

A woman in a white dress and blue cape is walking on a beach. The background features large, dark rocks and a cloudy sky. The title 'A Castaway in Cornwall' is written in a large, elegant, blue cursive font across the top half of the image. The author's name 'JULIE KLASSEN' is written in a white, serif font at the bottom. There are decorative flourishes at the top and bottom of the page.

*A
Castaway in
Cornwall*

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To Marietta and Ted Terry,
prayer warriors and friends,
with love and gratitude.

*During severe weather yesterday three vessels
were wrecked near Trebetherick Point,
beaten by the waves, and gone to pieces.*

—WEST BRITON, FEBRUARY 1818



*Obscurest night involved the sky,
Th' Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.*

—WILLIAM COWPER, “THE CASTAWAY”



*“What woman, having ten silver coins, if she
loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the
house, and search carefully until she finds it?
And when she has found it, she calls her friends
and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with
me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’”*

—LUKE 15:8–9 NKJV

Prologue

OCTOBER 1813

NORTH CORNWALL, ENGLAND

Flotsam or jetsam?

According to the heavy old volume of *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary* in my uncle's study, *flotsam* is any goods floating on the sea where a ship has sunk or been cast away, while *jetsam* is anything purposely cast out of a ship when in danger, in hopes of saving it, or at least lightening the load.

Almost daily I walk along the shore, eyes keen for either one.

I step, and sometimes leap, from rock to rock pool, from beach to beach grass. Looking, looking, always looking, my gaze pinned not on the unfathomable horizon or heavens but on the practical earth at my feet. Up, down, and over I go, across craggy rocks, shifting sands, and slate shelves with nary a misstep or hesitation.

All around me is the sound of the sea. Not a roar but a rhythm—a watery hum, strumming like a vibrating chord, a quickened heartbeat. The Atlantic rolls in, lapping and slapping

at rocks with percussion, punctuated by the mournful cries of gulls.

Even with the chill of autumn pressing in, dainty stoic flowers—purple, orange, white—grow on the otherwise barren rock. Beauty amid harsh conditions. Life where nothing should thrive.

Can I say the same for myself? Am I thriving, or merely surviving?

Sometimes I wonder how I ended up here in Cornwall, so far from my childhood home. I feel like a castaway, set adrift on the tide by the long-ago deaths of my parents, and left wanting answers. Is there a plan in all this? Does God truly hold my fate in His hands, or has my life all been happenstance, the mysterious ebb and flow of chance?

I don't belong here, yet here I am. Washed up on this strange shore with its strange ways. Here, anyone not born and bred in Cornwall is eyed with suspicion and viewed as a foreigner. I have lived among them now for eight of my three and twenty years, yet I still don't belong . . . and doubt I shall ever belong anywhere again.

Standing on a rock, wind tugging at my bonnet, I wonder once more—am I flotsam or jetsam?

*On Monday last the brigantine Star of Dundee
was wrecked near Padstow. Her crew of five
took to their boat which soon upset, and
melancholy to relate, they were all drowned.*

—WEST BRITON, NOVEMBER 1811

Chapter 1

Laura!” twenty-one-year-old Eseld called from the coastal path above the beach. “Mamm is angry and bids you come. You left something foul in Wenna’s best pot again.”

Laura’s stomach sank. How could she have forgotten? She called back, “I was soaking a leather purse I found. Could be saved with proper care.”

“The only good purse is a full purse to Mamm. You know that. Come on! I don’t want her angry with me as well.”

Laura sighed and picked up her basket. “Coming.”

As they trudged up the steep footpath to Fern Haven, Eseld said, “I don’t know why you come down here every day. It would be one thing if you found gold or valuables we could sell.”

Laura didn’t remind Eseld that she *had* sold several things to the antique and curiosity dealer in Padstow. She’d not earned a fortune but had contributed to her upkeep and begun saving for a voyage she dreamed of taking one day.

Before selling anything, however, Laura felt duty bound to

wait the prescribed “year and a day,” in case the owners might come forward to claim their property. Eseld always shook her head at the precaution, parroting the local saying, “What the custom and excise men don’t know won’t hurt ’em.”

Even Uncle Matthew, a kindly parson, saw nothing wrong in helping himself to anything that washed ashore near Fern Haven. “’Tis God’s bounty, my girl. It isn’t as though we’re stealing,” he’d say. “The crates and barrels come to us. Gifts from the Giver of all good gifts.”

Between treacherous Trevose Head, Stepper Point, the Doom Bar, and the rocks off their own Greenaway Beach, wrecks were a common occurrence, claiming many ships and many more lives. In fact, from Trebetherick Point, near their home, Laura could look down onto the rocks and see the remains of more than one shipwreck, the wooden pieces half buried in the sand like carcasses—the spine and ribs of giant ancient birds. Many local dwellings and outbuildings had been built of salvaged ship timbers.

Reaching Fern Haven—a two-story whitewashed house with a slate roof and dormer windows—they passed through the gate, also built from salvaged timbers, and climbed the few steps to its covered porch.

“Wipe your feet,” Eseld admonished, sounding very much like her imperious mother as she did so.

Laura obliged, wiping the worst of the sand and seaweed from her worn half boots.

As they paused, voices from within reached them.

Eseld’s mother, Mrs. Bray, said, “Thank you for the kind invitation, Mr. Kent. Mr. Bray and I, and Miss Eseld, will happily join you for dinner.”

A lower masculine voice said something that included her name.

“No, I don’t think Laura will wish to come,” Mrs. Bray replied. “She doesn’t like family occasions, not being one of us. And I believe she has a cold coming on. Best to leave her home, especially as the weather has turned decidedly chilly.”

Esel rolled her eyes, gave Laura an impish grin, and pushed open the door with a bang. “We’re ho-ome, Mamm dear.” She winked at Laura and sallied into the modest parlour, where Mrs. Bray was talking with two male visitors: handsome, golden-haired Treeve Kent and his younger brother, Perry.

“Ah, here is Esel now,” Lamorna Bray said with a smile, a smile that quickly faded when she turned to Laura. “Laura, child, you look a fright. Your face is nearly as red as your wind-blown hair. Roaming the beaches again, I suppose?”

“I . . . yes.”

“Why must you go scampering about the countryside? You look wild . . . almost blowsy!”

Laura felt her cheeks heat, but Treeve Kent smiled at her. “Actually, madam, I think her eyes and complexion are quite brightened by the exercise, and her hair shown to best advantage.”

Was the handsome man mocking her? Laura wondered. He must be.

“Forgive me,” she said. “I did not realize we were expecting callers.”

“We’ve come unannounced, I’m afraid,” Treeve replied. “Unpardonable to a Town miss, I suppose?”

Laura blinked. “I . . . hardly know.” As a child she had lived in Oxford, not London, but the local Cornish youths often called her an “up-country girl” or a “Town miss,” as though a great insult.

Treeve turned to his shorter and quieter brother. “Speaking of manners, I am not sure if you’ve met my brother, Perran.

He's been away most of the time you've lived here, I believe, either at university or training at Guy's Hospital."

Guy's Hospital, Laura knew, was a London teaching hospital. Her own father had trained there as well.

"We have met," Laura said. "Though I don't expect he will remember."

The dark-haired man smiled shyly at her. "Yes, I remember you, Miss Laura."

"And what about me?" Eseld asked with a coquettish fluff to the blond curls framing her face.

"Of course I remember you, Miss Eseld." Perry bowed.

Eseld dimpled and dipped a curtsy.

Treeve went on, "We have just come to invite you to join us for dinner. All of you."

A moment of awkward silence followed, marked by the ticking of the clock. Mrs. Bray said nothing, did not even look her way, but in her stony profile, Laura saw her irritation. The woman probably thought Laura would jump at this chance to override her wishes and experience an evening with the local gentry. But Laura knew too well that Mrs. Bray did not want her anywhere near this particular gentleman.

Instead, Laura said, "Thank you, Mr. Kent. But I shall have to decline the pleasure. I feel a cold coming on, and the weather has turned rather chilly."

Treeve's eyes glinted knowingly. "You look perfectly healthy to me." He turned to his brother. "What say you, Perran? You're the professional."

"I am not well enough acquainted with Miss Bra—"

"Callaway," the older woman swiftly corrected. "Laura is my husband's niece through his first marriage."

"Ah. That's right. I forgot." Perry shifted from foot to foot, his face reddening.

“Never mind,” Eseld soothed. “It’s a natural mistake. And Laura is practically my cousin, living together as we have these many years now.”

Laura felt weak gratitude seep into her heart at the young woman’s words. *Dear Eseld*. She was probably only saying it to curry Treeve Kent’s good opinion, but to her credit, Eseld *had* always treated her like a cousin, and not an unwelcome addition to the family.

For as Mrs. Bray pointed out, Laura was not really family. She was not related by blood to any of them. If not for Matthew Bray acting as her guardian after the deaths of her aunt and parents, Laura would be all alone in the world.

While Eseld and her mother dressed for dinner at Roserrow, the Kents’ home, Laura helped Wenna in the kitchen—her penance for using their elderly cook-housekeeper’s favorite pot to clean one of her finds.

Wearing a pained expression, Uncle Matthew appeared in the open doorway and beckoned Laura into his study. “I am sorry, my girl. I think you would have welcomed an evening out. You enjoy far too little entertainment or society.”

“That’s all right, I don’t mind. I think I shall walk over and visit Miss Chegwin.”

He gave her a rueful look. “The society of a woman in her seventies was not what I had in mind.”

She reached up and adjusted her uncle’s cravat, noticing his softening jaw, long silver side-whiskers, and kind hound-dog eyes. How the years and loss had aged him. Fastening the collar of his greatcoat, she said, “Button up. It’s a blustery night.”

“Yes, the wind is rising. If I don’t miss my guess, we’ll be hearing Tregeagle before the night is out, wailing for his lost

soul. . .” He cleared his throat. “If I believed in such things, which, as a learned man of God, I do not.” He winked. “Mostly.”

He was referring to the old legend of the wicked man who sold his soul and had been wandering the coast and moors ever since, bewailing his fate. When the wind rose to its worst, its howl *did* sound almost human, hauntingly so. Cornwall, Laura had learned, was full of such myths, though the fierce storms and deadly gales were all too real.

“If Mrs. Bray did not have her heart set on a match between Eseld and Mr. Kent, I would beg off,” he continued, “but she won’t hear of us not going. I pray to God we don’t regret it.”

“Be careful,” Laura urged. Uncle Matthew was the closest thing to family she had left, and she didn’t want to lose him too.

“We shall be.” He patted her hand and reached for his hat, then turned back. “If you go out tonight, take Wenna or Newlyn with you. I don’t like the idea of you out alone after dark on a night like this. It’s not safe.”

“I can see Miss Chegwin’s cottage from here,” Laura protested.

“Please. For my sake, all right?”

“Very well, though it shall have to be Newlyn, for I dare not ask Wenna. She is still cross about her pot.”

“Wenna is always cross about something.” He grinned. “Good thing she’s an excellent cook.”



Laura let herself into nearby Brea Cottage as she always did, her neighbor long ago insisting she treat their home as her own. Moreover, Miss Chegwin might not hear a knock above the howling wind.

Short, plain Newlyn sat resolutely on the small bench in the entry porch, refusing to go any farther.

“You can come in, you know,” Laura said. “She does not bite.”

“No, but Jago might.” The seventeen-year-old housemaid shuddered.

“Silly creature. He is harmless.”

“All the same, I’ll wait here.”

“Suit yourself.”

Laura entered the snug sitting room, and the old woman looked up, delight written on her craggy features.

“Good evening, my lovely. How are’ee?”

“I am well, *Mamm-wynn*.” Laura called her Grandmother as a term of affection and respect, for she knew it pleased her.

Mary Chegwin smiled, the lines of her wrinkled face softening under her halo of white hair. “*Meur ras*, my dear. And what brings you out on such a foul night?”

“I came to see you. The others have gone to Roserrow.” She glanced around the humble sitting room. “Where is Jago?”

“Out looking for firewood.” Trees were scarce in the area and firewood dear.

“I see.” Laura sat down near the dying fire, keeping her cape fastened around her.

The woman watched her. “And did you not wish to go to Roserrow?”

“I . . . would rather see you.”

The blue eyes, still keen, glinted knowingly, but she did not press her.

“I brought you something.” Laura stretched out her hand.

“What is it?”

“A coin purse. See the embroidery there?”

The old woman squinted. “Pretty. Now if only I had a farthing to put in it!” Mary giggled like a girl. “Did you find it today?”

“No. That one is still wet. This one I found a year and a day ago.”

Mary gave her a crooked grin. “You’ll have to become less exacting if yer ever to be a Cornish lass.”

“If I have not become one by now, I doubt I ever shall.”

“Well, there are worse things, though I can’t think of any at the moment.” She cackled again.

“I also brought you some cake.” Laura handed over a napkin-wrapped bundle.

Mary’s eyes widened. “Wenna sent me cake?”

“No, I saved mine for you.”

“I can’t eat yer cake.”

“Of course you can. You like it more than I do. But it will cost you.”

Mary’s wiry brows rose. “Oh?”

“Another tale.”

The blue eyes twinkled. “I’ve already told’ee about the merry-maid’s curse, but have I told’ee about the jealous piskies?”

Laura shook her head, eager to listen.

The old woman nibbled the cake, and then began the tale. “One night, during a harvest moon, the captain of a schooner called *Sprite* saw lights dancing on the waters and followed them to his demise. You see, those naughty piskies were jealous of the ship’s beautiful figurehead, so they gathered a big jarful of glowworms to lure the unsuspecting mariners onto the Doom Bar. By morning, the sailors was drowned and all that remained of the ship was that figurehead, scarred by the rocks and no longer beautiful. It now marks the grave of all those lost on the ill-fated *Sprite*.”

When Mary finished, Laura asked, “Is any of that true?”

“Course it is! Have’ee not seen the grave along the coast?”

Laura had. But like most of Mary’s tales, a liberal dose of fancy was woven among the facts.

Laura rose and put the kettle on. A few minutes later, refreshed by tea and shared cake, Laura urged, “One more?”

Mary smiled. “What shall it be this time? Smugglers? Pirates? Shipwrecks?”

Laura nodded. “Yes, please. All three.”

Outside the wind continued to rise, and Mary began another story.

“One night, a large three-masted ship was drove under Trevoose Head. Her lading was all sorts of warlike stores—muskets, bayonets, boarding pikes, and the like. All hands were lost except for three men. What country these men belonged to was not known.” Mary leaned nearer and lowered her voice to an ominous pitch. “They was supposed to be pirates, and—”

The back door flew open and Laura started. Jago came in, a load of driftwood in his arms.

“*Meur ras*, Jago,” Mary said. “Close the door dreckly, please. It’s mizzling. I can feel the damp from here.”

The tall, broad-shouldered young man dropped the wood near the hearth, then retreated into the kitchen to shut the door.

When he returned, he bent to build up the fire.

“Say good evening to our friend Laura,” Mary prompted.

The big man with a prominent jaw and forehead shyly looked her way. “Evening, our Laura.”

Some said Jago must be related to the Cornish giants of old. Some people, like Newlyn, were afraid of him due to his size, while others ridiculed him, assuming he must be slow of mind because he rarely spoke except to friends. But Laura knew him to be a gentle, thoughtful soul.

She smiled at him. “Good evening, Jago.”

“Yer supper is on the stove,” Mary added.

He nodded and turned to go, ducking his head to avoid hitting the lintel.

“I am sorry,” Laura said. “Did I interrupt your supper?”

“Not at all. I ate while Jago was out foraging. Took him longer than usual to find enough wood to last through the night.” She drew her shawl closer around her. “Sure to be a long winter this year. Thank God for Jago.”

Jago, Laura knew, was not Miss Chegwin’s natural son. Mary had worked for many years as a midwife and had never married or had children of her own. She had found the boy as an infant, abandoned in the churchyard.

She’d once explained, “I don’t know why his mother abandoned him. Perhaps she was simply unwed and frightened. Dr. Dawe told me I was wasting my time, that the boy was too small and weak to survive, let alone thrive. Now, how I dearly enjoy parading my very tall, hale boy past him at church on Sundays.”

From the kitchen, the sound of fork scraping against plate was followed by a festive tune—Jago playing his hurdy-gurdy. The music brought Laura back to the present. The wind now rattled the windowpanes, and water speckled the glass.

She stood. “May we finish the story another time? Newlyn and I had better go before the rain worsens.”

Mary nodded. “*Meur ras* for the visit and the cake. *Nos dha*.”

“*Nos dha*,” Laura said, echoing the phrase for *good night*. She understood more Cornish than she spoke, but very little of either.

As she and Newlyn left, Laura drew the edges of her cape closed against the stinging wind, and Newlyn grumbled and held on to her bonnet. The wind moaned its ghostly wail, and Laura shivered from more than the cold.

“It’s Tregeagle, miss, I know it!” Newlyn cried. “We’re doomed.”

“We are not doomed,” Laura assured her, though any ship on open water might be. From the sound of it, a dreaded north-westerly gale had risen.

In the dark distance, a gun boomed and a voice shouted, “Ship, ho!”

Newlyn grabbed Laura’s hand. “That’s my pa.”

Desperate ships frequently tried to navigate into Padstow’s harbour to find shelter during storms. Many were carried onto the sands of the Doom Bar, where relentless waves either caused the ship to founder or sent it onto Greenaway Rocks to be pounded to kindling.

Laura hurried out to Trebetherick Point, Newlyn following reluctantly behind. From the overlook, Laura scanned the churning water below. A dark shape loomed off the rocks. It was difficult to see through the mist, but it appeared to be a ship thrashing in the waves.

Laura’s stomach tightened, and her heart began to pound with a combination of fear and determination. “Come. Let’s go down to the beach.”

“Are’ee certain, miss? I don’t think yer uncle—”

“I’m certain. Come on.”

Laura turned and started down the narrow path, slipping on the wet sand and stumbling over a rabbit warren but managing not to fall.

Others were on the beach before them, gathering to wait. To watch. To hope.

From there, she could see more clearly. Weak moonlight now penetrated the rainy gloom, and streaks of lightning cracked the sky and illuminated the vessel. A ship a few hundred yards offshore was struggling. She rocked back and forth, listing too

far to one side. She'd run aground on the rocks, and if she didn't lift off soon, the waves would tear her to pieces. Laura had witnessed it before.

Seeing a stocky fisherman nearby, Newlyn ran to his side and clutched his arm. "Oh, Pa!"

"Steady on, my girl."

Most local men were either fishermen like Mr. Dyer or boat builders, or employed as crews of sloops, loading and unloading vessels that traded in Padstow. Others worked in local slate and lead mines.

As Laura watched, small male figures on the ship's deck heaved crates and barrels overboard. One wiry youth climbed to the rigging to evade the encroaching water, but a huge wave struck the ship, washing him off the topsail yard and into the sea. He did not rise again. Had the crew already lowered their boats or had the sea torn them loose? Had they no way of escape? Few people Laura knew swam, but even if the sailors knew how, the waves and rocks were likely to crush them before they reached shore.

"Dear Jesus, help them," Laura cried. She wished there were something she could do. Something anyone could do.

Their parish had no rescue apparatus or official lifeboat. However, Cornish gigs manned by experienced pilots often acted as lifeboats, their size allowing them to maneuver into dangerous coves to reach victims. Why had no pilots responded tonight? Yes, the risks of rowing out in heavy seas were great. Many had paid with their lives for such bravery in the past. Had they not heard the shouts? The ship's gun signaling its distress?

As if reading Laura's thoughts, John Dyer looked around. "Where are the dashed pilots?" He called to a group of men loitering nearby, "Come on, lads—let's try to get to 'em."

"Pa, no," Newlyn pleaded. "It's too dangerous."

The brawny man loosed himself from his frightened daughter's grip. "Someone has to try."

Most men hung back, but three brave souls climbed into Dyer's boat and took up oars.

Laura thought of her own father—gone to sea in a ship and never returning—and grasped Newlyn's hand.

The men rowed hard, but the pounding surf drove them back. Twenty yards out a wave flipped the boat over as if it were a toy.

"Pa!" Newlyn cried, squeezing Laura's fingers tightly.

The men disappeared beneath the boat, beneath the waves. Laura held her breath and prayed. One by one their heads began to reappear, struggling to keep their mouths above water and return to shore. Other men on the beach, more motivated to help their own than some unknown sailors, grabbed a rope, and the bravest among them sloshed into the surf to help the struggling men. Thankfully, all four would-be rescuers made it back to shore, tired and bruised but alive. The boat, however, had suffered damage.

"How's Pa to fish now?" Newlyn wailed. "To support the little'uns? To live?"

More people gathered on the beach, lamps or torches in hand, others carrying pickaxes. Laura surveyed the torch-lit faces, heard the stomping of feet against the cold, and saw the eager rubbing of hands.

The first discarded barrel floated to shore, and the people pounced on it, circling it like ants to a spill of honey. This was followed by one crate and then another. With their axes, they pried them open, finding treasures like salted fish, a crate of figs and another of oranges, then a cask of wine. People exclaimed and called to their neighbors, some helping themselves then and there to the wine, others filling their pockets

with fruit and fish. The scene took on the atmosphere of a macabre village fete.

Laura glimpsed golden-haired Treeve Kent among the revelers. What was he doing there?

He made to turn away, but realizing she'd seen him, he sauntered over, saying archly, "Home with a cold, I see."

"Entertaining my uncle's family, I see," she countered.

He smirked. "Evening grew boring without you there. I . . . went out for a pint, heard the gun, and came down to see what was happening." He avoided her gaze as he explained, she noticed.

"How long until the agent arrives?" she asked.

"Sooner than any of us would like, I imagine."

"You too?"

He sketched a shrug. "Why not?"

Laura held her tongue and returned her attention to the foundering brig.

Apparently having seen the wiry youth washed overboard and drowned, the rest of the ship's company remained on board. She counted nine or ten men and a boy, screaming for help. A wave crashed over the deck, sending others into the sea. One of the brig's two masts fell, and as it floated toward shore, Laura saw a man hanging on to it with one arm, his other wrapped around a comrade, trying to keep the man's head above water. Another wave swept over them and both men went under. The foremast popped up a few yards on, coming dangerously close to impaling one of the men in the shallows.

A desperate hand appeared above the water, before sinking again.

"He's close now, lads. Let's get 'im!" Newlyn's father called. He tied the rope around his waist and strode bravely into the water, while the others held the rope. Stretching as far as he

could, Mr. Dyer reached down and grabbed the man by the back of his collar and dragged him toward shore. An incoming barrel knocked them both underwater, but friends came to John Dyer's aid and finally both men fell onto the sand.

Mr. Dyer rolled to his back, panting. Newlyn knelt at his side. But the other man lay unmoving.

Tom Parsons—an infamous wrecker and smuggler—strode across the beach toward them. His sandy-red hair stuck out in unkempt curls beneath his hat. He had faded freckles and deep scowl marks between his brows. He must have been a darling child, but as a man of fifty, he made Laura's skin crawl.

Seeing the unresponsive victim, Tom prodded him with a careless boot and muttered, "Good thing."

Laura looked around for help. If only Dr. Dawe had not gone to visit his sister . . .

"Roll him over," she said.

Mr. Dyer was too tired to move, and no one seemed willing to cross Tom Parsons to do so.

"Someone help me!" Laura bent and attempted to push the man over herself. A waterlogged adult male was heavier than he looked.

"Let 'im be," Tom commanded.

She looked up and saw the wrecker looming over her, cudgel in hand.

Horrified to think anyone would strike a helpless person, Laura felt righteous indignation steel her nerves. "No, *you* let him be."

In the past, people had the right to claim cargo from a "dead wreck," with no survivors, but the law had changed over thirty years ago. Now, goods washed ashore were supposed to be handed over to the rightful owners or duchy. Even so, many country people clung to the old ways, especially when their families were hungry, or worse, when there was a profit to be made. The

penalties for wrecking ranged from fines to death, but perpetrators were rarely caught and convicted.

Laura shoved with all her might and rolled the man onto his side and then onto his stomach. A great deal of salt water came out of his mouth, and a little life began to appear.

Tom's voice remained deadly calm. "Back away, lass."

With a wary eye on the cudgel, she leaned protectively over the man. "No."

He raised the short, heavy club.

Treeve Kent stepped between them. "Everything all right, Miss Callaway? Ah. Good evening, Tom."

Parsons froze. "What'ee doin' here, Kent?"

Treeve gave the man a strained smile. "Same as you, I imagine."

"Doubt it. This don't concern'ee."

The shipwreck victim sucked in a watery breath and stretched out a hand, grasping at the sand.

"Newlyn!" Laura called. "Hurry and fetch Jago, and tell Miss Chegwin to meet me at the house."

"But—"

"Now!"

Though Laura had rarely used such an authoritative tone with anyone, she had no other choice but to do so now, to assert herself as mistress over the timid servant. She would not leave this helpless man lying on the beach a moment longer than necessary. Unless she did something, she doubted the victim would live much longer, exposed to the brutal Atlantic and cold night air, let alone Tom Parsons's cudgel.

Whether due to her resolve in remaining at the fallen man's side or the presence of someone from one of the parish's leading families, Tom Parsons backed off, turning his attention to the barrels, casks, and crates instead, no doubt determined to

salvage all he could before the duchy agent or a customs officer showed up.

A short while later, Jago came lumbering across the sand, drawing a few curious or disapproving gazes from those he passed. Fortunately, most people were too engrossed in rummaging through crates or going through the pockets of drowned men to pay him much notice.

“Jago, please carry him to Fern Haven.”

The big man nodded, sank to his knees, and picked up the survivor as though he were a child.

Laura followed Jago across the beach, then turned back to Treeve. “Dr. Dawe has gone to his sister’s. Please ask your brother to come as soon as he can.”

“You think Perran can help?” His brows rose in surprise. “I suppose it’s possible. Though I’d rather you asked me to call.”

“Are you a doctor?”

“No. But if you want me, you need only ask.” The handsome man stepped nearer, an impish gleam in his eye. “I am yours to bid.”

Laura hesitated. Treeve might flirt with her, but she could not imagine his intentions were serious.

She met his gaze straight on. “Somehow I doubt that,” she retorted, and hurried from the beach.