**Grandma goes Ormering \***

There was a good ormering tide last week, and we were always accustomed to going ormering. We were brought up on the beaches where we always found a lot of pleasure. Just think then, that when we were talking about it the previous evening, Grandma said, “if you are going at low-tide (ormering), then I am coming too. It is a terrible long time that I have not been.” And she started to laugh like a loony.

We did not want her at all, because, naturally, she is old and because, on the beach, she is more bother than she is worth, but at the same time we dare not refuse her. She's a funny old magpie and at times she gets offended. She would be quick to say that we did not want her (she would be right, but just the same it is better to remain silent).

The next day she hadn't dammed well forgotten. She was up at six-thirty rummaging in her drawers for some old clothes. Then there was a frightful commotion because she could not find her elastic-sided boots. She found them, finally, in the loft. She was so excited that she had put her skirt on back to front. But she didn't change it. As she said, "that is for good luck."

She usually put on four petticoats, but she said, "I have only put on two, because when

one is wet, they get heavy, and I am not so young now, me."

At 12.30 off we set, the four of us, in neighbor Toumas’ old granite cart, along with Uncle George, big Marguerite, Grandma and I.

We had a lot of trouble getting the old girl into the cart, but in the end off we went. The mare was old and she only went at one step today and the next tomorrow. Grandma sang at the top of her voice all the way along the road.

We passed a crowd of young lads who started to laugh like the devil when they saw the old girl with her ormering hook seated at the front. "I do not know why they are laughing like that," she said, "I do not see anything to laugh at me."

Soon, there we were on the beach where the tide had already fallen. "Do you find it too far to walk Grandma?" asked Marguerite. "You will be tired by the time you get there." "You look after yourself, you, and mind your own business. You do not know nothing, you. Gache-a-pan, I was going ormering, me, before you were born. If anyone gets tired, like usual, it will not be me. I do not care to hear you talk like that."

I do not know how long the old girl would have continued to grumble, but she

tripped on a rock, and that kept her quiet for a while, and Marguerite dare not say very much.

Shortly, Uncle George said, "Have you a handkerchief, Grandma, my nose has been running all the time we have been on the beach?"

"No, I have not got any,me," replied the old lady crossly, "it is only to lose them. Think: then of the (clothing) coupons needed for handkerchiefs, and you who grumbles that you have not enough. For me, I wipe my nose on the bottom of my petticoat, that is quite good enough."

Finally, there we were at the water's edge, and to tell the truth, the old girl had walked well. She was going along fine and scrambling up the rocks like a goat. When I fell in a pool, she was the first to laugh. "There now," she said, "if that was me, you would say that it was my old age and that I should never have come. But it is you that is clumsy." There she was starting to tum over the stones, and we did not hear another word. It was a fine tide and, to tell you the truth, we forgot completely about Grandma.

Presently we heard her singing at the top of her voice, "Tara ra boom de ay, Tara ra (dammee I've pinched my finger, and my nose, it runs all the time) boom de ay. Ta ra ra boom (darned things they are as stubborn as donkeys, Don’t they stick hard) de ay. Ta ra ra – and then we heard a tremendous clatter, and an almighty splashing and the old girl swearing like a trooper.

“I really think that she has fallen,” said Uncle George, “we had better go and see to her. Dammed old woman she would have done better to have stayed at home.”

We walked round a large rock, and there was the old lady sitting in a large pool of water, her legs in the air. She was now laughing like a loony. “Ive had it right up to my chemise,” she told us, “but I saved my ormers.” We got her up again with a lot of trouble as she is very large. She was blowing like an ox.

“Good,” she told us, “be off with you, I’me alright, me. Ta ra boom de ay.” And there she was turning over the stones again. Her clothes were soaked right up to the frill of her scoop bonnet, and her hair hung in rat-tails down her cheeks. But she had difficulty in walking, as she had split the end of one of her elastic-sided boots, and her big toe could be seen peeping out. Presently the tide started to rise and we started to gather ourselves together. But she started turning stones even faster, and her basket was almost full.

Suddenly she slipped, and there she was down in another pool. “Come and help me,” she cried, “my foot it is in a hole.” And she began to cry out.

“What is wrong?” I asked her. “Quick, quick, quick, something is pinching my toe. Come along and help me. Double stewed apples!”

“Don’t make so much row, I beg you,” said George. “I wish that you had my toe,” she replied.

We all started to tug on the old lady, and she hurled imprecations at the top of her voice. Eventually we got her toe out of the hole, and truly, she had a large lobster hanging from it.

Her poor toe was bruised for a long while, but it was for many years that we suffered her boasting of how she went ormering and came back with a lobster, while we only had ormers.

\* It is not customary to say one is going ormering in Guernsey-French lest the ormers are listening. It is more usual to say “va a basse iaux” – “go to the low tide.”