



BIRDS of **the Storm**



The story of
Marjorie Ozanne's
Bird Hospital

ERNEST-VIVIAN COLTMAN



BIRDS OF THE STORM

The story of Marjorie Ozanne's bird hospital on Guernsey really began in 1940 when the Nazis occupied the island. Many of those who escaped to the mainland left behind their pet birds, which Marjorie rescued and sheltered in her own home. Aided by her friend, Nell, she carried on her own secret "war" with the Nazis to save them from destruction and feed and protect those injured and helpless.

Against a fear-laden background she dedicated herself to rescuing and protecting the birds, half-starving herself and bartering clothes and shoes in order to provide them with food. Her concern was such that eventually even the Germans helped her, including the dignified, jackbooted Dr. Ortmann. The storm of war passed, but the winds and seas continued to batter Guernsey and leave bird-victims in their wake. Marjorie's hospital also continued and today she is famous throughout Europe for her ornithological knowledge and experience in the treatment of sick birds; it is a fame well justified: her hospital cares for hundreds of birds every year, ranging from toucans and seagulls to puffins and cormorants. Some have been injured and marooned on cliff faces and rocks, others have become oil-clogged. In the majority of cases it is a matter of life and death. Her patients overflow into her home, taking over the bedroom and bathroom, but her biggest headache are those who don't wish to leave her.

This is essentially a "bird" book, but it is also a human story, providing a graphic example of how the Samaritan instinct can exist and persist against the most adverse circumstances.

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THE STORY OF MARJORIE OZANNE
AND HER BIRD HOSPITAL ON THE
ISLE OF GUERNSEY



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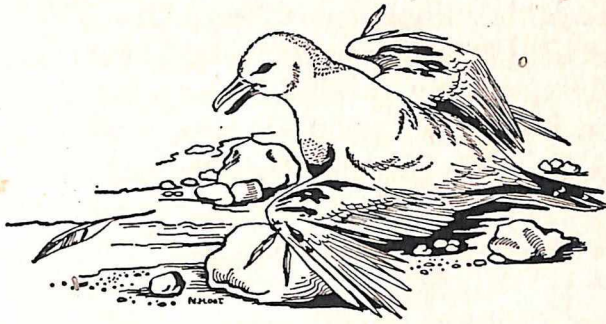
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Chapter One

I

It was like a scene from some comedy-show. Three fishermen and a gannet on a windy beach. They gazed at each other with mutual distrust. The gannet glowered, his eyes cold-blue, and the men if not exactly scared of it were uneasy and wished the sinister-looking bird would fly away.

The windswept beach was big enough for the gannet or the men to run. But the bird couldn't run and neither would the men. The gannet was covered from his neck to his tail-feathers with thick tarry oil, and the men felt they ought to try to do something about it.

Then clambering over the grey rocks came a small figure striding purposefully towards the bird. Her mop of white hair was blown high by the wind. She was half the height of the men.

'What's the matter with you all?'

Her voice rang out across the beach, loud enough to top the wind.

One of the men answered her in Guernsey French patois. They didn't know what should be done about the gannet. When they made a move to help it the bird blew out its feathers to attack them.

The woman thought to herself that it would be more difficult to assess who was the more scared, the men or the gannet. With a good-humoured laugh she turned to the bird. What happened was so quick that the three fishermen never realized how it happened.

The gannet's wing-span was a good six feet, as it began to demonstrate there and then. But the woman was the quicker. Before the bird knew what was happening, its long powerful beak was caught in a firm gloved hand and its big body was tucked firmly under a strong arm.

The trio watched open-mouthed as she marched off with the gannet. They watched until the bird and the woman had disappeared.

'She's got a way with her,' they nodded to each other. 'She's got a way with birds.'

They all knew her, of course, by name and by sight. Wherever you go, not only on Guernsey but around the Channel Islands and the French coast across the water, they know of *Marjorie Ozanne*. 'The bird woman,' they say, or 'the lady who heals the birds.' They talk of her in almost the same sort of reverence as a child will speak of a story-book magician.

Marjorie Ozanne's name means magic.

Today, giant aircraft circle over Guernsey's airport, bringing birds of all kinds from Sark and Herm,

Alderney and Jersey and the south of England, as well as from the Continent, all to be healed by one woman's magic.

'That's our twentieth today, Nell,' the little woman smiles as she clips and cleans the gannet's feathers. Nell holds the bird still and glances up at the sky.

'There'll be more - there's storms to come yet.'

Marjorie pauses as the last of the tar is cleaned off.

'Yes,' she nods. 'We'll have some more brought in tonight.'

The gannet is quiet by now. In his dazed state he is becoming used to being inside a house, used to this small woman, strong as she is gentle, who washes him clean of the dread oil, and handles him so deftly. As if mesmerized by Marjorie's infectious loving firmness, the bird is undismayed by the strange array of gulls and owls, blackbirds and thrushes that amble in and out of the room, with three cats also trying to get a look in at the fireside.

He lets himself be picked up and taken out through the cages in the garden aviary to join fifty or more other sea-birds, all trying to preen their shorn feathers. All suffering from the after effects of that terrible oiling that forms a death-dealing scum on the surface of the stormy seas.

Anxiously the tall, ungainly gannet begins preening himself, stopping suddenly to eye in the opposite corner of the large wire-netted cage, another gannet. A hen-bird. He struts towards her. Their beaks meet.

'Love at first sight,' chuckles Marjorie. Her magic and the island magic has begun to work.

Perhaps it is this power, strange and wonderful, which has kept Marjorie safe through sixty years of storms and wrecks, war and ventures on mine-charged beaches and the near-starvation of Nazi-occupied Guernsey. Perhaps it is this which has brought healing life to her birds, which have become part of herself.

In Guernsey, the island magic begins when a child first learns that the stones jutting out from the cottage chimney-stacks are there as stepping-stones from which the witches take off on their night-time flights; or first hears the sound of horses riding across the sea at dusk when the rocks begin to turn to black against the shimmering sea. It casts its spell when an old sailor pushes back his beret from his weather-beaten forehead to tell of the ghosts of sailors he has seen, the cries of lost mermaids he has heard, and the wrecks, skeletons of once brave ships, he has explored.

It began for Marjorie Ozanne with the shadow of an owl sweeping through a darkened church, and a tiny chaffinch that nestled securely into the child's hands that held it.

It began long years ago, when that small girl with long pigtails flying, hurried home with hands carefully copped together about the baby bird.

II

Marjorie's father was verger, grave-digger and odd-job man at the Vale Church. At this time she was deeply

interested in her father's grave-digging. 'I learned all the aspects of the job and was soon helping him. Unlike my mother and sister, I hated sewing, so my job was in the cemetery with Father.'

Her mind goes back to when, as a tiny girl, she stood surrounded by the churchyard grass, swinging a heavy scythe. Her hair was long and she had to keep tossing it from her eyes. She was only ten but her arms and legs were strong, as brown as a sailor's. She swung the scythe with as much skill as a grown man.

Suddenly she pulled the scythe aside, stooped down and felt cautiously in the grass.

'Papa,' she called out. '*J'trouvé - viens tu voir, viens voir . . .*' The strident patois rang out through the graveyard and her father strode across to her, his spade on his shoulder. He bent his head next to hers. In her hands she was holding a tiny chaffinch.

They took it home together. For once Marjorie didn't run all the way home, instead she walked, carrying the bird cupped carefully in her hands, taking an occasional peep at it to make sure it was still alive.

Before they had quite reached home, Marjorie could see her mother standing at the door watching for them. '*Maman! Viens voir, maman!*'

Her mother came down the path towards them. This wasn't the first bird to be brought in, shivering and petrified at tea-time. Marjorie fed it from her fingers with warm bread and milk, then slipped it gently inside her blouse to make sure that some

warmth really penetrated the tiny shivering body. Then she remembered about having tea.

It was only a few days before the chaffinch was well again and ready to be taken out and set free. It hopped a couple of times across the grass before it fluttered its striped wings. Then it was away, and there were a few tears brushed hastily from Marjorie's cheek.

But she could never be sad for long. There would always be more birds. Mostly sea-birds. Living on an island the size of Guernsey it was impossible not to be aware of the sea, and of the strange sea-birds wheeling over the fields and the lonely cries of the gulls and cormorants.

It was inevitable that Marjorie should grow up to know about birds. It seemed obvious to her that if her mother put a sticky mixture of rum and seaweed on her sister's leg to heal it, then the same mixture would work wonders for a bird. She tried it once, when a neighbour complained about having a hen with a stiff leg. The cure worked. Marjorie had never doubted that it would.

In the First World War, when she was about eighteen, her father was ill for some weeks and she took over his job, digging graves, cleaning the church. 'I didn't think anything, then, of the grave-digging. It was a job that had to be done so I did it. I dug about two or three graves a week.'

Another job that had to be done in the church was the daily winding of the clock. 'My father was very proud that in all the years he had looked after it the

clock had never stopped. One night at about half past eleven, during the time he was ill. I remembered that I had forgotten to wind the clock that day. My sister couldn't come with me to the church because Father would have asked us where we were going. So I had to go alone.'

It was dark and eerie as she made her way through the cemetery; up the outside iron ladder on the clock tower, through the room where the ropes were, up through the bell-room and into the very peak of the steeple where the machinery was kept. It took ten minutes to wind the clock. Not liking the idea of going through the cemetery again on her way back, she came through the church. Through the west door to the vestry and in to the main aisle of the church.

All at once she smelt lilies and there in front of her in the aisle was a coffin on trestles. 'I wouldn't have minded if I had known it was there, but they had brought the man from Jersey to be buried that afternoon while I was working in the cemetery and hadn't told me.' Quickly she ran down the aisle towards the main door, and then a great white shape suddenly loomed out at her. 'For a terrifying second I thought it was the ghost of the body in the coffin coming after me, until it gave a low hoot.'

For a long time afterwards Marjorie was to experience a shivery feeling of fear whenever she saw or heard an owl, associating them with her eerie experience in the Vale Church that night.

'It wasn't until the war, when I rescued an injured

owl and got to know it well, that I lost this fear and learnt what amazing birds they are and how affectionate, in their own individual way, they can be.'

Then there was one night when the sea lashed at Guernsey more angrily than it had done for months, the wind tearing against the sides of the houses making it impossible to sleep. The waves crashed rhythmically against the rocks and the fishermen's families in the tiny stone cottages at the edge of the sea listened to the waves against the stone wall. Then, somewhere near the south shore, a rocket hissed into the darkness. Then another. Somewhere there was a ship in trouble.

It was not until the next morning that Marjorie learned what had taken place during the night. By then, the whole of the island was talking of the wrecked French cargo ship. Now she was strewn in jagged pieces across the rocks, and as the tide at last turned back it laid her bare like a huge broken carcass.

As Marjorie made her way across the beach, the air innocently calm after the shattering storm, she could see the first men to reach the wreck climbing across the rocks and beginning to prise up the splintered wood of the crated cargo.

The gulls were circling round, but the shouts of the men as they opened the crates could be heard above their cries. Then they came leaping back, waving their hands in the air.

'What is it?' Marjorie turned to Nell Littleton, who was by then her closest friend from childhood days

Marjorie Ozanne,
right, and Nell
Littleton, bandaging
a gull's wing



Calming a hen while
putting its broken
leg in a splint made
with cotton-wool
and sellotape



This muscovy drake was swept away from a park during a storm and found exhausted on the shore at Guernsey

and who had joined her on the beach. 'What are they shouting about?'

The voices sounded more loudly across the stretches of sand, as the wind veered in the direction of the onlookers.

'It's wine,' someone said. 'Look, it's running over; it's all running over the rocks where the bottles have broken.'

A couple of boys whooped with excitement and set off for the wreck. Soon it was covered with men and women and children, all carrying out their own salvage operation. Soon, children were holding hands, swaying gingerly back across the rocks, their heads swimming with gulps of wine. Marjorie, followed by Nell, scrambled out with the rest. They managed to snatch three bottles of wine before the last ones were wrenched from the crates.

They raced back excitedly homewards. But on the way Marjorie came across a blackbird, its wing broken by the storm. It lay helplessly on the side of the road. The excitement of the wreck and the wine instantly forgotten, Marjorie knelt and carefully scooped the bird in her hands and cradled it gently to her. Nell, even then, marvelled at the quiet trust that the blackbird seemed to have in Marjorie's handling of it. 'She always had a magic way with birds. Even as a little girl.'

And so it was the injured blackbird that Marjorie took home, the bottles of wine left forgotten by the roadside.

'I would always be finding birds,' she recalls. 'Babies fallen from their nests. Birds caught by cats and half dead with fright. Or birds which had been stoned by boys.'

She would wander along the beaches, especially after a storm, looking for injured sea-birds. Their wings or legs might be broken, or sometimes they would be covered in oil, which not only prevented them from flying, but choked them or burned their insides as they tried to clean the filth off themselves.

These oiled-up birds would be rubbed down with Fuller's earth, which absorbs the oil, three or four times a day. 'The important thing is to rescue the bird before it has eaten too much oil. Once they have been trying to clean their feathers for more than about five hours they have consumed too much tar for you to be able to save them.'

Some birds had things stuck in their throats and she would put her fingers down their gullets and gently pull the obstruction out, give them something warm to drink and let them rest for a while before releasing them.

When she was about twenty Marjorie spent two years studying teaching on the mainland at Chichester. Then she returned to Guernsey happy to be back on the island of storms and birds, happy to be speaking the Guernsey French language again to the children at the school where she had herself been a schoolgirl, and now taught.

The days seemed to fall into a pattern much the same

as they always had been. In the morning and the afternoon there was school. Sometimes the children brought in injured birds which they had found, and Marjorie would patch up broken wings and legs. In the evening there was a trip to the Vale Church where her father still worked, to take him his supper, or hazardous hours fishing for mackerel in and out of the rocky coast, trying to dodge the squalls.

Then Marjorie's world began to change. Her mother, then her father died. Together, she and Nell built up a home between them, and she gave more and more time to birds, rescuing them from the sea and the storms that caught them in oil-patches or broke their wings. Sometimes it was a lame gull stranded on a rock, or a tiny sparrow fallen from its nest, or an oiled-up cormorant, or a neighbour's sick parrot.

III

Like all her friends that June, 1940, Marjorie Ozanne had never the slightest real expectation of any enemy attack on Guernsey. 'In fact,' she recalls, 'I remember now how I regarded it all as rather a joke, as I saw signposts being taken down, a machine-gun post being set up to protect the telephone exchange and heard from Alfred, brother of my life-long friend, Nell Littleton, that the local militia had been disbanded to let its members volunteer for more active service in England.'

Following the misleading months of the previous autumn's 'phony' war, there had come the Nazis'

sudden invasion of Holland and Belgium, then their terrifyingly swift advance across France after Dunkirk.

Now the sounds of war came from France, and as she stood on St. Martin's Point, Marjorie could see a great pall of smoke rising on the horizon from the French coast, as the retreating armies burnt their oil storage. A great black, ominous cloud rising up and up until it almost eclipsed the sun. At night she saw and heard the flashes of gunfire and explosions as the Germans came nearer and nearer.

It was on 10th June, 1940, that there were the first signs of people panicking in Jersey. That day came the arrival on Alderney of frightened French refugees in fishing-boats, crucifixes nailed to the masts, babies wrapped in shawls and brooms and pots and bundles heaped in the bottoms of the boats.

'About a week later it was announced over the radio that Guernsey was to be totally demilitarized and that preparations were being made for us to leave if we wanted to. Because it wasn't certain whether there would be enough ships to take all those people who wanted to go, it had been arranged that the children should leave first.' Parents had been coming to the school where Marjorie Ozanne taught in an anguish of indecision whether to send their children away on their own. Mothers were fearful of the expected air-raids on English cities, if not invasion. On the other hand there was their terror at the thought of the Nazis' arrival on Guernsey.

But to Marjorie, one of the most moving sights was

to see the queues of people bringing their cats and dogs into the town to be destroyed; hundreds of them, cats and pet birds, parrots, canaries and budgerigars.

It was the early hours of Wednesday, 19th June, and Marjorie Ozanne lay awake listening to the quick little footsteps of the children passing down the streets and lanes and their sleepy, excited chatter. A little later that morning she went to the quayside with a batch of children from the school and found two thousand already there. They had to wait nearly the whole day before the ships came to take them off. Troops and military equipment were being embarked at the same time and crush barriers had been erected in case any panic-stricken people rushed the boats. By Friday, five thousand children had left. A great silence came upon Guernsey. Parents looked sad and bewildered at being parted from their children.

A Trinity House vessel had come to take off the keepers from all the lighthouses round the islands. Marjorie felt that this was the end. The lighthouses would never be abandoned until the last moment, when the Nazis' arrival was imminent.

Meanwhile, the queues waiting to leave for England packed the narrow streets of St. Peter Port. People fainted in the heat and the crush, frightened crowds thronged down to the piers. Anxious, panic-stricken people were drawing money from the banks.

Confusion was everywhere, fears and forebodings increased by the continual arrival of boatloads of refugees on their way from France, their pitiful

belongings clutched to them, babbling frightening stories of the Nazis' atrocities.

All this time Marjorie had spent going round collecting the pet birds people had left behind. 'It was the only help I felt I could give. It was eerie to go into the houses suddenly left empty and find a last meal still on the table; half-packed suitcases indicating that someone had not even taken the permitted quota of two cases each for fear of being left behind. I remember clearly a children's nursery, the toy cupboard open, its contents strewn over the floor. I thought of a child desperately trying to make up its mind which toys to take with it.'

The streets were half empty. Shops were well-stocked, but no one behind the counters. Petrol-pumps, inns, cafés, were left deserted.

A front door swung open, it was easy to see that there was no one at all inside the house.

'Pretty boy . . . How d'you do then? Pretty, pretty boy . . .' A little perky voice chattered into the silence. Marjorie pushed hesitantly on the front door. Inside, in the corner of the room, a clothes-cupboard was left open, a few garments scattered in the bottom, last-minute rejects from a panic-stricken flight. On the table plates were hurriedly stacked on top of each other, with the remains of a hurriedly eaten meal. On one plate the food was still untouched.

'Come to mother, pretty boy . . . Ta-ta then, ta-ta . . .'

In the corner of the kitchen swung a covered bird-cage. Inside it, perched a blue budgerigar. Marjorie

lifted the cage down. The budgerigar put his head on one side and gazed steadily at her, and she put the cover over the cage again and hurried off with it. A little while later, she was carrying another cage, with a grey parrot squawking as it swung upside-down from its perch.

Some of the captive wild birds Marjorie was able to release. All the same, she had a hundred birds, among them five parrots and a toucan. The house which she shared with Nell already had a small aviary in the garden with a few birds Marjorie had accumulated over the years, but now she had to set about enlarging the aviary space as quickly and as best she could.

There followed days of suspense. Of waiting apprehension. All the time this strange, quiet eeriness lay over the island.

'I was in the garden binding up a blackbird's broken wing on the afternoon of 27th June,' Marjorie recalls, 'when I heard the drone of a plane. I looked up and there was a German plane flying backwards and forwards over the island, apparently surveying our defenceless state at leisure.'

Next evening, with hundreds of others, she was in the main street of St. Peter Port, on her way back home, after picking up the last of the birds left behind by their hastily-departed owners.

Lorries lined the quayside loaded with boxes of tomatoes to be sent to England. *The Isle of Sark*, a regular mail-boat which had started running again in the lull after the previous week's panic and confusion,

was bumping her sides on the jetty. She had just brought a party from Alderney with cattle.

Suddenly there was the spatter of machine-guns and the shriek and explosion of falling bombs. Nazi planes were diving at the harbour, regardless of the fact that Guernsey was utterly unarmed and had been declared an open island some days before. Two to three hundred intending mail-boat passengers with accompanying friends, including a number of children, were congregated on the quay when the raid begun. Some went into sheds, where they made themselves dug-outs of flour bags, and others on to the lower concrete platform underneath the jetty.

The Nazis' objective was apparently the line of tomato-lorries. Nearly every van or lorry was hit; Marjorie watched the petrol from the vehicles spread sheets of flames, burning to death many of the drivers who had gone under their lorries for protection. To add to the horror, horses and cattle from Alderney panicked and plunged loose. And the pulp from the smashed tomato-boxes mingled with the blood from the dead and wounded.

Haymakers were machine-gunned in the fields; fishermen in their small open boats; an ambulance carrying the wounded to hospital was spattered with bullets, killing one of the wounded and severely injuring one of the attendants. The Guernsey lifeboat was deliberately machine-gunned out at sea and the cox's son killed.

With the island demilitarized, the only defence came

from the eight anti-aircraft guns on the mail-boat *The Isle of Sark*. The raid, which started at 6.45 p.m. lasted for fifty minutes during which thirty-one people, twenty-seven men and four women, were killed; and thirty-eight men and nine women seriously wounded.

Numbed though she was by shock, uppermost in Marjorie's mind as she hurried back home was the safety of her birds. What on earth would happen to them when the Nazis came? What could she do to protect them? She didn't know. And not knowing made her all the more apprehensive.

Back at the house in Grange Road, which she shared with Nell, Marjorie stood in the kitchen. There were birds everywhere. Cages hung from the cupboards and stood on the table.

'Never realized I'd found so many,' Marjorie said to Nell. Then they set to sorting out the miscellaneous collection.

'There's a thrush here, can that go with the one we have already, Marj?' It couldn't, without starting off an almighty squabble.

'Pretty Jimmy,' suddenly shouted a green parrot from one corner of the kitchen, and pandemonium broke loose. It was late that night by the time every bird was finally settled in makeshift cages placed all round the conservatory next door to the kitchen.

'You don't think the Germans will stop me keeping them?' The thought had been niggling Marjorie's mind ever since the air-raid on the harbour. 'You know, Nell, I should mind that almost more than

anything else. They couldn't take the birds away, could they?'

Nell, too, thought back to the undefended harbour earlier in the evening. She had heard all about it from Marjorie. 'No - no, of course not, Marj.' She tried to make her tone sound convincing.

A look of determination filled Marjorie's face. She went out of the kitchen, to return in a moment with a paint-brush and a tin of black paint.

'Bring me a torch, Nell.'

They went out into the darkened conservatory. The rafters hung low from the roof. Marjorie opened the tin of paint, and began to print across the rafter:

'HERE SHALL NO EVIL TOUCH THEM.'

Satisfied, she replaced the lid on the tin, and they went back inside the house.

That night, when at last Marjorie climbed into bed, she looked at the ragged little starling swinging in a cage in the bedroom. He had been found by one of the schoolchildren caught behind a grating at the Vale School, where Marjorie taught. She had brought him home and fed him on bread-and-milk; he was too young and weak to put in the garden aviary. Now he refused to leave the house when he was freed. He preferred his cage, sitting with his head held inquisitively on one side, waiting for a chat before bed and a finger to peck at lovingly.

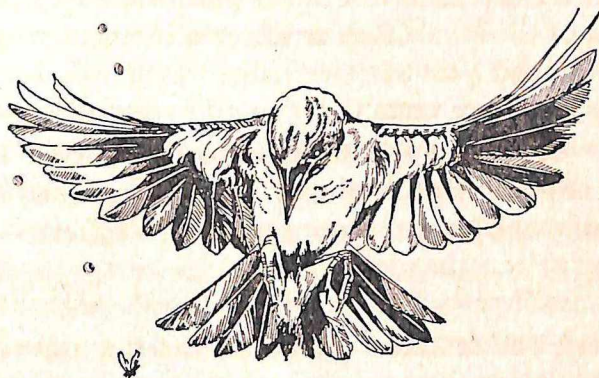
'Well, James?' Marjorie asked him anxiously. 'What do you think about it all?'

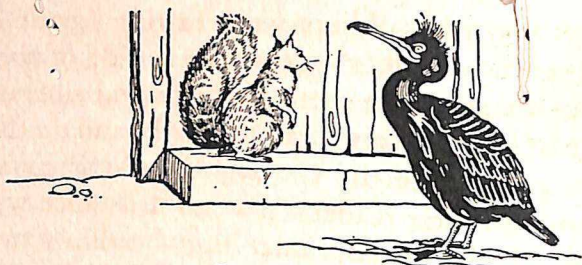
He gave a quiet, unmelodic squawk.

'Have I done the right thing? Have I taken on too much, James?'

James squawked again, a bit louder.

'I knew you'd agree with me.' Gently he closed his beak over her finger.





Chapter Two

It was two days after the air-raid, a peaceful sunny Sunday evening. Marjorie was in the conservatory giving the birds their final feed. 'Suddenly a lot of them began squawking and fluttering about and I couldn't think what was the matter. Then I heard the sound of aeroplanes. I rushed out and saw four German planes overhead, the black and red crosses clearly visible.'

Terror seized her as she stood there, certain the Nazis had come to bomb them again. She ran back into the conservatory instinctively to protect the birds. 'I don't know how I expected to be able to do so against bombs hurtling from the skies, but I felt that I had to be with them whatever happened.'

The planes passed over and, coming lower and lower, prepared to land at the airport.

The Nazis had arrived. Guernsey was the first piece of British soil to fall under the invader's heel since William the Conqueror reached England in 1066. 'Even now I can remember the odd, panicky feeling, my mind filled with end-of-the-world ideas, and I recalled my childhood Bible stories of Armageddom.'

Soon German soldiers were tearing about at high speed on motor-bikes on the wrong side of the roads. It was strange to see their uniforms and sinister swastikas, just as they were in photographs and on the films. Special editions of the *Guernsey Evening Press* and the *Star* notified their readers 'that no resistance whatever is to be offered'. Then, under huge headlines, were the first German orders to be issued on British soil.

A strict curfew was enforced from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. If anyone attempted to cause the slightest trouble, serious measures would be taken and the town bombed. All military orders had to be strictly obeyed. Spirits in pubs and shops had to be locked up immediately and further sales and consumption prohibited. No boats, including fishing-boats, were allowed to leave the harbour without military authority; and the use of private cars was prohibited, the sale of petrol only allowed for essential services. Blackout was to stay as it was; and the banks and shops were to open as usual. Under the order against Acts of Sabotage, the Nazis warned that any person who hid or helped escaped prisoners of war and other members of enemy forces would be punished by death.

What froze Marjorie's heart most was the Nazi decree that every pigeon on the island must be destroyed. 'They were frightened they would be used by spies to send messages. I had a little grey pigeon that I had found after it had fallen from its nest some months before. For some reason it had never fully grown, and because of its individuality I had grown extremely fond

of it. I knew I couldn't let it be killed, so I decided to dye its feathers.'

She remembered hearing stories of how, in the East, birds were dyed all colours and sold as rarities to the West. On the Continent, sparrows would be dyed yellow and sold as canaries. It was only when the birds moulted that the owner discovered he had been sold a common bird instead of an exotic rarity.

Marjorie was completely ignorant of the kind of dye she could use without harming the pigeon's feathers. Birds have what is known as a preening gland at the base of their tail feathers. This gland supplies the feathers with their natural oils. Whenever a bird preens itself it distributes this oil all over its feathers as it draws them through its beak. This conditions the feathers to enable the bird to fly in wet weather. If a bird didn't possess this natural oil, its feathers would become so waterlogged it would be unable to rise.

Marjorie realized, too, of course, that when the pigeon moulted she would have to re-dye him all over again. 'But how was I going to dye him, anyway? The awful thing was that I didn't have too much time, and nobody seemed to know anything about the technicalities of dyeing. It wasn't done on the island. Everything - clothes, hats, etc., were already manufactured when they came to Guernsey.' There were only the usual home-dyes that one bought in the shops. The method of most of these involved putting the garment into boiling dye to make the colour fast.

'What could I use that didn't necessitate such drastic

measures? Something that I could apply cold. I thought of bleaching the pigeon's feathers so that he looked like a white dove. But then I realized that to get a convincing effect I would have to use a very drastic bleach that might harm the roots of his feathers.'

It was Nell who suggested a Drummer dye. She said that one way of making a dye fast was to boil it, let it cool and then apply it. Marjorie bought one or two black and brown dyes and asked a chemist friend if they contained anything that might harm a bird, since when the pigeon preened himself he was bound to consume a little of what was on his feathers. The chemist said there was nothing harmful in the dye.

'So on the last day before the harsh Nazi rule came into operation, I dyed my little pigeon black. He looked rather like a cross between a blackbird and a crow. The process was very tricky. I had to do it bit by bit, so that it would dry quickly. I didn't want the bird flying around with wet feathers. I did the head and breast first, lightly brushing the top feathers two or three times - going over them again when they had dried until they were a good dull black. I wanted to see if I could get the required effect by just brushing the top feathers rather than getting right at the roots. I knew I would have to re-dye them anyway when the bird moulted, and so long as it looked reasonably like a blackbird I didn't see the need to dye the feathers more than was absolutely necessary. It took two or three hours and the dye never appeared to have

the slightest ill-effect on the pigeon whatsoever. All during the war I re-dyed him about once or twice a year.'

Pidgie, as he was called, was kept in the loft in the house, where his cooing was less likely to be heard.

The destruction of the pigeons was a terrible blow to Nell's sixty-year-old father, a retired greenhouse manager. For years he had kept about fifty birds for racing and showing. And when he retired he devoted all his time to them. They were his life's work and savings. He cried bitterly when they had to be killed and there was nothing anyone could do or say that would comfort him. Their death changed him from a sprightly, cheerful fellow to an old man deprived of his greatest joy in life.

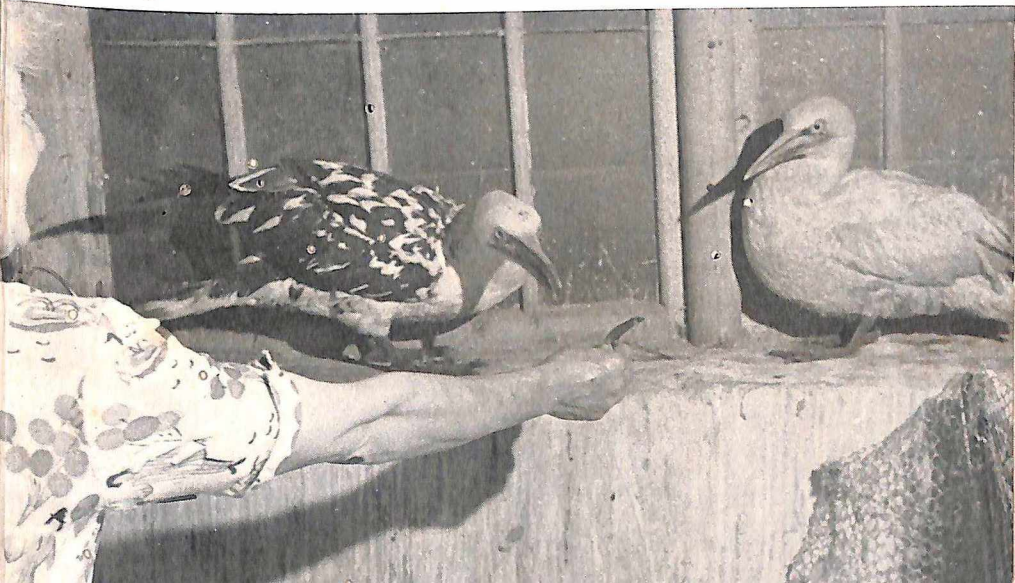
Billets had to be found for the Nazis directly they arrived. Nazi officers chose their houses with little consideration for the occupants. Elderly, sick, crippled and sometimes blind people were turned out indiscriminately. Some of the houses the higher Nazis requisitioned were respected and kept in order, but no supervision appeared to be given to those occupied by the troops. Many of the houses were subjected to wanton destruction and wholesale pillage and left in a state of indescribable filth.

The Nazi's 11 p.m. curfew was the worst blow to Marjorie. The birds in the aviary in the garden needed attending to last thing at night, and it now meant that if ever she were out after time she was liable to be caught and punished.



Sea-gulls, gannets and a black shrike, all patients at the hospital, wait eagerly at feeding time

Meal-time for the gannets






This guillemot might almost be saying 'thank you,' after being rescued from the sea

Coaxing a sea-gull and a puffin to become friends





There were baby birds and a number of injured birds that needed constant attention – a shag, which is a sort of cousin to a cormorant, for instance. Several weeks before, some fishermen had sent for Marjorie who found the shag, with one leg badly crippled, lying more dead than alive on the beach. ‘The poor bird was all bruised and bloody, his dark green feathers very bedraggled. I did think his poor leg might be better amputated and I hated the thought of doing it. Anyway, I tried the old rum-and-seaweed mixture, and it worked.’

The bird was so docile as Marjorie and Nell cleaned him up and set one of his wings which was broken that it was thought for a little time he might die of fright and delayed shock. But after a day or two he perked up and could be seen waddling around the place in the company of a squirrel that had been found injured in the road many weeks before, and who was now perfectly recovered but didn’t seem particularly anxious to return to its normal environment. The squirrel and the shag became inseparable. ‘Often when I went out the back door I would find them sitting side by side waiting to be let in. And if we left a drawer open in the kitchen, the shag would hop up and settle down for a nap.’

One day the oddly-assorted pair was missing. Marjorie couldn’t find them anywhere. She had looked in the near-by fields, in all their usual haunts. She finally gave up the search thinking that probably the shag had felt well enough to fly away back to his normal

surroundings, and the squirrel had followed suit. 'Later during that afternoon I went into my bedroom. The shag and squirrel were sitting on my bed. They had hopped through the half-open window. From then on they were always to be found having an afternoon nap on my bed.'

One day a sailor brought in a Leach's Petrel, a rare sea-bird which looks rather like a small starling, but is black with a white rump and a forked tail. Their feet are so weak that it is impossible for them to stand upright. They have a strange, flickering flight low over the water, their feet pattering across the sea as they search for plankton upon which they live. They land only to nest, usually in the islands off Scotland and Wales.

The sailor had found the petrel exhausted on the deck of a ship taking evacuees to England. 'I put him on a blanket in front of the fire and gave him some whisky and milk to revive and warm him. The cats sat around and watched. We always seemed to have a lot of cats around, despite the presence of all the birds. They always sat and watched whenever we laid injured birds in front of the fire, showing no resentment at being ousted from their warm place. They never hurt the birds, just sat and stared, as if the thought of eating any of them never entered their heads. But I often used to wonder what they were really thinking.'

One of the cats, a jet-black, battle-scarred tom, had a passion for whisky and milk. Whenever he thought Marjorie wasn't looking he would sidle up to the bowl

that had been put beside the petrel and if it contained whisky would have a quick nip and sidle away again.

The baby birds, of course, required to be fed last thing at night and woke early, usually a bit before 5 a.m., clamouring for their food. 'So I would have to creep out to the aviary in the darkness last thing at night and early in the morning, along a little pathway with a low hedge on one side that just hid me from the house next door. The babies all the time making a noise fit to wake the dead.'

But she was lucky. Or the Nazis turned a blind eye to her continued defiance of the curfew.

All the same, Marjorie lived on a tightrope of fear and anxiety, never knowing from one day to the next what would happen. At any time, for any reason, the Nazis might destroy her birds. 'One afternoon, I was just turning into the front gate when I saw a couple of Nazis on what looked like sentry duty outside the house opposite. Suddenly about eight German officers came running down the front steps, got into two army cars and drove furiously away.'

She went quickly into the house and asked Nell what had happened. It seemed that the house opposite had been requisitioned as the Nazi Kommandant's headquarters. 'Two days later I saw that the house next door to us was being prepared as a canteen and officers' mess. I could see the German cooks bustling about through the hedge that ran along the path to the aviary. The canteen was right next door to my bird family.'

Marjorie nicknamed one of the German mess-orderlies 'The Walrus' because of his enormous moustache. They all, including the cook, wore spotlessly white aprons and were always surprising Marjorie and Nell with offerings of cakes and bread. The German cook often gave them cakes his wife made for him in Germany.

They always accepted the food – and fed it to the birds.

Two evenings later, Marjorie was on her way home after doing some shopping. It was quiet, the public houses were already closed and there were only a few soldiers walking or cycling through the town. The red and white Nazi flag fluttered insolently from the quay. Not a Union Jack in sight. In her pocket, Marjorie could feel two mark pieces jingling harshly together. The shop-tills were already full of them.

It would be good to be home again, and away from the Germans for a while.

Nell didn't call out as usual as Marjorie opened the front door and went inside. As she shut the door, something caught her eye at the bottom of the stairs. Tall, and brightly polished, facing the front door, stood a pair of high German jack-boots. She stared, hardly able to believe her eyes.

'*Guten abend*, Miss Ozanne . . .'

Coming down the stairs towards her was a tall Nazi officer.



Chapter Three

I

They stared at each other in silence. He was aged in his early 30s, Marjorie decided. His uniform was immaculately clean and trim. He had changed into a pair of slippers and he came on quietly down the stairs. At the bottom, he stood for a moment.

'You are sorry to hef me here. I am sorry to be here. Ve vill make the best off each other.'

He went back upstairs again. She watched him go, and then hurried to the kitchen to find Nell.

'Nell, what's he doing? How long's he here for?'

'As long as the Germans,' Nell replied, without looking up from the supper she was preparing. 'He's an army doctor. He's billeted with us, and we've got him whether we like it or not. I don't think he likes it much,' she added as an afterthought.

'D'you think he'll mind the birds?'

'They've been squawking their heads off for their

supper ever since he came, and he hasn't said anything yet. . . .'

His name was Dr. Gerhard Ortmann. His manners were excellent. He was very musical and would often sit at the piano in the evenings and play Mozart and Debussy, Chopin and Liszt. Life with the Nazi doctor settled down well enough. In fact, Dr. Ortmann somehow began leaving various items of food in the kitchen. These were bits of meat for James to enjoy, which Marjorie would mix with broken up boiled potatoes.

One morning, several weeks after Dr. Ortmann's arrival, Marjorie woke up extra early. She came to with a sudden jerk and knew that something must have woken her. She lay quiet for a minute, wondering what had startled her.

The sound came again. It was a cock crowing. At least, that was what it sounded like, yet there were no fowls near by, the last cockerel had been killed off for eating only a couple of days ago. She listened again. It was very faint, almost as if from another world. But it was definitely a cock crowing.

Marjorie got up and went to the window. As she looked out she heard it again; this time it sounded more as if it came from inside the house.

'Where on earth is it, James?' Marjorie asked the little starling. She talked to him a lot. Then she realized that the cover was still over his cage. She pulled it off.

Inside perched James, crowing quietly to himself.

He had heard the cock crowing so often that when he missed the early morning call he copied it for himself. The power of mimicry is common to most starlings and though they are usually content to sit on a chimney-top gurgling and spluttering and whistling, James had grown more ambitious.

As Marjorie went downstairs, still laughing to herself at the way James had foxed her, she met Dr. Ortman on his way out. He was looking puzzled.

'I heard a cock-crow, Miss Ozanne, I know I heard it.' He looked at her anxiously, as if hoping she would not think him raving mad. He knew that there wasn't a domestic fowl left alive in the neighbourhood.

'Yes,' she told him, 'it was James, my starling.'

She began laughing all over again as she saw the startled expression on his face as he marched out of the front door. He turned back to stare at Marjorie in bewilderment, certain he must have misunderstood what she had said. Early that evening he came apologetically into the kitchen where Marjorie and Nell were sorting out the separate dishes of worms and meal and seeds for the birds.

'You hef many birds?'

'Over fifty,' Nell said.

He hesitated before going to the window and pointing out. It was a bright, sunny evening. He said to Marjorie over his shoulder: 'I would like to hef my picture taken vith that bird.' She saw that he was indicating the black and white toucan. He picked up one of the stiff-backed kitchen chairs.

'I will sit out in the garden with the bird on my arm. You will take the picture, please?'

'But we don't have a camera,' Marjorie said. 'We're not allowed to have one.'

He swept aside her objections. 'I have my own camera upstairs, and I would like my picture with that bird to send home to my fiancée in Germany. I should like so much if you would do this for me.'

He hurried out of the kitchen, to return in a few minutes with an expensive-looking camera. Handling it lovingly, he showed Marjorie how to take the picture. Nell stood by with the toucan.

Carefully hitching up his trousers before he sat down, Dr. Ortman straightened his uniform before holding out his hand for the bird. The creases in his trousers were knife-edged and his uniform was spotless. Then he took the toucan and sat like stone, while Marjorie focused the camera. There was a tiny click and the atmosphere relaxed.

'Thank you - I am so pleased. You are very kind.'

As she took the toucan from his arm, Marjorie saw a mark spreading across his sleeve where the bird had been perching. Dr. Ortman saw her look of embarrassment mounting; he had obviously realized what had happened some minutes ago.

'It is of no consequence,' he smiled charmingly at her. 'My batman will see to it.' Then he thanked her and Nell again profusely, and without even glancing again at his sleeve, picked up his camera and went upstairs.

Marjorie saw him again ten minutes later, disappearing in the direction of the house next door where his batman was billeted. Under his arm was a parcel. He had on a clean uniform.

The mess-orderly, 'The Walrus', had for some weeks past been leaving a bundle of scraps dropped over the wall into the back garden. That evening, as usual, Marjorie collected the bundle. As she picked them up, she caught a glimpse of 'The Walrus', his droopy moustache extended as he nodded at her and smiled. It was the first time she had seen him since the bundles had begun appearing and she wanted to call out her thanks, but he had gone before she could pluck up the courage.

When she went indoors again two children had called with a wounded thrush they had found. The bird had a gunshot wound slitting its gullet. It was hard to know how the wound had been inflicted. Someone might have shot it for sport, or it could have been an accident.

'I can't even feed it like this, Marj.' Nell held out the thrush, lying almost dead in her hands.

Marjorie went to her work-basket and found some strong thread and the thinnest needle. While Nell held the bird firmly she sewed up the long slit in its gullet, as nonchalantly as if she were sewing a tear in a summer frock. A few minutes after she had finished Marjorie dipped her finger in some warm milk and water and pressed it to the thrush's beak. Eagerly it pecked the moisture from her hand.

Almost at once the bird seemed to revive a little. 'You'll be all right now.' Picking him up carefully Marjorie took him to the conservatory to find a spare cage.

For the last few days Nell and Marjorie had been saving up any food they had been able to find to celebrate Alfred's birthday. Alfred was Nell's brother. Marjorie had managed to buy a large pre-war tin of pears and two tins of salmon from her friend, the baker, and next evening, Alfred, whose wife and children were in England came round to find that Nell had brought out all the ornate plates in his honour. He unrolled from under his arm a large Union Jack, which he proceeded to spread as a brilliant tablecloth.

There was no wine to drink to Alfred's health, but there was plenty of laughter, and for a while, the war was pushed away into the background.

Half-way through the tinned salmon, there was a click as the front door opened. Marjorie always left it on the latch. It would be one of Alfred's friends who were expected to drop in to join the party.

They looked up as a tall figure stood in the doorway. It was Dr. Ortmann, looking from the Union Jack spread boldly and blatantly across the table to the shocked faces of the people sitting round.

'Ach, so. It is very beautiful.'

No one could think of anything to say, and Dr. Ortmann turned on the heels of his shining boots and went out. There was a short silence. They heard the front door close behind him.

'Oh, well,' Alfred said glumly, 'we'd better enjoy what's left of the meal while we can. We'll be off to Germany tomorrow.'

They ate on in silence, imagining the sort of account Dr. Ortmann must be giving to the local Gestapo. Somehow the party wasn't such fun any longer. There was still some food left, but appetites had suddenly waned. Marjorie wondered what would happen to all the birds with her away in a German concentration camp.

Then suddenly a thunderous knock on the door broke into the conversation which had become tense and quiet.

'That's it,' Alfred grimaced, and got up reluctantly.

As he did so the door opened and once more Dr. Ortmann stood there. Everyone eyed him apprehensively - but to their surprise he was half-smiling. Bowing, he produced a large bottle of champagne from behind his back. He clicked his heels.

'For the birthday,' he said, holding out the bottle to Alfred, who could only gaze at him, speechless.

As he turned away, the spell was suddenly broken and Alfred, Nell and Marjorie stood at the door, calling their thanks after him.

As the evening wore on with renewed gaiety and the bottle of champagne went down and down, Marjorie slipped quietly out to the kitchen to prepare supper for all the birds.

It was after eleven: after curfew time. Alfred's friends had gone - he was staying the night - and

Marjorie should have kept in the house. But as usual she slipped stealthily out into the darkness to the aviary to feed the birds. Somehow, they seemed to have come to sense that they must not make too much noise. Quietly, those in communal cages fluttered into a disorganized queue, hungry for their supper.

Once or twice Marjorie could hear Alfred and Nell laughing, and she would remember to tell them to be quieter when she went back indoors.

That morning, she had come upon a tiny bag of canary seed pushed to one side in the grocer's. He had let her have it in exchange for an old pair of shoes which would fit his wife. Now, she searched about in the darkness and found an old wooden box. Carefully she filled it with moist earth.

It had just turned half past eleven, as, not really daring to believe that her plan might work, she hastily planted the seeds in straight rows along the box and carried it into the conservatory.

Three weeks later, sheltered against the sunny side of the conservatory, a hundred tiny green shoots began pointing their way through the soil. Marjorie could hardly believe it.

The canary seeds were growing.

II

James turned out to be a collaborator. There was no other word for it. He squawked at Germans and Guernsey visitors alike, and when Dr. Ortman or *other Nazi officers* stroked his beak, he gave them as

gentle a nip as he gave to Nell or Marjorie. Indiscriminately and completely, James loved everybody.

In spite of the shortage of meat and potatoes, James was still fairly plump under his gleaming feathers. He would swing impertinently backwards and forwards in his cage in Marjorie's bedroom until she took him downstairs and let him out in the conservatory. Here he found himself a hasty meal, swooping down on unsuspecting ants scurrying into the dark corners and crevices.

Then he perched on the top of the cages, his eyes darting from one end of the conservatory to the other while he ate his catch, waited a while for the ants to digest, then swooped off in search of more food.

The cats prowling round didn't worry him. He knew he was quicker than the fastest cat. But he never ventured near the door leading out into the garden. He had elected to live indoors, and he knew that if he had shown his beak out of doors now he would have been pecked to pieces.

It was several years since James had first squawked his way into existence, a half-dead little mite caught between the grating of the school window. After nearly an hour of being trapped and stared at by dozens of children it had seemed to Marjorie hardly sensible to try returning the baby starling to its nest.

At one end of the schoolroom had blazed a fire where he was laid in a margarine-box. There, cradled in cotton wool and tissue paper, the tiny bird was fed all through that day by eager children dipping their fingers

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At one end of the schoolroom had blazed a fire where he was laid in a margarine-box. There, cradled in cotton wool and tissue paper, the tiny bird was fed all through that day by eager children dipping their fingers

in a bowl of warm milk. When school had ended they hadn't wanted to say good-bye to it, but Marjorie had packed them off and then taken the starling home.

It was some days before they could be sure it would live. It always was a tricky business. One day a bird would be well and alive, the next, Marjorie would come back and find it dead. Sometimes the delayed shock of falling out of the nest, or being clawed by a cat, would catch up on a bird two or three days after it was apparently recovered.

But James survived. They should have guessed he would, with his bright insolent eyes and eternal craving for more and more food. He became one of the family.

But like all the birds, most of all he belonged to Marjorie. He watched expectantly every time she came near his cage. She gave him a bath every day and he revelled in the splash of the cool water as he fluttered his wings up and down, watching her expression as the water splashed up into her face. Then, when he was clean, he hopped round impatiently while she cleaned out his cage and lined it with fresh newspapers. Whatever his faults, James was clean. Nothing would induce him to go back into a dirty cage after his bath.

He squawked louder than most of the other birds, as if he knew that Marjorie loved him best and he wanted to brag about it. He only shut up when one of the cats slunk around; then he hopped back into his cage, to sit peering out, bright-eyed and alert, until it was safe to venture out again.

He wasn't fussy about his food. Worms, or canary seed or corned beef, it was all the same to him. Not that the other birds were getting much choice. Food for them was becoming more and more of a problem.

By now there was hardly any tea or butter or flour. The shelves in the shops which had been packed so full a few weeks before the Germans landed were collecting dust, apart from the last depleted show of tinned food like bottled anchovies or cling peaches, incongruous delicacies against the wartime economy.

Finding a forgotten tin of evaporated milk was cause enough for a tea-party, even if there were nothing to eat with it, that was how near starvation life on Guernsey was becoming.

Marjorie and Nell tried to lighten the worry of it all. They gave a party on the least excuse; it was pathetic, but it helped to make one forget the grim world outside. A musical evening helped to drive away the pangs of hunger. Then it was time for bed, to dream that it was all over, and in the first minutes of waking it almost seemed as if the dream were true, until the silence of the streets dominated the birds' early chorus, as Marjorie got out of bed and went downstairs. There the polished jack-boots still stood in the hall, and she knew there was another day to go.

There was still food growing in the fields, strictly rationed and guarded by the Nazis. But even they couldn't stop her taking a few sly handfuls of pulled carrots or corn seeds. Every day, on her way to school, Marjorie left the house a half-hour earlier than she

needed, to make a detour past the fields on the other side of the school.

By now, Marjorie's Bird Hospital was well known not only to the people of St. Peter Port, but right across the island; and to the local Nazis her determined little figure had become a familiar sight. Dr. Ortman, and 'Walrus Moustache' had talked to their fellow-soldiers about the woman 'with a houseful of birds.' Consequently the Nazis usually turned a blind eye when she passed, and she was quick enough to make sure they knew nothing of the few fistfuls of carrots or millet which she would grab.

Sometimes she would encounter a more watchful soldier, one less sympathetically disposed towards the strange little woman who was as worried and anxious for the welfare of her birds as any living mother for her family.

'Who's that for then?'

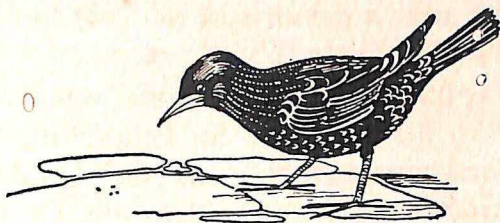
The guttural voice rang out across the field one morning, as Marjorie was quickly and surreptitiously cramming a handful of millet into a pocket.

'For my children,' she replied without hesitation, looking the burly Nazi N.C.O. straight in the eye.

'So . . . you are married then?'

His tone was sceptical. He could see no wedding ring on her finger.

'No, I'm not married - but I have fifty-seven children,' she smiled at him. Quickly, she walked off, to leave him gazing blankly after her.



Chapter Four

I

It was beginning to get dusk. The big black letters stood out boldly from the scarlet boards:

'Achtung! Minen.'

It was an autumn evening in 1944 and Marjorie, on her way home from school, had decided to walk down by the sea to collect some driftwood for a fire. Nell had been lucky enough to buy some millet the previous day and provided there was fuel for the fire she could use it as flour to make some cakes. An armful of driftwood would make a useful contribution. As the glaring warning about the danger of mines loomed up at her, Marjorie's thoughts went back to the days before the war, when children would be racing and playing games all along the shore. She sighed. It seemed as impossible as another world. A world that seemed lost for ever. The world of peace and happiness, with no menacing shadows of near-starvation, and fears of reprisals for ever overhanging the days and nights.

She made her way down to the darkening shore;

ahead were tiny creeks littered with rocks and pointing in to shingled bays. There were no warning Nazi signs along this part of the beach so presumably it was safe.

Marjorie began collecting the odd pieces of wood washed up on the stretch of shore.

It could almost have been peacetime. She looked back up the rocks down which she had climbed sure-footed in the gathering darkness. Sea-gulls circled like miniature wraiths in and out of the niches where they rested and built their nests. Looking far out to sea she watched the sun fading quickly, until it was just a streak of scarlet sky. There were no planes or ships in sight.

Marjorie bent to pick up the last piece of driftwood to add to the bundle she had collected and which she could comfortably carry. As she picked it up, she realized that she was clutching something that was smoother than wood. In the dusk it was hard to see.

Then she realized what she was holding. She dropped it and the blood seemed to congeal in her veins. So the rumours were true, the rumours that had filled her with such horror and loathing when she had first heard them.

The Poles and Russians, Jews and other enemies of the Reich, slave-labourers whose emaciated, skeleton-like shapes she sometimes saw stumbling along the roads under the harsh whip of the Nazi overseer commanders, *did* die on their feet. They *did* collapse as a result of starvation and torture, to be pushed over the

cliffs into the sea. The only rest the Nazis gave them was that last rest on the sea-bed. It was their poor bones that were strewn along certain stretches of the shore, thousands of them washed up from the sea. She hurried away.

'Aren't you afraid?' she asked Dr. Ortmann that night when she was sitting with him and Nell, the freshly-made cakes still warm from their oven of chopped driftwood.

He had listened to her account of what had happened on the shore, his face impassive, only his lips twitching a little.

'Of what should I be frightened?'

'Marjorie means,' Nell said, 'aren't you scared that you and the rest will meet some dreadful punishment?'

'It cannot be helped if these people die,' said Dr. Ortmann. 'Many Germans are dying, men, women and children, in the rubble of our bombed cities. Do you worry about the sleepless nights your flyers may suffer for what they are doing to innocent people?'

Nell glanced from him to Marjorie as if to say there was not much use talking to someone who deliberately refused to understand the horrors that were being perpetrated in his country's name, and whose only answer to the argument was a counter-accusation.

With a sigh, Marjorie turned to get on with the evening's work. By the noise from the conservatory, the birds were all pretty hungry.

James had not been taken up to bed yet. As Marjorie went out to the birds Dr. Ortmann followed her

for a game which he played last thing at night with James. As he put his head round the conservatory door, he would call good evening to James. James would make it very plain by his tremendous squawking that he regarded this as an invitation to come out of his cage. Dr. Ortmann would unfasten the catch.

It was the same routine tonight. Gleefully James shot out of his cage, as fast as a cannon-ball. He was as quick as lightning. Dr. Ortmann shot out an arm and caught him in mid-flight. Back in his cage, wondering how he had got there, James sat and shrieked with rage, until Dr. Ortmann offered him a second chance.

'Come on, James,' Marjorie duly teased the little bird, 'you're not going to let him catch you . . .'

James hopped cockily off his perch, made a dive for the cage door - only to be caught again, in split mid-air by Dr. Ortmann's unerring hand, swift and firm, yet gentle.

When the game had gone on long enough, and James was almost hoarse with frustrated shrieking, Dr. Ortmann departed, calling out good night and leaving the cage door open. By now Marjorie was preparing the bowls of strangely assorted food for the other birds, while James ventured cautiously from his cage and began venting his annoyance on the ants.

Although Marjorie rarely knew from day to day how she was going to feed the birds, not one of them had starved. Even a couple of hens were still clucking healthily and brooding and laying, providing Marjorie

with some useful black-market produce, good for bartering.

At last, by the time it was getting on for midnight and everyone else was in bed, Marjorie finished feeding and cleaning the last of the birds. Softly whispering good night to them she closed the kitchen door wearily behind her and climbed the stairs to bed, carrying James in his cage. A muffled squawk from the cage bid her good night as she put out the light and closed her eyes.

She dreamed of the beach in the dusk and the horrible bones. The dream became so nightmarish that she woke with a little cry. In the darkness of her blacked-out bedroom she lay there. She heard James move in his cage. She called out to him quietly and back came his answering sleepy squeak.

Marjorie couldn't sleep for a long time. But when she finally did her dreams were peaceful. She dreamed about James and the other birds.

Daylight had its nightmares as well as the night. The nightmare of trying to obtain food. To get wood or a few bits of coal or peat to provide some warmth.

Some days were luckier than others. Sometimes, answering an abrupt knock on the door, Marjorie or Nell would be confronted with 'Walrus Moustache', carrying a large pail of cabbage leaves.

'For the rabbits,' he would say with a large wink. Under the cabbage leaves was coal, to help eke out the rations of peat.

A little while after her grisly experience on the beach

Marjorie was in the baker's shop when he produced a fourteen-ounce loaf which he wrapped speedily and pushed into Marjorie's shopping basket. A few minutes later at the next shop, she found that the grocer's eyes held a bright gleam.

'Quarter of a pound of tea, and two ounces of butter, Miss Ozanne - four pounds the lot. If you can call it a lot. . . .'

A crazy price to pay, but Marjorie couldn't get the money out of her purse fast enough.

That night, she and Nell had a scraping of butter on thin slices of the sour oatmeal bread and two cups of weak tea while they discussed the gossip that was going round St. Peter Port and the island. There was a new rumour. Someone had heard the whisper that the Nazis were relenting, that they were going to allow Red Cross parcels through to Guernsey. She didn't offer the story with any great optimism.

'We've heard that one before,' was Nell's only comment. And Marjorie was pleased enough with her pittance of butter and tea. This new piece of gossip seemed to be no more than another rumour that would add up to nothing.

Christmas Eve drew nearer but there was little prospect of festivity about it. The gas supply had completely ended and even the Germans were getting short of coal. Their attitude was undergoing a change, too, as the Allies advanced across Europe, leaving them in the strange position of being masters of the island yet cut off, the remnant of a retreating army

that was being pursued by the forces of those who were their prisoners.

It was a strange paradox, and the Nazis on Guernsey did not quite know what to make of it.

Christmas Day, 1944, was spent in a chill atmosphere of semi-darkness. It was only permissible to use any light between 6 p.m. and 10 at night. There were no candles left and Marjorie, getting up out of bed while it was still dark, stumbled and groped her way through the house to the conservatory, feeding the birds more by touch and luck than by skill.

Christmas came and went and Marjorie and Nell tried to look ahead. They listened in the hidden darkness of a back room to the forbidden wireless set secreted under an armchair seat, their hopes and longing for an end to the war quickening and fading with each success and setback of the Allied armies.

Everyone looked thinner and older. No one commented – perhaps no one even noticed. Marjorie noticed that the war was beginning to affect James, or was it merely old age? He was becoming slower certainly, his feathers were losing their glow of colours. He squawked just as loudly, as if in defiance of time and the wearing demands life made upon a starling, and Marjorie obliged by pretending not to notice any difference in him.

It was the Wednesday after Christmas; the New Year was about to unwind its spool of fateful days, though one day seemed so much like another that this particular day was likely to pass unnoticed, in the same way

as had Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Then, that morning, a strange ship was seen off Guernsey. She looked to be an old ship, and for some time no one could make out her nationality. Marjorie, standing in a crowd of onlookers on the quay at St. Peter Port, presumed, with everyone else, that this was just another German ship, to pass by and be gone.

But the ship dropped anchor, and by early next day Guernsey was buzzing with the startling rumour that the Nazis had signed an agreement with the International Red Cross Organization. The arrival of the ship meant that everyone was going to be issued with packages of food, Dr. Ortmann confirmed the truth of the exciting news.

From the open windows of the house, Marjorie and Nell could hear the rising and swelling sounds echoing from the harbour. At first they had difficulty in trying to place the sound. It was months since anyone had dared to shout, or felt like cheering.

Marjorie hurried off into St. Peter Port as quickly as she could, eager to find out what all the commotion was about.

People passed her, climbing slowly up the hill as she hurried down. 'It's come - the food, it's really come at last . . .' Go and see, there's a whole shipload of food anchored down by the quay!

Even now, with so many tales told that had turned out to be false, so many rumours spread which had

proved to be without any foundation of truth, Marjorie couldn't believe it. Then she was down at the harbour herself, and actually staring up at the 1,500-ton Swedish ship. At last, she allowed herself to join in the cheering and the excited conversation as everyone watched and waited.

The unloading began.

The following morning, it was New Year's Eve, Marjorie made her way down to the town again jostling and elbowing her way through the crowds, as everyone pressed eagerly to get hold of their bundle of food.

On her way back she found herself staggering under the weight of two fourteen-pound parcels, hers and Nell's. The years without proper food had taken their toll. She felt sick with weakness, her legs felt like paper. Marjorie stopped to rest her arms and lean against the wall. Behind her St. Peter Port swarmed with people, pushing their way down the narrow high street.

Some of them struggling behind Marjorie were too weak to carry their parcels for more than a few steps. They began dragging the food after them, spurred on by the thought of a meal when at last they reached home. The first decent meal for many months. Guernsey's rich and poor mingled together, trundling push-bikes or prams and wheelbarrows, not caring how undignified or exhausted they looked, as long as they got the food home somehow.

All the gossip now was that the war was coming to

an end. But there was no reliable way of telling garbled truth from 'wishful thinking.

Earlier in the day it had been pouring with rain, but as Marjorie reeled erratically homewards, clutching her precious parcels, she caught a glimpse of the winter sun as it shone for a few seconds on the watery streets, across the heads of the weary men and women and out over the sea. Marjorie, exhausted but triumphant, pushed open the front door and dumped her food packages on the hall floor.

As she turned to close the door she saw a German soldier, about to cross the road to the Kommandant's offices, turn to look at her. He was pale, and obviously very hungry. He hesitated for a moment, enviously eyeing Marjorie's parcels.

'Good for you, good for you . . .' he nodded his head wearily, and went on.

'Honestly, Nell, he's as hungry as we are,' Marjorie insisted as she and Nell gazed unbelievably at the food they were unpacking. Food they hadn't seen for years now, tea and dried milk, cheese and tinned meat and fish, and biscuits made from real white flour.

Presently they sat down to a meal, dizzy with disbelief that what was on the table before them was real. Tinned meat, biscuits and cheese and a strong cup of tea. It had taken Nell a lot of will-power to make the tea strong; after so many months doing without it she almost automatically levelled out a tiny spoonful into the bottom of the teapot. Then she caught

Marjorie's eye and heaped in a couple more teaspoons for the pot.

As the clock ticked nearer midnight, on that last day of 1944, James swung happily in his corner in Marjorie's bedroom, enjoying the left-over bits of tinned meat. Downstairs, Marjorie boiled a kettle for another cup of tea with which to toast 1945.

Then she and Nell huddled over the precious radio set to hear the New Year in from London. The birds were quite silent in the conservatory and in the outside aviary. Marjorie had been able to feed them well and they perched with their bright eyes shut, beaks nestled deep into their feathers.

Then, from the radio, the chimes of twelve o'clock struck, and with them came the sounds of London's optimistic welcome to another New Year. Marjorie and Nell drank a toast in hot, strong tea. As she went up to bed, Marjorie felt in her heart that this time next year the war would be over. It must be over. There couldn't be long to go now. She was saying good night and a happy New Year to James. She let go of his beak, and he squawked and squawked the New Year in.

II

Slowly, inch by inch it seemed, the grey British warship made the harbour. At last it dropped anchor by the White Rock Pier. Mingling with the sailors on deck were soldiers - not soldiers in stiff, grey tunics and high jack-boots, but cheerful, waving figures in

khaki battle-dress. From the onlookers surging along the quayside, cheering rose again and again.

It was that never-to-be-forgotten day in May, 1945. The war had ended.

The dragging days of near-starvation, of scraping the wheatfields and combing the beaches for seaweed – anything that might make food to eat – were over at last. Marjorie and Nell were excitedly shaking hands with people they had never spoken to before, everyone was laughing or crying with happiness.

It was over, the war was over. For the first time in years the Nazis and the fears and apprehension, the tension and all the anguish they stood for, seemed to be forgotten. Except for the few officials at the quayside, there were no German soldiers to be seen. They had gone. Dr. Ortmann had gone. They were never to see him again, although he was to write to them once or twice after the war was over.

St. Peter Port market-place and every street leading down to the quay swarmed with the happy people of Guernsey. Like a scene from some wild, melodramatic film, everyone crowded forward, singing, as near to the quayside as possible, everyone looking out to sea and the warship.

Marjorie and Nell managed eventually to reach the quay, as the first of the soldiers jumped ashore. Arms were fung round his neck, strangers kissed him and shook his hand. Then the other soldiers jumped ashore to receive the same wild, near-hysterical greeting.

Marjorie reached out to one of them to take his

hand and touch his khaki uniform. The soldiers strode through the streets laughing and smiling, as people ran after them, cheering, weeping with pent-up emotion and shouting. They would have hoisted them to their shoulders and chaired the soldiers like heroes through the town, but there was no one in the crowd strong enough to lift them up and support them.

And so it went on, the islanders catching the presents of cigarettes, sugar and chocolates thrown to them, turning each item over and over in their hands as if they were precious stones or pieces of gold.

It grew quieter as Marjorie and Nell made their way back home, the shouting and cheering and the hubbub of excitement fading farther and farther away.

The Kommandant's house was deserted. Like Dr. Ortmann, most of the Nazi officers had gone. There was only a faint noise to be heard from the canteen.

The sun had begun to sink, the distant murmur of cheering mingled with the beat of the sea against the shore in the distance. A sea-gull cried stridently as it wheeled above, like a sound in a dream from another world.

The bold Nazi flag was no longer flying from the flagpole opposite. Instead, slowly climbing the mast of the house next door fluttered the Union Jack. As Marjorie and Nell stood watching it fluttering in the breeze they saw 'Walrus Moustache' walk out on to the flat roof of the canteen. He was alone.

He stood for a moment looking down towards the town, shading his eyes against the last light of the sun.

Then, suddenly, church bells pealed out clamorously across the town and as they rang, their notes were echoed and re-echoed by the bells of all the churches through the island.

'Walrus Moustache' turned away. As he turned, he looked down at Marjorie and Nell, as if seeing them for the first time. Slowly he raised his hand in the Hitler salute, and then he was gone.

When she woke next morning, Marjorie could not believe that she hadn't been experiencing some wonderful dream. She had gone to sleep with the curtains drawn back, no need for the hideous black-out now, and a bright sun was pushing its way through the clouds. The first early morning chorus of birds had already ended and the bedroom was quiet.

'James! Good morning, James!' she called as she got out of bed.

Usually James replied with a yawning, contentedly sleepy squawk, one eye only half open, as Marjorie drew aside the covering over his cage, sharp beak cocked and his feathers all ruffled out in anticipation of his morning bath.

This morning, there was no sound from the corner.

For a moment, Marjorie didn't recognize the silence. Puzzled, she went over and pulled back the covering. James was lying on his side on the floor of the cage.

At first, she could hardly believe he was dead. James had become part of the household. He had lived through the war, sharing it with Nell and Marjorie as if he were a human being. He had gone short of

food when everyone else was short of food, and he had shared in any unexpected windfall. Now, when the hardest time was over, and all fear of starvation had ended, James had not lived to enjoy the good times ahead. Then Marjorie realized he was nearly seven years old. He had died of old age.

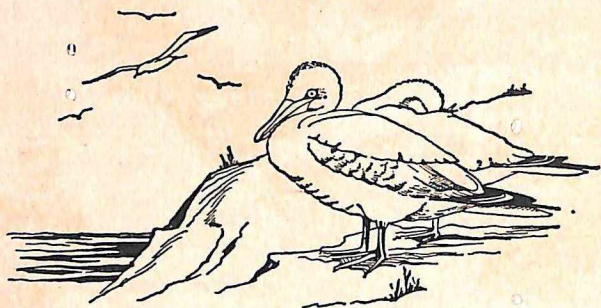
Spots of rain started to spatter on the windows. Marjorie pulled herself together. Her reaction to shock was to start doing something; she must get busy feeding the other birds.

Birds come and go, that was what she was always telling Nell.

But Marjorie, as she dressed hurriedly, knew that it wasn't like that this time. James was different, he always had been, with his strident squawk and his soft little morning cock-crow.

'I'll never forget you, James,' she whispered softly as she picked him out of his cage and took him downstairs to the garden.

Then she buried him quickly.



Chapter Five

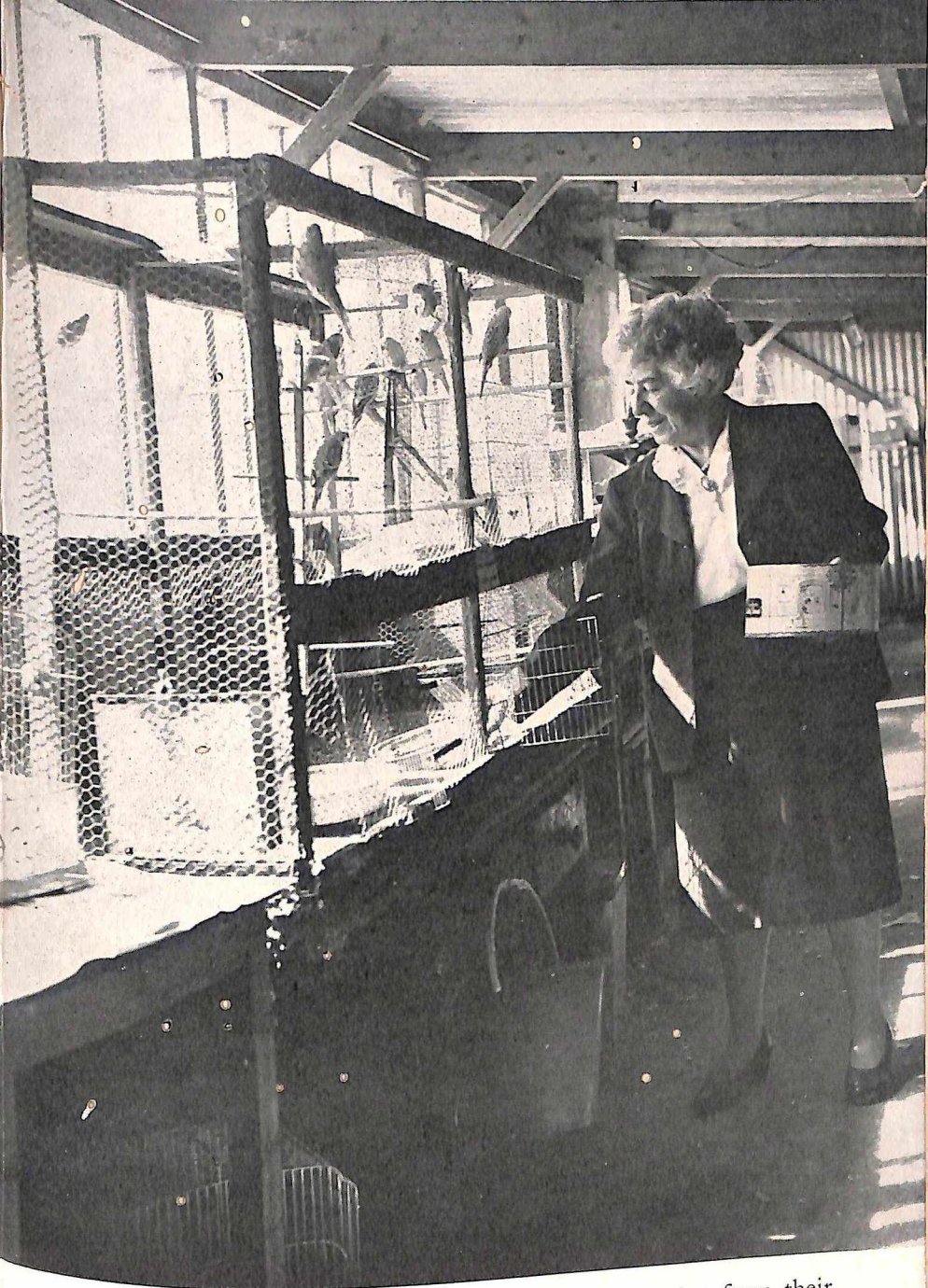
I

Guernsey had come to life again surprisingly quickly, waking out of the wretched drag of pulling through day after day, the slow, painful round of living and working on so little food. Now, life was taking the weeks and months in leaps and strides, eager to prove that God really was good and in his Heaven and all was right with the world.

It was strange to walk along the beaches without glancing over one's shoulder for fear of watching Nazis. There was still the danger of mines, but not the same sense of danger. There was just freedom.

Even the sea-gulls seemed to be crying and shrieking louder again as they wheeled up and down the cliffs, searching for their nests.

Marjorie felt as if she were coming out of a nightmare. As she walked around, through the town, across the cliffs, even between the small rows of desks at



A cageful of budgerigars, which are always escaping from their homes. When rescued they are kept at the Bird Hospital until their owners claim them



Baby woodpigeons recovering after having fallen from their nests

school, it was as if she were doing it all for the first time. She found herself smiling at faces in the streets because they were full of vitality instead of wearing those half-dead expressions and sagging with fatigue and hunger.

For days after the arrival of the British warship and the khaki-uniformed soldiers, there were dances in the narrow streets. Lights burned till late in the houses, as families sat together, trying to remember what there had been to do before the war began.

As soon as food appeared in the shops, everyone expected to eat and eat. The shopkeepers had expected to be overwhelmed in the rush. But it hadn't been like that at all. Instead, the people collected outside the bakers and the grocers, the butchers and fish shops, gazing in stupefied amazement at the food.

'I remember one afternoon' - Marjorie looks back on the occasion with a smile - 'rushing home breathlessly from school. "Nell, come down to the town," I called. "You must come. There's bread there, shelves of it, all for sale. . . ."'

Together she and Nell had hurried into the town, to join the group standing outside the windows of the baker's shop, just staring at the loaves upon loaves of bread. In the streets the children had been tearing down the hated Nazi posters, and scarlet-lettered '*verboden*' notices floated on the sea.

But there were some repercussions from the war that could not be stamped out so easily.

At school, at playtime, Marjorie watched small boys

marching round the cobbled recreation-ground waving uprooted Nazi emblems and flags in a half-salute, their childish voices barking orders to their imaginary troops. It didn't mean much, but to Marjorie it meant another war to be fought. A war against the after-effects of war which could be seen all around her. Not only the physical harm the conditions under which they had existed for so long must have caused, especially to the growing children, but the hatred and bitterness which had been engendered, the hatred and bitterness of those whose loved ones had died in concentration-camps, or the anguish of wives whose husbands had died, fighting the Nazis.

Only the birds were the same.

Marjorie was unable to give much time to wondering uneasily about the future; there was too much work to occupy her mind. War or peace, human bitterness and hate notwithstanding, the birds still fell out of their nests, still crouched sadly on the sands pecking at the oil thick in their feathers. They still needed Marjorie, and perhaps she needed them, to take her mind off the anxieties of the peace that lay ahead.

At any rate the island magic had soon begun to work again. And the magic of the birds was working more strongly than ever on Marjorie. She was conscious of a fresh power within her. She was revelling in the knowledge that now she could set about giving them all the care and attention they really needed, but which the dangers and restrictions of war had made impossible.

'Marj,' Nell said to her one afternoon. 'Have you seen Alderney today? It's not so misty and I could just see it from the quay.' Nell's voice had come floating in above the hum of bees and the bird song from the sun-warmed garden.

'No, I've not seen it - I've too much to do with the birds.'

Nell interrupted her. 'You must look. It's June now, yet Alderney is covered with snow.'

Marjorie smiled to herself. Snow on Alderney at the beginning of June! What was Nell talking about? That evening, she went down by the harbour to see for herself. In spite of having flatly disbelieved Nell, she was intrigued, although she wouldn't have admitted it for the world.

The evening was still and quiet. It was only a year since the war had finished, and Guernsey was still coping with the practical difficulties of war's aftermath, sorting out the future, and trying to erase the past. The streets were not yet busy with holiday-makers as they had been and would be again in years to come. Hardly any boats moved out on the water as Marjorie looked away to Alderney in the east.

She stared hard. It couldn't be - she knew it couldn't be, but for a moment she could almost have believed that Nell was right, and that Alderney was covered with snow. The little island rose in a gentle curve and right along the top of the slope it was completely white.

But as the pale evening sunshine bathed it, the island

slopes didn't dazzle and glitter like snow. If anything, they looked duller where the sun glanced against them – a shadowy, greying white.

Then Marjorie smiled again as she had smiled to herself when Nell had talked about snow on Alderney. She chuckled to herself as she turned for home. Once she looked back towards Alderney, just a blurred shadow on the horizon now that the sun had almost set.

Her expression was gravely enigmatic. 'You'll need me,' she said aloud. 'You'll need me when the winter comes, and the storms, and the oil is a deadly scum, a filthy muck on the sea. I'll be seeing some of you then.' As she shut the front door she called out to Nell: 'Who says there's snow on Alderney?'

'Tea's made – I saw it with my own eyes,' Nell called back.

'If you did, then the snow you saw had wings and webbed feet and bright blue eyes,' Marjorie said, enjoying the situation as Nell looked at her in puzzlement. 'Those were gannets, not snow. When Alderney was left unoccupied during the war the gannets must have taken over,' Marjorie went on, as she took a cup of tea and a biscuit. Nell was still staring at her blankly.

'Gannets,' Nell said slowly. 'Is that what they are – why, there must be thousands of them —' She broke off, as if hearing for the first time what Marjorie had just said. At the same time she found herself asking the question which had been on her mind for some

time, but which she had never come round to putting into words. 'Do you mean we're still keeping this lot?' she said. 'I mean, the war is finished. There are more than thirty birds here —'

'What do you expect me to do with them? Throw them into the sea? And what about all the others that are going to come to us? The gannets oiled up in the storms and the gulls beaten down by the wind, and the birds thrown out of their nests when they've only just begun to live — what about all of them?'

Nell had her answer before she had barely put the question. She listened on in stupefied silence. She knew better than to try to argue with Marjorie Ozanne.

'I tell you, this is only the beginning now,' Marjorie was saying confirming the worst fears that had been nagging at Nell. 'I'm going to take in all birds that are brought to us. I'll go out in the storms and look for them. We've already got a bit of a reputation as a hospital for birds. From now on, that's what we are going to be — the Bird Hospital.'

Marjorie held out her cup for more tea. Nell filled it, managing by a great effort of self-control not to shake her head hopelessly. She looked up and handed back the cup, to see that Marjorie's eyes had suddenly become misty.

'What a pity,' Marjorie said, 'that James didn't live to see it. He would have crowed with enthusiasm.'

Nell could only murmur assent.

Even Marjorie had no idea then that it would end

with parties of children, families on holiday in Guernsey, Americans and tourists from the Continent continually turning up on the doorstep, sent by their guide-books to see the famous hospital. She could not foresee just how big the project would grow.

All she knew was that all her life there had been something that she wanted to achieve.

II

Marjorie and Nell had already been planning to leave the house where they had lived during the war. In a few weeks they would be moving to a small, neat, detached bungalow at St. Peter's, situated just above the beach on the north-west shore of the island, below Fort Saumarez. 'We often regret coming here to live,' Marjorie was to say later. 'We're right in the path of the prevailing westerly gales. It's no joke mending fences at two a.m., which I've done more than once.'

The storms would blow the roof off the long shed which filled the garden as well as the fence. There was no conservatory at the new home so Marjorie and Nell put up this wooden structure, the inside of which was stacked with rows of cages, constructed from old cereal boxes and grocery cartons, fronted with lengths of chicken-wire.

'Though, of course, this isn't the only accommodation provided,' Marjorie says. 'I often have to give up my bedroom. At the moment I have twelve gaping beaks - baby birds of various kinds rescued from the storm or from the quarries near by - which have to

be filled every hour beginning at 5 a.m. until late at night.'

The bungalow was promptly named 'Bird Hospital', painted in large letters on the gate. Inside the shed the sign was put up which had once been painted in the blacked-out conservatory of other days:

HERE SHALL NO EVIL TOUCH THEM.

On a table by the door stood a cupboard - the medicine chest. Inside was ranged the strangest collection of medicines owned by any hospital.

Bottles of iodine and rum stood side by side, surrounded by pots of Vick, and numerous reels of Sello-tape. In one corner was propped a needle-case and reels of tough, thin cotton. On the cupboard floor were stacked bags of meal and seeds and bird-food.

In the bungalow kitchen there was always a large saucepan of fish on the boil over the cooker, and several loaves of stale bread cluttering up the larder. Organization of a sort began to take over in time, and, despite lack of money - Marjorie had to continue her school-teaching to help towards funds - the Bird Hospital became a going concern, depending upon gifts of food, Marjorie's and Nell's life-savings, and the never-flagging efforts of its two founders who were also doctors and nurses, head cooks and bottle-washers.

Squawking burst from all corners of the small, yellow-painted bungalow that morning in September, 1945, as Marjorie settled down with her first diary, like a ship's log-book, ready to make her first entries.

A green linnet had been brought in earlier that day by some children, after they had just managed to rescue it from a cat. Carefully Marjorie entered one more bird - that made the total 42. She wondered what would come next, and just how far the resources of accommodation in the garden-shed would be able to stretch.

'I never for a moment imagined that in the years to come there were going to be more than a hundred crowded into the cages at one time, and somehow, miraculously, still room to spare.' As the years went by the Bird Hospital averaged some 500 patients annually.

Every day new birds came in, and healthy birds, recovered from their injuries, were set free. There were the great gannets, sometimes 20 or 30 a day, after a bad storm, and the baby birds always chattering for their feed from five and six o'clock in the morning. Not many years elapsed before Marjorie knew that she couldn't carry on her school work and the birds as well. And if one had to go, it took no lengthy discussion to decide which. With only the slightest wistful glance back, Marjorie left school and, helped by her pension, plus occasional dances and other functions held to raise funds, her whole day and half the night she gave to the birds.

'It wasn't hard to heal them, it's hardest when they're well and ready to fly away. Even if a bird only stays a couple of days, it becomes part of the family, and saying good-bye is quite an emotional business.'

It was the arrivals that were exciting. The arrivals, and the successes; the tiny baby birds that looked as if nothing could ever keep them alive, and the sight of them growing better as the days passed. When those first difficult few hours were safely over it seemed hard to believe that the tough, scruffy fledglings fighting each other over a bit of food, could ever have been on the point of death.

'You'll never guess what was brought in while you were in town,' Nell, her expression smug with satisfaction, announced one day. 'You've wanted one for a long time,' she went on, as Marjorie followed her into the kitchen, impatient with curiosity.

Sitting in a cage on the kitchen table was the fattest baby cuckoo Marjorie had ever seen.

'Where'd he come from? It's so rare to actually see one.'

A small boy had brought him in. Whatever nest the cuckoo's mother had found in which to lodge him she had evidently gone about the job carelessly. The bird had fallen into the roadway, and lay there, half-stunned, its mouth hopefully opening for food.

That night, Marjorie took Cuckoo - he never became known by another name - to her room.

Early next morning Marjorie got out of bed to look in the cage. Cuckoo sat there, fat and contented, waiting for his food. He was too young to feed himself, but he was old enough to know just how much food he wanted. Whenever Marjorie went into the room he sat looking at her, grey feathers ruffled out

round him, the white flash gleaming on his head and his beak wide open, showing the brilliant orange colour inside.

He looked so big and beautiful that Marjorie found herself getting into the habit of popping into the kitchen before going upstairs, so that whenever she went into the bedroom she had a tit-bit to thrust into that wide, ever-open beak.

Other birds were still coming and going, but Cuckoo occupied Marjorie more and more.

'However beautiful he was to look at, Cuckoo was a bird of very little brain,' Marjorie recalls. 'Which undoubtedly accounted for the fact that he was afraid of nothing. If he had been free to fly round the house he probably would have sat himself next to one of the cats, as a friendly gesture. And he was lazy. He sat on his perch all day, eating and sleeping and squeaking.'

He was too young to utter his famous and familiar 'cuckoo', although Marjorie tried to persuade him to perform by chanting the noise in his ear whenever she was near him. Instead, he just sat happily munching meal-worms and rough bits and pieces from the garden, blinking his bright eyes and growing fatter and sleeker as the days went by.

'It's all very well,' Nell groaned, putting her head round Marjorie's bedroom door one day. 'Whenever you're wanted, you're always up here 'cuckooing' to that bird. There's a man downstairs with a large basket - says he wants to see you. I think he's one of the fishermen from the harbour.'

Reluctantly Marjorie gave Cuckoo one last worm and hurried downstairs.

On the doorstep stood a tall man with a weather-beaten face, his worn navy guernsey making him look broader and bigger than ever. At his feet was a large wicker basket.

'What is it? Another gannet?'

'It'll be a surprise for you,' the fisherman said, shaking his head. 'This one, Miss Ozanne, I'll bet you've never had before. Be in all the papers tomorrow, you see . . .'

She glanced at him sceptically. There were few birds that she hadn't handled at some time or other during the last years. She bent and opened the basket.

Inside, lying exhausted against the wicker sides, almost dead with fatigue, was one of the most attractive-looking birds she had ever seen.

It wasn't brilliantly coloured, or unusually shaped, but it possessed an oddly dignified personality, even in its present state, that gave it an extraordinary appeal. It had the appearance of a small black starling.

But Marjorie remembered that white rump and forked tail. 'I haven't seen one like that since the time the Nazis arrived,' she said.

Marjorie stared at the new arrival, completely fascinated, while at the same time her heart went out to it, it was obviously so near to death.

'Fell on the deck of a fishing-boat this afternoon, it did. Exhausted itself flying, and then got caught in the rigging.' The fisherman paused to give

full dramatic effect, as he went on. 'It's a Leach's Petrel.'

For a few minutes after the man had gone Marjorie stood on the step, gazing at the bird. This was admittedly more exciting than Cuckoo. A tame cuckoo was rare enough, but Marjorie had only heard of a Leach's Petrel once before.

It was scarcely larger than a crow, and yet, like the previous bird, it possessed all the grace of a sea-bird. Its wings were a smudgy, sooty black, very similar to the species of Stormy Petrels, affectionately nicknamed 'Mother Carey's Chickens' by the sailors.

'Stormy Petrels are seen quite often by the mail boats,' Marjorie explained to Nell that evening, as she fed the exhausted bird on some bread-sops and rum-and-milk, 'but we hardly ever see one of these.'

The little bird trembled in her hand, and she gently smoothed the ruffled black feathers and laid it down on a bed of straw for the night. Contented and quite calm, it lay still. Like all the other birds, it had no fear of Marjorie.

For the next few days, Marjorie's attention was torn between the two favourites. While the gulls squawked in the pen in the garden, and the smaller birds cheeped incessantly in the shed, Cuckoo and the Leach's Petrel were showered with alternate affection.

The latest patient grew stronger every day. Soon it began screeching raucously for food and gulping down fish-pieces straight from Marjorie's hand as soon as she held them out. The damage to its wing

where it had been caught against the rigging was almost healed, and now the bird was strong enough to wriggle protestingly as its body was firmly pinioned and iodine rubbed into the torn flesh beneath the ragged feathers.

Cuckoo squeaked dismally in the bedroom, jealously watching the door, ready to devour a meal-worm as soon as Marjorie appeared round the door, dangling one temptingly from her fingers. He was fat and strong. The winter, when he should have migrated, had come and gone and he had weathered the cold perfectly.

It was almost Easter, and Marjorie had finally given up trying to get the bird to 'cuckoo'. As she had already observed, it had very little brain. What little it had was more than fully occupied with eating meal-worms and sleeping and eating groundsel.

Marjorie had not yet reached a decision about Cuckoo's sex. In all the books about birds she had read it said that the male birds 'cuckoo', and the hens make a bubbling noise. Since Cuckoo neither 'cuckooed', nor bubbled, but spent his or her time squeaking softly and preening its glorious sleek tail-feathers, its sex was still something of a mystery.

The winter of 1949 should have been the worst time for Cuckoo, but the first cold months of the new year had safely come and gone. Then, in March, he went off his food.

Marjorie would dangle a meal-worm invitingly under his beak, but he would turn his head away and sit glumly in his cage. Instead of diving out, when

she opened the cage door and put some food on the floor, he stayed dismally inside.

In the excitement of tending to the petrel, Marjorie pushed aside her worries about Cuckoo, feeling sure he'd be better soon. There was so much excitement over the new strength the little petrel was finding.

Then, one morning, Cuckoo was dead.

'But Nell, what did I *do*? What could have killed him?'

Marjorie stood gazing at the broad, sleek-feathered little bird, lying on the bottom of the cage, unable to believe that Cuckoo would never again hop out on to her finger, as he always used to when she called his name.

'There's only one thing to do,' she told Nell determinedly. 'In case I ever have another one, I must find out what I did wrong, however horrible it will be to know.'

The poor Cuckoo was packed up and sent off to a London veterinary surgeon for a post-mortem.

For the next few days, Marjorie thought sadly about the little bird she had lost. It was as bad as the day James died. She kept wanting to call 'Cuckoo', and hear the little squeaking response. Instead there was silence, and she would hurry downstairs to see how the petrel was coming along and occupy her mind and energies on the other birds.

Then the letter came from London.

To her shocked dismay Marjorie learned that Cuckoo - who was a he - had been killed by kindness.

He had died from an overdose of meal-worms, the fat of which had affected his liver. Marjorie thought with a bitter kind of sadness of the pleasure it had been to see Cuckoo greedily stretching out his beak for food, and preening his plump, gleaming chest afterwards.

'He was such a lovely bird,' she said wistfully to Nell. 'But the next one, if ever another cuckoo does land on us, is going to stay as scraggy as I can keep it - because I *am* going to keep it.'

But the Leach's Petrel almost made up for Cuckoo's absence. It strutted round the pen in the garden, mingling with the other sea-birds and making no attempt to fly away, though its feathers had grown over the rough tears on its back. Many people called in to look at it, never having heard of the bird before.

Its eyes continued to become glintingly bright, and its beak all ready for food. Marjorie, who began glancing at the sky and checking with the weather forecasts, knew that it must go.

'I'm sure there'll be a storm soon, Nell. I can feel it coming. I'm getting a bit anxious for the petrel. If I let him off now he can go before the storm blows up. Besides, he must go sometime, he'll be getting too tame.'

Nell nodded - she was holding the sooty bird tightly while she smoothed away the last pieces of iodine and cotton wool from the gleaming feathers. Then she handed him to Marjorie.

The sky had, as Marjorie predicted, become cloudy

and dull, a factor which somehow seemed to make the situation rather worse than if the sun had been shining. The bird nestled trustingly into Marjorie's hands as she hurried off with it towards the sea. She was talking softly to it all the time, as she always did before setting a bird free.

People passed, some looking curiously at the little woman with her mop of grey hair and weather-beaten face, clutching a strange bird and talking away to herself. But Marjorie rarely cared what other people thought of her. The Leach's Petrel was calm, soothed by the voice constantly talking to him. He wasn't frightened, which was all Marjorie cared about.

She walked out a short way towards the sea, across the rocks and the shingle. Then she let the bird step slowly off her hands on to the beach. This was now she had let the war-time Leach's Petrel take its freedom. How different the world had seemed then. Then, she remembered, a Nazi war-plane had zoomed across the sky. Marjorie had wondered how the petrel would fare as it flew into the skies where so much death and destruction stalked.

Now she watched this other bird, as for a moment it stood completely still, the black feathers ruffling gently in the wind. Then he strutted forward a couple of steps, fluttering his wings experimentally. Within a second the petrel was in the air. -

Very low down, just above Marjorie's hand, the bird wheeled round a couple of times, swooping near to her. Then it was gone, flying strongly away until it

Hand-feeding for this crow, still suffering from an attack by a cat



In the grounds of the Bird Hospital





Vee, a sea-gull reared by Marjorie Ozanne from the nest, seems disinterested in this offering of fish. The siamese cat is a stray

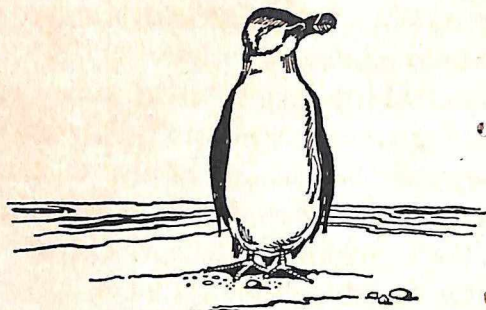
Marjorie Ozanne does not confine her work solely to birds. She saved this spaniel, Toby, from being destroyed



was just a speck in the distance. Marjorie stood watching from the rocks, waving good-bye. Then she sighed and turned for home.

Above the noise of the sea the wind began to whistle eerily through the island. As darkness came, clouds sailed angrily across the white half moon. The storm was rising.





Chapter Six

That night the rain came, tearing through the island, driven through barn doors and cottage windows by the furious gale. The trees bent over double against the mad wrenching of the wind, while the rain streamed down glass-house windows, beating a frenzied tattoo on the roofs.

The lightning flashes through the bedroom window woke Marjorie. She lay for a moment, trying to collect her thoughts. Then thunder crashed overhead, and she shuddered and huddled farther down into the bedclothes.

But the night was hot and close. It was impossible to sleep, with the chaos of noise and sense of upheaval and impending disaster all around. And because it was impossible to sleep, Marjorie could not stop herself thinking of the birds.

There were always birds hurt in a storm. Sometimes a gull was beaten down by a cuff of wind. Sometimes it was a gannet, already heavy with the oil in its feathers, collected from the wake of a mail-boat. With

the driving rain its wings would become so water-logged it would be unable to fly.

Such unlucky birds might be on some rocky beach now, huddling down against the incoming tide, trying to escape the lashing of the wind and rain. Marjorie couldn't think about the prospect any longer without doing something to help. She crept out of bed and dressed as quietly as she could, putting on a couple of thick sweaters and a tough pilskin macintosh.

She made her way softly downstairs and collected a pair of high wellington boots to put on over her socks. The clouds were so black that there was hardly any light from the moon, and at the last minute she grabbed up a hurricane-lamp. She lit it and turned towards the door, ready to meet the storm.

Already there were lights on in several houses, as people woke and realized that the storm had broken. Marjorie had to use all her strength to stay on her feet as she battled her way to the shore, fighting against the drenching rain.

No need to reach the shore to see the waves. Already they were crashing up against the sea-wall, like great open jaws, gaping for a second as the crest of the wave reached its peak and then rolling over to fall with a crash, sending a sheet of spray battering against the stone walls of the fishermen's cottages.

Families were anxiously lining their windows and doors with paper and sandbags. Each time the waves just missed the top of the sea-wall, but the tide hadn't yet reached its height.

On a sheltered part of the shore, a couple of fishermen were just beaching their boat, half-filled with water. They shouted to Marjorie as her storm-lantern flashed across the beach.

'It's going over tonight,' they called, pointing towards the wall, hardly visible behind a giant wave. The foam from the lacy edge just made the top of the heavy cement bricks and trickled over the other side, on to the sea-road.

Marjorie strode along the beach until she reached the parts where it had already become impassable. There were no birds in sight. She retraced her steps, searching the crevices in the rocks more carefully, shining the light into the recesses where gulls huddled here and there, waiting until the wind died down.

As she reached one clump of rocks, the storm-lantern shone fully on a large gannet, sitting partly sheltered from the rain. Even in the shadows, Marjorie could see the heavy droop of his wings, and the dull patchy marks on his feathers where the oil was clinging. Every now and then the gannet pecked and pulled at his feathers, trying to clear them from the sticky tar. Marjorie knew that if the desperate bird got much more oil inside him he would soon be dead.

The rocks were slippery now, shining with seaweed as well as the rain and sea. As steadily as she could she worked her way round the front of the bird, blocking his flight towards the sea. If he ran, he would run towards the water, and on a night like this, Marjorie knew she wouldn't have much chance of catching him.

Already he was eyeing her suspiciously. He half-flapped his great wings once or twice, but they were made clumsy by the heavy tar. He was a good six inches taller than a goose, his wing-span broader than the height of an average man.

Then Marjorie had put down her storm-lantern, caught the gannet firmly round his wings, tucked his body under her arm, shoved his head in a large sack, picked up her lantern again and turned for home. One gannet was enough to deal with at a time.

She turned to look back at the cottages. Windows were cracked by the showers of pebbles flying against them, caught in the body of the waves. Relentlessly the sea was pressing on. At times the waves were so high that the cottages were almost covered. Water ran in torrents through the gutters and down the drain-pipes, filling the rain-butts with sea-water.

As Marjorie came nearer home she could see a light on in the back of the bungalow. Nell would be up making tea. The gannet suddenly gave a determined wriggle as Marjorie stood and dripped on the doorstep, but she held on to it. Nell took the gannet and pushed Marjorie outside again.

'Hurry up back again to dry out. There's a couple more gannets been brought in since I got up. They're sitting by the fire drying off. This one can join them.'

Nell shut the door quickly as Marjorie disappeared into the rain. The black, blustery night was just beginning to break into a nightmarish grey dawn.

As she went back to the shore, Marjorie saw figures

trying to mend the first breach in the sea-wall. Half a dozen men, in oilskins and sou'westers, were struggling with sandbags and ballast. Before they began they must have known that the task was impossible. The whole wall must soon crumble under the constant weight of the water. Already in places the sand and seaweed was piling in drifts across the roads, banking up against the sides of the cottages.

Marjorie came across a razorbill, battered against the rocks by the wind. Its glossy black feathers were torn and the white plumage under its throat and wings was matted with sea-water and gritty sand. As she bent to pick it up it pecked at her hand half-heartedly with its strange, flattened hook beak and then let her hold it carefully, resting quite calmly in her firm, steady grasp.

It was a sad dawn. Marjorie walked slowly home, exhausted after battling for a couple of hours against the storm. A strange yellowish gleam spread across the sky, as black clouds raced across the island. It was still raining so hard that it was difficult to see far. Houses and trees were just blurred smudges, pinpointed by the occasional light, or a flash of lightning which suddenly illuminated the scene for a moment.

Slowly the sea was retreating from the cottages, pressed reluctantly out beyond the shore again. Marjorie looked at the sky. There was no sign of a calm. Down on the beach they said it would be over the wall again when the tide turned back.

True to her word, Nell had the kettle on the boil,

ready to make tea the moment Marjorie appeared, dripping pools of water across the hall. She paddled out of her boots and shook her oilskin outside the door.

'We'd better drink the tea out here,' Nell called. 'You'll see what I mean.'

Rubbing her hands, trying to warm her finger-tips, Marjorie hurried into the front sitting-room where the fire was already blazing warmly.

Not that there was any room for Marjorie in front of the hearth. Surrounding the fire were three large gannets, a smug, self-important looking little guillemot, in appearance rather like a staid, elderly penguin, and two puffins, hungrily snapping their big beaks open and shut. Cosy and snug, and very pleased with themselves, they sat blinking in the heat, warming their soaking feathers to the roots. Huddled into a corner, almost out of the range of the fire's warmth, curled two cats. They looked cold and uncomfortable, though not unduly disturbed by the presence of the bedraggled birds that had annexed the warm hearth.

Marjorie leaned over the puffins and felt their feathers. They were still very wet and cold. The newspaper they stood on was almost soaked through. Fetching a large, strong pair of scissors, she carefully began to clear some of the oil from the gannets' feathers.

Years ago, when she had first begun to try and clean the birds free of oil, Marjorie had laboriously washed their feathers. But all the time she had felt

their bodies shivering with the cold, while it had never been possible to clear the oil completely.

Now, while Nell held each bird firmly, she carefully cut away the oiled feathers. Underneath, the soft white feathers were exposed, like a fluffy cotton-wool waistcoat. As each bird was cleaned, the others waited in an orderly crowd, like patients in a doctor's waiting-room, eyeing each other curiously.

But the gannets weren't always as docile as the smaller birds. It took all Nell's strength to hold them still, and all Marjorie's tact and coaxing to keep them calm.

They were fierce birds, used to fending for themselves. Their cold blue eyes darted backwards and forwards round the room, as they flexed their wings impatiently, anxious to be free and able to fly again.

They were used to the freedom of the sea, flying high above the water, watching for the movement of fish, the glint of their scales beneath the surface. Then they would close their tremendous wings and swoop like a dart to catch the fish with an unflinching precision, eating it while submerged then treading water until they surfaced again.

It was strange to see those sharp eyes and sharp beaks now, as the birds sat snugly round the fire, the centre of such a domesticated scene.

For a second Marjorie took her eyes off the gannet she was cleaning to pull back one of the puffins from scorching himself before the fire.

'Look out . . .' But Nell's warning came an instant

too late. The gannet jerked his powerful beak out of Marjorie's hand and lunged towards her face.

The next moment, the bird was calm again. Seeing the other birds still squatting quietly round the fire, it seemed to recover its nerve and strutted quietly over to join the throng.

But the damage was done. Marjorie felt the two-inch gash across her cheek beginning to bleed as Nell ran out to the kitchen for a bowl of clean water to bathe the wound.

'Serves you right for being a crank about birds,' Nell grinned as she dealt with the gash. Nell had done a considerable amount of nursing and was quick and capable. Marjorie smiled back ruefully, but it hurt to smile too much.

'He didn't know me, that's why he snapped. But he does now. He'll not do it again,' Marjorie said confidently.

There was no more sleep that night. It was breakfast-time before they had finished cleaning the birds. By then, the old-stagers in the garden were all squawking for their food. The storm still beat strongly against the island, with little sign of abating.

Marjorie sighed. There would be plenty more birds brought in before the storm ended.

It would take some time for the new feathers to grow again on the shorn sea-birds. They sat dismally in opposite corners of the shed, which was cluttered to bursting point with all the birds from the outdoor pen. It was impossible to leave them out there sheltered

only by the tough garden netting which was already bent and torn by the howling wind.

The storm raged for three long days, then eventually it blew itself out, dying down suddenly to a gentle murmur. The waves receded wearily from the coast, as if, like the islanders, they were spent of all energy.

Some twenty birds a day were brought in, one after the other, as people found them floundering helplessly, blown along the beach. Every evening they sat and dripped and ruffled their wet feathers in front of the fire, while Marjorie and Nell bathed and bandaged their torn wings or legs and cleaned and dried them of the oil.

The cats had given up the unequal fight. Once or twice they had tried to push in and claim a front seat, warming themselves in the blaze, but soon their fur was so bedraggled from the water dripping on to them from the birds' wings that they gave up and curled disgustedly in an easy chair, sprawled across each other, making a great show of trying to keep warm.

Meanwhile, as the birds grew stronger, the squabbling and squawking became rowdier. Instead of queueing in orderly fashion for their treatment and food the gannets pushed each other out of the way, grabbing at the fish from Marjorie's hand. If she hadn't watched out for them the smaller birds would have eaten nothing at all.

The razorbill was stronger now. His feathers were beginning to gleam again and the white fluffy undercoat where his wings had been cleaned of tar was

beginning to toughen. New feathers were already growing in place of the old ones.

When Marjorie appeared at the pen the razorbill was always among the first to come jostling towards her, pushing his long, hooked beak through the wire-netting in his eagerness to peck her hand and trying to get hold of some food.

'It's the same whether it's peace or war,' Marjorie says. 'There's always the same problems, always the same fights of anxiety when new babies are brought in, and it's touch and go whether they'll live. It all goes on, regardless of what's happening in the world outside. War or peace, riots or strikes, atom-bombs, H-bombs, no matter what - the birds live and suffer, and die, in their own world.'

While the storm-hit birds grew stronger the islanders set about clearing up the debris and chaos left in the wake of the storm.

Hardly any of the sea-wall was left standing. Pebbles and seaweed stretched scattered along the road, where it had been swept to the side, in a hasty attempt to clear up. Broken cottage windows were boarded up. The small fishing-boats put out safely from the shore, and life returned to the usual routine.

The Bird Hospital's list added up to over a hundred birds now. They were coming and going all the time. Marjorie knew soon she would have to say good-bye to the little razorbill, but she was becoming used to saying good-bye to the birds she loved best.

Winter was beginning, the sun was losing its

brilliance and as it became paler the wind grew more icy. The salt air stung harshly, instead of warming and tanning the gnarled sea-faces that were so used to these yearly transitions.

It was quite cold on the morning when Marjorie buttoned her thick overcoat round under her chin and went into the garden to collect the razorbill.

He came running across the pen towards her. She remembered the time when he had first huddled close to her hands, dangerously frightened, and then gradually calm. He had been bedraggled and scared then. Now he was healthy and well and eager to be out among the waves and the fish and the other sea-birds.

Carefully Marjorie scooped him up in her thick-gloved hands. He didn't struggle. He was too used to her touch. His bright eyes peered curiously to right and left as Marjorie hurried with him out into the road to the beach. Softly, she whispered and chatted to the bird, as she had with the Leach's Petrel and the other birds she freed week by week.

The beach was almost deserted. Only a couple of men collecting seaweed glanced casually across towards Marjorie and then went on with their search, working farther and farther along the beach. She stood still a moment. Fondly she stroked the little white shirt under the razorbill's beak. Then she felt his body tremble as the wind brushed his feathers. It was a shiver of eager excitement, not of fear.

'Away you go then. Take care this time . . .'

Marjorie bent down and opened her hands. Very

slowly the bird stepped on to the stony sand. Then he stood, looking round and taking in the salt taste of freedom.

Quickly Marjorie turned and began walking back up the beach. Once she let a bird go, it had gone, and there was nothing more to be done. It was better to go back quickly than to wait and watch and wish that the bird was still in her care.

She gave a glance back. What she saw made her stop in her tracks.

The razorbill had followed her right back up the beach, waddling as fast as his ungainly webbed feet could carry him. He was determined not to be left behind, alone on the beach.

There was only one thing to do. Marjorie picked him up again, took him firmly back to the edge of the beach, where some rocks rose high out of the water, set him down, and then ran back up the beach.

This time there was no turning back to glance behind her.

All lunch-time, Marjorie wondered what had happened to the razorbill. Usually when any of the birds were set free they flew up into the sky or over the sea without even a backward glance. Often she had wished that they would just linger a moment or two, but now she was thankful that they hadn't. The trusting way the razorbill had automatically followed after her up the beach was all she could think of that afternoon.

'I must go back, Nell. Just to make sure he went

off all right. I'll have to know he's gone before I can stop thinking about him . . .'

Nell helped Marjorie on with her coat and prepared to see to the birds' dinner herself.

At first Marjorie thought the beach was empty. It stretched endlessly, with no one in sight. The tide was gradually coming in, almost covering the rocks that had seemed so high in the morning.

Putting her hand to her eyes, Marjorie looked out towards the rocks where she had last left the razorbill. As she looked she saw a distant speck dive off one of them and into the sea.

Although it was too far away to see much, Marjorie knew who it was.

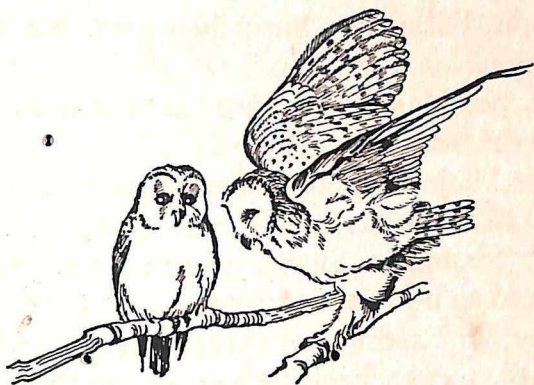
As it swam nearer the shore, the bird surfaced. Then it rose into the air and circled above Marjorie's head. She realized too late what was going to happen.

Resolutely turning her back on the bird, just as it alighted on the beach, Marjorie dashed towards the road. This was her penalty for being too soft-hearted.

'I ran and ran. All the time I knew the razorbill was sure to be somewhere behind me. I ran until I reached the road, until I was quite out of breath. If only, I thought, the blessed razorbill had enough sense to swim away again, or to fly far out to the rocks, just to lose sight of me . . .'

At length she reached home. Only then did she turn at the gate and look back. No razorbill. She gave an exhausted sigh of relief and staggered indoors.

She never saw the razorbill again.



Chapter Seven

I

'How can they be so cruel?' At first Marjorie thought it must have been boys out for some sadistic fun, as very gently she picked up the little pigeon from the roadside and wrapped him in a handkerchief. Muttering dire and angry imprecations against demon boys who torture birds for amusement, she examined him. He was just alive.

'If we can keep him alive,' Marjorie said to Nell when she reached home, 'I shall call him Pidgie.' There was a far-away look in her eye. She was remembering the first Pidgie, dyed black and kept in the roof, looking like a cross between a blackbird and a crow. Dear little Pidgie who had kept up his masquerade so cleverly, never forgetting himself and emitting a single coo whenever any Nazis were around.

At the end of the war Pidgie had been released and flown safely away. Now, here was another one, but this time there would be no need to dye him, for fear of having his tiny neck wrung by a Nazi soldier.

Marjorie realized she had made a mistake, blaming cruel boys for Pidgie Two's wounds. He had been lying beneath his nest, bloody and near to death. He was barely three weeks old. She and Nell had seen the nest being built; they had watched the single tiny fledgeling since the first day it was born.

Marjorie had looked more closely at the injuries all over the pigeon's thinly feathered body and realized that the wounds had been made by the beaks of other pigeons.

She had observed this sort of thing before. Pigeons could be very cruel. If, for some reason best known to themselves, the parents took a dislike to a pigeon when it was young, they would peck it to pieces or throw it out of the nest before it was strong enough to defend itself.

Washing the blood away from his torn feathers, Marjorie could see that there was hardly a part of the pitifully tiny body that hadn't suffered in some way. It was a marvel that she could still feel the flicker of life as she held him.

As he began to recover, Marjorie bound up one of his legs firmly with Sellotape to act as a firm splint and carefully smoothed some iodine into the wounds. Then, between them, she and Nell coaxed the little bird to drink some warm milk.

It had recovered quite noticeably even within this first hour. Warily it raised its head, trying to help the milk trickle down its throat. Marjorie watched. Then she snorted: 'That's not going to do him any good - look at his gullet.' It was the thrush which had been brought to her during the war with its throat shot half away by gunshot all over again. Remembering how she had dealt with the thrush then, Marjorie was quickly rummaging for her thinnest needle. The milk continued to run out of the jagged tear in the bird's throat. While Nell mopped up the drops of milk trickling down his front, Marjorie was at the medicine cupboard looking for some fine nylon thread. Then deftly and gently, she began sewing up the long slit.

◦ All through the operation Pidgie Two lay quite still. His eyes remained shut and his body didn't flinch. He was hardly conscious enough to feel any pain and Marjorie was so used to stitching birds together and did the whole thing so speedily that the operation was almost painless.

'When it was finished, Nell fetched a shoe-box from her bedroom and I laid the patient gently inside. Then I pressed some more milk between his closed beak. Slowly his beak opened and he began to drink the milk. As he drank the food seemed to give him almost immediate strength. The old needle and thread had done its job again.'

Pidgie Two stayed in his shoe-box for the next month. He accepted love and care and attention with

what could have been gratitude, but which could equally well have been the grace of a well-bred bird who knew what respect was due to him.

He ate all the food that came his way as soon as he was well enough and old enough to digest solid food properly, then very quickly he began to grow fat.

The wounds healed on his body and soon there were only a few tiny scars, where the feathers ruffled unevenly, to show that he had ever been hurt. After three weeks Marjorie cut the splint of Sellotape from his spindly leg, exposing the regular pink rings surrounding his claws and leg. There was not a scar or sign to show where the bone had been broken. Pidgie Two hopped contentedly round the sitting-room surveying the warm fire and the other birds that were occasionally brought in to share the warmth with him. He had no idea that a battle royal was ensuing outside the door as the inevitable odd cat fought to come in and Marjorie fought to keep it out. Pidgie Two just sat in contemplation and preened himself and puffed out his plump chest and waited for the next tit-bit of food to come his way.

Pidgie Two was well; he had also established himself as a new member of the Bird Hospital family.

But he soon had to get used to sharing Marjorie with the other birds. They were always demanding attention. Either youngsters needing food, or a new bird arriving to be cleaned and patched up.

Marjorie's day was never-ending. It began when

first light filtered through the greyness of the very early morning and the first piping notes of the dawn chorus rang haltingly in the trees, even before the sun was up over the restless sea. It ended only when the last birds were fed, and all around beaks were sinking into contented chests, feathers were ruffling out in sleep and dusk had long ago turned into the blackness of night.

Marjorie has no other memories but these. 'That was how it went on. Day after day, never quite knowing what was coming next. Never knowing who was going to arrive on the doorstep or when the telephone bell was going to ring announcing the next patient. And it's the same now as it was then.'

That was how it was one quiet, lazy June Sunday afternoon when it was too warm to do much but lie and think. Think about the weather; about the sand and the sea; and perhaps about work to be done when the sun began to go down and the evening was cool.

The telephone rang, harshly cutting in on the lazy beatitude of the afternoon.

Marjorie pulled herself out of a deck-chair where she had been half asleep, with one eye watching the gulls and the gannets waddling up and down in their pen.

'Miss Ozanne?' It was a small boy's voice. He sounded agitated.

'Yes. What's the matter?'

'You must come quickly. It's Bobby and me and

the gang.' She knew the boy and some of his companions by sight and by name. She knew the place he was phoning from as he went on breathlessly. 'We're on Lanresse. We've got a bird here; we think he's a shag. Had some stones thrown at him. He's a bit of a mess; please come quick, Miss Ozanne, we don't know what to do.'

'You just sit tight and wait for me.' As she spoke Marjorie was making a mental note of all she would need. 'I'll be there in twenty minutes - and mind you boys keep him safe.'

There was a short pause. 'And, Miss Ozanne, - if you could bring some sticking-plaster? Had a bit of a fight ourselves.'

She had heard the story so often before. There were good and bad on the island - she knew what to expect when she arrived on the beach at Lanresse.

The beach swarmed with holiday-makers, lying flat with newspapers and sunhats over their faces, sunbathing and making the most of the warm weather. Farther along, the groups thinned out and only one or two people clambered across the slippery rocks, making their way up to the road.

On a wooden bench where the beach met the road sat half a dozen small boys, clutching a bird.

If the bird looked the worse for wear, the boys certainly looked as bad. One of them had a black eye, and a grubby handkerchief held to a cut on his lip. The others were covered with sand and seaweed slime, their hands and knees grazed and scratched. With their

hair over their eyes they looked a real bunch of ragamuffins.

'What happened?' Marjorie asked them.

In bits and pieces, told first by one, then another, the story was completed. The boys had been walking along when they saw some boys about their own age throwing stones towards a crevice in one of the high rocks. It had happened so many times before that they knew exactly what was going on without stopping to ask.

When they called to the boys to stop, they were just laughed at, and a few more stones hurtled on their way to the small crevice. As they came nearer they could see the tall, ragged-looking black bird, huddling against the rock, trying to escape the vicious death-dealing stones as they came flying towards him.

The fight that followed didn't last long. Just long enough for a good many cuts and bruises to be sustained on both sides. The boys found stoning a bird a much more congenial form of amusement than fighting boys their own age and size. They soon ran off, back along the beach, hurling a few pebbles behind them as they went.

The shag was so battered and dazed that it didn't take the boys long to coax it down, pick it up between them and take it to the seat. It sat there blinking its big round eyes, still shivering slightly with shock, one wing hanging loosely against the side of its ungainly body. It stood almost three feet high, but it was so numb with fright that it had been easy for

the boys to keep it under control while Marjorie was sent for.

She took George home, and the family grew again.

There was no reason for calling him George, 'except that he looked like George,' Marjorie says.

He was a strange-looking bird. 'He always reminded me of my idea of the island witches, and their black bats and pig's blood bubbling in their cauldrons.'

George was black and his long neck hooked backwards and pointed upwards to his long, bent beak. With his distraught crest of spiky black feathers he looked as if he were suffering from a permanent attack of indigestion. As he waddled towards her, with his big, ungainly-webbed feet flapping outwards, he never failed to make Marjorie laugh.

But there was not much to laugh at when he first came to the Bird Hospital. His body was bruised all over and his wing badly torn. His round, penetrating eyes, instead of being bright and intelligent, were dulled with pain.

Carefully Marjorie cleaned and bathed his feathers, wiping the blood away from the wounds, until all the cuts and grazes were clean. Then she cut away a few of the feathers close to the wounds and covered the cuts with a dressing of antiseptic powder. Once or twice the bird cringed away from her, but gradually he relaxed, leaning his body heavily against her hands.

The wing was more difficult. It was easy enough to clean, but then it had to be set in position and held in place until it had completely healed.

‘Usually a bird’s bones take anything from a fortnight to sixteen days to mend, but I like to keep a dressing on for a good three weeks, to make absolutely sure that all is well.’ She fastened George’s wing securely folded across the other, stuck firmly in place with several strips of Sellotape. With the broken joints fitted perfectly together, it would be hard to tell where the breaks had been.

Nell always marvelled at Marjorie’s instinctive skill with her patients. Marjorie merely marvelled at the simplicity of it all. To her it seemed so easy. As long as one wing was in exactly the same position as the other, it had to heal together the right way. This was the island lore of logic working out in practice. And time after time, as wings and legs healed quickly and perfectly, Marjorie proved that the simplicity of her methods, the magic in her gentle, firm touch, was the right way.

‘It may not have been the way a vet would have gone about it, but I hadn’t their training. At first I often thought I should try and take a proper veterinary course, but I hadn’t the time – or the money to pay for training. So I just do what I can how I can.’

When George was patched up, covered in Sellotape and white antiseptic powder to keep the flies away, Marjorie looked at him thoughtfully. Every now and then his body still shivered slightly with shock. Leaving him standing on a large piece of newspaper in front of the empty grate, Marjorie hurried out to the kitchen.

In a few moments she was back with a bottle of

brandy. Carefully she measured out a little, and gave it to the shag. Then she picked him up and carried him outside to the garden, where the other birds crowded up against the wire-netting, squawking at her. Leaning over, she put George in with them.

He took no notice of the other birds, and they took no notice of him. They were too busy looking for some food, and he was too busy orientating himself. Marjorie turned and went back into the kitchen. As she disappeared, George watched her and opening his beak gave a quiet, solemn croak.

As the days went by, George emitted his quiet, solemn croak frequently. Whenever Nell went out to see him, to take a good look at the newest arrival, George would eye her and croak so seriously that Nell couldn't help laughing at him.

In a few days he became tamer than any of the other sea-birds. He saw Pidgie Two fluttering out of his cage and perching on Marjorie's head, but when he moved on to her arm while she fed him George began to croak disapprovingly. He went on croaking until Marjorie said good-bye to Pidgie Two, and went indoors to fetch the fish for the birds in the pen.

Then he went quiet again. Solemnly he stood in a corner watching. Sometimes he wandered nonchalantly round while the other birds were being fed. His big feet flapped in an amusingly pompous fashion as he stalked about, paying not the slightest attention to the commotion as the birds fought over the fish thrown towards them.

Then, when it was all over, Marjorie would call across the grey and white heads of the gulls to the black shock-head waiting patiently in the corner.

‘Come on, George, come on . . .’

Running as fast as his ungainly legs would carry him, George would flip-flap across the pen, clear the wire-netting with one effortless jump and saunter after Marjorie into the kitchen, leaving the other birds shrieking with greedy rage.

He soon learned where the whiting and mackerel were kept. Every afternoon he would climb laboriously up the step of the back door and across the tiled floor of the kitchen to the refrigerator. Then he waited patiently until the door was opened, croaking hopefully at anyone who happened to pass.

And when he had eaten, George was meticulously polite. He was not one to rush away as if food were all he had called for. But neither did he outstay his welcome. He sat for a few minutes digesting his meal, then with a croak of thanks and satisfaction he was out with a dignified stroll – ‘You could imagine that he had tipped the waiter at his favourite restaurant handsomely’ – and away down the steps again. With typical nonchalance he would jump the wire-netting and be back inside the pen with the other birds. Somehow, miraculously, he managed to remain good friends with them all, in spite of the blatant exhibition of favouritism that he was shown.

‘It isn’t always so easy to keep the birds happy. You have to watch them continually to see that there’s

no fighting or quarrelling; and with all the noise that is always going on,' Marjorie adds, 'it's sometimes hard to tell the difference between love and war.'

II

The birds are at their most irritable and possessive at nesting-time. In the spring of 1960, two sea-gulls built a nest at one end of the pen, and it was a daily thrill for Marjorie to take a look at the end of the garden to see how the home was coming on.

The cock sea-gull inevitably created a terrific noise as soon as he saw Marjorie approaching. One morning his alarm and anger was more forceful than ever. Marjorie thought the sea-gull might attack her. When she could get near enough to look in the rough, dry, grass nest, she saw the mother sitting on two large, greenish-blue, black-spotted eggs. Marjorie turned and rushed excitedly indoors.

'Nell, come and see - if all's well there's going to be two baby sea-gulls in the pen. Just come and see the mother sitting.'

As Marjorie was breathlessly urging Nell to leave her housework for a quick look at the eggs, a tremendous commotion suddenly began in the garden.

Marjorie rushed outside again, followed by Nell. They could hear the continuous high-pitched raucous scream of the gulls, interspersed with the short, harsh rasp of the gannets. George kept to himself in the corner, with a doubtful expression in his bright eyes. He was keeping well out of harm's way.

There was no doubt where the trouble lay. Marjorie raced to the nest with the two new eggs. Both the sea-gulls hopped backwards and forwards, flapping their wings and shrieking for all they were worth, the hen sea-gull had been chased off her nest.

There, sitting smugly on the nest, was a large gannet.

'How dare you,' Marjorie shook her fist at the gannet as she stormed down the garden. The gulls screamed louder than ever.

The gannet was twice as big as the gulls, its feathers overlapped the sides of the rough nest, which with its two precious eggs had completely disappeared under the ample mound of grey feathers.

The sea-gulls flapped their wings frantically and began to have what looked to Marjorie like hysterics. But the gannet took no notice. It sat comfortably and securely on the nest, safe in the knowledge that the gulls were incapable of moving it. Then it saw Marjorie striding down the garden, her face like a thundercloud and her voice full of indignation. She knew how upset the sea-gulls must feel. It was like a couple of human beings, father and mother, witnessing their two babes being kidnapped under their very eyes.

'How dare you,' she blazed again at the gannet.

The bird gazed at her, its big eyes growing apprehensively puzzled. In spite of her concern for the eggs' rightful owners, Marjorie felt some of her rage waning. She could almost have felt sorry for the bird. 'It was something of a new experience for me,' she

says, describing the scene. 'I certainly never had a gannet with a mother complex before.'

She turned to Nell. 'Come here quickly,' she said briskly. She knew how she was going to tackle this problem. 'I can't manage alone.'

She had to shift the usurper off the nest without causing too much fuss.

She took hold of the gannet's powerful beak. It twisted and turned so swiftly that it took some time for that first job to be safely accomplished. Then while Nell took hold of the gannet's heavy body they moved it firmly off the nest and carried it back into the pen with the other birds.

It took the two of them a good half-hour. All the time the gulls continued crying and shrieking in their ears, hopping backwards and forwards getting in the way. Nell's greatest difficulty was to try to block her ears against the deafening noise and help Marjorie at the same time.

The gannet kicked a lot. Wrenching her head this way and that, once she almost twisted out of Marjorie's hands to fight her way back on to the nest. But she knew when the battle was lost. Sadly she squatted in the corner of the pen, glowering at any birds that ventured near her, occasionally glancing jealously back towards the sea-gulls, rightful owners of the pair of greenish-blue, black-speckled eggs.

The gulls' nest was built right against the fence at the bottom of the garden. Marjorie studied the situation thoughtfully while the hen sea-gull settled

herself back on top of her eggs and the cock-bird fluttered his wings and hopped anxiously round her, both of them gradually calming down. Marjorie had to think up a plan that was good enough to prevent the whole thing happening all over again. The gannet was obviously so besotted with mother-love that it would inevitably get out of the pen and repeat its performance. There was a danger that in its excitement it might clumsily smash the eggs, break the nest or attack the sea-gulls.

'I know what we'll do for you,' Marjorie said suddenly. 'Stay with them for a minute, Nell,' she called over her shoulder, as she ran back down the garden.

She was soon back, trailing a long piece of wire-netting and clutching a hammer and a box of tacks.

'Can you get her off for a moment, Nell?' she indicated the sitting hen breathlessly. The cock sea-gull had already started flapping his wings and creating a commotion once more. As the hen was again parted from her eggs, she cried mournfully, and deafeningly, in Nell's ear. Both the sea-gulls now watched the proceedings suspiciously.

Roughly but firmly, Marjorie constructed a lean-to wire-netting guard against the fence, over the nest. She made it high enough for the gull to sit inside comfortably, and a hole in the front just wide enough for her to get in and out. No gannet could possibly squeeze inside, however determined it might be.

Nell carried the mother-gull back to Marjorie who

carefully took hold of her and taught her how to get in and out by way of the hole in the wire-netting guard. A couple of lessons and the bird was quite happy. She and the father-gull were soon nipping in to the nest and out, highly pleased with the new arrangement, and all suspicion and fear completely vanished.

By this time the whole morning had almost gone, and today was going to be a full day. Every time she went into the garden Marjorie couldn't resist a quick glance at the nest, where the sea-gull sat happily on her eggs. Marjorie had never reared a sea-gull from the egg before and couldn't bear the thought of losing this chance.

In the afternoon she had to tear herself away from the sea-gulls. There was a job to be done that always fascinated her, although in many ways it was a sad one.

While she had been attending to this complex problem of mother-love thwarted and mother-love requited, a tiny duckling had been perched on the sitting-room settee. Some children had brought him round the previous day; they had found him waddling along the road, far away from any fresh water and almost exhausted by lack of food and thirst.

The only place Marjorie could be sure of him surviving was on Vale Pond, a good expanse of fresh water on the other side of the island. Almost every week she had to take birds there to be freed, and their exuberant reactions to the water never failed to thrill her.

Today there was only the duckling and a small, brilliantly-coloured kingfisher that sat in one corner of the birdhouse, whistling and warbling happily to itself, occasionally fluttering its wings, impatiently sensing the prospect of freedom and flight.

The trouble with the two sea-gulls had delayed her and dusk was beginning to fall by the time Marjorie reached Vale Pond. The two birds were very quiet and still in their box as she carried them along. The box was open and there was nothing to stop them flying away, but even after one day with Marjorie, they trusted her and had no desire to leave.

Then they reached the pond. Marjorie stood for a moment watching the water lapping the side of the bank and rippling beneath a capful of evening breeze. The big pond appeared curiously remote in the shadowy dusk, more than it was in the sunlight of the day. Now, it seemed a world of its own. Quiet, cool and the air about it curiously heavy as if it half belonged to the water beneath it.

She lifted the birds out of their box. One last ray of sun glinted on their feathers, making the kingfisher flash brilliantly and even bringing a sudden sheen to the brownish green feathers of the duckling.

Then, without a backward glance, the kingfisher was away. He flew towards the water like a gleaming dart. Without a moment's hesitation he dived at the glassy surface, his long pointed beak piercing the water as he disappeared. He was so small that Marjorie couldn't see when he surfaced again.

The duck was more hesitant. For a moment he hovered along the side of the bank where it ran down to the water, one eye still on Marjorie, but occasionally turning his head to gaze longingly at the pond. Then he too was gone. He flopped in at the water's edge, swam for a few yards and then dived.

Marjorie narrowed her eyes and stared at the ripple as he swam for a moment under-water. He reappeared a few yards away, happily shaking his wet green head and prepared to dive down again at any moment. Marjorie was completely forgotten.

She never minded how quickly they forgot her. 'You soon learn that it's no good trying to be possessive. It's the same with human beings, the children soon forget the parents. It's part of human nature. Love - for anything or anyone, birds or children - has to be selfless, without any prospect of repayment. Otherwise it isn't love. It's just wanting to possess something or someone.'

It was enough for her to feel the thrill which the kingfisher and the duckling experienced when they saw the water, and the way they seemed, after a couple of minutes swimming around, as if they had always lived on the pond. Marjorie picked up the empty box, and turned back for home.

Next morning, the birdhouse had to be given a really thorough clean out. After the lick and a promise which was all it had received the previous day because of the commotion over the gulls' nest she couldn't afford to let the cages go neglected for another day.

Carefully she went round one after the other, removing the bowls of food and water, to place them on the floor below the cages. Then, while each occupant reacted in its own individual way, she began.

Some of the birds enjoyed having their cages cleaned. The thrushes, the pigeons and blackbirds hopped eagerly to the front of their cages, letting Marjorie pick them up and move them to the one empty cage while she went to work. She finished up by putting in a new lining of newspaper on the floor of the cage. As soon as it was returned to its cage the bird would hop round all the corners, examining the new paper as though it was in another cage.

The owls were the worst to deal with. Messy and with unattractive eating habits, their cages were littered with lumps of raw meat that they had toyed with and then tossed on to the floor. They blinked their great round eyes at Marjorie and as soon as she put her hand to the catch of their door they hissed at her. A low, continuous, hostile sound it was that sometimes made Marjorie feel uneasy, although she knew that she was stronger than they were.

Deliberately she refrained from nipping out to look at the gulls' nest. Doggedly she worked through the cages. The bowls to empty and refill, fresh food to be distributed. Bird-seed came to an expensive bill for Marjorie by the end of the week. Each packet cost 3/9, and the birds ate a good packet between them every day. That was without the eight or nine fish eaten by the gannets at one meal. Between them, the

birds made a hole in a good £6 worth of food a week.

Marjorie knew the fishmonger well. He didn't mind waiting a few weeks for payment, he always knew that the money would arrive in the end. 'Most of the time,' Marjorie confesses, 'I have no idea where the money's coming from at all. Then, at the last minute, someone sends in a cheque, or the small committee formed to promote the Bird Hospital arranges a dance and produces some life-saving pounds to cover the costs for a few more weeks.'

She knows the full meaning of the well-known phrase: a hand-to-mouth existence, but she has never thought to worry. She knows that somehow all will be well, so it isn't worth wasting time on worry.

At last, the job was done and Marjorie felt she was entitled to see how the two gulls in their wire-netting protected nest were making out. The hen-gull was sitting there quietly and all was well with her little world. As she turned back to carry on with the rest of the jobs to be done, Marjorie gave a thought to the gannet. She noticed sadly that it still wore its thwarted look.

The days passed; then one morning she was just putting a large rat that one of the cats had caught into the owls' cage when a sudden squawking and shrieking broke out from the direction of the garden. Marjorie listened. It was the excited *qua-qua-qua* of the gulls.

Pausing long enough to make sure that the owls'

cage catch was firmly secured, she ran out. She knew without stopping to look where the noise was coming from. At the bottom of the garden, the cock sea-gull was standing proudly outside the wire-netting enclosure, screaming with delight.

Inside, lying beside the mother, was a baby sea-gull, newly hatched.

It wasn't yet dry. The grey spotted feathers were damp and ruffled and although the baby was just able to stand it couldn't see. There was still the one remaining egg for the mother to sit on and keep her content. As Marjorie gently reached into the nest and took out the baby gull, she knew she was acting for the best. There were too many cats roaming the garden for the fledgeling to be safe in a nest that had been built somewhat hastily and thoughtlessly and was so easily accessible.

Marjorie was so excited that she felt her own heart must be beating almost as fast as the tiny bird's pulsating body lying securely in her hand.

'Nell,' she whispered as she stepped inside the kitchen. 'Nell, look.'

They bent over it. About five inches long, and barely three inches high, the speckles of brown made dark smudges all over the tiny fluffy grey body.

As Marjorie looked at it, she suddenly realized that its eyes were focusing properly now. They were fixed on her intently, and quite unafraid.

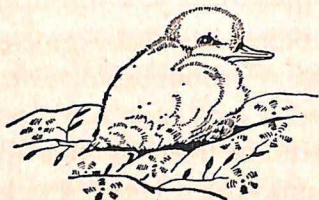
Nell glanced at the bird and then at Marjorie.

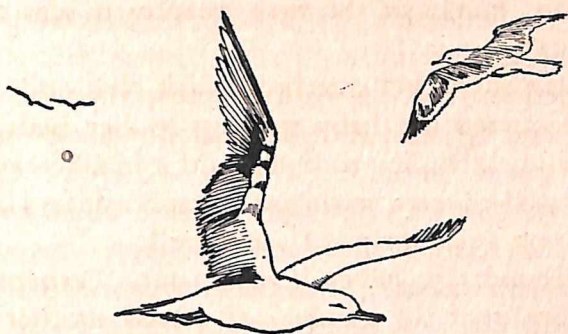
'You know what they say, Marj,' she said. 'They say

that a bird thinks of the first creature it sees as its mother . . . ?

But Marjorie didn't care how much Nell pulled her leg. She carried the baby gull up to her bedroom. Cooing and chirruping to it, she laid it in a box of hay next to a well-covered warm hot-water bottle and began to feed it on a few drops of warm milk.

The second egg never hatched out. 'Perhaps the disturbance over the gannet's thwarted mother-love may have had something to do with it,' Marjorie thinks. 'Or the gannet may have fixed it with an evil eye, out of sheer jealousy and frustration.'





Chapter Eight

I

It wasn't long before the baby gull established itself as a member of the household. After a few weeks Marjorie decided it was time for the shredded-wheat box that was its home to be moved from the bedroom into the bathroom. The sea-gull was becoming a restless sleeper and early riser, much to Marjorie's discomfort. It was soon roaming round every room and into the garden. The cats in the house thought it wise to take no notice of this new arrival. In a straight fight a gull could lick a cat any day.

In fact, the newcomer found the cats very amusing. One day there was an uproar of mewing and crying in the hall and Marjorie hurtled downstairs to find the gull hanging on to a tabby-cat's tail, pulling for all it was worth.

Marjorie got hold of its beak and forced it to let

go. The cat fled away, leaving the gull looking unrepentantly at Marjorie.

She tried to look angry, but knew that she was failing. 'Naughty, bad bird,' she tried again to scold it. But it was no good. She couldn't be cross. 'Come and talk to Mother.' She put her face close to the gull's, which duly reciprocated by gently caressing her cheek with its beak. Then the bird opened its beak wide for the first time uttering the curious, harsh cry: 'Vee, vee, vee.'

'Yes, Vee, you're a lovely bird.' Marjorie scratched the top of its head. That was the sea-gull's christening. Vee had come to stay.

During the winter, Vee spent most of the day in the drawing-room in front of the fire, sharing the warmth with Nell and Marjorie. When his coat was still fluffy and ruffled, Vee would stand beside Marjorie when she sat before the fire, and every now and then tweak the ends of her apron until it was nearly undone.

When the weather grew a bit warmer, Vee went hopping through the house, down from his home in the bathroom, out through the kitchen, gulping down anything that happened to be on the cats' saucers as he passed, and into the garden. There Vee hopped round happily all day, tolerating the other birds, but never mixing with them.

In the evening, as soon as Marjorie called his name, he came hurrying back, jumping up the kitchen steps again, rifling a bit more of the cats' dinner, standing,

like George, in front of the refrigerator, shouting until it was opened and he was fed, and then, after a game or two, it was time for bed.

Vee's favourite game was admiring himself in the mirror.

Sometimes he would stand for hours gazing down into a mirror placed for him on the floor, fascinated by his own reflection. 'It wasn't all vanity,' Marjorie felt sure. 'When he had tired himself of looking, he'd try to turn the mirror over, and then he would get annoyed. He wanted to find the other bird that had been gazing at him. Then when he realized that somewhere, somehow, he was being fooled, he went back to studying himself, full of admiration, until the cats came blundering in and upset his concentration and spoilt the fun.'

As soon as Marjorie called bedtime, Vee was ready. Ready for the left-overs of the gannet's fish - a night-cap which he would never expect to do without - and for Marjorie to help him into the cardboard box. Then he settled down comfortably and in a few moments was asleep.

'This is how it has gone on every day,' Marjorie says. 'And will continue to go on. Vee has made no attempt to fly away.'

Almost every day there are new entries in the Bird Hospital diary. More birds brought in, bringing the totals to dozens each week. Sometimes patients are brought in by plane and mail-boat from the other islands. Usually injured and wounded birds are sent

to Marjorie, but sometimes she has gone to attend them, answering a call for help. The storms and the floods and the island gales and pounding seas come and go, and all the time, somewhere, there are birds needing help and attention.

Marjorie has had occasion to wonder to herself just how far her inextinguishable love of birds will force her to go in an effort to save one.

Once she had been frightened of thunderstorms, but forcing herself to rescue a baby owl during a thunderstorm dead overhead while she was extricating it from where it had fallen from its nest, cured her of any fear of thunder and lightning. At one time she had admitted to being dead scared of climbing the jagged cliffs surrounding so many sides of the island, but one evening a call came through which was to put an end to that fear also.

It was late in the afternoon. The day had been hot, and Marjorie and Nell felt like an early night. Then the telephone bell rang. It was a call from one of the disused quarries deep in the cliffs along the coast.

'It's a sea-gull, Miss Ozanne. Hurt it is, and lying in a niche in the rock down at the bottom of the quarry. They've gone for ladders, but we think that you would be more help than anyone else.'

It makes you wonder how a sea-gull, of all birds, could get itself stuck in such a place, Marjorie thought, a trifle irritably. She didn't relish the prospect of descending the quarry face.

By the time she reached the place there was quite a

small crowd standing watching. Someone had brought a ladder, but still it was hard to reach the sea-gull. Marjorie looked over the jagged edge. She could make out the gull, lying some feet below.

There didn't seem much point in waiting for help. Perhaps the side of the quarry didn't look as steep as she had imagined. That was what she told herself as tentatively she began walking down the first few feet of the crumbling cliff face. The rocks held all right. Slowly she went on down.

Now that she was actually moving down the side of the quarry the bird seemed to be a long, long way down. Marjorie concentrated hard, and tried not to think of what might happen if she slipped.

At last she reached the bird. She never thought of looking up to see what was happening at the top of the quarry. All her attention was fixed on the sea-gull, as it lay with its legs folded awkwardly underneath it. The bird was watching Marjorie as she steadied herself with one hand and bent to pick it up with the other. She held it firmly, then she started the climb up again.

Steadily she ascended the side of the quarry, until she could take her mind off the climbing enough to hear the men talking at the top of the cliff.

'Here,' one of them called down to her. 'Hang on to this, it'll help you up.'

A length of rope snaked over the edge and was held steadily at the top. Marjorie grabbed at it gratefully with her free hand.

Then, at last, she felt the scratching, gritty hardness

of the rock surface giving way to the springy grass. Now she scrambled over bunches of thrift and great pink ice plants growing untidily over the edge of the cliff. Coming out of the sheltered dip of the quarry the cool breeze blew on her cheeks, cooling them as she puffed and gasped over the top.

She still held on to the gull. The watchers patted her on the back and muttered their congratulations, but Marjorie hurried away as quickly as she could and started on her way home. The sea-gull needed immediate attention.

As she walked home, Marjorie was still trembling slightly from the fright and the thrill of the climb. She had always hated heights. Although it was very cool now that the evening had come her hands felt hot and stinging as she held the bird carefully between them. She could feel several of the scratches beginning to bleed. There was probably a ladder in her stocking as well.

Suddenly, as if to welcome her safe return, the bells from St. Peter's Church began pealing out into the early evening air, and Marjorie forgot her shivers and the nasty feeling which had continued to linger in her stomach.

It always gave Marjorie a feeling of nostalgia to hear church bells ringing. The continuous rhythm brought back the memories of her father. Memories of the tiny, dust-ridden room in the belfry of the old Vale Church, where as a child she had gone to wind the old clock and later to learn to ring the bells.

And Guernsey church bells were another part of the island magic. A powerful, rejoicing sound that took skill and precision to produce, and which seemed to fill all the air with its compelling, dominating rhythm.

'You've been a long time, Marj.' Nell peered anxiously round the sitting-room door.

'Just picked up another sea-gull - broken legs,' Marjorie replied briefly.

Nell had no chance to inquire further. At that moment one of the cats flew into the room in a rage of indignation.

Vee was hanging on to his tail and pulling hard.

II

Sometimes, at oncoming night, when the sky is streaked with the red of sunset and the grey of dusk, and the shadows begin to sink deep into the sea, Marjorie goes off for a long walk alone. If the tide is low enough, she climbs across the jagged rocky causeway to Lihou, the tiny island off the shore. There is only the cry of the sea-birds as they wheel across the sky, and the sense of night's wonder, full of island magic.

Strange, strong and powerful, more powerful than all the superstition that says a friendly robin means death and three magpies bring bad luck. Strange as the far-away smile in Marjorie's eyes as she watches the birds; strong as her gentle hands when they hold a frightened bird still until it is calm; powerful as the

skill with which she can make them well to fly free again.

The short while alone is enough. Before the brief half-hour ends, and the causeway is lost in the tide again, she is walking back, eager for the squawking commotion that greets her return.

'There'll be more than 600 birds this year,' she reminds Nell that evening. 'There are the baby robins to feed,' she adds. 'Four of them, found barely alive an hour after their birth, alone in the nest. Then there's the gannets, and the hissing owls. And there's Vee,' as she feels a tweak at the apron she has put on. 'Two years old this spring. . . .'

Outside, the last light fades gently into the obscurity of night, a light breeze quickens into a moan of wind from the west. And Marjorie Ozanne is glad that some birds, at any rate, are safe against the storm that may beat upon the island that night.

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