Am I not to have a turn? Give me one of our babies, never mind which," cried Gilbert, laughing, "—or I shall have to kiss Constancy," he added wickedly.

"And what of the ship?" cried Nanciebel, when she had passed Charlie on to him, and had released herself at last from Constancy's embrace. "Are you all nearly dead with misery? Has it been very horrible? Did it nearly kill you all?"

"Nay, I do not think the children suffered," Constancy said quietly, "but for myself I would say thee is right. It was horrible."

"The sea is a horror," Nanciebel said fervently.

"I liked it," Charlie said stoutly. "One night was very wild, and we felt somehow strange, Joyce and I, but not like Constancy. 'Twas not that we were sick, you know, but something made us feel—well——"

"Like I felt when I stepped on one of your worms," said Joyce promptly.

Nanciebel laughed. "Come and see our little house. I know you will like it. 'Tis good to have you all again!"

But when the cottage had been duly admired and its position on the sand approved by the children, Sir John and Gilbert had to go off to work again, for it was a busy time. So after a while together to satisfy the first craving for one another, and after a meal to ease the children's hunger, Nanciebel turned them both out of doors, with Prince Peredur, now a handsome young collie, as escort.

“Be off along the sands, both of you! You’ll come to no harm. To-night we are going to have a feast of joy because we are all together again, and I have to prepare it. Connie, my dear, you may either go with the children or watch me, but I will not let you help. You shall see how fine a supper I can cook quite by myself. I’ll give you soup and fish and rabbit, and a fowl which Marsli brought me this morning, and such a pudding! And then cakes and honey—and I will not forget a single thing! Connie, I truly think I have learned to remember as I never used to do! I have had to try very hard, but I am sure you can praise me now. And I am very sure you will like my supper. Oh, we fare well here, I can assure you! Father and Gilbert must eat when they work so hard, you know, and ’tis a hungry place, with such strong air and fresh wind all the time.”

She made Constance sit and watch her as she mixed and baked, and while she worked they talked and questioned till it seemed almost as if the year’s parting had never been.

“And how did you like our friend the Captain?” she asked. “Was he pleasant? He is not near so bad as we thought at first. We are quite good friends now—except Gilbert. He will not speak to him.”

Constance laughed. “He did not say very much to me, but with the children he seemed friendly enough.”

Nanciebel paused in mixing her pudding, and looked at her.

“With the children? I would not have thought he would notice them at all.”

Constance laughed again. “And does thee think they would be content to remain unnoticed? Joyce, now, she found he did not speak to her, so she must needs speak to him. Thee would have laughed, as I did. I was downstairs—below, as they say on a ship—so I could not see her up on deck, but I heard it all. The Captain, it seems, was standing looking over the side when Mistress Joyce, finding herself unnoticed, went up to him. ‘ ’Tis a fine day for sailing, Captain, is it not?’ said she. I could guess how he turned to look down at her. ‘A very fine day, little mistress! And what is this name they do call you?’ said he. ‘I am Joyce,’ said she, very prim and with much dignity. But Charlie was at hand, and you know what he is. ‘I think there is another name I have heard your sister say,’ said the Captain. ‘Oh no! That is just foolish baby-talk,’ said Mistress Joyce. But Charlie had been drawing near, eager to tease her as usual. ‘She’s called “Sweet Joy!” She said it herself, you know,’ said he, and Joyce in a fury chased him round the deck till he fled down to me. Then back she went and seated herself by the Captain again. ‘I hear them say the wind will blow harder before night. Shall we be wrecked, do you think, Captain?’ said she. ‘I think not, little mistress. I very much hope not,’ and I heard him laugh. ‘I hope we shall have a good and quick voyage. ’Tis my first, and I find it greatly to my liking,’ said she. ‘Do you indeed, Mistress Joyce?’ said he. ‘Indeed, that is well, for with this wind ’tis like to last many days.’ With that, she must question all about the wind, and much about the sea, and its tides and currents, and the moon, and very much more which meant nothing to me, and thereafter if the Captain did not talk to her she talked to him, so that he found that to leave Joyce out of his thoughts and conversation was impossible.”

Nanciebel laughed. “The rogue! She must learn not to tease folk so. Constance, there is a pretty Welsh girl here, a very great friend of mine, and if she comes you must not laugh because she wears a man’s tall hat, for ’tis not a man’s at all in these parts, but a lady’s, and if you laugh she will never forgive you. She is a friend of Gilbert’s also, and she is teaching him the stars, and needs very many lessons in which to do it,” she laughed.

The children came back in a couple of hours delighted with their new playground. Joyce was wearing a dark blue frock of strong useful cloth scarcely reaching to her knees, and had stripped off shoes and stockings for the joy of racing over the firm sand with bare feet. Constancy had dressed her with care and much thought for the needs of this new life, and all the dainty white gowns, falling quite to her feet, were left behind—save one, which, following Nanciebel's example, she had brought for some possible need. So Joyce, in her travelling-dress, with little blue cloak covering the tiny sleeves and bare white arms, and little close hood set well back on her lint-white curls, looked ready for anything. She had some regrets for her pretty gowns, though, like Nanciebel, was much charmed with her short skirt, but Charlie, barefoot also at the moment, highly approved of his dark useful suit with none of the lace and ribbons, fine collars and cuffs, which he had despised at home.

"Nanciebel! Nanciebel! We went right 'way along the sand ever so far, and all in the water, to some rocks——"

"All green and full of pools, Nanciebel, and in the pools heaps of things! Things with shells and legs, that ran away, and things like flowers that opened when we tickled them, and tiny little fish. I'm going to have a collection in one big pool. I've begun it already, and we're going back to-morrow to see if they're still there."

"Yes, Nanciebel, he's going to be fishy here, jus' like he used to be wormy at home. But fish are cleaner than worms and spiders, a'n't they, Nanciebel? Not so slimy and messy—ugh!"

"Constancy," said Nanciebel, when it was nearly time for the workers to come home from the fields, "I do propose a most mad thing for to-night. I know 'tis mad, but then I am so madly pleased to have you all again. I must do something foolish, just because I am so glad. For to-night, for our first glad night together, for our feast of joy, we will think ourselves still at home. Do you take Joyce and dress her in her white gown of which you told me, that I may see my own Sweet Joy once more. Those long bare legs do not look like my baby's at all, but more like a Welsh girl's, and her little arms will be as brown as berries before the summer is over. I want to see her once more as she used to be. And I am going to take out my blue birthday dress, which has never yet seen the light in this land, and we will surprise Daddy and Gilbert when they come. 'Tis but three days to my birthday again, so we will keep the day to-night, and rejoice as we used to do at home. But I hope Marsli will not think to come down and visit us to-night, for she has never seen that gown of mine, and she might think us all too foolish."

The cottage at Tanybryn was divided into three rooms—that is to say, the big central kitchen and living-room was partitioned off at each end into a tiny bedroom. The girls lifted their dresses from the chests which served as seats in the kitchen, and retired to their little room to robe themselves—Joyce in great glee at thought of dressing up once more.

When Sir John lifted the latch to come in out of the black darkness of the shore, he stood for a moment almost doubting what he saw. The kitchen was lighted up and very cheery and warm. There were primroses everywhere—Joyce and Charlie had gathered them on the cliffs at sunset. The table was spread for the feast, and Constancy, in her grey gown, bent over the big pot on the fire. Nanciebel, in her blue velvet dress, with its wide skirt, so long that it lay on the ground about her feet, its full sleeves and graceful low bodice leaving bare her neck and arms as they had not been since she left home, and all the hanging lace and knots of ribbon, dainty silk stockings and slippers, and little lace cap laid lightly on her curls, stood by the big table cutting slice after slice of black bread with a big knife—a curious contrast of town and

country life. But they were all used to black bread by this time, except, perhaps, Joyce, who grumbled a little at sight of it. She herself was longing to play with Prince Peredur on the floor, but was in terror of soiling her one fine gown, so was standing primly by a chair, deftly twining primroses into a wreath for Nanciebel like the one she wore herself.

“Well, now, is this Summertown, or is it Tanybryn? Am I dreaming or wide awake?” asked John-o’-Peace, from the doorway. “Gilbert, here is a welcome worth coming home for!”

Marsli Madryn had heard so much during the last few weeks of Sweet Joy, Charlie and Constance that it was only natural she should wish to see them. She waited a while to give them time for full enjoyment of their reunion, but as darkness fell she sprang up and called the dogs.

“Where are you off to so late?” asked Morgan, waking out of a dream of London and the Dutch.

“I am going to see Nanciebel and the children.”

“I will come with you. The Morfa is too lonely for you at night alone.”

“Gilbert will bring me home. He always does,” said Marsli coolly. “And I have the dogs.”

He laughed. “No one could call that a welcome, but I want a chat with them also, so I shall come nevertheless, Marsli.”

“Indeed, I am very sure Nanciebel does not want to see you to-night,” she retorted sharply. “Come, Prince Rhodri! Come, Rhys, Llevelys! We are going to see your own little son, Llevelys, my dear. You haven’t seen him for two whole days, have you? Won’t he be pleased to see you, darling? That he will, indeed!”

In the excitement of her “feast of joy,” Nanciebel had forgotten to close the shutters. The feast was over, and they were sitting round the fire talking of home or calling upon her for songs, when Marsli peeped through the window.

“Nanciebel!” she gasped. “*Look* at her! Look at her dress! Where did it come from? Indeed, I never knew she was like that—that she could look like that. Why, she’s beautiful! I didn’t know. Did you know? Have you ever seen her in such a gown before, Blaise?” and she turned on him incredulously.

“Once,” he said slowly, “but I had half forgotten it. And she has grown more of a woman and more beautiful. Yes, I had forgotten,” and he looked long at Nanciebel, who had risen to sing “King Estmere” to please the children.

Marsli gave Constance and Charlie a brief glance, and, having seen that Gilbert was present, did not look at him again. Joyce, in her picturesque white dress, held her gaze for a moment, then her eyes fastened on Nanciebel and did not wander from her again.

“Indeed, I didn’t understand!” she said under her breath, as the long ballad proceeded. “It’s one thing to hear, and quite another thing to see! In that dress she could go to the King’s Court and there would be no greater beauty there. And I have asked her to work in my garden! I have watched her cook, and wash, and scrub the floor! And—look at her!”

But Captain Morgan was both looking and listening, and needed no urging thereto.

“She has done it all very bravely,” he said at last. “They are strange folk. I do not understand them. Marsli, we ought to go. They do not want us to-night.”

“That is what I told you up at Madryn!” said she. “But I have not crossed the Morfa just to gaze at Nanciebel, though, indeed, she is worthy of it. I am going to speak to her when she has finished this song. You can go home if you like.”

But it seemed to Blaise that his duty required him to stay and give Sir John the news from town.

When the song was finished Marsli burst in, and little Prince Peredur started up to welcome his royal relations with sharp delighted barking.

"Nanciebel, how could you hide that lovely gown so long? You knew how I would rejoice to see it. And what have you done to yourself to-night? I didn't know—indeed, I scarcely knew you!" and Marsli gazed at her incredulously. "Oh, you may well blush and look guilty!"

*'The ladye looked, the ladye blushte,
And blushte and looked agayne—'*

I don't wonder if you don't know where to look. I can hardly believe 'tis you even now. How have you made yourself look so—so—so imposing and so much like a Court lady?"

"We are not mad, you know, but only rejoicing," Nanciebel laughed, shaking back her loosened curls. "How do you like my gown? 'Twas made for my birthday last year. Do you know, I have grown fat, I think, and certainly taller! Connie could hardly fasten my bodice! And I scarce have to hold it up in front when I walk now, as I always had to do at home. Marsli, you would not believe how pleasant it feels to wear a long dress again, after my little grey gown! And these are a delight also after my heavy shoes," and she drew up her skirt a couple of inches to show the dainty slippers and white stockings. "But don't they look ridiculous here on this floor?" tapping the bare boards. "'Tis very foolish, of course, but 'tis just for to-night. Now you must know my dear friend Constancy, and my baby, Sweet Joy, and my big boy, Charlie."

They had already been eyeing Marsli's tall black hat and white frilled cap and short red petticoat. But they had been warned, and would not, in any case, have made comment. Charlie greeted her with his most courtly manner, and Joyce dropped a stately little curtsy and expressed herself as overjoyed to meet any friend of Nanciebel's.

"War is declared at last," said Captain Morgan, taking his eyes reluctantly from Nanciebel and turning to Seymour. "I thought you would wish to know."

"I am sorry. I think it is unnecessary and a great mistake."

"All is well with your friends. Also in London. Well, they do say there have been two or three cases of plague in town, but not in the City, and nothing serious."

"I hope it does not spread."

"Oh, I do not think that likely. There is always a little of it about, and 'twas sure to visit us when it has been so bad among the Dutch so close at hand. But, as I say, 'tis only two or three cases—nothing to think twice about."

"Except for the two or three families concerned!" said Seymour quietly.

"Well, yes, of course," and Morgan recognized this as an argument characteristic of him. "But we away here need not trouble about it. 'Tis not likely to spread into the City at all."

"I am sure I hope not. 'Twould be terrible if it once entered there—the people are so crowded together and the streets so narrow."

"Oh, I do not think it likely in the least," Morgan said lightly.

Gilbert had disappeared as usual, but after a time Marsli took pity on him and slipped away, leaving the Captain talking of his visit to the King. She found him pacing the sand outside and waiting for her.

"Come and show me the Pleiades, Mistress Marsli! 'Tis time I had another lesson. Indeed, I cannot find them anywhere," said he, to tease her.

She fell into the trap at once, and cried out indignantly—

“The Pleiades! And this the end of May, and he is looking for the Pleiades! Is this what all my teaching has come to? Indeed, then, 'tis not worth while wasting any more time upon you, I think! The Pleiades, he asks for! 'Twill be Orion and the Dog Star next! You will not see the Pleiades again till September, you most careless forgetful pupil! Must I then explain it all to you again?”

And Gilbert winked up at Vega and Arcturus and the Northern Crown, and listened contentedly once more to the explanations he had mastered long ago.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

Gilbert's Opportunity

That summer's heat matched the winter's cold in its intensity. But Tanybryn rejoiced in sea breezes most of the time, the children played barefoot on the sands and revelled in their nearness to the sea, Sir John and Gilbert learned much of fishing, of making and mending nets, and of the care and management of boats, and Nanciebel tended Marsli's garden and generally left the charge of the cottage to Constancy.

At first, indeed, Marsli had been inclined to argue that a girl who possessed such a dress as the blue velvet gown and could look like a Court lady upon occasion, must not be allowed to work in her garden, and, coming down to Tanybryn one morning and finding Nanciebel with her sleeves rolled up and her hands in a wash-tub, had cried out indignantly at the sight. But Nanciebel laughed all such nonsense to scorn, put the blue dress out of sight again, and rejoiced greatly in her work in the garden and in the plentiful repayment it soon began to offer.

So she was much up at Madryn during the summer, and constantly in sight of those dwelling there. Marsli, running down the passage with her dogs, would find Captain Morgan gazing out of a window, and would salute him with—

“Well, Blaise, what are you staring at? Oh, is it Nanciebel?” with a glance down into the walled garden where Nanciebel, in her grey gown and white hood, was pruning roses or layering pansies.

Or another time, finding him standing idly at the big front door—

“Well, what is it now? Oh, Nanciebel again! Well, indeed! Don't stare too hard, now, or you'll frighten her away!” following his gaze to where Nanciebel stood on the lawn directing her Welsh boys in the mowing and rolling.

The Captain was very thoughtful during those summer days, and spent still less time with Thomas Madryn and still more quite alone, riding and sailing, or fishing out at sea in his boat with no one to speak to. He came often to Tanybryn to talk with Sir John, but his position in these conversations was becoming distinctly that of listener, and he had less to say in answer to the weighty arguments suggested. He came more to ask than to discuss, but gave much time and thought when alone to turning over and weighing carefully the answers he received.

“What would you say,” he would begin, and Sir John would smile in the twilight which they favoured for these discussions, and would give his attention to the consideration of the problem, while Gilbert and Marsli studied astronomy on the beach or cliffs outside.

Nanciebel sat listening while these discussions were in progress, and the Captain's eyes wandered to her sometimes, as she sat, apparently intent upon her knitting, but listening with interest all the time, and he failed to follow the argument and had to ask that it should be repeated. She had something on her mind which concerned him, and as the autumn drew near, and Gilbert and Marsli found it almost time to watch low down in the east for the rising of the Pleiades, she put her thought into words one night when he offered to accompany her home across the Morfa from her work in Marsli's garden.

To Nanciebel, brought up at Summerton, the autumn work of a garden must largely deal with bulbs. Hyacinths, narcissus and tulips must be to the fore in everything. Marsli knew nothing of bulbs, and had looked blank when asked if she intended to send for any. It was evident that the early flowers of a garden, at least in their cultivated varieties, were quite

unknown to her, so Nanciebel had conceived a great idea, which filled her with delight whenever she thought of it.

“Captain!” said she one night. “You will soon be going to England again?”

“Yes, Mistress Nanciebel, in a few weeks now I must go.”

“Will you take a letter for me to my cousin Kate at Ryde Park?”

He hesitated. “I am not sure! I would gladly do anything you ask, but I do not think I ought to carry letters. You see——”

“Oh, I promise you there will be nothing treasonable in it!” she laughed. “Are you still doubtful of us, then? You shall read it, if you like. Or I will tell you all about it if you will promise not to tell Marsli. You see, ’tis a secret. I want to surprise her.”

“Yes? I will keep faith with you, but I think you must tell me about the letter if I am to carry it for you.”

“’Tis this way!” she said eagerly. “I want to plant her garden with hyacinths and tulips for the spring. She has never seen them, and I know they would delight her. Kate will send me a box of bulbs, I am sure. So will you take a letter for me? Or a message will do just as well, if ’tis a sin to carry letters.”

“I will take a message. I will see that you have your flowers, Mistress Nanciebel.”

“Thank you! I will give you a list of some kinds which I very greatly wish to see again, if you will take it—for I know you would never remember the names! And again,” she added, laughing, “they are mostly Dutch names, and you might think it treason even to learn them!”

In September, when the Seven Stars were rising late in the evening, the herrings came into the bay in shoals, and all the boats and men were busy. Sir John and Gilbert had conquered their dislike of the sea, and Gilbert found fishing more to his taste than farming. In September also came the gales, when the hot weather was over, and many a night, when the boats were out, Nanciebel and Constancy sat by the fire while the children slept, and trembled for those at sea, as they heard the waves crashing on the beach and the wind howling about the cottage.

One night, when the moon was full but hidden by clouds, the high tide swept in almost to the door of Tanybryn, driven up the shore by a high north wind. Marsli came down with the dogs during the evening, and sat over the fire for a while, talking of the storm outside.

“Indeed, ’twill be a wild night,” she said. “I suppose the boats are out?”

“Yes, they all went off with the tide this afternoon.”

“Blaise has gone too. I saw him setting out. He was not going in the big boat with your father, but in one of the little ones, alone, as he likes to do. I do not think he should go quite alone. Some day he will have an accident and not come back.”

“No, he ought not to go alone,” Nanciebel said, looking troubled.

“Not in a storm like this, at least. Hark at the wind! ’Tis rising every minute. Indeed, I wish they would come back,” she said uneasily. “I shall be glad to see them all safe home again.”

“You don’t think they are in any danger?” Nanciebel asked in alarm.

“Danger? Why, no, I hope not. But ’tis a bad storm, and will be worse before daylight. I suppose your brother can swim?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes, and father too.”

“I am glad to hear it,” but Marsli still looked nervously out at the waves dashing on the rocks.

She went home to Madryn at last, plainly very anxious, but not daring to wait longer, as her father was at home. And Nanciebel did not think her fear was for her cousin, Blaise

Morgan.

She and Constancy sat up till midnight, far too anxious to think of sleep, for the storm was increasing every moment, and the boats had not come back. The shutters were rattling and the rain was beating in at the door, which stood half open so that they might catch the first sound of the return of the men. Out on the beach the women of Porthdynllaen had gathered in a group, showing that they also were anxious. This, they declared, was the worst gale there had been for months, and all would be relieved when they saw their men safely home again.

But at last a shout announced the first arrivals, and Nanciebel and Constancy threw on their hoods and cloaks and ran out to join the others. One by one the boats came in, each welcomed by a shout from the watchers on the beach, and those already landed ran out into the surf to help the later comers ashore.

The big Madryn lugger was one of the last to come in, and Nanciebel, laughing with relief, welcomed her men back again and hurried them home for food and warmth and rest.

Sir John was tired out, but Gilbert, after a hasty meal, went out again to see if all the comrades were safe.

Apparently there was yet some one missing, for the excited crowd was still gathered at the water's edge. He questioned Dafydd ap Lloyd, who had come down by Marsli's orders to see to the safety of the Madryn men and bring back a report to her, and learned that the larger boats had all come in, but that one of the small ones was missing.

"They're saying Blaise ap Hugh ap Morgan went out this afternoon and has not come home," he added.

"What, the Captain? Alone?"

"Yes," said another, "quite alone, and, indeed, 'tis not safe or right. He may have lost an oar, or any little thing, and he is alone with no one to help him. But I do not think a small boat like that could live long in this sea. You know what trouble we had in the lugger. The wind is still rising. He won't come back."

"Well, Rhys, what is it?" asked Dafydd sharply, to a man who came hurrying up. "You were last in, and only came five minutes ago. Did you see anything of him?"

"Ay! We think there's a boat in trouble off Careg y Chwislen out there. We heard a shout as we passed, but could see nothing."

"Are you sure? You could easily think you heard it in this gale. Don't play with us, now, Rhys. We've all had enough for one night."

"We all thought we heard it, but only once. We can't be sure."

"And you didn't go to make certain?" cried Gilbert.

"There was no time. We wanted to get home."

"Well," said Dafydd ap Lloyd, "if 'twas Morgan, he is past our help now, for that must have been half-an-hour ago. If not, 'twas a mistake. I am not going to sea in this weather unless I am sure there is need."

"I am not going out again to-night, need or no need," said Rhys. "I do not love the Captain well enough to risk my life for him, or even my boat."

"You could do no good now, that is certain," said another.

"And, for sure, you could not launch a boat now! 'Tis still rising, and will do so for a while. I do not think the boats could live in this sea."

Gilbert turned on them incredulously.

"You will not go to his help? There is still a chance we might save him. He may be in desperate need of us. Surely, while that is possible, you will go to his help? Who will join me?"

I will go. Who will come with me?"

But the men hung back. They had all had more than enough for one night, and were tired out.

"You can't go. The boat would go to pieces."

" 'Tis only a guess of that fool Rhys. Who will throw away his life for such a chance?"

" 'Tis too late now, anyway. If 'twas the Captain, he has gone down long since."

"Why should we risk our lives for him?—or even our boats?"

"You won't come? Not one of you? These are only excuses, as you know very well. You do not want to go, so make these reasons. Will you, then, let a man drown on the rocks out there, and never try to save him?" and Gilbert looked round at them in fierce anger and unbelief.

Nanciebel grasped his arm. "Gilbert! You don't mean——"

"Will no one come with me? He is one of you, and I am a stranger. Will you let me go alone to find him?"

"Gilbert!" she cried in terrified dismay, "you will not——"

"I can't stay here, if he is possibly drowning," he said stoutly, looking round at the men and raising his voice to a shout to be heard above the wind. "Will any one come with me in one of the small boats? We have no time to lose."

"Gilbert," said Dafydd ap Lloyd sharply, "this is folly. You will only throw away your life. Why should you? You do not love the Captain. We all know that——"

"Does it matter who it is?" and Gilbert turned on him angrily. "If he is in need, some one must go. No, I do not like him, but I am not a coward—though he called me one!" with sudden remembrance. "Well, then, is no one coming? Then I'll go alone. I can't stay here and do nothing to help. I suppose one of you will help me launch a boat, at least?"

"Gilbert, you can't go alone!" cried Nanciebel, seeing that he would not be hindered. "Let me call father——"

"No, I won't have it. He's tired. I'm quite fit. Nance, 'tis not so bad as they say. I shall soon be home. You know I can't stay and do nothing, and let a man drown without help. Don't let him know till I am gone," and he kissed her hastily and ran down to the water. "Now, who will help me get afloat?"

"You are a mad Englishman," cried Dafydd. "You are throwing away your life for no purpose. You do not know he is there, and you hate him, anyway——"

Gilbert had hurriedly chosen his boat, and was dragging it towards the water. The men gave very disapproving help, and watched him jump in and get out the oars, all feeling and looking uncomfortable. He got away without mishap, in spite of their gloomy forecasts, and was out of sight at once.

They stood looking after him and commenting on his chances of return and of finding Morgan; and Nanciebel, with a sob of fear, ran home to tell her father.

It had all happened so quickly. A few moments before, when she had run out to find him, she had not even known of the Captain's danger. It was very like Gilbert, of course, but it was terrible to think of, and she cast a look at the angry sea as she unlatched the cottage door.

"What's the matter, Nanciebel?" her father asked sharply, at sight of her face.

She sank down on the ground by his side.

"Captain Morgan is out there—they think in danger—and Gilbert has gone to help."

"What—away out again?" and Sir John sprang up.

"Yes—all alone. None of them would go. He would not let me call you."

“I must go and see,” Seymour said anxiously. “Alone! And—to save Morgan, of all men! Well done, Gilbert! Nanciebel, don’t be afraid. He’s very strong. He’ll do it if it can be done.”

“I’m afraid it can’t,” she said shakily, as they went out together.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

One Night at Sea

Gilbert found his little boat answer to his control better than he had expected. Once beyond the surf he found no great difficulty, in spite of the gloomy forecasts of the Porthyllaen men. He was strong, and, rowing vigorously, made his way quickly out towards the rocks.

At intervals, as he drew near, he shouted, and listened intently for some reply. But he could hear nothing above the wind and the waves on his boat, and for a time rowed about in vain search for the missing man. Either Rhys had been mistaken, and was a fool, he thought, or he had come too late, but he shouted again and again, unwilling to give up his quest, and at last was rewarded by a faint cry not far away.

He made for the sound, and, repeating his shout, received an answer which guided him to the spot. An upturned boat, and a half-drowned man clinging to it, were his reward, and as he bent and gripped him and dragged him in, he laughed triumphantly, "So Rhys was not a fool after all, nor was I!"

He dropped Morgan in the bottom of the boat, and bent to see what he could do for him. He was exhausted and numb with his long time in the water, and his left arm hung helpless and seemed broken. But before long he began to come to himself, and Gilbert, in great relief, left him and turned to his oars again.

"Now we'll get home! 'Tis time——"

Then he gave a sharp cry of dismay.

"Well, now, after this I will never boast of myself as a boatman again! Captain, I have lost my oars. I forgot them at sight of you, and never thought of them till this moment. How are we to get home? Captain, do you hear? I have no oars. They are nowhere about, and in this sea and the dark we might search for hours in vain. What shall we do? Lose no time in telling me of the carelessness of it. I know it all very well, but I am not yet used to boats, and I forgot them quite."

With the thwarts and rudder he tried to paddle, under Morgan's directions, but could do no more than keep the boat well before the wind.

"Two or three of those waves on board, and we'll go down," said Blaise, more thoroughly awakened to the seriousness of the situation than Gilbert himself. "If we meet them *so*, we may float, at least, though where we shall be by morning I do not know. The wind is very fierce, and has changed, I think."

"Yes. 'Tis straight from the west now."

"Then we shall find ourselves over by the mountains—if we last so long. Can you keep her head so?"

"I'll do my best. But I had scarcely bargained for a whole night at sea, after that last fight," he added, bracing himself to the task. "Well, I have only myself to blame for it."

"How is it you are here?" asked Morgan, in a momentary lull in the storm.

"No one else would come. I don't think much of your countrymen—or else they care very little for you. But they were tired out, and we were not sure you were there."

"I don't understand."

“We were all out this afternoon. Rhys ap Evan was the last in, and he said he’d heard you cry for help out here. But they didn’t believe him, and wouldn’t risk it.”

“And you?”

“I thought it shameful that nobody should go, and I knew I could do it.”

“Did you know it was I?” asked Morgan, slowly grasping the situation.

“No one else was missing.”

“Then why did you come?”

“Because you needed help,” Gilbert said curtly. “It mattered nothing who it was. I could not leave you to drown. Now you had better rest and talk no more. We may have trouble again soon, if we are carried to the rocks over yonder, and you will need your strength.”

He took some bread from his pocket and tossed it across.

“I expect you are hungry. I had time for some supper ashore, and carried the rest with me. So eat and rest, and if we have to swim you will be ready for it.”

“Will you not share this?”

“No. Too busy.”

The Captain laughed and took the bread gladly, and Gilbert frowned as he paddled vigorously, and hoped he would not return to the subject.

Day broke at last, but the storm still raged and the wind carried them helplessly before it. There was a good deal of water in the boat, in spite of Gilbert’s efforts, and Morgan did his best to bail it out with his right hand. His left arm was useless, but was, he thought, not broken, only badly sprained. To move it at all cost him severe pain, however, and he seemed suffering all the time, though he tried to make light of it.

“There is the Bird Rock,” said Gilbert suddenly, “and ’tis closer here on our right than I like. What do you say—shall we be driven on the cliffs of Yr Eifl?”

The Captain sat up and looked about him.

“Yes!” he said grimly. “We shall—unless a gull will lend us wings to get ashore, or unless the wind falls at once. I see no other way of escape.”

“Is there any beach there, or shall we be flung upon the rocks?”

“There is beach in there, in the valley, but we cannot get there.”

“If we could, we’d have been ashore long since. I’ve done my best, but without oars I can go only where the wind carries me.”

“That is to the mountains. There is no beach there. The hill falls into the sea, six hundred feet or more of sheer rock.”

“We shall go to pieces finely upon that,” said Gilbert, and looked intently out across the angry sea to the shore.

“There are cottages there, but the people will not see us. Well, then, there is nothing for it but to take to the water. I am not going to sit still to be broken on Yr Eifl. Without oars I can’t row, but I can swim, and though there is some risk in this sea, there is at least as much in staying in the boat, it seems.”

Morgan said nothing. Gilbert turned on him quickly.

“You *can* swim? And I suppose you are not afraid?”

The Captain gave a short laugh, the question reminding him of many things.

“Under certain circumstances I can swim well enough, though this is a bad sea to venture in. Under others, I can’t.”

“I forgot your arm. No, you can’t do it. I wonder——” and he hesitated.

“Go and leave me, if you think you can get ashore,” Morgan said sharply. “You have done more than enough for me already. I’ll take my chance at the cliffs yonder. You had best go quickly. ’Tis pity to lose time. But before you go, will you forgive me and shake hands? I wronged you, and I am sorry. I could not understand you, but I was wrong when I called you coward. You are no more a coward than I am myself, and I am sorry——. So will you forgive me?—and then get away as quickly as you can, and I wish you all luck. You’ll have a fight to get ashore.”

Gilbert, after momentary hesitation, gripped his hand.

“We’ll talk later if you want to. I’ll get you out of this somehow. I have not come so far for nothing. We’ll get through or go down together. What is the best way?”

“Nay, I won’t have it,” Morgan said quickly. “You’ll throw away your only chance. Alone you may do it perhaps, though it won’t be easy. But I should be greatly in your way, and I can do nothing to help. Gilbert, I won’t hear of it.”

“Then we’ll be broken on the cliffs of Yr Eifl together, and that’s a pity, if there is a chance the other way. Don’t be a fool!” Gilbert said sharply. “I won’t go without you. Is it likely I would? Why do you suppose I came out to you this morning, if it wasn’t that you needed help, and I was ready to do what I could? They told me in Porthdynllaen ’twas a risk. By this time they’ll think we’ve gone down, anyway. We’ll take the risk together, and come through if we can. You must grip my belt with your sound hand and leave me free to swim. I’m stronger than you give me credit for, perhaps. Now, are you ready?”

“Gilbert, leave me to take my chance. I won’t have you——”

“Is there any chance if we stay in the boat?”

Morgan said nothing. Gilbert laughed.

“Come, then! We’ll make something of a fight for our lives, at least. Don’t waste more time. Ready? Right! Now for it!”

“You should have been a soldier,” said Morgan, as they met in the water.

Gilbert laughed and struck out for the shore. But those next few moments were the hardest physical struggle of his life, and there was no more time for thought of anything but the battle with the sea. The waves tossed them about and beat the breath out of them, and Gilbert had hard work to keep his own head above water at times, and was more than doubtful of how the Captain would fare. The tide was ebbing, also, so was against them, and he despaired many times of ever reaching the shore, but always battled on by instinct, and would not be beaten while he still had strength to fight.

Suddenly he heard Morgan’s voice above the sound of the waves.

“Gilbert, I won’t have this. You’ll do it alone,” and he felt him loose his hold of his belt.

Then Gilbert said a word which he did not often use, and, swimming more easily and freely in a moment, turned and dived for him.

His way was not made more easy by this action of the Captain’s, but fortunately, though neither of them had had time to see it, they were very near to land. Holding up the unconscious man with one hand, Gilbert struck out again, and then a breaker caught them and threw them high up on the shingle. Panting, he crawled a little farther up the beach, dragging Morgan with him. Then he fell, and lay gasping.

Blaise opened his eyes at last to find Gilbert bending over him, trying to rub some life into his numbed limbs.

“Good!” said Gilbert cheerily. “We came through that after all—no thanks to you, though! That was an ugly trick to play on a man, Captain! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Morgan sat up, weak and shaken.

“What—how—do you mean to say—you brought me safe ashore after all?”

Gilbert laughed. “There are other things to fight in life besides the Dutch! Confess, Captain! I have fought well for you to-day, eh? But it was a very close thing. Now do not try to talk. You are more nearly drowned than I am. And if you move you’ll find you’re bruised all over. I don’t know how we are to get home. I’m sore from head to foot, and will be for days. But better so than in the boat. Truly, we would have had no chance against those cliffs. They are cruel. This is a strange wild place altogether, but I begin to see where we are. What do you call it?”

“Nant Gwrtheyrn,” said Morgan, and lay still on the shingle, his face white with pain.

On three sides were frowning black precipices, on the fourth the angry sea. Above were the peaks of Yr Eifl, bleak, bare, very majestic and impressive. Here, in this hollow in the lap of the mountain, they were sheltered from the wind, and the relief of this rest and quietness, after the struggle and turmoil outside, was very great.

There were cottages and fields farther up the valley, and the sun was shining. Gilbert went up presently to the cottages, with a curious glance at the great square mound in the middle of the valley, and told his story to the folk in the first farm he came to. These received him with great surprise and much kindness, gave him food and dry clothing, and carried Morgan up from the beach and made him comfortable in their house.

At the Captain’s suggestion, a boy was sent off by the wild cliff road to find his way to Madryn and Porthdynllaen with news of their safety. Then he and Gilbert rested there in the valley for some days, till they had recovered sufficiently from the bruising of the waves and shingle to attempt the journey home.

The Captain waited curiously to see if there would be any return in Gilbert of the resentment he had shown for the last ten months. But to Gilbert that matter had been ended by Morgan’s apology, and he was not anxious for any return to the subject. He was perfectly friendly, but gave no opening for any reference to the past, so Morgan had to wait his opportunity.

They were sitting on the grass above the shingly beach one evening, watching the red star Capella rise over the sea, when Gilbert asked—

“What is that strange high mound in the middle of this little valley, Captain?”

“What does it look like?” asked Morgan.

“I am not very sure. A grave, perhaps?”

“Yes, it is a grave. They say an old chieftain of the Britons lies under it—Vortigern, indeed. I do not know if it is true. They say he fought to the last and then came to this corner to die.”

“So! I wondered greatly what it was.”

“Gilbert! I am sorry for the words I said to you up at Madryn that night.”

Gilbert moved uneasily. “Well! I would rather not talk of it. You were angry, I suppose, but you had no right——”

“I had no right. I knew it very well, but I could not understand you, and I was very angry. But even at the time I knew I was wrong, though I did not think ever to admit it.”

“You were wrong both in what you said and in saying it,” Gilbert said abruptly. “And you made it very hard for me to do right. I did not easily refuse you.”

“I knew that also. I am sorry, and ask your pardon.”

“Then we will speak of it no more—unless,” he asked hopefully, “you will now grant me what I asked then, and wrestle with me some day to see who is the stronger.”

But Morgan laughed. “Nay, I felt your strength as you swam, and have no desire to feel it again. You are the stronger. I will grant you that.”

“I would not hurt you,” Gilbert said reassuringly, but the Captain only laughed again.

“You have fought for me, so I cannot now fight against you. You should have been a soldier, you know—your father also. You are both soldiers at heart, and are more than fitted for it.”

“Maybe, but we are content to live peacefully,” Gilbert said quietly. “I have learned from my father, and in this matter I believe he is right. But, mind you, we are neither of us cowards, and we are both as able to fight as any man if we would.”

“I grant it. I agree—though at one time I would have disputed both points.”

“I know you would. I am glad you are honest enough to own that you were wrong. I did not think you ever would.”

“So much you have won from me by your peaceful fighting,” Morgan said soberly. “But I do not understand any of you. If I had wished to fight, as you did, I would have done it.”

“But I knew it to be wrong.”

“Nevertheless, in your place, I would have done it, right or wrong. I have always done what pleased me, and have gloried in it—unless, of course, it was a question of my duty as a soldier. I obey orders, whatever they may be, but you——”

“We obey orders also,” Gilbert said, his face very sober. “But our orders are our knowledge of right and wrong. That knowledge comes first, and we strive above all things to give it full obedience. You serve your King, and glory in it. We”—he was stripping the bells off a sprig of heather as he spoke, and looking down at it to hide his strong feeling—“we also obey our King, Whose orders we have, and we glory in such obedience. If His orders differ from man’s, there is no question of which comes first. Scoff if you like. I know this is not London talk, but I am not ashamed to say it.”

Morgan sat silent, his face rather puzzled.

“I think we are about a thousand miles apart in everything,” he said at last. “But still I think we can be friends, if you have forgiven me. I hope you will now be friendly, as your father is. I have felt guilty all this last winter and summer, because our quarrel was of my making. . . . Gilbert! I had not meant to speak of it to any one, but by calling me honest, as you did just now, you force a confession from me. ’Tis perhaps only right that you should know. You can tell your father, and he can do as he thinks fit. Till to-day I had not thought there was any need to speak of it, but now I think ’tis only right, and only fair to you.”

Gilbert turned to look at him in surprise. He lay back on the grass, looking away from him towards the frowning cliffs of the Bird Rock.

“I love your sister,” he said briefly.

Then, at Gilbert’s exclamation, “Nanciebel?—*You?*”—he sat up suddenly and spoke out quickly.

“You need not be angry. She will never know. I don’t need you to tell me how impossible it is. I know better even than you how unfit in every way I am for her. If there were nothing else against me, the fact that I am a soldier would be enough. She could never marry a soldier. And your father would never give her to me. I have known it from the first. As I have just said, we are a thousand miles apart in everything. But I cannot help my love for her. I have never seen any one like her. Her courage in this hard, rough life—her faithfulness to you when

she might be in comfort at Madryn or at home in England—the way she has borne everything, meeting difficulties with laughter, and singing when she might be sighing—in every way she has taught me new thoughts of women. I had not thought of women as having great courage. She is very wonderful. Before you left home, I said this life would kill her, but she has helped you all, I am very sure of that. I am not speaking of her beauty, but it was when I saw her on the day I brought your children home that I understood how she had grown into a woman during this last year, and what it was I felt for her. Before that I did not understand. Well, forgive me for talking on thus. You cannot blame me for loving her. I think my cousin Marsli has taught you that 'tis not a matter entirely for choice. I cannot help it. I have tried to conquer my love, and I cannot. But I can, and will, keep all knowledge of it from her, lest it should trouble her in any degree. And perhaps it is as well that you and your father should know.”

“I am sorry,” Gilbert said slowly, and looking troubled, “for I do not think she——”

“She dreams of nothing of the kind yet for any one, and she could never think of it for me. I know it very well, and that I have only made trouble and sorrow for myself. But if she never knows there will be no great harm done.”

“I was thinking of you.”

“Never mind me. That is my affair. But, since you understand, I shall have to give up bringing her home from Madryn, as I have liked to do. You will scarcely permit that. Perhaps 'tis as well. I might not be sufficiently careful some time, and she might guess and be distressed. I must be off to London as soon as my arm will let me, anyway, and then the winter will be here and she will have to give up her gardening for a while. You could tell her, if you like, to take one of the children with her when she goes up to Madryn, so that she will not be quite alone. But you need not fear any trouble for her from me. I love her far too well to allow anything that might grieve her in the slightest. And I prize the constant sight of her too highly to say any word which might make her wish to see me no more. You may be very sure I shall say nothing to trouble her.”

“I am sorry,” Gilbert said again, and was very thoughtful during the rest of their stay in the valley in the lap of the mountain.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

The Terror

Thanks to the results of that night at sea, it was October, and Gilbert and Marsli were counting the Seven Stars every night, before Captain Morgan set out for London. Nanciebel, mindful of her secret commission, was distressed at thought of the consequent lateness of her planting, but reminded herself that if the narcissus and hyacinths did flower late, Marsli would be none the wiser, since she knew nothing of their habits.

The Twin Stars were rising in the eastern sky, and the Wagon galloping straight down into the northern sea—or, as Nanciebel, mocking the stargazers, irreverently said, standing right up on the end of its tail—before the Captain returned. Without giving those in Tanybryn any warning of his arrival, he walked into the cottage one afternoon in the middle of November, bringing Marsli with him, so that all might hear the latest news from London together, and this time Gilbert did not go, but stayed to listen.

He told them of the victory over the Dutch in the beginning of June, then stood silently gazing down into the fire, his face very grave.

“Well, Captain, what is it? Have our ships also been beaten? Tell us the whole truth. We can see there is yet more to come.”

Morgan looked at him. “It is very horrible. I told you at Easter of two or three deaths from the plague. It has been in London all summer. Thousands are dead of it—some say nearly seventy thousand altogether. Yes, it passes belief, but yet it is true. If you had seen the City, as I have, you would feel the horror of it. In one week eight thousand died. For several weeks three and four thousand. In September, when we had the gales, it was worst. In one night, then, four thousand died, and in one week twelve thousand. The town and City have been deserted by all who could fly to the country. Grass is growing in the court at Whitehall. The King has, of course, been away. Street after street is full of houses shut up and marked with the plague cross. It is too horrible to talk of. I could not tell you the sights I have seen. ’Tis nearly over now, and the people are coming back, but it has been an awful summer.”

Nanciebel left them talking it over, and slipped out of the cottage. Climbing the cliff road, she sank down on the grass overlooking the sheltered harbour, the quiet bay, the mountains with the silent shadows sweeping across their slopes, and the sunny country behind.

“Twelve thousand died in one week! *Twelve thousand!* And we knew nothing, but were all lighthearted and happy—the children playing on the shore, and I working in the garden! And people were suffering so with this horrible thing—four thousand in one night! One night! It can’t be true! I can’t have heard aright! *Four thousand!*” and she covered her face and shuddered with the horror of it, and wept for the distress of London.

The Captain did not bring her bulbs, after all. He had sent her message to Ryde Park, he told her, when she came in again with pale grave face, to see if there was not some mistake in what she had heard. Mistress Kate had promised to select the bulbs carefully and send them by ship as soon as they were ready, and it was likely they would come before long. So Nanciebel waited impatiently, and spent much time in preparing the ground so that they might be planted as soon as they arrived.

By her father’s suggestion, which she thought a very good one, she often took Joyce with her on these excursions up to Madryn, and Sir John, by quiet questioning, heard that she rarely

saw Captain Morgan anywhere about. He was very careful to keep faith with them since his confession to Gilbert, and if he watched her at her work more often than she knew, he seldom spoke to her and never made any effort to see her alone. But occasionally, thanks to the presence of Joyce or Charlie, he allowed himself to offer her his escort home across the lonely Morfa, or stopped in crossing the garden for a brief word with them as he passed.

Marsli, rejoicing in the more friendly feeling which had reigned since that great September gale, protested that Tanybryn, away down on the shore, had more than its share of evening gaiety, music, and pleasant talk and laughter. Why should she and Blaise continually walk all that way, and never have a visit in return? She begged Nanciebel to stay at Madryn some evenings, and to arrange that her father and brother should come up to fetch her and sit for a while after supper. Occasionally, when Thomas Madryn was absent, they did so, and spent merry evenings around the hearth in the big entrance-hall. Gilbert's eyes met Morgan's when he entered it for the first of these gatherings, and they both laughed, but the Captain with a touch of shame.

But Marsli was not yet satisfied.

"Father is to be away for some days," said she, "and there is a thing I very greatly desire. I want you to meet my friends, Nanciebel. I am going to visit them all—to Boduan, and Nanhoron, and Brynodol, to see Myfanwy Wynn, and Gwyneth Edwards, and Nesta Griffiths—and ask them all to come here on the first day of December. 'Tis my birthday, and we will enjoy ourselves. You will all come, and, Nanciebel, to please me—to make me very happy—you'll wear your blue gown, and just let those other girls see how an English lady of the King's Court ought to look! Now if you refuse you'll break my heart with disappointment."

They laughed, and raised many objections, not being at all eager for such an introduction to the society of the neighbourhood. But Marsli would have no refusal, and rode away next day to give her invitations in person, and to spend a few days with each of her friends.

On the very day of her departure the English ship arrived in Nevin, and the great box of bulbs was carried up to Madryn. Nanciebel had not hoped for such a chance of getting her planting done secretly, so that Marsli's surprise in the spring might be complete. She turned to her task in great delight, and gave up the next few days to the garden.

Captain Morgan watched her each day, from the windows above the walled garden in which she was at work. With the bulbs spread over the little round lawn, and Joyce to help and carry, she was very busy, very picturesque, and quite unconscious of his presence.

Sometimes it was almost more than he could do to watch her thus quietly and keep himself unseen. He knew it would have been wiser, since he might make no attempt to win her love, to see less of her and not thus wilfully enter into temptation. Sometimes the impulse to go down and join her in the garden, send away Joyce, and tell her all that was in his heart, was almost beyond his power of resistance.

But since the discovery of his love for her, he had given much thought to the situation, and very much to himself—from her point of view and her father's—with very enlightening and rather humiliating results. In spite of the friendliness they had so willingly accorded him, as soon as he was ready to accept it, he felt strongly that between himself and them there was a vast distance in all matters of principle and opinion. He knew that he was in no way entitled to their respect, and that Nanciebel would only be given to a man of whom they thought highly. And if in thus thinking he left out the important factor of Nanciebel herself, he did it deliberately, knowing how absolutely she was one with them in every thought, and that she could only love where she had first given respect.

So he felt that he could in no way try to win her love, and that by loving her he had only laid up sorrow and longing for himself. But he allowed himself to watch her as she worked in Marsli's garden, and could not help seeing how she was utterly free from any such thoughts as were troubling him.

"These are narciss, 'Sweet Joy,' and these tulips. Daffies over there, and hyacinths here. Now you must remember, and bring me just what I want. These tiny crocuses must go in front, of course, so we'll put them in last. Isn't it good to see the dear things again?" and she fondled a fat round hyacinth lovingly.

"O-o-oh! Here's a horrid slimy worm, Nanciebel!" and Joyce skipped away to the other side of the lawn. "Charlie would like to see it, wouldn't he? I'm glad he's not here. He'd want to pick it up—ugh! He'd turn wormy at once, like he used to be at home. I'm so glad the things on the shore are clean, aren't you, Nanciebel? 'Tis so much nicer to have him crabby and fishy than wormy and beetly and snaily, like he used——"

"Bring me the daffies, Sweet Joy. We'll plant them in the grass, just anywhere, like they grow in the fields. I know Marsli will be pleased. 'Twill make us laugh to hear what she says, won't it? Now we'll set the hyacinths carefully in the beds. 'Tis fine rich soil. They should do grandly. This, I think, will be a white one, 'tis such a light-coloured bulb. Those will be blue, or red, or something dark. We'll mass them so far as we can—light ones over here, dark ones over there, and daffies in between. Narciss in front, I think, with tiny jonquils, and the tulips at the back. Now we'll get to work."

She spread a little mat on the damp soil, very thoughtful for her neat grey skirt, and knelt to dig a row of holes for the tulips to sleep in. Joyce ran backwards and forwards, her fat little arms full of dry bulbs, screaming at sight of every worm, and chattering away all the time, and Morgan watched them from his upper window with one constant hungry thought.

"If I could somehow deserve her! Nay, 'tis too late now, but if I had been worthy of her! If I had only known!"

The bulbs were all out of sight before Marsli returned, and the little walled garden held its secret and must be left in quietness till the spring.

Marsli was in high spirits. Her friends had all accepted the invitation eagerly, being curious to meet the English strangers of whom they had heard. There were only three days for preparation, so Nanciebel and Constancy offered their help, and all three worked hard with the Welsh servants to make the birthday feast a success.

Marsli mischievously informed Blaise Morgan that she had invited the three pretty Welsh girls for his especial benefit, since Gilbert did not seem interested in them, and at the same time told Nanciebel pointedly that they would each be accompanied by an interesting brother as escort. And when Nanciebel, yielding to her entreaties, arrived in her blue velvet gown, with her white neck and arms bare, and her curls hanging loose about her face, Marsli, with no understanding of the situation, said to herself that if Blaise could be blind to her beauty it was more than other folk would be, and that Owen Wynn or Gwilym Griffiths would surely have something to say on the subject in the future.

Perhaps it was some such thought that made Captain Morgan not very eager for the birthday party. He had very little to say about it beforehand, and when the eventful evening came and the guests had all arrived, he was nowhere to be found. He had been summoned down to Nevin early in the day, said the servants, staring round-eyed at the astonishing transformation in Nanciebel, and he had not returned.

Madryn Hall looked very gay that night. Its master was away, and its mistress was enjoying herself to the fullest.

There were branches of wild holly everywhere—on the walls, around paintings, wreathed about the antlers and stags' heads and around the old weapons, ancient swords and shields, which made up the ornaments of the hall. The great table was heavy with good things, and all the old silver plate which Marsli could find was displayed to best advantage. A huge fire of logs was blazing on the hearth, and all the lamps and candles were alight.

Marsli, in a long white gown and with streaming dark hair, welcomed her friends in eager excited Welsh, then introduced them in very prim and proper English to Nanciebel, Sir John and Gilbert, who were waiting by the hearth with a large company of dogs, collies and terriers, old and young, and several puppies.

Nanciebel's blue gown and rich lace drew the eyes of the Welsh girls at once. They were dressed in English costume, but, as Marsli had gleefully said before they arrived, there was not among them a dress to compare with Nanciebel's. Her beauty delighted their brothers, and her singing charmed them all, when, to hide her annoyance at Blaise Morgan's absence, Marsli begged her to sing while they waited for him.

*“There was a knight, a baron bright,
A bauld baron was he,
And he had only but one son,
A comely youth to see.*

*But it fell ance upon a day
The bauld baron did say,
'My son, ye maun gae court a wife,
And ane o' high degree.'”*

Then Captain Morgan came hurriedly in, and Marsli sprang up to warn him to silence.

But at sight of his face Nanciebel stopped her song suddenly and stood staring. Sir John and Gilbert rose instinctively, and Marsli cried shrilly—

“Blaise, what's the matter? What's wrong?”

He was very grave, and his eyes were full of trouble, with more than a hint of fear.

“You must all go home—and stay there. Do not come near us till this is over. I think you will be safe enough at home. Sir John, you had better bring your children up here, or take them back to Tanyrallt. 'Twill be safer than on the shore. Do not go near the town, if you value your lives. That English ship, which came and went last week, has brought us disaster, but up here I hope, I think, we shall escape.” He looked round at their bewildered faces, as if loth to tell the worst. “The plague is in Nevin.”

CHAPTER THE TWENTY THIRD

Facing the Terror

The guests, terror-stricken, set out for home at once. Marsli, tearful and terrified, hastened their departure, and insisted that Nanciebel should stay while Sir John and Gilbert fetched Constancy and the children. Nanciebel, white and dismayed, looked at her father.

“Yes, child, stay here. It’s best. Gilbert and I will fetch them. The shore is too near the danger. But, if no one from this house goes near the town, you will be safe enough here on the hills. Only—no one must go near Nevin. You must be content to wait up here till it is over.”

They all looked at him. Captain Morgan gave a sharp exclamation of understanding, incredulity, and utter dismay. Nanciebel covered her face.

“*You?*” cried Gilbert. “Then—then you——”

“I am going to Nevin.” He faced them, prepared for opposition.

Gilbert drew a quick breath, but said nothing. Marsli gave a sharp cry of dismay, and Nanciebel said shakily, “I knew it. I knew he would.”

Morgan spoke out sharply.

“Sir John, you don’t mean that! It’s madness. It’s certain death.”

“There have been those who nursed others through it without sickening themselves. And others who fell sick and yet recovered. But that has nothing to do with it. There is no doctor in the place. I am going to do what I can.”

“I won’t allow it. The people are nothing to you, an Englishman——”

“You have no power to hinder me, so that I keep within bounds, Captain. I must go. I could not stay idle here. Perhaps I can do a little to help.”

“Do you then put no value on your own life? Up here you are safe. Down in the town you can hardly escape the sickness. ’Tis a horrible thing. Men die of it in a few hours—nay, a few moments, sometimes. You are perfectly strong and well, and, if you stay here, safe. Will you run this risk? It’s more than a risk—if you go, you are not likely to come out of it alive. Why should you do it? Why not stay here as the rest of us will do? Sir John, I ask—I beg you not to go.”

“I must go, Captain. I must do what I can.”

“It’s madness.”

“You said that long ago of other matters,” Seymour reminded him gravely, “but it did not move me then, and it will not now.”

“And you are not afraid?” said Morgan suddenly.

Sir John looked at him quietly. “No! Besides—there is work to be done. You are a soldier—who talks of fear in the face of duty? Now we’ll talk of it no more. How many are sick?”

“There was one yesterday, but ’twas only to-day, when three more in his house sickened, that they grew frightened, and sent for me to see if I knew what it was. I knew at once, but waited to see if there would be more—I did not go near them, Marsli, you need not be afraid of me. To-night there are four more, in two new houses, and the first man and two of his children are dead.”

Marsli had sunk down by the hearth, her face hidden in Prince Llevelys’ silky coat, shaking with fear and distress. Nanciebel, white and silent, leaned against the wall and gazed

at her father, with now and then a quick glance at Gilbert, who stood staring down into the fire, his face set, his lips tight.

Sir John's face was very grave at thought of what was before him.

"That is worse than I thought. I must go at once. Captain, you must have heard much in London which might be helpful. Tell me anything you can. I'll take such care as I can of my own life, for the sake of the help I can give. The people down there in the town know nothing. Without help they will every one die. But it ought to be possible to fight it. Here we have clear cold weather, while in London they had great heat. We have pure air from hills and sea, while they were in a big crowded city. We'll do our best, but I know very little. So tell me what you can."

"You're determined to go?"

"Don't waste more time on that, man! I've told you so. How did they treat it in London?"

"By very great warmth and heat—great fires and many blankets, if possible, to drive it out so. And the infection is by the breath. You must not let a sick man's breath touch you. It is certain poison."

He gave him various other points, and Sir John listened carefully, and nodded as he understood each one.

"Well, then, I shall go at once. Gilbert, you can fetch the children. There is no need for me to lose time at that. Come with me back to Tanybryn, and I will kiss them good-bye. Then you can bring them here."

Gilbert looked up quickly. "I'm coming with you—to Nevin, I mean."

Marsli raised her white face with a sharp cry.

"No, no, Gilbert! You must stay here—you shan't go——"

Nanciebel said nothing. This also she had known from the first. But Captain Morgan looked up in increasing dismay.

"You also, Gilbert? Think a moment what it means!"

"I have thought, and I am going."

"You are not afraid either?"

"I don't say that," Gilbert said soberly. "The plague is an ugly foe, and not one I would have chosen to meet. I'd rather fight something I can see. But I'll not stay behind because I am afraid."

Sir John had turned to him, a sudden glad light in his face. But when he spoke it was to say quietly—

"Think again, Gil. I'd dearly like to have you, but I am more afraid for you than for myself. You have your life before you"—and he looked down at Marsli, sobbing brokenly between her dogs. "Don't think you have to go because I do. 'Tis a matter for each of us to decide for himself. If I should fall in this fight, the children will need you."

"Nevertheless, I am going with you," Gilbert said sturdily. "Did you think I'd let you go alone? In any trouble two are better than one. We'll help one another. And I do not see why either of us should die. We are very strong, and as healthy as can be, and we'll be very careful, for the sake of these girls and the children. Truly, I know less of nursing sick folk even than I did of farming and fishing, but I can learn, and I'll do my best."

"'Tis as much to save those who are still well, if possible, and show them how to escape, as to save those already stricken that I go. Well, then, if you are sure——"

"I have been sure from the first. I do not know that I would have been the one to propose it, but if you go I know it is right, and I go also."

“Then we’ll go together, and you will help me greatly.”

“Good-bye, Marsli fach!”

“Father! Let me go with you! I can at least nurse the children who are sick!” cried Nanciebel, but knowing the hopelessness of it.

They all turned upon her in quick refusal. Morgan’s voice, as he called on her father to forbid it, sounded harsh and angry, but it was his fear for her that spoke. Seymour, as he kissed her good-bye, explained that her duty lay with the little ones this time, and added that the sights they must see in Nevin were not for women’s eyes.

“Nursing is women’s work! Let me go, father!”

“ ’Tis not for little maids like you. Nay, Nanciebel, we understand, but this time we must go alone.”

“Nanciebel, I want you!” wailed Marsli, as Sir John and Gilbert left the house.

Morgan followed them. “I can at least bring the children here, and save you that,” he said. “Perhaps I can also tell you more that may be useful.”

He delivered the bewildered children and Constancy safely up to Nanciebel a couple of hours later, and she and Marsli had to put aside their sorrow and fear, and see to their comfort for the night. They all disappeared upstairs to take possession of some of the unused rooms and to make up beds and big fires, and Captain Morgan sat before the fire in the darkening hall, with no companions but the dogs, and thought of Sir John and Gilbert walking quietly across the sands and cliffs into plague-stricken Nevin.

Very early in the morning Nanciebel slipped out of bed. Constancy was sound asleep. So were the children in the next room.

It was very cold, and, of course, quite dark. Outside, the stars were still shining, strange spring stars which would not be seen in the evening for months yet. “Perhaps,” thought Nanciebel, “we may none of us see them in the evening again.” She did not strike a light, but groped noiselessly about in the dark.

Her blue velvet dress and white petticoats and silk stockings lay spread over a couple of chairs. She turned from them to her short work-a-day grey gown and strong shoes, and dressed herself without a sound. Then, covering herself warmly in her blue cloak and close round hood, and making a few extra garments into a little bundle, she crept out of the room and down the big staircase. Then she stopped short, with a noiseless gasp of dismay, for Captain Morgan sat before the hearth, his back to her, his eyes fixed on the dying fire. The logs had burned away, leaving only glowing embers, and the big hall was very dark.

What could be the matter with him? He was wide awake, staring at the fire. Had he sat there all night?

She leaned on the balustrade and gazed down at him. He looked very stern. What could be the matter? What was he so angry about? Or was he grieving for the people of Nevin? That was possible. They were his friends.

She knew he would stop her if he understood. The great door stood ajar, letting in a stream of cold air. Could she reach it undiscovered?

He seemed very intent on the fire and his own gloomy thoughts, whatever they were. She decided to risk it.

So she slipped noiselessly across the dark hall, with many a glance at him sitting gloomily over the fire. But he never stirred, and the dogs lying at his feet were all asleep.

So out through the open door without touching it, and she sped across the lawn and down the road and through the lonely lanes, and so to the big Boduan road and into Nevin before it

was time for the stars to pale and the day to break.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

Fighting the Terror

Sir John was standing by a sick man, not stooping over him, but giving directions to his frightened wife, when Gilbert entered quietly.

"There is a woman here saying her child is sick. Will you come as soon as you can? That other lad is dead. We were too late."

"'Tis so slow to declare itself that if they wait till they see the signs we must be too late in most cases. I'll come at once."

They had had a busy night, locating the various cases and instructing the terrified people how to isolate them so far as was possible. It was still early morning, and they had not yet stopped to rest. The first signs of sunrise were streaming out from behind Yr Eifl as they went down the street to visit the newest patient and take up the latest almost hopeless fight.

The heartbroken mother led them hastily home. As they entered the room, Seymour gave a sharp cry of dismay, for a familiar little figure in grey and white stood by the bed, spreading an extra blanket over the moaning child.

"Nanciebel! What does this mean? After what I said——"

"If you will tell me what to do, I'll do my very best," she said quietly. "You can't send me back now. We'll talk later, daddy, and you can scold me then if you must. I could not help it. Tell me what to do for this lassie. 'Tis Mairi, who gave me the penny that first day in this place. How can we save her?"

They gave her hasty directions and added some hope that the child might recover, as the disease was yet in a very early stage.

"I have not bent over her. I will be very careful," she said, and looked anxiously at her father.

"I wish you had not come, child."

"I could not help it. Father, you have always taught me that every one must choose for himself what is right! I know I can help, and it could not be right to stay away. Surely I have the right to be with you in everything, since I have come with you so far!"

"Maybe, but 'tis harder for us. We were glad to think you were safe."

"You must not think more about me than you do about yourself."

"You know that's impossible. One's children come first. It makes me anxious even to have Gil here, though I am glad of his help, and glad that he chose to come. But you——! But I dare not send you home now. Only be very careful, for all our sakes, Nanciebel, and go out continually to breathe the fresh air."

"Yes!" she nodded, "I know! Now leave me to care for this lassie."

They looked at one another as they stood outside.

"I wondered that she stayed so quietly," said Sir John.

"'Tis like our Nanciebel. I wasn't surprised," said Gilbert. "Dad, I believe she'll come safely through it. I believe we all will."

Seymour had certain plans which he hoped might be the saving of the town, and, indeed, of the country-side. He called the people together and spoke to them urgently, absolutely forbidding the flight which had been the first instinct of those still safe and well. If they must leave the town, they might build themselves huts on the beach or cliffs, or take to their boats

and live in them, though they might find it cold, for although the season was very mild for December, the nights were frosty. But flight into the rest of the country, towards Madryn, Boduan, or Yr Eifl, he strenuously forbade, and begged them to think of their neighbours and the rest of the land. Wales must not be filled with the plague, and some of the refugees would be sure to carry it.

They did not easily accept his wishes in this matter, for their only idea had been to get as far away from Nevin as they could. But his presence there to help them added immense weight to his every word, and a wholesome fear of those same neighbours, who would certainly shrink from them and give them no friendly welcome, helped to keep them within bounds. And Thomas Madryn, arriving home next day, came to Sir John's help on this point by sending a strong force of his men to keep guard round the stricken town—at a very safe distance, of course—and turn back any who tried to escape, and most especially any who offered to go Madrynwards.

Gilbert, beginning to think of breakfast at last, and realizing the necessity for taking very good care of himself at this crisis, went in search of Nanciebel. She had already made a hearty meal, however, and assured him that she had sense enough to look after her own needs very thoroughly, so he sought out his father to be sure of him also.

They were standing in consultation beside one of that morning's victims, when into the room came Captain Morgan.

"I am come to help, if you will have me. Will you tell me what to do?"

"*You!*" cried Gilbert, while Seymour's face lit up with sudden eagerness and relief.

"I am glad to see you, Captain," he said heartily.

Their surprise was not very flattering, but he knew that he had given them small reason to look for him there.

"You have shamed me into coming," he said abruptly. "After you had gone last night, I understood who it was that was playing the coward now—eh, Gilbert? As it is, it took you five minutes to decide to come, while I have needed a whole night. That is surely bad enough! But now that I am come I will do what I can, and had best take orders from you, I think. I know very little of these matters. What is the first thing?"

"Breakfast, and plenty of it. Have you taken food this morning?"

"No. I came off before any one was about."

"I thought so. That's no good, Captain. You have come to help, not to give us a fresh patient. Come along to the inn. Do you know that Nanciebel is here?" he asked, as they went down the street.

Morgan stopped short. "Here? But——"

"She came unknown to us. You heard me bid her stay at Madryn. She came, nevertheless, and was nursing a sick child before I knew it. She can't go back now. She says she crept out while every one was asleep."

"I am glad I did not know," said Morgan, when his first dismay was passing off. "'Tis bad enough to have been taught my duty by you, without learning it from her. I am very glad I came. Now tell me what you can. Is it very bad? I feared it would be, last night."

"Yes. There are seven new cases this morning and the people are terrified. If they lose their heads they will simply be wiped out. I think our coming will give them courage."

"Undoubtedly! They will follow our lead. If we can make them think we do not fear it, 'twill help them greatly."

As they ate, Sir John told the plans he had made, and those he still wished to carry out. Following what he had heard from Morgan, of how in London St. Paul's had been used as a hospital, he had decided to take possession of the little church and lay the sick there. In the already tainted houses he had ordered the closing of all doors and windows and the lighting of huge fires to kill the infection. In the houses as yet free from danger he had advised the big fires also, but with open doors and windows added, to admit as much fresh air as possible.

The people shrank from this last measure as too drastic, believing the air to be tainted, but he had ridiculed the idea, and bade them be out of doors as much as possible. The fresh breezes from the sea, the wild, strong wind from the mountains and open moorlands of Yr Eifl, full of salt and the scents of peat and heather, would, he told them, keep the plague farther away than any preventive medicines they could think of.

What he feared most of all was that they would sit at home and mope and tremble till they had practically invited the scourge to claim them as its next victims. So he had urged the men to continue their fishing, only begging them not to approach the boats from Porthdynllaen or other villages along the coast, and had encouraged them to take the women with them for the sake of the novelty and the fresh air, or at least to take them sailing in the bay. He had sent the children down to the beach to dig sand castles, which, since the sand had always lain at their doors, was a pastime they usually despised, and had offered prizes of pennies for the best.

"I would gladly give pence to any who could say they had spent the whole day on the beach without once coming near the town," he said, "but they might all claim the reward, and after a day or two I should have none left."

"I can help you there, anyway. 'Tis a good thought. We will make it known at once. Truly, you have done much in so short a time. You have taken possession of the whole town, and if the people will obey you I believe you will save many of them. Last night I feared there would be no one left in Nevin. But you by yourself have seized and occupied it in the face of the enemy, as we soldiers would say, and I believe you will hold it after all and drive him out. I will take orders from you gladly, and be well content to be your second—no, third, or perhaps fourth—if you will have me."

They laughed, and he added, as they went out into the cobbled street once more—

"But you should have been a soldier! I would greatly like to see you plan a campaign."

Sir John laughed again. "I have planned my first-to-day, and probably my last, and 'tis a campaign of saving life and not of taking it, which kind pleases me more than yours. We are glad to have your help, Captain."

He and Gilbert looked at one another when they were alone and laughed.

"I did not think he would come," said Gilbert.

"Nor I. But I am glad for his own sake as well as for the help he can give. I think well enough of him to be sure he would have been miserable if he had stayed. He's better with us. Also, his coming will help us greatly with the people."

During the morning, Nanciebel, going out for a moment's rest in the fresh air, found herself face to face with the Captain. She had not heard of his coming, and at sight of him her face lit up with sudden glad surprise.

"Captain, have you also come to help?"

"Yes. You should not be here, Mistress Nanciebel. It is no place for you."

"I crept out this morning while you were sitting over the fire," she said triumphantly. "You should have stopped me then. I was quite close behind you. Now 'tis too late, and I must have my share with you men. I am glad you have come. Now, Captain, I have a thing to ask you. I

have been thinking while I nursed the poor child in there. We all want to keep well if we can. We must rest at times, and 'twould be much better for us, I am sure, if when we sleep we could be out of the town and away from all possible taint. Is there any place up on the hills, not too far away, where we could go?—any farm where no one is living, or even a cottage? 'Tis only to sleep in. We can eat down here, but do you not think it would be well to get right out of it when we are tired and needing rest?"

"Yes! 'tis well thought of. And there is an old house on Boduan Hill, not far away, but yet well above the town, which is what you want. 'Tis in ruins now—I passed it the other day—but yet some of the rooms would give us shelter, and we could soon make it fit for use. 'Twas a good house once, a summer dwelling of the Wynns of Boduan, but we will use it. Bryn Noddfa, they call it."

"Bryn Noddfa!" said Nanciebel, making the "dd's" into "th" as she had long since learned to do. "'The Hill, or House, of Refuge!'—is that it? A good name! Could you send some one up to make it ready for us, Captain?"

Her idea was adopted with enthusiasm by Sir John, and Bryn Noddfa, up on the Nevin slope of Boduan Hill, became their house of refuge during those days when they fought and conquered the terror. The old house was mostly in ruins, but a few of the central rooms still had roofs and walls, and with big fires and beds of heather were easily made into very comfortable sleeping quarters. Nanciebel and her father at one time, and Gilbert and the Captain at another, took a few hours' rest while their comrades worked in Nevin, and felt all the fresher because they had breathed the purer air while they slept. They met chiefly down in the town, in the streets or by sick-beds, and there was no lingering up on Boduan on the part of any one.

Captain Morgan took his full share with Sir John and Gilbert in all that had to be done. He hesitated, indeed, when first asked to carry a dead man down to the boat which lay waiting on the shore to carry the bodies far out to sea for burial, and Gilbert, without comment, took the duty upon himself and left the lighter work to his companion. That was enough for Morgan. Thereafter he insisted on sharing every duty, however trying, and after a time succeeded in forgetting himself and his own safety as thoroughly as he had ever done in the excitement of battle or in any of the difficulties of the campaigns he had come through.

Sir John insisted that the dead must be buried at sea for the sake of the rest. The townsfolk protested loudly, but Captain Morgan seconded the proposal warmly, and his influence was sufficient to make them yield. At first Gilbert or the Captain had to take the oars, and so lost much valuable time. But no other man would go near the boat, and when they approached the shore the children on the sands and the boats in the bay fled to a safe distance and the beach was left deserted. But in time one or two volunteers came forward for this duty, men who had lost wives and children by the scourge and cared little now for their own lives, and so Gilbert and Morgan were left free to the more important work ashore, and fought so strenuously, with Sir John and Nanciebel, for every life, that many were saved. The cold frosty weather helped them also, but still it was some weeks before the signs of victory began to show and the daily number of victims to decrease.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

The Lady at the Door

For the second time in her life, Nanciebel could not sing. She was cheery enough during those dark days when the Terror reigned in Nevin, for she knew the value of her cheerfulness to them all, but she could not sing. It was not so much the physical weariness, though they all worked each day to the limit of their powers, but rather the sights and sounds around, the distress of the people, the grief of those bereaved, and the fear of all the others, which burdened her spirits and stilled her song.

She stood at the door of the old house on Boduan early one morning, and looked down on Nevin with its golden horse-shoe bay, its deep blue waters, and its fringe of snowy breaking waves. December though it was, the sky was clear and blue, and the sun shining brightly. This was the weather, bright and sunny, with strong sweet wind blowing down from the eastern mountains or straight across the sea from Anglesey, which had lasted for days, and had probably, as she thought gratefully, been the saving of Nevin.

The nights were cold and sharp, with wonderful star-pictures changing with the hours. She watched them as she went from house to house, and followed the mighty figure of Orion the hunter, with his belt and mysterious shadowy sword, and the brightly blazing Dogs at his heels, or the Bear and Lion sprawling across the sky, as they circled slowly round the Pole or marched untiringly westward. To Gilbert they spoke of Marsli, anxious and miserable up at Madryn, and the misty Pleiades whispered her message every night as they rose, and shouted it triumphantly to him, and him alone, as they hung dimly overhead. To Nanciebel and her father it was another message they gave, and they wondered at them reverently as they watched the sick and tried to cheer the anxious and afraid.

This morning the circle of mountain peaks bore a covering of powdery snow, but all the land below was green and brown, vivid in colouring as always in that clear air, every tiny farm on the hillsides a bright patch of white, or blue, or drab, Nevin a grey stain on the cliffs above its bay. Madryn Castle in the west was invisible among its dark woods. The bare grey head behind was thickly crested with white, but it was the sharp white peaks of Yr Eifl in the east, with the deep blue sea at their feet, which drew her eyes as she stood in the doorway of the old house on Boduan.

She was alone up there. Her father had risen an hour ago, and had hurried away down to the town to see how things were going there, leaving her to sleep as long as she could. She must follow at once, so she turned back into the house to see that all was ready for Gilbert and the Captain.

A tap on the open door made her look up in surprise. Who would come up to Bryn Noddfa just now?

In the doorway stood a woman, clad in a long dark cloak, with a big hood drawn over her head and face. Nanciebel stood staring. Was it some woman from the town wanting help? But why come all this way, when there were so many helpers in Nevin? And if it was a Nevin woman, where was her tall Welsh hat?

The stranger raised her head.

“May I come in?” she asked in good English. “Do you not know me, child?”

She put back the loose dark hood so that her head was bare, and Nanciebel gave a sharp incredulous cry.

Soft dark hair falling loosely, in London style, round the beautiful pale face,—clear white skin and fine delicate features,—great dark eyes, with none of their old proud masterfulness, but a distinct touch of doubt and hesitancy,—it was the lady of the grey horse, who had come to Summerton on that long-ago birthday night.

“My Lady!” gasped the astonished Nanciebel, and then, recovering her wits somewhat as her guest still stood in the doorway, waiting leave to enter, “Oh, come in, I pray you, come in! But how are you here, so far from London? What does it mean? It is a marvel! Lady Llety, I pray you enter, and I will fetch my father——”

“Oh, do not call me that!” and there was distress and annoyance in her tone. “That is all over. Call me by my name, child.”

She bent over the fire, drawing off big riding-gloves and warming her hands. Nanciebel drew near in bewilderment.

“Your name, my Lady? But I know no other.”

Lady Llety stood suddenly upright, and looked at her, amazed in her turn.

“Child, do you mean to say no one has told you? And you have been here two years! *Here!* And they have not told you?”

“Told me what?” asked poor Nanciebel, more and more bewildered. “I did not know there was anything to tell.”

“Do they then never speak of me?”

“No! I do not understand.”

“Then—they hate me still!” she said, with a catch in her breath, and turned to the fire again. “I had hoped—after so long—well!”

She bent over the fire, then knelt before it on the stone hearth.

“I have left London. I am tired of it. My horse is down at Boduan. They told me there of the trouble in Nevin. I am sorry it has come here. We had it in London last summer, you know. Will you let me help? I am a good nurse. But first I must rest after my journey. Is your father down in the town?”

“Yes. Gilbert and Captain Morgan will be coming here to rest. We rest and work by turns.”

“What, is Blaise helping you?” she asked in much surprise.

“He has helped us nobly from the first.”

“Well! What have you done to him to work that marvellous change? I saw him in the autumn, and he was terrified of the plague. I should have thought he would have fled to Caernarfon, at least, if not out of the country.”

“He has helped us bravely and without fear.”

“So! Some one has been working miracles, then, if Blaise no longer fears the plague. Are they well up at Madryn?”

“Yes. It has not gone beyond Nevin, thanks to my father’s care. Our children are in safety up there. Then you know Marsli and her father?” she asked in some surprise.

My Lady flushed and gazed into the fire, her lips tightening. She nodded, but said nothing.

“But, of course, how foolish of me! If Blaise is their cousin, you will be the same. I had forgotten. So of course you will know them. ’Twas a foolish question.”

My Lady stared at the fire with set face and troubled eyes, and offered no further explanation. Nanciebel said shyly, for she still scarcely understood, and did not quite know how to proceed—

"I cannot give you food, my Lady, for there is none here. We do but sleep here, and go down to the town to eat. But I will go there now to my work, and will send a boy with all that you will want. And I will tell—ah, here they come!"

Steps and voices outside told of the approach of Gilbert and the Captain. Lady Llety instinctively drew up the hood of her dark cloak, so that it covered her face again.

"Good news, Nanciebel! There are fewer new cases to-day. Now, perhaps, we are going to conquer it at last. Why, who——" and at sight of the stranger they stopped in surprise.

She rose suddenly, and, putting back her hood, faced them.

"Lady Llety!" gasped Gilbert.

"*Gwladys!*" cried Morgan sharply, and stood and gazed at her as if he doubted his eyes.

"Blaise, I've come home! Don't turn me out! And—Blaise, she doesn't understand! Don't tell her, I beg of you! I am going to help you nurse the sick. I know what to do."

She had flung out both her hands to him in eager appeal. Now she turned to Nanciebel.

"My children died of this same thing in the summer. All the babies in London died, I think. My husband died of it also. So I know what to do. You will let me help?"

"Your children? Oh, I did not know! Oh, that was terrible! I do not wonder that you came away. I am so sorry, so grieved for you," Nanciebel cried in quick sympathy.

Lady Llety turned again to Morgan.

"You thought I cared for no one but myself. You thought I had no heart. I tell you, I found it in those children. I loved them as I had never loved anything before. You know I never loved my father, and never remembered my mother. And my husband—you know that I married him because it was suitable, and I could stay in London, and they all wished me to. But those babies—my own—I tell you, I learned to love when my boy was born. They were all the world to me. At Court they used to mock me because I could not hide my love for them. I didn't care. All my hopes were for them." She turned to Nanciebel. "My boy was just two years—just old enough to be my darling—just learning to speak to me, and to run after me wherever I went. My little daughter was three months, and I was rejoicing in holding a baby in my arms once more. As she lay on my breast I found the plague-marks on her, and she died that same day. My boy sickened while she lay dying, and I knew I must lose them both. I think I have been heartbroken since that day. Let me help you nurse the Nevin children for their sake. I know what to do."

Nanciebel was crying in pity. The men were silent, Blaise looking at his cousin rather sternly.

"We must ask Sir John," he said. "He is in command here. But I suppose he will let you help."

"Ask him, Nanciebel! Tell him I am here, and do not let him call me 'My Lady.' My husband is dead, and I want to forget. I am *Gwladys*—nothing else, I pray you!" with a swift glance at Morgan. "Now go and ask him. I will rest here, if I may."

Mistress *Gwladys*—they gave her no other name—proved a valuable addition to their fighting strength in the final struggle with the Terror. Sir John would have refused shelter to no one, and least of all to one who offered help, so she became one of the party in the old house on Boduan, and worked strenuously with them in the streets and houses of Nevin. It was no time for unnecessary conversation, and all further questioning and explanation were allowed to wait. Nanciebel, indeed, did not realize that there was more to tell, and was quite content to welcome *Gwladys* for her help and companionship, with no thought for the past but a pitiful sympathy when she remembered those babies who had died in London. Sir John and

Gilbert had long ago grasped the whole situation, and their silence regarding Lady Llety had been intentional. They knew that there was more which must be told in time, but left the time of that telling to be decided by circumstances or Mistress Gwladys's own will.

And very soon they all had something else to think about.

For one evening, as Gwladys, Nanciebel and Sir John were setting out for Nevin for a night's work in the little hospital in the church, they met Gilbert coming hurriedly up the hill, and he came alone.

"Where's the Captain?" asked Seymour quickly, for though all his helpers had come unscathed through the danger so far, he watched them anxiously day by day, and, indeed, had some fear of this time, when the first excitement which had buoyed them up was gone, and all were beginning to feel the wearing effects of the long hard fight.

"He's sick," Gilbert said briefly. "Will you go to him, father? I've done everything I could."

Nanciebel gave a sharp cry of dismay. She had come to feel almost as if they were all in some way protected from the infection. This seemed to bring the trouble which the people were suffering suddenly home to themselves.

"Where is he?" asked Sir John briefly. "In the church?"

"No, in Ty Gwyn, John ap Evan's house near the well. I thought we could nurse him better there."

"Very good!" and he strode off down the hill.

"I must go to nurse him," Nanciebel began. "'Tis only right."

"Nay, surely that is for me to do!" Gwladys said quickly, and Gilbert agreed with her.

"He wanted you not to know of his sickness, if that had been possible, Nanciebel. He asked me not to tell you. I do not think he would like you to go just now. He would be in terror lest you should be ill also."

"But I have nursed many others without being ill," she urged. "And he is a friend, and has helped us bravely. I would like to do what I can for him."

Gilbert looked at her keenly, but her eyes met his eagerly, with no slightest trace of self-consciousness or hesitation.

"She does not love him—yet. But she has learned to respect him of late, as we all have. I verily believe she will come to the other also," was his quick thought, as he said aloud—

"Let Mistress Gwladys nurse him, Nanciebel. She will tell him how grieved we all are for his illness. If he was all the time troubling, and afraid for you, it would not help him to get well again. Do not grieve too much. I do not think he is very sick. I believe he will recover."

"I greatly hope so. I am so very sorry. He has helped us so bravely, and has done as much as any of us, though fearing it greatly. I am sorry it should be he. I thought we were all going to escape."

"He took it bravely when he found himself stricken. I think he will come through it as others have done," said Gilbert, and went soberly on up the hill to Bryn Noddfa. For during those strenuous days they had come to be very good friends in fighting side by side, and now, as he went on, alone, he missed the Captain at every turn.

He had met him at the appointed time and place, that they might return to Boduan together, and had instantly read the truth in Morgan's face.

"You're sick, man! Is it——?"

"Yes. I mustn't go up the hill. The other way for me this time! Don't tell her, if you can help it. Is my life worth fighting for a second time, Gilbert?"

“Ay, and a third, if need be! Come along, man, and we’ll fight out this fight also! Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Have you known it long? More than an hour?”

“I guessed it, but kept struggling against it,” Morgan said, feeling ready at last to yield to the faintness and weariness he had been combating.

“You ought to have known better. You know very well you do but make it harder for us to save you,” Gilbert said vigorously. “You might at least have helped us by giving in at once.”

“I did not want to believe it. Don’t tell her, Gilbert! And do not on any account let her come——. I can go no farther. I can’t walk.”

Gilbert with some difficulty helped him into the nearest house.

“You should have confessed it sooner,” he said severely. “Now we shall have all the harder work to get you well again. See to it that you do your best to help us now! I brought you in from the sea once before. I do not want to have to take you back and leave you there.”

“I’ll try,” Morgan said wearily, and lay still.

“You did well not to let your sister come to nurse him,” Gwladys said to Gilbert, when it was time for her to rest and she was giving up her place to him. “He has been beside himself all night, and talking only of her. Assuredly he loves her. Did you know it?”

“Yes, I thought of it, and knew she must not come just now.”

“And she?”

“She is very troubled about him. Give her what hope you can.”

“I think he will recover,” said Gwladys, and went to carry that news to Nanciebel.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

My Lady goes Home

Within a week Captain Morgan had so far recovered that he was beginning to be impatient to be out and about again. He was not a good patient, and once he felt well enough to be out of bed, could with difficulty be prevailed upon to stop there. Nanciebel, in the intervals of nursing her other cases, went in often for a moment or two to scold him for being so restless, and he spent the time between her visits in longing for the next.

Now that he was out of danger she was in the highest of spirits, possessed by a mighty relief which she did not attempt to explain to herself, and which seemed out of all proportion to her friendship for him. While he was in danger she had hardly realized the depth of her fear and anxiety, and the consequent relief was so great as to surprise her and make her wonder at herself. She told him frankly how very, very glad she was to find him growing strong again, and how grieved they had all been for his sickness, and he lay and wondered and thought much, and was glad he had come down to Nevin to help.

As soon as he was able to be moved, they wrapped him up well, being fully aware of the danger of any chill, and carried him up the hill to the old house on Boduan, where they hoped he would recover strength more rapidly in the purer air. For a few days before this change he saw nothing of Nanciebel, and in answer to his questions was told that she was making all ready for his coming up at Bryn Noddfa. When he was laid on the bed prepared for him, he began to understand.

The room was scantily furnished with necessaries from Nevin, where there were now plenty of empty houses. Coverings for warmth, dishes and cooking utensils were needful now that he was to live here, and not go down to the town for food, as they had done hitherto. These had been brought, and the bare central room of the old ruined building looked more homelike than before.

From another room came the sound of children's voices—a crying baby—soft, soothing singing—and subdued childish chatter. As he wondered, a child ran in and stood staring in the doorway, and Gilbert and Sir John, who had carried him in, began to laugh.

“Our family has grown, as you will find! But we will leave Nanciebel to explain. We have still work to do in Nevin, though there is less each day now, I am glad to say.”

Behind the child in the doorway came Nanciebel, a baby in her arms.

“Welcome home, Captain! I am glad to see you here again. You will soon get well now.”

“And whence come these babies, Mistress Nanciebel?”

She laughed. “I am mother of a large family now! 'Tis this way! I am not needed down in Nevin now. There was but one fresh case yesterday and none to-day. I think it is over at last. So father bade me do what has been in my mind these three weeks past, to be done as soon as I could be spared from nursing. There are so many motherless and fatherless bairns in the town with no one to care for them! So we have brought some of them up here, to be in safety if it should break out again, and to be warmed and fed and cared for. The women in the town have done what they could, but I have seen babies and small children crying with hunger, or tended only by children not much bigger than themselves, or wandering in empty houses from which we had carried their parents. I could not bear it, and have been longing for the time when I would no longer be needed to help in the nursing. Mistress Gwladys is there to take

my place, and I can nurse you up here as well as my children. I have seven little ones who can only just run, and three babies, but Mairi is here to help me,” and she nodded towards the small girl who had been her first patient and one of her first friends in Nevin. “She had the plague weeks ago, but I saved her, and she has been well ever since Christmas. Now she is helping me with my babies.”

The Captain’s eyes followed her continually as she stepped softly up and down the room, hushing the baby to sleep. Nanciebel, with Joyce and Charlie clinging to her skirts, had been a delight to see. Nanciebel nursing a baby was a revelation. He watched her during the day, as she fed and cared for and played with the children, and even, as the afternoon grew dark, offered to tell them all a fairy tale if they would sit on his bed, or on the floor at his side, and so set her free to prepare supper for them all and for those working in Nevin. She thanked him warmly, and smiled now and then as she went about her work.

“And I called him a Nightmare!” she murmured once.

Gilbert and Gwladys arrived in due course, leaving Sir John still busy in his little hospital. The children were all in bed save one wakeful baby in Nanciebel’s arms. The news from Nevin continued to be good, and they were all deeply satisfied to have their one invalid among them again and well on the road to recovery. So all were in high spirits, and more inclined to be merry than they had been for weeks.

Mistress Gwladys was very quiet, indeed, as was her custom, and more so than ever since Blaise was present. But she was always quiet, and Nanciebel, looking at her grave, pale face, and remembering the gay lady who had come to Summertown, said to herself that she was thinking of her lost babies, and gave her silent but hearty sympathy. But Gilbert and she were in the highest spirits, and the Captain scarcely less so, though his weakness forced him to be less exuberant.

Their hearty welcome and unfeigned delight at his recovery had touched him deeply, and he was more than ever glad that he had come down to Nevin to help. Friendly as had been their relations for some time past, there was an added warmth in their greeting now which he was fully aware of and quite understood. He realized that their comradeship in the struggle with the Terror had done more to win him their respect than perhaps anything else could have done. As for his own feelings if he had stayed in safety up at Madryn with Marsli and the children, he dared not think of that. He wondered now that he could ever have hesitated for a moment. Yes, he was very glad he had come down to Nevin to help.

They were sitting together after supper, Gwladys silent in a corner in the shadow, Gilbert and Morgan talking merrily, Nanciebel crooning softly to quiet the baby, when the Captain said wistfully, “Will you not sing to us also, as well as to the baby, Mistress Nanciebel?”

Nanciebel looked sober. “I am not sure! Do you think ’tis quite right? I have not felt like singing lately. People were all so sorrowful.”

“The trouble is nearly over. Surely we may begin to rejoice, Nanciebel!” said Gilbert. “I am going up to Madryn one of these days. How soon do you think they can receive me without fear? I would not like to carry danger to them.”

“Sing to us, Mistress Nanciebel!” pleaded the Captain, and, after a thoughtful pause, she began softly with “When Arthur First in Court Began.”

*“He arméd rode in forest wide,
And met a damsel fair;
Who told him of adventures great,
Whereto he gave good ear.*

*‘Such would I find,’ quoth Lancelot;
‘For that cause came I hither.’
‘Thou seem’st,’ quoth she, ‘a goodly knight,
And I will bring thee thither.’”*

They were listening intently and with much enjoyment to the sweet low notes, for she sang softly lest she should wake the children in the next room, when the door was flung wide, and a boy stood there and poured out his message in eager frightened Welsh. There was sickness up at Madryn—Madryn himself was stricken, and Mistress Marsli also was sick—would some one come to help? They were all afraid—and he kept at a safe distance from them.

Gilbert sprang up, his face white with sudden realization of what fear meant.

“I’ll go at once. Is Marsli——?”

Then Gwladys came quickly forward from her corner.

“No, you must leave it to me. I must go. Blaise, it’s my right! You understand. You’ll let me go——”

She turned to Gilbert. Nanciebel, white with the sudden thought of Joyce and Charlie, had risen, clasping the baby to her breast. Gwladys spoke out quickly to them both.

“I can do all that is needed. I will send your children away, and you shall hear at once how Marsli is. But I must nurse them. It is my right. Gilbert, I think you must understand. Nanciebel, I shall have to tell you. You would have had to know soon. I wonder you have not guessed it already. I am Gwladys Madryn. Marsli is my sister. They are ashamed of me, as you can see, since they never speak of me. I went to London four years ago with Blaise’s mother, my aunt, for a few weeks in town. Then she died, and when he wanted me to come home I would not. I had made friends at Court, and I wished to stay. They promised me everything if I would stay at Whitehall, and I chose to stay. I liked the gaiety of the Court, and could not bear to think of being buried at Madryn again, so I would not go home with Blaise, and he has scarcely spoken to me since. Already Lord Llety was pressing me to be his wife, and I married him against Blaise’s wish and before my father could prevent me. I know my father would refuse to see me if I asked it, and would not let me speak to Marsli. But if they are both sick ’tis I who ought to nurse them. So give me what medicines I can carry, and I will go at once. Blaise, it is right, is it not?”

“Yes, you ought to go.”

“I shall come with you,” said Gilbert. “I will return here if father needs me. I cannot leave him to work alone. But I must know if she is very sick. You will tell me, and I will come up again in the morning.”

“I will do everything for her, and will save her if I can,” Gwladys said, anxious to comfort him, for his face told its story.

They hurried off into the darkness, and Nanciebel sat down before the fire again, soothing the wakened baby and thinking over it all.

“Our children! But Gilbert will care for them Oh, Sweet Joy! Charlie! What if they should be ill? But Connie is there. She is very wise. I think she will know what to do. . . . Poor

Marsli! She feared it so greatly. I do not think her father has health enough to live through it. But Marsli is well and strong. She ought to recover. . . . And—and—Gwladys is her sister! I did not understand that.”

“Your father guessed it long ago,” said Morgan, answering her thoughts. “Madryn was terribly angry when she chose London instead of Nevin. I told him she would not come home, for I felt her left in my care, and he went to London himself to fetch her. But then, of course, it was too late. The King upheld her choice and gave her his protection, and in the face of that Madryn was helpless. She married Llety, the King’s favourite, who was hated by every one, and after that she was in high favour at Court. You know what London is—well, no, I am thankful that you do *not* know! But Madryn had to come home without her. He will never forgive her. Marsli has grieved deeply and longed for her sister, but he would not let even letters pass between them. I, of course, have given her what news I could. Also, this is, of course, why he so greatly hates all things English. Before that time, four years ago, the girls talked English and wore English gowns, as is the custom in other houses, but since that time he will have none of it. He will not speak her name nor hear a word of her.”

“I never heard her spoken of, or I might have guessed. But I ought to have understood since she came home, for I saw that she was known to all the people in the town. ‘Eh, Gwladys fach, is it yourself come back? Well, indeed, it is glad we are to see you!’ I have heard a dozen say it. But I never understood.”

By midnight Gilbert returned to relieve their anxiety, looking and feeling much relieved himself.

“The children are up at Tanyrallt with Constancy, all safe and as well as could be. I did not go near them, of course. Madryn is very bad. I do not think he will live through the night. He did not know her, but Marsli was overjoyed to see her. And Marsli’s sickness is not the plague. I think ’tis simply brought on by fear and anxiety for us, and then this blow, when her father fell ill, was the last straw. She has a touch of fever, but no sign of the plague about her, thank Heaven! She has had a very hard time, thinking of us all the while, but with nothing to do and with no news of our safety. I think she has been believing us all dead. Now that she knows we are well, I have no doubt she will soon be strong again.”

“Us! We!” laughed Nanciebel, able to tease him now that her fear was over. “As if Marsli cared a whit for any of us but one!”

Sir John had come up to Boduan to rest, and Gilbert was on duty down in the town next day, when Marsli herself came creeping in, and collapsed in a little tumbled heap beside the Captain’s bed. Nanciebel ran to her, calling her father, and raised her and chafed her cold hands and tried to give her water. But Marsli thrust her away and turned to the men.

“You must come and help me!” she wailed. “They are both dead. My father died in the night, and she—Gwladys—two hours later. She was nursing him, and did not tell me for fear I would come and take it also. I went at last, and found her dead. . . . Every one has fled from the house, and I was all alone. Will you come?”

“I will go at once,” Sir John said quietly. “Nay, Captain, be still. I do not need you.”

Marsli looked at Blaise with dull uncomprehending eyes.

“Have you been sick? Yes, she said something about you. Where is Gilbert?” with a quick look round and a sharp ring of fear in her voice.

“At work in the town. He is well, Marsli. You need not fear for him.”

She sank down again, satisfied on the only point which moved her deeply, and lay there exhausted, for the long walk had worn her out in her weak state. Nanciebel tended her as well

as she could, and asked an anxious question as to the safety of the children up at Tanyrallt. But Marsli had little to say, and asked no questions now that she had been assured of Gilbert's safety. She did not even notice the crowd of orphan children, but was content to lie and rest. Her thoughts were busy with her newly-found, and so quickly-lost, sister, however, and at last she said wearily—

“I am glad she came home. Indeed, I am glad to have seen her once again! And did she tell you of her babies, who died of this horrible thing in London?”

“Yes. I wonder she did not sicken and die herself at that time.”

“I think she wanted to see Nevin and Madryn and us once more. Indeed, I think she was glad she had come home.”

“Did your father forgive her?”

“He never knew her. He died almost at once after she came.”

“And he wanted me to kill all my dogs!” she wailed suddenly, reverting to the tragedy up at Madryn.

“Kill the dogs? But why, Marsli?”

“He said one of them must have carried the sickness—must have been down near the town when we did not know. I told him they had all been with me all the time, as you know they always are, but he would not believe it. He remembered what Blaise had told us, how in London all the dogs and cats were killed for fear they should carry the taint, and he ordered me to send for Dafydd and tell him to kill them all. My dogs—my darlings!”

“And did you do it?” asked Nanciebel pitifully.

“Indeed, now, what do you think of me? As if I would! I knew he was going to be sick, and would perhaps die, so I just said nothing about it to anybody. Indeed, I could not live without my dogs.”

“Father! Nanciebel! Good news!” cried Gilbert's voice outside, and Marsli sat up suddenly and pushed back her tumbled hair. “I am no longer needed in Nevin. Father must rest here to-night, and not go down till to-morrow. There has been no fresh case for two days, and all the sick are nearly well. I think this is the end of it. Now I am going up to Madryn.”

Then Nanciebel met him at the door to tell him Marsli was there.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

Afterwards

“Nanciebel,” said Marsli, a month later, “I was down in my little walled garden to-day, to see if there were any violets in bud, and, do you know, the ground is covered with the strangest little green things, as if plants were growing everywhere, even in the grass! We did not plant anything last year, did we? But the garden is full of them! Indeed, now, what do you think they can be?”

And Nanciebel laughed, and vowed it was too early to answer that yet, but perhaps by the time Marsli returned there would be more to see.

For Captain Morgan, as Marsli’s only guardian now, had decided to carry her off for a few weeks to some warmer spot to recruit her strength. The months before and after Christmas had been a severe strain on them all, and all, as the spring advanced, felt the effects of that strenuous time, though in varying degrees. He could not propose a change of scene to Sir John for himself or his children, but they were living down at Tanybryn on the shore once more, taking life very easily for a while, rejoicing in freedom from care and in their once more united family, and giving up hours at a time to games on the sands with Charlie and Joyce.

But he could insist on Marsli’s trying the results of a change of air, and did so. He had many things to think out for himself also, and was not sorry to be away for a while.

Not many miles south of Nevin, along the big Boduan road, lay another great blue bay with sunny shores and southern aspect. Madryn in the spring was apt to be bleak and chilly, its northern shore the prey of fiercely bitter winds, crashing waves and flying spray. But the great bay in the south was sheltered by the mountains and always had its full share of sunshine. On its shores, with a name so long that it provoked irreverent laughter from Nanciebel and Gilbert, was an old house, surrounded by a considerable stretch of rich land and well-wooded estate, all given up, since the death of the Captain’s mother, to stewards and servants, but which he claimed as his own. He saw to it that this was set in order and made ready, and carried Marsli there for a few weeks to give her and Gilbert a chance to see if they could live without one another, as he thoughtfully informed them. Gilbert promptly threatened to break through the bounds set to his liberty if she was kept away from him too long, then gave himself up to the fishing he enjoyed to pass the time till her return.

Nanciebel’s orphanage had become a permanent institution, but had been moved to a house in Nevin, as being more easily dealt with there. Here a dozen small children, orphaned by the plague, throve under the watchful care of Constancy, who had taken up this work with enthusiasm, as being exactly what she felt fitted for. Sweet Joy and Charlie did not really need her, and Nanciebel delighted in giving herself up to the care of her cottage. So Constancy took the Welsh orphans to her heart, and rejoiced exceedingly in her work.

Blaise Morgan would have kept Marsli away till the spring was well advanced, but she craved for home, and would not be content in his house in the south, though she freely confessed that it had much more of comfort and luxury than Madryn, and that the lands around were richer and better cared for. But her heart was at home on the northern shore, and she was restless and ill at ease till he brought her back to her own house, to her friends, to her dogs, and—Gilbert.

They were all up at Madryn to welcome her. As soon as the first greetings were over and the exuberant delight of the dogs had calmed down a little, Nanciebel seized her hand and led her out into the garden.

“There is something here for you to see, Marsli fach! Come along. I have been afraid you would come too late.”

She led her to the walled garden under the windows of the house, and triumphantly showed a glowing golden ring round the edge of the green lawn, dotted with white and purple, but mostly blazing gold, so that the little patch of grass looked like a great round emerald set in a golden frame. Here and there, also, were patches of white and deep blue, where clumps of scillas and snowdrops nodded among their thin spiky leaves, but it was the glory of the vivid crocuses of which Nanciebel was most proud. Marsli stood and gazed at them.

“But what is it? I have never seen these flowers before. Oh, indeed, they are beautiful!” and she knelt on the grass to peer into the deep golden cups, wide open in the strong sun. “But where do they come from, Nanciebel? How did they get here? Is it fairy magic, or is it you? Oh, go away, Llevelys, my dear, go away at once! Prince Rhodri, Rhys, Peredur, come back! You must not step on them, the darlings! You wicked dogs, keep back! Nanciebel, how did these strange new beauties come here?”

“I planted them for you, before that terrible time of the plague, Marsli fach. I wished to surprise you. Do you like them? I thought you would. But these are only crocuses! Wait till you see my hyacinths, and tulips, and narcissus! See, you can almost see them already—all these green shoots will soon have flowers. See how big they are!”

Marsli’s pleasure in the crocuses was nothing to her delight in the larger flowers when they came. The sweet narcissus, hanging in graceful clusters, scented all the rooms when they had been potted with care and carried indoors. The snowy single flower, with its crimson heart and widespread white wings, sent her into raptures; so did the first hyacinth, pure white, sweet-scented, stately, with graceful drooping bells. Then all the daffodils were upon them—lemon, yellow, golden, orange; delicate single flowers and curious double ones, with thickly clustering yellow leaflets; great trumpets and small, and deep and shallow cups with outstretched turned-back petals. And all the glory of the hyacinths, in all their shades, from pale blue and pink to deepest purple and crimson, and all the sweetness of their strong perfume, till the little garden was heavy with their scent, and Marsli fetched her friends in haste to see and admire and delight in them. Then, when they had to droop and fade, and she was grieving over their loss, the proud, prim tulips rose among their pale leaves, and unfolded their hidden secrets of red and white and yellow, crimson and orange, and in her enjoyment of them she was consoled for the passing of the hyacinths. Her joy and pride in her garden that spring knew no bounds, and her gratitude to Nanciebel, especially when she understood that she might look for a repetition of all this every spring, was very great.

In the early spring Captain Morgan paid his usual visit to town, and was away for some weeks. He brought back little news that was good, but told how there were still some cases of the plague in London, though few in comparison with what had been. As for the war, it was still dragging on, and the French had declared their intention of joining with the Dutch against England.

“I saw the King,” he said to Sir John, as they paced the sand in front of the cottage under the cliff, “and talked with him concerning you.”

“Concerning us! And what had you to say concerning us?” laughed Seymour. “Have we then not been conducting ourselves to your liking?”

“I found his Majesty in a good humour. He told me I might think myself fortunate to have been in safety, so far away from London, during the plague time. So when I said I had myself been sick, and told him all that had passed here, he was much interested. Then I spoke to him on another matter.”

They were close to the rocks of Pen Cim, the sharp point which sheltered Porthdynllaen Bay on the eastern side.

“Let us sit here,” Morgan said abruptly, and they sat down on the yellow limpet-covered rocks beside the anemone pools.

“I told him that your son would shortly be marrying my cousin and settling down at Madryn——”

“But, Captain, matters have hardly reached that stage,” said Sir John, in some surprise.

“Nevertheless, there is not much doubt of it, I suppose? Their wishes are plain enough.”

“But Gilbert will not wish to live upon his wife’s riches, and he has little to give her in return.”

“She must have some one to help her up at Madryn, and I do not want to have to do it. I have my own house at Abersoch, and have other ideas for myself than becoming merely Marsli’s steward. Gilbert is in every way fitted to be her husband, and he will some day make her ‘my Lady,’ which fact Marsli will no doubt appreciate.”

Sir John laughed. “Yes, that thought will please her, no doubt. And are you willing to give her to him? I know it has been in his mind to speak to you when you returned.”

“Willing! I’ll be delighted. He can have her as soon as he likes, so far as I am concerned. I know her wishes in the matter, and I am too wise to deny Mistress Marsli what she has set her heart upon. Also, I know Gilbert, and think she is fortunate.”

“Well, if you are willing. I shall be glad to see them happy.”

“Yes. I would like it settled. Marsli is a wild girl at times, but he will take care of her. The King laughed, and remarked that you seemed to have done very well for yourselves. Then I spoke to him of you, and asked that he would allow you to go home to England.”

Sir John looked up quickly. “You did? Now that was good of you!”

“I thought it would be well. I thought perhaps you would wish to go. But he would not. He said, after a time, that he would grant this much, that anywhere in Wales you might go, but not England. I did my best, but——”

“But if the children are settling here, I can be well content also. But I am grateful for the thought.”

“Wales is perhaps wide enough for the present. I will be glad if you will come and visit my house at Abersoch, and see if the southern coast of Lleyn is as much to your liking as the northern. This, I think, is the healthier, but the other is warmer and richer. And, by the way, though I did not speak of this to the King, I have not forgotten Madryn’s promise to you of a house and land this summer. I have no doubt Gilbert and Marsli will make that promise good!” he laughed. “You have but to choose where you will go. But if you would like to have Bryn Noddfa, up on Boduan, where we sheltered in the plague time, I can arrange it with Wynn without difficulty. He is more than grateful for your help at that time, and if you would like Bryn Noddfa for your home, for the sake of those weeks we spent there, it is yours for the asking. The land around is good, and you know well that you can have all the help you want from Nevin. There is not a man in the town but will do anything you ask.”

“I think that is true. I had not thought they would be so grateful. I would very greatly like that old house, Captain.”

"I thought so. Then I will speak to Wynn, and you can look on that as settled. And one other matter! . . . I told the King that I could no longer stay here as his officer in power over you. I have been ill-pleased with it for a long time, but since last winter it is no longer possible."

He was drawing figures on the firm sand with his sheathed sword in some embarrassment. Sir John watched him curiously, wondering how far he had gone in thought and how much he had said to the King.

"I told him," Morgan said slowly, "that it was not only because we had come to be friends, but that I had come to believe you right in the protest you made, and for which he sent you here."

"You told him that?" said Seymour sharply. "But I did not know you had even thought it —"

"I had not discussed it with you. I have heard you say so often that men must decide for themselves what is right, that I knew you would only repeat it if I asked what I must do. You would only have told me 'twas a matter for myself alone. So I have thought it out for myself, and acted for myself."

"I am very glad," said Sir John quietly, and glanced thoughtfully at him, then looked out across the bay at the cottages under the cliff, and Nanciebel and the children paddling about the smooth water in one of the Madryn boats.

"I do not say that war can never be right——" began Morgan.

Sir John laughed. "Nor I!"

"But I agree that if unnecessary it is wrong, and that this time it was, I think, unnecessary."

"That means much from you."

"Two years ago I would have mocked any man who said it. But you are right, and war for its own sake, or for any other reason than great necessity, is wrong. I do not think the present war was needful, but it was brought upon us by others, for their own ends, no doubt. I have heard it said in London that the Court wished for war so that the King might have the money which Parliament must grant for the necessary expense, and however that may be, 'tis certain much of that money has never gone to the sailors nor to pay for the war supplies. I will not say where it has gone, but I know some who could tell, if they would. Perhaps there was some such thought behind the outcry against the Dutch two years ago. If so, the war is very wrong."

"Gilbert said openly it was that, long ago, and I told him not to talk treason. And what did the King say when you told him?"

"He laughed, of course, and mocked me for learning of you, but I held to it."

"Does he send any one in your place?"

"No. Not since he has given you all Wales to wander in. But, of course, if you cross the Border, you do so at risk of arrest."

Seymour nodded thoughtfully. "I have no great wish to return to England, unless 'twas to go right home to Summerton. I can be content here, and I am sure the children have no wish to leave this place."

"I would leave the King's service at once," said Morgan, turning to him with anxious eyes, "but I cannot do it while there is war and I may be needed. Even though the war be wrong, yet it is none of my making, and I am a soldier, after all. There is horrible mismanagement in London, and what will be the end of it I do not know. There may be pressing need for every man before it is over, and if the country is in danger I can see nothing for it but to help. I do not know what you would advise, and I have told you why I did not ask you, but this is what

seems right to me. I have taken up my sword for England, and until there is peace and no more danger, I cannot lay it down. I am content now, like you, to say that peace is best, but while there is war, and a war which is like to go against us, I fear, I cannot draw back. The French have already declared for the Dutch, and some say that the Swedes will do the same—the King of Denmark also. It looks strangely as if we are in the wrong, but I may be needed, and I must be ready to go. That is what seems right to me. What do you say?"

"I find no fault with it," Sir John said thoughtfully, and Morgan looked relieved. "As you say, you cannot withdraw now. But when peace comes——"

"Then I will cease to be a soldier," Morgan said quickly. "I have learnt so much from you, and am decided on that point."

"But," said John-o'-Peace, smiling slowly, "is not fighting the only work for a gentleman? And what will you do? Will you become only a farmer, after being a soldier? But, Captain——!"

Morgan reddened. "Now, be generous! Don't remember all my past follies against me! I'll disprove those foolish sayings——"

Sir John laughed. "Good. Shake hands on it, Captain! I am very glad."

Morgan clasped his hand, then dropped it and sat turning up the sand again, his face very thoughtful still.

"I am not going to fight unless there is need. I am going over to Abersoch to see to my house there. If I am needed, I have friends in town who will send for me."

They both sat silent for a time. But at last, as he seemed to have no more to say, Sir John asked quietly—

"And what of Nanciebel?"

Blaise turned to him with a start of surprise, for that matter had never been mentioned between them.

"I—you cannot—I would never dare——"

"Nanciebel will only, with my consent, marry the man she loves," Sir John said very gravely. "But I trust her fully, and if she loved a man I would give her to him. I should know that I might safely do so. She will only love a man who is worthy of her."

"No man could ever be worthy of her."

Sir John laughed. "Oh, as to that, I am not sure!—though you may continue to think it, if you like! As to whether she has begun to care for you—have mercy on that poor little flower, Captain!"

Morgan laughed, and spared the crimson anemone button he had unconsciously been poking off its yellow rock.

"Do not mock me, Sir John! If you think there is any fear of that, indeed, I had better go away. I could never"—he rose sharply—"I could never dare to ask you for Nanciebel. The thing's impossible. We had better not talk of it."

Seymour rose also. "I would not wish you to say anything to her just now," he said soberly. "Let matters remain as they are till there is peace and you can come home to stay. She is not yet nineteen, while Marsli, I suppose, is twenty-two or thereabouts. She is young enough to wait a while, and in many ways she is still almost a child. You must do your duty, and go away if there be need, and when the war is over we will speak of this again. If she learns by your absence that she loves you, I will know it, and if it should be so, I will not stand in your way. I think you would be good to her."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

The End of the War

While the rebuilding and preparation of Bryn Noddfa were in progress, Captain Morgan carried Nanciebel and her father off to his house at Abersoch, being anxious, for many reasons, to know their opinion of it.

The yellow bay, with its sunny sandhills, and cottages under the cliff, and shallow fishing-river winding down in one corner, delighted Nanciebel. This coast seemed warmer and more sunny than the northern shore, and the outlook across the great bay to the wavy blue line of mountains in the distance was entrancing. Captain Blaise pointed out the various places of interest, as they stood on the great headland, with some pride in the wideness of the view.

“Those are all the hills of Merioneth. Beyond is a glimpse of Cardigan. There is Cader Idris rising above the others. All this is Lleyn, and those are the Snowdon mountains. Yr Eifl is over there, looking very grand from this side, and showing all three of his peaks, and we cannot see our friend Boduan at all! Here, close behind us, is Madryn, not looking so high as we have known him hitherto—yes, it is Madryn, though you might well think me mistaken. Gilbert and Marsli are just on the other side. Over yonder you look out to St. Tudwal’s Islands, and Bardsey, to which the pilgrims used to go. We see a great part of Wales from this spot—very much more than you have seen yet. I have often wondered,” he said to Sir John, “that you and Gilbert did not climb the hills so that you might see more.”

Nanciebel looked at her father and laughed. Sir John smiled.

“Did you truly think we had never done so? Why, Captain, we were on the top of Madryn during our first summer, and I think during our first month at Tanyrallt. I was curious to see in what part of the land we were, so climbed the mountain to see if that would help me.”

“And did it?”

“Yes, to be sure! The shape of the country was enough. The children did not know the map, but I did, when I saw it spread at my feet. The low land across the sea in the north, with the yellow sands and cliffs on which the sun shines, is the Isle of Anglesey, I suppose?—and Chester lies beyond those heights? It did not take us long to find out so much.”

Captain Morgan laughed.

“Yes, you have it all right enough. I wondered you had been content so long, with no questions to ask!”

“We had answered them for ourselves. I did not know we had not told you of our climbing.”

Blaise reddened. “The first summer, did you say? I fear I was not very amiable at that time. You must forget that with several other things.”

“Oh, we forgot them all long ago!” laughed Nanciebel, and he looked relieved.

It was only the near approach of the wedding-day at Madryn that took them home again. But when the wedding was over, Morgan received news from London of the defeat and flight of the English fleet and the urgent need of men. Men were being pressed into the King’s service to man the ships, it was said, and every one was needed.

He went at once, and they did not see him again till the autumn, when he paid a flying visit to Madryn, but spent most of his time at Bryn Noddfa.

“London has fallen on evil days,” he said gravely, when they asked for news. “While you here were picking heather and gathering blackberries, another great trouble has come upon the City. Not plague this time, but fire—the greatest fire ever known to any of us. A great part of London is burned, and there is much distress, and thousands of homeless people. For nearly a week it burned, and could not be checked. Eighty-nine churches are burned, and, they say, four hundred streets—thirteen thousand houses. From Mark Lane as far west as the Temple, all is ruins; St. Paul’s is burned, and Paul’s School; Ludgate, Fleet Street, Newgate, Cheapside, are heaps of ashes; Fenchurch Street, Lombard Street, the Old Bailey, Tower Street, Moorfields, the Exchange—all are gone. ’Twas a great sight by night, but very terrible. The whole sky seemed ablaze on every side. As for the war, we were fighting again in July, but without much result. We were not beaten, that is the most that can be said. But how long it will drag on thus I do not know. There is desperate want of money to pay our sailors, and where it has all gone to I would not like to say. And as desperate want of men! They will not man the ships unless they are pressed into it, and one can scarcely blame them. No one has much heart for this war, but we are in it and cannot get out of it, it seems. The King and Court care only for their own pleasures. In the fleet every one quarrels and blames every one else. There is always some one at fault. The men are disheartened and will fight only when driven to it. They desert when they can, and though we may blame them, yet ’tis very true they are there against their will and are unpaid for months. ’Tis a wretched business. I wish we were well out of it. I would like to give it all up and come home,” he said, looking wistfully from Nanciebel to her father, “but I cannot bring myself to that. ’Twould be an ugly time to draw back now.”

Nanciebel looked down at the sewing she was busy about for Marsli, and said nothing.

He only spent a few days with them, then returned to town, in case the fleet should put to sea again. Then for months they had no news of him, and did not know whether it was peace or war, whether he was alive or dead. Nanciebel was often sober during that winter and spring, and spent much time alone, wandering on the cliffs and shore, or at other times made herself very busy at Bryn Noddfa or up at Madryn, as if trying now to escape from her thoughts.

On his return to London in the early autumn, Blaise sent back to Nevin a great box of gifts—bulbs for Nanciebel’s new garden, so that she should not lack what Marsli possessed, and books for Sir John, which gave him more pleasure than any other possible gift could have done. So it was not only the garden at Madryn which was gay next Easter, and in her planting and watching and hoping Nanciebel remembered the giver of the bulbs, whose thought for her had supplied them unasked, and she feared much on his account and wondered when he would come home.

Her father watched her quietly, content to see this change in her, if only Blaise came safely home. If he did not, then, indeed, there might be cause for regret, but at present Sir John was well pleased with what he saw in Nanciebel, though he did not think it wise to speak to her on the subject.

All through the spring Nanciebel was anxious. All through the spring Gilbert was anxious also, but not concerning the Captain. All through the spring Marsli’s garden bloomed richly, and she rejoiced in her flowers, and wondered greatly to see them again after months of total disappearance when she had feared them all dead.

Early in May they welcomed the arrival of a dark-haired, black-eyed baby heir to Madryn, and the rejoicings on every side were very great. Gilbert felt as if several inches had been added to his already considerable height, and much also to his years and responsibilities.

Marsli's bright eyes shone with a tenderer light, and she thought often, as she nursed her little son, of Gwladys, and wondered if she had cared for her two lost babies as she herself loved this one tiny boy. Nanciebel bent over the baby with a wistful face, and Sir John's satisfaction was very great.

"We gained something after all by leaving home, eh, Gilbert? 'Tis good to see you all so happy."

"If only Nanciebel——"

"I think that will be well in the end. We have only to wait."

The end of July brought the Captain home.

He turned into the Nevin road at Boduan one afternoon, and rode slowly northwards, his face as gloomy as it had ever been in the old days. He had come far to-day, and was tired out, but there was more than that the matter. The news he brought, which must be told, was a crushing weight to him, and had burdened him ever since he rode out of London. He did not want to tell them, and yet, when they asked for news, he would have to speak.

He had thought, when he set out from town, that the joy of meeting and the sight of Nanciebel would drive the ugly facts out of his mind, and that he might even be able to tell them easily. He had seen her often enough, away there in London, and the constant picture of her had been something of a relief during these last hard months. Nanciebel playing on the shore with Sweet Joy and Charlie; Nanciebel kneeling in the little garden, burying the bulbs; Nanciebel nursing the baby and feeding the children in the old house on Boduan; or, going farther back still, Nanciebel on the beach at Abergeirch,—in the little tent,—flying from the black cows,—singing in the streets of Nevin,—or trudging bravely up and down the long steep roads beside her father,—he had always been able to see her when he wished, and had spent much time thus in the past in her company. But now, although he would see her so very soon, the thought of the news he brought, and all the past few weeks in London which had hurt him sorely, overwhelmed even his longing for her, and he was depressed and miserable.

At the cross-roads he paused. Madryn this way, Nevin and Bryn Noddfa to the right. Surely it was only fair to carry his news first of all to Sir John?

He turned and rode towards Nevin. In spite of his gloomy thoughts it was a delight, as always, to look all round and feel at home again. He loved the place so keenly, from Yr Eifl to Abergeirch, that the first long look around, after months of London, must always be a keen delight.

The sea was very deep blue, flecked everywhere, even though seen from this distance, with wild white caps. He could almost hear the roar of the waves on the shingle, though he was three miles inland. The hills were very clear, with constantly changing shadows from the heavy clouds sweeping in from the sea. A strong high wind, laden with salt, came tearing in across the fields from the north-east.

"Indeed, it has been a bad wild night," he said to himself, looking at the waves and clouds. "The sun may shine now, but there has been a big storm. I wonder if the boats were out?"

He rode on towards the lane leading up to Bryn Noddfa, with keen memory of all the countryside during the plague time. Along this way he had come down from Madryn to help, that first early morning, not knowing that Nanciebel had come the same way a few hours before him. He remembered how she had sung to them, up in the old house on Boduan, when they had thought the plague was nearly over, but before its outbreak at Madryn. How often he had thought of her singing, away in London! And in memory of her, and the hope of the future, he began to forget the news which had burdened him so.

Along the high wind, straight from Nevin on the cliffs, came the sound of church-bells. They were tolling, and that was very unusual. He drew rein sharply and sat, a wild horrible thought driving out every other and possessing him completely.

But he had been thinking of her singing, and irresistibly the words of her favourite song came upon him suddenly.

*“It’s then he rode, and better rode,
Until he came to the town;
And there he heard a dismal noise,
For the church-bells a’ did soun’.
He asked what the bells rang for,
They said, ‘It’s for Nanciebel.’”*

Of course it was madly foolish to think such a thing. Why should any harm have come to her? But he had been away for nearly a year, and had had no news from home.

He realized that this was probably the result of an overlong and overhasty journey, and of the weeks of strain and distress which had gone before it. But, foolish as it might be, he was wildly, terribly afraid, and the fear would not leave him till he knew what the bells were ringing for.

He spurred on his horse, and rode furiously up the lane to the old house.

But it seemed deserted. There was no one in sight, and no answer came to his impatient shout. The windows and doors stood open, but no one seemed about, except indeed Prince Peredur, who came strolling out to sniff at him, then wagged his big tail approvingly.

He was about to dismount and enter the house in search of some one, when a small girl came to the door and cried out at sight of him. It was Mairi, the fair-haired child of whom Nanciebel had made a friend.

“Indeed, Captain, is it you come home again? It’s glad they’ll all be to see you.”

“Where are they all? Where is Sir John? And Mistress Nanciebel?”

“Up at Madryn, sir. Indeed, they are all there all the time,” and she smiled.

“They are all well?”

“Indeed, yes, all very well.”

“What are the bells ringing for in Nevin?”

Her face clouded. “There was a great storm last night, and two of the boats went down, and the men are lost. There is great trouble in Nevin.”

“I am sorry. Who were they?”

“Rhys ap Evan, and John ap Hugh, and Thomas ap Lloyd ap Thomas, sir.”

“That’s bad. But I must go up to Madryn to seek Sir John,” and he turned and rode down the lane again, grieved for the widows and orphans in Nevin, but greatly relieved in spite of it, and ready now to laugh at his own foolishness.

Nanciebel and Sweet Joy found their new dignity of aunthood so enthralling that every possible moment had to be spent in baby-worship, so they were up at Madryn most of the time just now, and the little maid, Mairi, found herself alone at Bryn Noddfa for a good part of each day. The Captain did not quite understand the situation, having had no news for months, but he supposed them to be paying a family visit to Gilbert and Marsli, and was somewhat relieved to think that his bad news could be finally disposed of at one telling.

In his great relief after those few moments of anxiety, he was in higher spirits than had been possible before. He had realized suddenly how dear Nanciebel was to him, and the

thought of seeing her immediately possessed him entirely.

It was she whom he saw first of all as he entered the little walled garden at Madryn, where the crocus and daffodil leaves had at last been cut down and the roses were making a brave show. She was bending over Marsli and the baby, who were enjoying the sunshine, and singing in a low voice to them alone.

*“O seven, seven, seven long years,
They are much too long for me!”*

Sweet Joy and Charlie were playing with the big collies, and Sir John and Gilbert were discussing a new family of handsome pups and comparing notes on the hay harvest, when the Captain walked into their midst.

“Surely there is one here I have not yet seen!” he said, when he had greeted the children and the men, kissed Marsli, and bent over Nanciebel’s hand with a first hungry look at her rosy face. “Is this a lad bairn, or a lass, Marsli? Nay,” as she cried out indignantly, “you cannot ask a soldier to know such things—till he has been taught. But—I am no longer a soldier. Well, my best wishes for this little one!” and he stood looking sombrely down at them.

“What’s the matter, Captain? Have you bad news?” for his face betrayed it. “Come, tell us the worst.”

“There is peace. The war is over.”

“Good! That surely is not bad news! Then you stay with us now?”

“Yes. I am going no more to London.”

“Why so downcast, man?” cried Sir John. “Is it not what you hoped for? What could be better? We have all been longing for peace. What then is troubling you?”

“I wanted peace, but I hoped for peace with honour,” Morgan said, turning on him sharply. “I am no Englishman, but I have some care for the flag I have fought for. Of such a peace as this I never dreamed. I have been glad, for a month now, that I am not an Englishman. I can remember the days when the Protector made our name not only respected, but feared all over Europe. There are others of us who remember, and were proud to belong to the army at that time. ’Tis they, and I, who are heartbroken and ashamed to-day. The others do not care. I wish we had Cromwell again. At least he kept our country’s name highest among the nations. This —! I tell you, we are shamed before the whole of Europe. I have been sick with disgust for weeks, for months, and longing to get away. I did not come in the spring because I was ashamed of what I had to tell. I could not face you. I hoped something better might yet come. I hoped something might save us. Instead of that, it is the worst which has come, and a worst which is blacker even than I dreamed.”

His voice broke, and he stopped abruptly. They looked at one another and then at him in great dismay.

“Tell us, Captain!” said Sir John at last. “We have had no news for months.”

“Tell us what’s the matter, Blaise!” begged Marsli.

“I am ashamed to tell you, but you will have to know. ’Tis hard to speak of it even now, though I have been thinking all the way home how I should tell you. Here you are, then! All this year we have been making this peace, and why? Because we cannot fight—because we have no fleet—because we dare not face the Dutch. That’s the truth. We have sued for peace. And worse! A month ago the Dutch sailed up the Thames and burned our ships of war at Chatham. What do you say to that?”

He stopped again, and their outcry of dismay and incredulity gave him time to recover himself.

“Why? Because our men were rising in mutiny from very hunger. Because our ships were leaking and had not their needful rigging. Because our dockyards were unguarded. We could not attack, we could not even defend ourselves. Why? Ask the King where are the millions he has had for this war. They say he has had five million pounds. Do you know that our men have gone unpaid for months? That they were starving? *That they left their ships and joined the Dutch?* Yes! For the Dutch could pay them, and we could not. We gave them tickets in place of their wages, but men, and wives and children cannot live on tickets. They joined the Dutch, and then, when they sailed up the Thames, they cried to their fellows on our ships, ‘We did heretofore fight for tickets; now we fight for dollars!’ What do you say to that? Others came to us with these same tickets, saying they would gladly do their best against the Dutch if we would but pay them, and many of us did what we could, privately, but of public money there is none, spite of the chimney-tax and the votes of Parliament. So we were helpless, defenceless, when De Ruyter knew his chance and came down upon us. Sheerness is destroyed, and the Dutch sailed up the river as far as Tilbury Fort. Then they withdrew with the ebb-tide. If they had advanced, London must have fallen, and invasion might have followed. We were not ready; we were taken by surprise. ’Twas decided that if they still came on, the Tower should next be abandoned. Abandoned, mark you, not defended! The City was filled with panic, and almost with insurrection. The people ran about the streets crying out for a Parliament. The houses and carriages of the King’s ministers were attacked by the mob. I do not blame the people. I felt like it myself. Well, we have made peace, this peace! We have granted everything their lordships the Dutch did ask. We could do nothing else! But we cannot make them keep the peace if they do not so choose. We are beaten. They do not care—in London. They were frightened when they heard the guns of the enemy’s ships, but for the shame and disgrace of it no one cares. Our ships are burned, our men in mutiny. But the King feasts with his ladies and does not care. Do you wonder that I say I am done with England? You”—turning to Sir John—“will no doubt say we deserved it. A wicked war, with an ugly ending. But it comes hard on us who have done our best, and who care something for the credit of the country. I do not think it will be a lasting peace. I think they will make us fight again, when it suits them, and they feel ready for it. We cannot keep them to their promises. But I shall not fight again—not with such a King. It has been heartbreaking, and I am done with it.”

His distress was very evident. He turned and walked away out of the garden, and off among the trees.

They looked at one another. Then Sir John said quietly—

“Go you after him, Nanciebel! Tell him not to grieve. He has done his share, we know, and grieving will not change those others in London. Go and comfort him. Tell him I sent you. I think you can succeed where we could not. Go to him, Nanciebel!”

And Nanciebel went.

THE END

[The end of *Mistress Nanciebel* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]