

4

As it turned out, finding Wharf P19 proved to be harder than actually loading the Calvados. The wharf seemed to be stuck into the back corner of the big commercial harbour and it had obviously been intended for smaller boats. For all I knew, it was intended for local fishing boats and the very smallest of coastal freighters. At least, that was the impression I got from the fishy smell of the wharf and its modest height. It also had a concrete ramp from the water level up to the concrete and stone wharf and a covered warehouse behind a modest open expanse used for loading. This was perfect for *Jester* and Ivory.

Now Ivory, painted dark blue, was an anagram for 'Integrated Vehicle On Rennsalaer's Yacht'. It was powered by compressed air turning a modified two-stroke motorcycle engine. It was amphibious and versatile. Mariko had called it Achilles when it had been powered by the old modified Norton 500cc single-piston that tended to rust a bit after every immersion. It made, she had said, 'a fearful clatter of arms' – the Homeric epithet of Achilles – every time it started up. Achilles, too, had been reluctant to enter the fray, in his case the Trojan War. With the engine transplant to the all-aluminium Kawasaki made in Roche Bernard during the past summer, it clattered on start-up no more. All I had to do was undo all the ties that held the dolly and grab-bucket and newly-acquired plastic bin, remove all three, find somewhere out of the way for the grab-bucket and bin, and throw the dolly in the back of the vehicle's bed again.

I drove straight off *Jester* and up the ramp. Mélusine met me at the working level of the wharf and clambered over the doorless side. I explained to the wharf foreman what I was after. He pointed down one of the long aisles of the warehouse to where a stocky figure stood already waiting, and looking at his watch impatiently, beside a modest ziggurat composed of cardboard cases. We wuffled off, as directed, in his direction.

Scripture

We passed cargo like debarked and trimmed lodge pole pine logs about twenty feet long, fence rails or ceiling beams, cartons of farm-preserved bottles of whole tomatoes in oil, local homemade (or farm-made) pâté, and many stacks of local bottled wine in cartons. There were more stacks of grain in cloth bags than anything else – wheat, barley and oats – and these grains contributed the dominant smell of the warehouse. And a nice, earthy and wholesome smell it was, too. None of the stacks of goods was very large. This was, indeed, a wharf for very local produce.

Me, I revelled in this warehouse and these kinds of cargoes. There was something timeless about it. Things had been much the same on the wharves of Sumeria five thousand years ago, on those of Rome two thousand years ago and on medieval wharves right here in France until about a hundred years ago. This warehouse and these small cargoes were the way of the future, although they were still overshadowed *now* by the huge ocean freighters carrying 50,000 tons of wheat from Canada, the United States, Argentina and Australia.

This would gradually cease and, in fact, was declining daily as anyone could read on Lloyd's website. North American agribusiness was already so mechanized that the fuel crisis was cutting deeply into production. And the soil of North America's prairies, once (for a brief time) the breadbasket of the world, was so depleted by chemical fertilizers that the yield-per-acre was already declining, and was propped up only by ever-newer chemical combinations and genetically modified grain that could accept them as nutrients. The entire 20th century house of agricultural cards was folding in upon itself, and had been doing so for some years.

It was this local produce, using little mechanization, fewer chemical fertilizers and disdaining genetically specialized strains of age-old organisms selected only by nature and human knowledge of it, that would survive to sustain the next century, the 21st, *ours*. The unknown answer to the unspoken question was a simple one. How many people could the old-new agriculture sustain? The old-new

Scripture

transportation methods, like *Jester*? I had given this a great deal of thought.

I had concluded that the present world might, if we were very lucky, represent the level of about 1930. If we were not so lucky, we could sustain a level of civilization and living of, perhaps, 1850-1870. In the first 'very lucky' scenario, only about half the present population would have to die. In the second, not-so-lucky scenario, two-thirds of the population would have to die.

Whether it would be the 1930 or the 1850-1870 scenario depended largely on the strength of Socialist politics and Socialist sentiments. That is, whether in a political movement to save as many people as possible (whether they had contributed anything or not beyond their over-rated sheer existence) we would fall from 1930 to about 1850-1870.

I figured that if we were courageous enough to accept the losses of mostly useless people *now*, we could hold the line at 1930 more or less. Misguided policies of 'humanism' to alleviate the shortages with 'equalization' would definitely and inexorably push us back to about 1850-1870.

No matter what, I had long ago resolved to be part of the surviving population, that half to one-third. At the end of my cogitation, I saw that it was really a genetic battle.

I thought that my genes and *being*, since I had been a soldier, writer and inventor, were *worth* more to humanity's present and future than the genes of anyone who had not contributed any courage, creativity or commitment to the world.

I always kept in mind that this attitude had to be softened by appreciation for the kinds of courage, creativity and commitment that I did not happen to manifest within my own psyche and behaviour. That's why I had proposed a long-term agreement to Joëlle. That's why someone who claimed to be named Mélusine was beside me in the passenger seat of Ivory. For lack of a better word, I called this 'Chivalry'. It was tempered by open-mindedness and as much humility as I could manage.

Scripture

The little man, in a somewhat ruffled suit and a ragged moustache proved to be the shipping agent. We said a few words of hasty greeting, shook hands, and started checking out the Calvados. The agent had already borrowed one of the wharf's ingenious manually operated and purely mechanical light-duty forklifts.

I took a very careful look at this clever contraption composed mostly, it seemed, of bicycle sprockets and chains. It required no fuel except muscle-power, but was a wheel-supported forklift that could lift a skid of 250 kilos (call it 500 to 550 pounds). I studied it carefully, thinking of the warehouse at Aiguillon, while Mélusine asked the agent to open a bottle in a case with his corkscrew. He'd also brought a bag of many extra corks and a cork-inserting tool.

Mélusine came up to me while I was more or less memorizing the forklift's innards. "This is very good Calvados," she whispered. "In fact, I have had far worse in good restaurants. It has preserved the true aroma of the autumn, as Calvados should."

So, as Mélusine sampled a bottle from each case, and as soon as the corks were replaced, I took a load of ten cases back to *Jester* tied up at the ramp. I had to stow the cases so that they would not shift. This took a few minutes with each load so that by the time I returned another load was usually waiting for me. I noticed that Mélusine did reject some cases and they were stacked to the side of the principal pile. Once, when I came back for another load, I had to wait while the corks were replaced in the bottles of two or three cases. "What's wrong with those," I asked, pointing to the apparently rejected cartons.

"They smelled bitter to me," said Mélusine. "I think they were from apple trees that grew on a side of the orchard near a road or highway. The trees, they were not happy breathing car exhaust. They made bitter cider. So, bitter Calvados."

I had to drive nineteen times back and forth to *Jester* before all my cargo was loaded. The agent perched aboard *Ivory* with Mélusine as we wuffed the last trip up the long aisle toward the rectangular glare of sunlight at the far end of the wharf's warehouse. It was getting warm, but I just

Scripture

unzipped my windbreaker. His count and Mélusine's tallied: 157 cases. At our agreed price, the cost of the cargo was a bit less than 12,000 Euros. I went into a far corner in the shadows and counted out the exact amount from my money-belt. I kept a firm hand on it and stuffed it down into my jeans.

The agent took the wad, counted it carefully, and gave me a floridly stamped Bill of Sale denoting the 157 cartons of 24 1-litre bottles each of Calvados. Another stamp, this time from his pocket, said 'Cherbourg' in grand letters over his signature. And so we parted, shaking hands again, and I took his business card. On the back of it he wrote the name of the vintner – if that's the proper word for someone who produces apple cider and Calvados. The whole transaction and loading had taken about three hours.

Mélusine and I were careful with the huge plastic-weave tarp I selected from my collection. This cargo of neatly rectangular cartons made a welcome change from this past summer's crazy cargo of Marcel Bouchard's small wooden wine casks. Ivory was invisible and unobtrusive, being loaded with cartons itself while others were stacked close beside it and all around and then as far forward as the ramp-door of the forward hull. We fitted the corners of the tarp at each corner, and wrapped the nylon belts around the whole lading, until it was maybe the neatest cargo I had ever shipped. It made a compact kind of wedge inside *Jester* because I had stacked most of the weight up near the rear hull, of course, to keep *Jester's* proper trim. This manner of loading effectively used the rear hull's flotation even though no cargo was stacked in the cabin.

Under power, I backed *Jester* away from the warehouse's ramp. Mélusine helped to secure *Jester's* landing craft-style ramp door and fold out the cutwater extension again. I let her bolt down the Chinese floor since my back and shoulder were starting to ache. When we were through, I decided, on impulse, to head back to the Club Nautique Sportif. I knew they had plenty of berths and the sky in the west was building up some clouds, I thought.

Scripture

“How much is it worth,” asked Mélusine beside me up on the poop with her knees over one of the great hinges.

“My guess would be about 40,000 Euros in Bordeaux, Agen or Narbonne,” I said. “But it would have to be sold in very small quantities to get that price. Carton by carton, almost bottle by bottle. To restaurants.”

“And how much did it cost just now, if you do not mind my asking?”

“A very little less than 12,000 Euros,” I said.

“That’s quite a lot of profit.”

“Is it? On the other hand, I have to get it there in one piece. To Narbonne? Call it 600 kilometres from here. I usually travel by canal – for safety’s sake – and that’s fuel all the way. Still,” I conceded, “if you’re careful, lucky and shrewd, you can make a good living. That’s more than most people these days.”

“Yes.”

“I thought about these times coming over ten years ago. So I worked while others played. I had this boat made and I came here where, I figured, I could work along the canals when the bad times started.”

“Yes, I know.” She paused. “When are you headed for Brittany?”

I pointed toward the west where some potentially troublesome clouds were assembling, as if for attack. She followed my pointing finger. “Tomorrow, if the weather’s good. I cannot take a chance on the hundred miles across the Gulf of St. Malo with this cargo. Do you feel how heavy the boat seems now?”

She nodded. “I think that would be wise.”

When I came back into the Club Nautique Sportif, I eased into a berth. Mélusine squeezed past me down the hatchway. I tied up securely and went to explain everything to Matilde, saying that I would pay for another day’s mooring if it did not look more promising by nightfall. I then went back to *Jester*, looking at her trim and computing all the intangibles I had learned in the Channel storm. She was down by the bows, of course, by almost a foot, leaving three feet of freeboard forward and not the usual four. Was it foolish to

Scripture

do what was in the back of my mind? And, of course, it was now September – *that* time of the year.

I went below to find that Mélusine had washed the few dishes from this morning, made up both bunks into passable day beds and was cooking a big lunch. She had gotten a pot of coffee going, too. I pulled the table back down so that we could enjoy luncheon in a civilized manner. Until the lunch materialized, I took out a chart and began some measuring. Mélusine glanced at me every once in a while.

Now, I *could* coast along the southern shore of the Cotentin Peninsula, with the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey (and many smaller ones) as something of a breakwater against the open Atlantic weather, and enter the Brittany Canals at St. Malo. This would be the safe and prudent passage. From St. Malo, I could eventually reach Aiguillon by an all-inland canal route. The operative word was ‘eventually’. I estimated that this route would require about three weeks, if I pushed it. The odds were very heavily in my favour, almost certain, that I would actually reach Aiguillon with the Calvados.

On the other hand, given *Jester’s* newly discovered seaworthiness, I could, just possibly, take several chances.

First, I could sail direct for Brest across the mouth of the Gulf of St. Malo. This would still not be *too* dangerous because it was only about a hundred miles to Brest and I could always run into the Gulf of St. Malo in threatening weather and find a haven in the lee of several islands, some large and some small. This passage would take about eight to ten hours, with a good Atlantic breeze. It *could* take as long as 24 hours under sail, the same 10 hours under power – but that used fuel, coal oil. That was the minor temptation.

Then came the horrible temptation, the Devil’s own concoction.

Dare I sail direct from Brest to the mouth of the Gironde? Across the notorious Bay of Biscay? When the season had just turned to equally notorious September? This was the month of equinoctial storms. It was a damned fool idea.

But one *could* have good weather luck, even in September in the Bay of Biscay, especially if one paid very close

Scripture

attention to the forecasts. The chart said that Brest was about 28 hours from the mouth of the Gironde – if *Jester* could make ten knots, that is.

And perhaps only a craft like *Jester* could be expected to make ten knots laden. An Indonesian *orembai* was a sort of cross between a mono-hull and a multi-hull. Lightly loaded, it was a multi-hull. Heavily loaded it was virtually a Chinese junk, a mono-hull. I had rendered this concept in steel and aluminium and specifically, the long wide keel under the forward and rear parts of the hull worked to trim *Jester*. I *could* blow compressed air into several compartments in this keel under the front hull and force part of the free water ballast out through small holes in the bottom. If the welds were still air tight.

This would raise *Jester's* front hull. In theory, it might raise the front hull sufficiently to reduce the surface friction considerably. With this load, *Jester* could not become a true multi-hull. She could *almost* become a multi-hull. Perhaps she could make those ten knots – with a good and constant breeze of about fifteen knots out of the west.

The trouble was, I had never tried it. Not once during the past ten years. If it worked as I had designed it so long ago, I could possibly make Aiguillon in about seven days instead of three times as long. The Chinese cutwater extension had worked in the Channel storm.

The down side of this diabolical plan was that I would not make Aiguillon at all, being somewhere at the bottom of the Bay of Biscay for eternity instead of on the inland canals for three extra weeks. I figured I *should* be able to ride out almost any storm *if I jettisoned the Calvados cargo*. Of course, the cargo of Calvados was intended for Aiguillon, and in several ways. And did I have the sheer strength to jettison this cargo quickly enough if worse came to worst? Altogether, it was a pretty problem of probabilities. It kept me occupied until Mélusine asked if she could serve lunch.

I talked to her about this while we enjoyed her rice-and-onion-stuffed spicy tomatoes with a delicious cheese topping and, once again, equally delicious garlic bread. I showed her

Scripture

the charts and the distances, giving her the dividers. “Mélusine,” I said, “you are a truly excellent cook.”

“Ah, but you have truly excellent... pots...? pans?”

“Call it cookware.” I had bought some extremely upscale copper-bottomed thick stainless steel cookware when I had outfitted *Jester* almost a decade ago. This alone seemed to have cost a minor fortune. And I had bought a few other implements since that Joëlle had recommended from time to time. And I had used them. The Magdalene Mandala adventure had interrupted my self-taught course in Languedoc and Roussillon cookery that had even impressed Mariko O’Shaughnessey.

In London, we had eaten to live and not the other way around in the approved French manner. We shopped at the giant Tesco supermarket a long block westward from the Kensington Arms at the intersection of Earls Court. I had to admit that Tesco’s stock of ready-to-cook prepared meats and prepared vegetable ensembles far surpassed anything I had seen in the United States or Canada. The mix of tastes was well chosen and nutritious, the basic and all-important quality of the vegetable components was very high, the seasonings added were imaginative and piquant without being over-bearing and the packaging was both thrifty and highly practical. During seven years in France I had never seen a supermarket even remotely approaching Tesco’s high standards.

Nonetheless, even Tesco’s pre-prepared dinner components could not compare with Mélusine’s productions. These bordered on true gastronomie.

Mélusine glanced up from the charts. “I understand the... chance... the gamble,” she finally said. “Do you mind if I try something?”

“Go ahead,” I said. “I am interested.”

She closed her eyes and spread her hands out, finger extended. She held her hands out just above the surface of the chart and moved them back and forth over the two legs of my course. First, from Cotentin to Brittany. Back and forth, back and forth. This went on for some time and I would normally have become impatient, but I remembered

Scripture

that I had nothing else to do this afternoon except for watching cloud accumulation. Finally, she finished and looked at me. “The... voyage from Cherbourg to Brest will be no problem... but we will leave unexpectedly tonight. You will be in Brest all day tomorrow, however.”

Then she turned her attention to that crazy Brest-Gironde crossing of the entire Bay of Biscay. This took even longer, and her expression was sometimes pained, but it gradually brightened. She looked up at me and her eyes seemed troubled. “It is like this,” she said. “On the whole, it will go well, if you set out when a storm is approaching Brest. It will... go away... but only for a day or longer because it will go to the south. Then it will come in your direction here...” she pointed at the mouth of the Gironde. “If you know this, you will try to get into the Gironde as quickly as possible.”

“I would do that, for damned sure, anyway,” Mélusine.

“Yes, but you must make every effort from *here*...” she pointed offshore of the Ile de Ré “... or there will be a disaster. I see death, perhaps.”

I swivelled the chart toward me and pointed as I spoke. “The Cherbourg to Brest leg...”

“La jambe?” she said, obviously puzzled.

“Er... part... segment,” I said slowly and saw her finally nod. “Well, I had already figured that it would be pretty much like that – without the Sight – just with navigation. It is the Brest to the Gironde... *jambe*... that bothers me,” I said.

“Yes, I know that bothers you. But this journey is all one... one... *movement*.” She shrugged, but I nodded. “We must leave Cherbourg when the weather *seems* threatening because that is part of the same storm that will move *comme ça*...” her finger scrolled over the chart in an arc to the southeast, “... to hit you *there*.” Her finger stabbed precisely where she had indicated previously – some miles northwest of the Ile de Ré. “That is why, even if the weather seems good there, you must make all energy to get to *here*.” Her finger tapped inside the Gironde estuary.

Now, although Mélusine probably did not know it... except, perhaps, from ages of lore on the Ile de Sein... what she was describing was a weather pattern I had intuited from

Scripture

the occasional Bay of Biscay weather report I had happened to hear. The Atlantic coast had not been my area of operation during my years in France. I had stuck to canals, from Bordeaux to Narbonne, mostly, with the odd trip as far as Marseilles. I had noticed, or had *seemed* to notice, that some (not all) Atlantic storms seemed almost to hit the Cotentin Peninsula and then sort of bounce off the land to arc southeastward to hit hard at about the Ile de Ré. They made a mess of the Bay of Biscay en route. I had seen a photograph once that still provoked nightmares. A 60,000-ton battleship awash back to the bridge in huge waves with the mild caption: ‘Heavy weather in the Bay of Biscay.’

I regarded Mélusine speculatively across the table.

“Oui?” she said.

“Well, if you are correct about the first leg, you get to Brest tomorrow and that’s that. If you’re wrong about the Brest to Gironde *jambe*, I’ll probably be lost at sea with *Jester* and the Calvados. If I take this crazy gamble, you’ll think of me from time to time, won’t you?” I smiled.

Then she really surprised me. “I will go with you from Brest to the Gironde,” she said. “Besides, you will need me. I must play the harp and enchant the storm *here*,” she pointed northwest of the Ile de Ré again. “So that you can get safely *there*.” And her fingernail moved down into the Gironde again.

“If this is witchcraft...”

“Wicca.”

“– it sure takes at least some of the luck out of being a successful trader.”

“It always did, in the old days,” she said, regarding me steadily. “A good trader always needed luck too. But that is the... ah... *département*... of a capricious god, not a judicious goddess.”

“Hmmm.” I paused for along minute. “Yes. Loki.”

“We do not often speak of Loki. He is... how do you say...? A bump... in the patterns.”

“Okay, Mélusine, how will you get back to your beloved Brittany? Of course, if this works it will save me a lot of

Scripture

money and time. Time is money, come to that. I will give you some train fare and some extra living money.”

“Thank you, Marc Rennsalaer, I know you by now and I trust you. There are bigger patterns at work here than you can see, I think. It may be that I shall not see Brittany for a very long time. There is a college of dru... of... us, in Bordeaux, so I shall not be lonely in the south. You need me now, I think. Also...” she sounded puzzled, “... there is a woman somewhere in this pattern. She is very special, but she does not yet know what she is. She has had no teacher.” She said this in a sort of sing-song and dissociated way. Maybe she was just mildly deranged. And I was considering taking on the Bay of Biscay in September with someone who would ‘enchant’ the storm with a bog oak harp? I was the one who was deranged, and not mildly. Perhaps Mélusine was contagious.

“Hmmm.” She was correct, in a way. For I was feeling some sort of urgency about reaching Aiguillon, an urgency I could not quite define. It was a sense of great peril – for Joëlle? – that caused me to consider the crazy plan at all.

I went topside and had a long look at *Jester* and Ivory. The reason why the vehicle was ‘integrated’ was that Ivory carried all the tanks for compressed air. The compressor itself was aboard *Jester* and was run by the steam engine. Ivory’s tanks of compressed air were ‘fuel’ for the vehicle, but also a reservoir of ‘fuel’ or ‘propulsion’ for the air-cannons in the whistle-tubes that flanked the smokestack.

These air-cannons had won the battle of the Lac des Doigts against the Scandinavian Sleipnir attack helicopter. And Ivory had saved our lives off Le Croisic – when Mariko had renamed the vehicle ‘Victory’ – ‘Vehicular Integrated Compression Tanks on Rennsalaer’s Yacht’. This had been a peace feeler against my American penchant for anagram-assault.

Crouched beside the wheelhouse, I turned on the compressor – I always left the steam engine ticking over on ‘simmer’, about 50 revs. The thing had enough torque, God knows, to take the extra load of the compressor with only a minor upward adjustment of coal oil to the boiler. Even

Scripture

though Ivory was covered by the tarp, I could see from the compressor's gauge that the air pressure was building up toward 175psi in all the ten scavenged scuba tanks.

Atmospheric pressure was only about 15psi, give or take, so I valved some of the air from wheelhouse levers into the floodable compartments of the keel under *Jester's* front hull. I had never tried this, except when testing the boat when it was first launched back in Toronto almost ten years ago, during my seven-plus years on the French canals. I *had* covered all the air hoses with 'Longlife Rubber Conditioner' religiously every three months and I *had* checked the bicycle-type valves of the rubber nipples at the same interval.

Now, came the acid test, with five tons (more or less) of Calvados in the front hull, but with (as I have explained) most of that weight snuggled up against the immense flotation of the rear hull. The great stainless steel hinges, plus the vertical stainless steel box-sections joining the two hulls in stainless steel sleeves, took the stress of this weight.

I clambered down to the dock and saw bubbles all around *Jester*. The front hull came up out of the water several inches. She was no longer down by the bow, but at least partly supported by the *orembai* keel. Finally, the actual flow of bubbles seemed to increase markedly. I took this to mean that all the water had been expelled from the inflatable tanks in the keel, so I clambered back aboard and up to the wheelhouse and cut off the flow of compressed air. I went back to sit on the dock, pseudo-lotus fashion, and contemplated the front hull's waterline.

After an hour of TM (Transcendental Meditation) on air leakage I discovered that my unused air connections *did* leak – but not much. I could keep the front hull even in an *upward* trim with a zap of compressed air every hour or so.

No, the air in the available hollows in the keel under the front hull would not convert *Jester* into a true multi-hull. Not with almost five tons of Calvados aboard, but the air did bring the front hull up in the water so that the wetted surface of the larger steel sides of the bottom barely kissed the water – at rest at the Club Nautique Sportif's berth, that is. And the

Scripture

air would have to be topped up every hour or so. There was some slow leakage from somewhere, either through the welds of the aluminium or through the disused rubber-tire fittings to the tanks. More likely from these neglected fittings than from the welds, I thought.

“What do you think?” This came from Mélusine now sitting on the poop beside the wheelhouse.

“Mélusine,” I said. “I am gratified to find that the flotation tanks leak only a little. I tend to think it is the fittings, which have not been used for ten years, and not the actual aluminium welds. *Jester’s* a bit up by the bow, not down like she was before, and she can be kept that way. She is almost a multi-hull, not quite, but I believe that the surface friction will be reduced considerably. In short, *Jester* may well make the desirable ten knots. Not anything compared to magic, of course, or witchcraft.”

“Jesus,” said Mélusine. “Can I come down there and... er... presume... to educate you?”

“Not unless you bring a beer.” But I looked up into the sky, and especially into the west. The clouds looked black and purple out over the Atlantic. Not so good.

After some few moments, I heard Mélusine clamber down over *Jester’s* gunwale, a movement punctuated by a tasteful ‘gong-like’ sound as one of her Nike’s banged on the steel hull. I imagined Zen Buddhist monks drawn to prayer from Japanese rock gardens. After a while, I felt the cold can of beer pressed into my hands while my eyes were yet surveying the heights. I popped the tab of Pirate, not a good beer, but cheap and all that was now available in some places in Europe. It came from the Netherlands, had an illustration of Long John Silver and a Parrot on the label, and could be found most anywhere. I find that the better European beers, like Stella Artois, Union Spazier and Amstel have a slightly soapy taste after one has sampled Molson’s Canadian.

“There are many kinds of magic, Marc Rennsalaer.” I said nothing to that, and so she continued. “This boat is magic. That vehicle – Ivory? – is magic. You yourself are magic. You shouldn’t be afraid of women’s magic. It is no more or less than your own. We only pay attention to different...

Scripture

ah... proportions and... ah... relationships. You pay attention to weights, measures, capacities and the relationships between them. We pay attention to different weights, measures and the relationships between them. That is all.”

“Hmmm.”

“Those weights, measures, capacities and relationships are... how do you say... emotional ones, not physical ones, and yet they are just as real as the truths that have dictated your life. The... ah... tragedy is that too few men can understand women’s reality – et... and... I sometimes... pense... think, even fewer women can appreciate men’s reality.”

“That’s why men think of women’s reality as witchcraft, or ‘women’s intuition.’”

“Précisément... but this boat is ‘men’s intuition’, and magic, at least to me and I am accounted a Seer.” She paused. “If we live, Marc Rennsalaer, it will be because of your magic – which I don’t understand – and mine, which you don’t understand.”

“Perhaps,” I said, “both kinds of magic may work together.”

“That was ever... always...? our only chance.”

“Well,” I said, somewhat dryly, “if *your* magic is true, then we should leave pretty soon.”

I looked up at the sky and, although it was still angry toward the west, the clouds no longer drifted toward us. They seemed to have stopped heading eastward and were being propelled southward. I naturally attributed this to a clockwise cyclonic storm system that had somehow been deflected off the Cotentin Peninsula and southward along the coast. Perhaps a rising column of hot air from the Peninsula had done it. Maybe the Brittany Peninsula would hold it at bay, for a few days or hours in confusion, but the open Bay of Biscay would invite it into the southeast corner of Atlantic France.

“You are correct. Our pattern is... begun... starting.”

Mélusine scurried below. As for me, I watched the clouds veering sharply southward and then went aboard *Jester* to

Scripture

check the compressor – the belts had not been used since the Lac des Doigts – and backed *Jester* out of the Club Nautique Sportif. I steamed rapidly between the Grande and Petite Rade breakwaters this time, since there was no oncoming traffic (I suppose that the threatening weather had caused the local boats to scurry for shelter hours earlier).

Like an idiot, once we cleared the southern headland, I turned *Jester* to port for Brittany and Brest. And, just to make the idiocy complete, I de-clutched the engine, reduced the revs to ‘simmer’ and raised the three starboard sails. Occasionally, I fed bursts of compressed air into the forward keel. I estimated the wind at about 15 knots from the west, 25 knots in gusts, and *Jester* was making about 9 knots on a virtual beam reach. It was going to be a long afternoon and a longer night. The sky to the west was full of low, black clouds and the sun was now behind them. So, the afternoon was dark.

Knowing very well that I should have been heading the other way, toward the shelter of Cherbourg and not out of it, I decided to complete the folly. I raised the portside main and this gave *Jester* another knot. In the gusts, I had to free the sheets considerably, and then haul them in again. On the whole, *Jester* seemed stable enough.