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We had cleared Cherbourg about three o'clock in the afternoon in a confused chop with waves about six feet high, but no real pattern to them. The swells were rebounding from the coast and, somewhere out in the Atlantic they had once been driven in some other direction by a strong wind. At sundown I began to see a sprinkle of tiny lights far off to port. Some of them were extinguished from time to time and I took these for Guernsey and Jersey changing position relative to *Jester* sailing past.

When the sun actually sank, it was as if a black velvet wall came down around *Jester*. I steered a little west of due south by the softly glowing binnacle. Not too much westing because I didn't want to run up against the Ile de Sein myself. After all, I needed no sorceress ashore. I had one on board. I rather hoped that I could thread the channel between the Ile de Sein and Cape Finistère at the western end of the Brittany Peninsula. There were supposed to be powerful lighthouses on either shore.

And, sure enough, by 11 o'clock that night, I thought I could see the faint wand of light every few seconds from the lighthouse on Cape Finistère off the port bow. A little later, I picked up the barest finger of light every few seconds from the light on the Ile de Sein. It was a little too fine on the starboard bow for my liking, so I steered a bit more southerly. Of course, there must have been a current setting out of the Gulf of St. Malo toward the west. I had not consulted Blondel's tide tables for Brittany because I had read in too many boating books that Blondel's predictions were invariably wrong. It was a stupid thing to try to thread between Cape Finistère and the Ile de Sein, at night, when I knew very well that a storm was just to the west out in the Atlantic. The two suggestions of lights gradually became actual dim beams, and then stronger ones.

Mélusine stayed with me, in a manner of speaking. Every hour or so she came into the wheelhouse and asked me if I wanted anything. She also said that she could steer a boat.

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And at about 11:30 when the two beams were a bit more definite I let her steer between them while I, on a lifeline snapped to the toe-rail around the cabin, relieved my bladder to leeward. She brought me some hot chocolate after that.

By midnight, *Jester* seemed equidistant between the two slowly pulsating lighthouse beams. And by 1:00 in the morning, the first pair of leading lights peeked at me coyly from behind a headland of Cape Finistère. All I had to do was follow successive pairs into Brest. I called brusquely to Mélusine and she came into the wheelhouse at once. I told her to take the wheel and steer *directly* for the two lights. Me, I turned on a pair of masthead lights to flood the deck with wan light, although this wasn't strictly nautical.

I dowsed the sails, starting with the port main, and then worked to windward with the three starboard sails. So many sails (six) might seem cumbersome, and it was sometimes, but they were all identical and they were all small. And, being all full-battened variations on a Chinese lug, they came down like window blinds. In spite of the fact that there were six of them, I had never experienced any difficulty in raising or lowering these sails. As a single-hander most of the time, I had resisted the temptation to have fewer but larger sails. These worked very well, and one didn't *have* to use all six. I only had to furl four, for example, tonight.

I took the wheel again, and steamed at ten knots under steam power along the rather convoluted channel, past the several protecting breakwaters, into the heart of Brest. I decided to tie up alongside the government dock. This offered, so the Pilot Book said, storm mooring behind the breakwaters to any vessel, any time. For ten hours I had been *afraid* of the storm, if not actually running before it. Maybe this counted. And I was happy to see two other boats – one seemed like a fishing boat and one seemed more yachty – tied up further along the mole.

As soon as the tire-fenders were over the side and I had double-checked the mooring lines, I locked *Jester* and went into the cabin. I was more than tired; I was exhausted. So, I just sat on the side of my bunk and drank another cup of

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Mélusine's hot chocolate. She had put the table down. It had been washed off spic and span.

"We did it," she said, and smiled.

"Yes... And maybe we were very, very lucky. I don't know if I... we... should tempt fate like that again."

"Is there a yacht club here?"

"Several. There's also a commercial harbour and many moorings for fishing boats and barges." Brest, too, like St. Malo, was a terminus for the inland canals. Some canal barges that never put to sea did unload their wares in the safety of Brest's well-protected harbour. As a registered barge, I could use the commercial moorings if I could find a place there. It was much cheaper, too, a nominal fee.

"We must stay at Brest today, you know," she said. "The storm will hit here and then... how do you say...? rebondir..."

"Bounce off."

"Yes... bounce off... Brittany and go back out to sea. When it has gone, that is when you must leave."

"If I don't choose the inland canals."

"Yes. That is so." Then she paused. "Where is the University of Western Brittany – from here – do you know?" I didn't, but she had a folded chart beside her on the bunk. She placed it on the table. I pulled it toward me and saw that the government wharf where we lay was only a few blocks from the University. I pointed with my finger. "Not far, as a matter of fact," I said. "Look, regardez, a matter of ten minutes walk."

"How long can you stay here?"

"I don't really know. A day or so, I would imagine."

"Good. That's all you need, I think."

Perhaps. I had to think very carefully about that. I squeezed past the end of the table and rinsed my cup, putting it into the ridiculously small wire drain board beside the sink. The galley was spotless. I returned and raised the table up to the ceiling. I fumbled with my belt and Mélusine withdrew discreetly toward the head. I was glad that she did because I could shrug out of the Walther's shoulder holster and the money-belt beneath the windbreaker and flannel

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shirt. These items I temporarily stowed beneath the foam mattress under my pillow along with the Beretta from the drawer, as an afterthought. I had had no time to open my cache in the keel. I smoothed the pillow to look just as it had before.

Mélusine returned after a fairly decent interval, I admit, but it was to find me stretching out of my jeans. I stood up in my very brief French-style briefs and peeled the tee shirt over my head. “You know, I think I’ll take a shower,” I said. Then, remembering the Walther, Beretta and money-belt under the mattress under the pillow, I shocked her by saying, “Want to come along?”

“Ah... oui... bien sûr... si vous voulez.”

“I do.”

As it turned out though, Mélusine sat on the toilet while I stripped out of the briefs in the shower, and showered. I also washed out the briefs while I was at it. I hung them over the steering shaft, as was my wont. One thing about a steam engine with a boiler: you seldom ran short of hot water, although I always conserved it. With the engine ticking over at about 50 rpm, there was also electricity from the generator, using the minimum of coal oil.

I stepped out of the tiny sit-down shower stall nude and after I had towelled off the front of me, I handed Mélusine the towel and turned my back to her.

Presently, she kept those hands busy and dried me off. She patted my legs apart, somewhat imperiously, I thought, and was *very* thorough with the towel. “Les couilles, elles sont très dures... Your... ah... balls are very... hard”, she said. “Comme des pierres.” By the time she was finished, I had the erection that I had been getting, off and on, all day.

“Thanks,” I said. I hung the damp towel over the steering shaft, letting her see everything there was to see, and padded off toward the bunks.

“I haven’t looked in your bunk... closets...” she said.

“Drawers. I know.”

“How?”

“Well, Mélusine, you’ve cleaned everything else, but you didn’t clean those.” I knew this because my notebook and

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other items had not been moved – and some had been balanced securely, but purposefully.

“I could have looked,” she said.

“Did you?”

“Non.”

“I didn’t think so.” The notebook had been lightly wedged inside the lip of the drawer. If the drawer had been opened, it would have fallen flat inside. The other two drawers had similar impromptu devices.

“Then why did you invite me into the shower?”

“To give you a thrill.”

“... Trill...?” I heard her mumbling right behind me.

“Un petit frisson...” I said.

She laughed as I sat down on my bunk. “Mélusine, do not doubt that I will tell you to go into the wheelhouse or into the head... er... bathroom or on deck when I want to do something private, like hiding money.” She nodded. “In fact, you have the choice of the bathroom or the wheelhouse now. Make it the bathroom, I said as an afterthought, it’s probably warmer in there.” She nodded, and left.

I unlocked my secret cache, which I have described at length elsewhere, and deposited the Beretta and the money-belt inside. This took only a few moments, but I also took the opportunity to check the action on the AR-15 and to look at the clips and cartridges to see if there were any signs of rust or corrosion. There weren’t, but then I had given them a light coating of oil in London. I checked the much-depleted air-cannon magazines, too. I would have to fabricate some more projectiles in Aiguillon, since I had not wanted to do *that* in London. With the spate of suicide bombings that had forced Britain out of America’s ongoing and ill-fated Iraq war, the British police were understandably touchy about anyone fabricating terrorist-like munitions. They kept a discrete, but highly effective, watch on the sale of certain nitrates.

When I had re-locked the cache, keeping a selection of Euros and Francs for immediate use, I called to Mélusine that she could come out. I heard the... bathroom’s... door unlock noisily, presumably so that I would know that she had really closed it, and she rejoined me at bunk side.

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“Would you like me nude or barely covered,” I asked.

“Nude, s’il vous plaît.”

I lay down on my bunk and switched off my private little reading light. *Jester’s* cabin was dark, but for her reading light. “About your hands...” I said.

“Oui?” she answered.

“You are truly good with them?”

“Yes. Very.” Then she hesitated. “Maintenant?”

“No. Surprise me, *Mélusine*... if you really want to, that is.”

She giggled, an odd sound for a middle aged woman to make, I thought. Looking at her across the narrow corridor of the thick keel that worked the magic of an *orembai* to give standing headroom in a low hull, I saw that her face was handsome, in that lighting, at any rate. It was the fine bones of her face that did it, the brightness of her frank eyes, her flawless skin except for laugh-lines around her mouth and eyes, and her smile. “*Bien sûr*,” she said. After some moments she asked, “We are fairly secure at this mooring?”

“Very.”

“Then, if you don’t mind, I will undress as if we were.”

“Not at all.” I knew what she meant. Last night, she must have slept in her jeans, as I often did, against the possibility of having to move quickly. Her concerns may have been because of an unknown personal situation, not primarily the weather or an external human threat.

At length, her own light clicked off and I think we were both asleep very quickly. It had been a long day.