

"Oh no, I don't think so," the lad said, with nothing visible in his face to tell whether he was guilty of a mere blunder or of intentional impertinence. "Many elderly gentlemen marry their housekeepers, and in most cases wisely, as far as I have seen."

"Oh! but that is another thing," Roscorla said, with his face flushing slightly, and inclined to be ill-tempered. "There is a great difference: I am not old enough to want a nurse yet. I have chosen Miss Rosewarne because she is possessed of certain qualities calculated to make her an agreeable companion for a man like myself. I have done it quite deliberately and with my eyes open. I am not blinded by the vanity that makes a boy insist on having a particular girl become his wife because she has a pretty face and he wants to show her to his friends."

"And yet there is not much the matter with Wenna Rosewarne's face," said Trelyon, with the least suggestion of sarcasm.

"Oh! as for that," Roscorla said, "that does not concern a man who looks at life from my point of view. Certainly, there are plainer faces than Miss Rosewarne's. She has good eyes and teeth; and besides that, she has a good figure, you know."

Both these men, as they lay idling in this smoking-room, were now thinking of Wenna Rosewarne, and indolently and inadvertently forming some picture of her in their minds. Of the two, that of Mr. Roscorla was by far the more accurate. He could have described every feature of her face and every article of her dress, as she appeared to him on bidding him good-bye the day before on the Launceston highway. The dress was a soft light-brown, touched here and there with deep and rich cherry colour. Her face was turned sideways to him, and looking up; the lips partly open with a friendly smile, and showing beautiful teeth; the earnest dark eyes filled with a kindly regard; the eyebrows high, so that they gave a timid and wondering look to the face; the forehead low and sweet, with some loose brown hair about it that the wind stirred. He knew every feature of that face and every varying look of the eyes, whether they were pleased and grateful, or sad and distant, or overbrimming with a humorous and malicious fun. He

knew the shape of her hands, the graceful poise of her waist and neck, the very way she put down her foot in walking. He was thoroughly well aware of the appearance which the girl he meant to marry presented to the unbiassed eyes of the world.

Harry Trelyon's mental picture of her was far more vague and unsatisfactory. Driven into a corner, he would have admitted to you that Wenna Rosewarne was not very good-looking; but that would not have affected his fixed and private belief that he knew no woman who had so beautiful and tender a face. For somehow, when he thought of her, he seemed to see her, as he had often seen her, go by him on a summer morning on her way to church; and as the sweet small Puritan would turn to him, and say in her gentle way, "Good morning, Mr. Trelyon," he would feel vexed and ashamed that he had been found with a gun in his hand, and be inclined to heave it into the nearest ditch. Then she would go on her way, along between the green hedges, in the summer light; and the look of her face that remained in his memory was as the look of an angel, calm, and gracious, and never to be forgotten.

"Of course," said Mr. Roscorla, in this smoking-room, "if I go to Jamaica, I must get married before I start."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHAIN TIGHTENS.

ONCE, and once only, Wenna broke down. She had gone out into the night all by herself, with some vague notion that the cold, dank sea-air—sweet with the scent of the roses in the cottage-gardens—would be gratefully cool as it came around her face. The day had been stormy, and the sea was high—she could hear the waves dashing in on the rocks at the mouth of the harbour—but the heavens were clear, and over the dark earth the great vault of stars throbbed and burned in silence. She was alone, for Mr. Roscorla had not returned from London, and Mabyn had not noticed her slipping out. And here, in the cool, sweet darkness, the waves seemed to call on her with a low and

melancholy voice. A great longing and trouble came somehow into her heart, and drove her to wander onwards as if she should find rest in the mere loneliness of the night, until at length there was nothing around her but the dark land, and the sea, and the white stars.

She could not tell what wild and sad feeling this was that had taken possession of her; but she knew that she had suddenly fallen away from the calm content of the wife that was to be—with all the pleasant sensation of gratitude towards him who had honoured her, and the no less pleasant consciousness that her importance in the world, and her power of helping the people around her, were indefinitely increased. She had become again the plain Jim Crow of former days, longing to be able to do some indefinitely noble and unselfish thing—ready, indeed, to lay her life down so that she might earn some measure of kindly regard by the sacrifice. And once more she reflected that she had no great influence in the world, that she was of no account to anybody, that she was plain, and small, and insignificant; and the great desire in her heart of being of distinct and beautiful service to the many people whom she loved, seemed to break itself against these narrow bars, until the cry of the sea around her was a cry of pain, and the stars looked coldly down on her, and even God himself seemed far away and indifferent.

“If I could only tell some one—if I could only tell some one!” she was saying to herself wildly, as she walked rapidly onwards, not seeing very well where she was going, for her eyes were full of tears. “But if I tell Mabyn she will say that I fear this marriage, and she will go straight to Mr. Roscorla; and if I tell my mother she will think me ungrateful to him, and to every one around me. And how can I explain to them what I cannot explain to myself? And if I cannot explain it to myself, is it not mere folly to yield to such a feeling?”

The question was easily asked, and easily answered; and with much show of bravery she proceeded to ask herself other questions, less easily answered. She began to reproach herself with ingratitude, with vanity, with a thousand errors and evil qualities; she would teach herself humility; she would endeavour to be contented and satisfied in the

position in which she found herself; she would reflect on the thousands of miserable people who had real reason to complain, and yet bore their sufferings with fortitude; and she would now—straightway and at once—return to her own room, get out the first letter Mr. Roscorla had written to her, and convince herself once more that she ought to be happy.

The climax was a strange one. She had been persuading herself that there was no real cause for this sudden fit of doubt and wretchedness. She had been anticipating her sister's probable explanation, and dismissing it. And yet, as she turned and walked back along the narrow path leading down to the bridge, she comforted herself with the notion that Mr. Roscorla's letter would reassure her and banish these imaginary sorrows. She had frequently read over that letter, and she knew that its ingenious and lucid arguments were simply incontrovertible.

“Oh, Wenna!” Mabyn cried, “what has been troubling you? Do you know that your face is quite white? Have you been out all by yourself?”

Wenna, on getting home, had gone into the little snuggerly which was once a bar, and which was now George Rosewarne's smoking-room. Mabyn and her father had been playing chess—the board and pieces were still on the table. Wenna sate down, apparently a little tired.

“Yes, I have been out for a walk,” she said.

“Wenna, tell me what is the matter with you!” the younger sister said, imperatively.

“There is nothing the matter. Well, I suppose you will tease me until I tell you something. I have had a fit of despondency, Mabyn, and that's all—despondency, over nothing; and now I am quite cured, and do you think Jennifer could get me a cup of tea? Well, why do you stare? Is there anything wonderful in it? I suppose every girl must get frightened a little bit when she thinks of all that may happen to her—especially when she is alone—and of course it is very ungrateful of her to have any such doubts, though they mean nothing, and she ought to be ashamed—”

She stopped suddenly. To her dismay she found that she was admitting to Mabyn the very reasons which she

expected to have to combat. She saw what she had done in the expression of Maby's face—in the proud, indignant mouth and the half-concealed anger of the eyes. The younger sister was silent for a minute; and then she said passionately—

"If there's any one to be ashamed, it isn't you, Wenna. I know who it is. As for you, I don't know what has come over you of late—you are trying to be meeker, and more humble, and more grateful—and all for what? What have you to be grateful for? And you are losing all your fun and your good spirits; and you are getting to be just like children in the story-books, that repeat texts and get gooder and gooder every day until they are only fit for Heaven; and I am sure I am always glad when the little beasts die. Oh, Wenna, I would rather see you do the wickedest thing in all the world if it would only bring you back to your old self!"

"Why, you foolish girl, I am my old self," the elder sister said, quietly taking off her bonnet and laying it on the table. "Is Jennifer up-stairs? Who is in the parlour?"

"Oh, your sweetheart is in the parlour," said Maby, with badly-concealed contempt. "He is just arrived from London. I suppose he is telling mother about his rheumatism."

"He hasn't got any rheumatism—any more than you have," Wenna said, with some asperity.

"Oh yes, he has," the younger sister said, inventing a diabolical story for the mere purpose of provoking Wenna into a rage. She would rather have her in a succession of tempers than the victim of this chastened meekness. "And gout too—I can see by the colour of his nails. Of course he hasn't told you, for you're such a simpleton, he takes advantage of you. And he is near-sighted, but he pretends he doesn't need spectacles. And I am told he has fearful debts hanging over his head in London; and that he only came here to hide; and if you marry him you'll see what will come to you."

Maby was not very successful in making her sister angry. Wenna only laughed in her gentle fashion, and put her light shawl beside her bonnet, and then went along the passage to

the parlour in which Mr. Roscorla and her mother were talking.

The meeting of the lovers after their temporary separation was not an impassioned one. They shook hands; Wenna hoped he was not fatigued by the long journey; and then he resumed his task of describing to Mrs. Rosewarne the extraordinary appearance of Trelyon's sitting-room in Nolan's Hotel, after the young gentleman had filled it with birds and beasts. Presently, however, Wenna's mother made some pretence for getting out of the room; and Mr. Roscorla and his betrothed were left alone. He rarely got such an opportunity.

"Wenna, I have brought you the ring," said he; and with that he took a small case from his pocket, and opened it, and produced a very pretty gypsy ring studded with emeralds.

Now, on the journey down from London he had definitely resolved that he would put an end to that embarrassment or shamefacedness which had hitherto prevented his offering to kiss the girl whom he expected to marry. He was aware that there was something ridiculous in his not having done so. He reflected that scarcely any human being would believe that he could have been such a fool. And it occurred to him, in the train, that the occasion of his giving Wenna her engaged ring would be an excellent opportunity for breaking in upon this absurd delicacy.

He went across the room to her. She sat still, perhaps a little paler than usual. He took her hand, and put the ring on, and then—

Then it suddenly occurred to him that there was something devilish in the notion of his purchasing the right to kiss her by giving her a trinket. Not that any such scruple would otherwise have affected him; but he was nervously sensitive as to what she might think; and doubtless she was familiar with the story of Gretchen and Faust's casket of jewels. So he suddenly said, with an air of carelessness—

"Well, do you like it? You can't quite tell the colour of the stones by lamplight, you know."

Wenna was not thinking of the colour of the stones. Her hand trembled; her heart beat quickly; when she did

manage to answer him, it was merely to say, in a confused fashion, that she thought the ring very beautiful indeed.

"You know," he said, with a laugh, "I don't think men like engaged rings quite as well as girls do. A girl generally seems to take such a fancy for an engaged ring that she won't change it for any other. I hope that won't be in your case, Wenna; and, indeed, I wanted to talk to you about it."

He brought a chair close to her, and sat down by her, and took her hand. Now, ordinarily Wenna's small, white, plump hands were so warm that her sister used to say that they tingled to the very tips of her fingers with kindness, and were always wanting to give away something. The hand which Mr. Roscorla held was as cold and as impassive as ice. He did not notice it: he was engaged in preparing sentences.

"You know, Wenna," said he, "that I am not a rich man. When I might have taught myself to work I had just sufficient income to keep me idle; and now that this income is growing less, and when I have greater claims on it, I must try something. Well, my partners and myself have thought of a scheme which I think will turn out all right. They propose to wake up those estates in Jamaica, and see if they can't be made to produce something like what they used to produce. That wants money. They have it: I have not. It is true I have been offered the loan of a few thousand pounds; but even if I accept it—and I suppose I must—that would not put me on an equal footing with the other men who are going into the affair. This, however, I could do: I could go out there and do all in my power to look after their interests and my own—see, in fact, that the money was being properly expended, before it was too late. Now, I might be there a very long time."

"Yes," said Wenna, in a low voice, and rather inappropriately.

"Now, don't let me alarm you; but do you think—do you not think, in view of what might be rather a long separation, that we ought to get married before I go?"

She suddenly and inadvertently withdrew her hand.

"But don't make any mistake, Wenna," he said; "I did not propose you should go with me. That would be asking

too much. All I wish is to have the bond that unites us already made fast before I go, merely as a comfortable thing to think of, don't you see?"

"Oh, it is too hasty—I am afraid—why should we be in such a hurry?" the girl said, still with her heart beating so that she could scarcely speak.

"No," he argued, "you must not make another mistake. Before this scheme can be matured, months must elapse. I may not have to go out before the beginning of next year. Now, surely another six months would make a sufficiently long engagement."

"Oh, but the pledge is so terrible," she said, and scarcely knowing what she said.

Mr. Roscorla was at once astonished and vexed. That was certainly not the mood in which a girl ought to look forward to her marriage. He could not understand this dread on her part. He began to ask himself whether she would like to enjoy the self-importance that her engagement had bestowed on her—the attentions he paid her, the assistance he gave her in her charitable labours, and the sort of sovereignty over a man which a girl enjoys during the betrothal period—for an indefinite time, or perhaps with the hope that the sudden destruction of all these things by marriage might never arrive at all. Then he began to get a little angry, and rose from his chair, and walked once or twice up and down the room.

"Well," said he, "I don't understand you, I confess. Except in this way, that our relations with each other have not been so openly affectionate as they might have been. That I admit. Perhaps it was my fault. I suppose, for example, you have been surprised that I never offered to kiss you?"

There was something almost of a threat in the last few words; and Wenna, with her cheeks suddenly burning red, anxiously hastened to say—

"Oh, not at all. It was my fault. I am sure if there was too great reserve it was my fault; but I do not think there has been. It is not that at all; but your wish seems so sudden, and so unnecessary——"

"Don't you see," he said, interrupting her, "that if our relations at present are not sufficiently frank and confiden-

tial, nothing will mend that so easily as our marriage? And this that I ask of you ought to be as agreeable to you as to me—that is to say——”

He stopped, with a look of impatience on his face. There was some one coming along the passage. He knew who it was, too; for a young girl's voice was doing its best to imitate in a burlesque fashion a young man's voice; and Mr. Roscorla had already heard Harry Trelyon, as he rode or drove carelessly along, bawling to himself, "Oh, the men of merry, merry England!" He knew that his old enemy Mabyon was at hand.

That very clever imitation of Harry Trelyon was all the warning that the young lady in question condescended to give of her approach. She opened the door without ceremony, marched into the middle of the room, and proudly placed a bird-cage on the table.

"There," said she, "can either of you tell me what that bird is?"

"Of course I can," said Wenna, rising with a sensation of great relief.

"No you can't," her sister said dogmatically. "It is sent you with Mr. Harry Trelyon's compliments; and it is something very wonderful indeed. What is it, ladies and gentlemen? Don't answer all at once!"

"Why, it is only——"

"A piping bullfinch—that's what it is," said Mabyon, triumphantly.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CONVERT.

NEXT morning was Sunday morning; and Wenna, having many things to think over by herself, started off alone to church, some little time before the others, and chose a circuitous route to the small building which stands on the high uplands overlooking the sea. It was a beautiful morning, still and peaceful, with the warmth of the sunlight cooled by a refreshing westerly breeze; and as she went along and up the valley, her heart gradually forgot its cares, for she was listening to the birds singing, and picking up an occa-

sional wild-flower, or watching the slow white clouds cross the blue sky. And as she walked quietly along in this way, finding her life the sweeter for the sweet air and the abundant colour and brightness of all the things around her, it chanced that she saw Harry Trelyon coming across one of the meadows, evidently with the intention of bidding her good-morning; and she thought she would stop and thank him for having sent her the bullfinch. This she did very prettily when he came up; and he, with something of a blush on his handsome face, said—

"I thought you wouldn't be offended. One can use more freedom with you now that you are as good as married, you know."

She quickly got away from that subject by asking him whether he was coming to church; and to that question he replied by a rather scornful laugh, and by asking what the parsons would say if he took a gun into the family pew. In fact, he had brought out an air-cane to test its carrying powers; and he now bore it over his shoulder.

"I think you might have left the gun at home on a Sunday morning," Miss Wenna said, in rather a precise fashion. "And, do you know, Mr. Trelyon, I can't understand why you should speak in that way about clergymen, when you say yourself that you always avoid them, and don't know anything about them. It reminds me of a stable-boy we once had who used to amuse the other lads by being impertinent to every stranger who might pass, simply because the stranger was a stranger."

This was a deadly thrust; and the tall young gentleman flushed, and was obviously a trifle angry. Did she mean to convey that he had acquired his manners from stable-boys?

"Parsons and churches are too good for the likes o' me," he said, contemptuously. "Morning, Miss Rosewarne," and with that he walked off.

But about three minutes thereafter, when she was peacefully continuing her way, he overtook her again, and said to her, in rather a shamefaced fashion—

"I hope you don't think I meant to be rude to you, Miss Wenna. I'll go to church with you if you like. I've stuck my air-cane in a safe place."

Wenna's face brightened

"I shall be very glad," she said, with a smile far more frank and friendly than any she had ever yet bestowed on him. "And I am sure if you came often to hear Mr. Trewhella, or if you knew him, you would think differently about clergymen."

"Oh, well," Trelyon said, "he's a good sort of old chap, I think. I find no fault with him. But look at such a fellow as that Barnes—why, that fellow's son was with me at Rugby, and wasn't he a pretty chip of the old block—a mean, lying little beggar, who would do anything to get a half-crown out of you."

"Oh, were you at Rugby?" Wenna asked, innocently.

"I don't wonder at your asking," her companion said, with a grin. "You think it doesn't look as if I had ever been to any school? Oh yes, I was at Rugby; and my career there, if brief, was not inglorious. I think the records of all the eight Houses might be searched in vain to find such another ruffian as I was, or any one who managed to get into the same number of scrapes in the same time. The end was dramatic. They wouldn't let me go to a ball in the town-hall. I had vowed I should be there; and I got out of the House at night, and went. And I hadn't been in the place ten minutes when I saw the very master who had refused me fix his glittering eye on me; so, as I knew it was all over, I merely went up to him and asked to have the pleasure of being introduced to his daughter. I thought he'd have had a fit. But that little brute Barnes I was telling you about, he was our champion bun-eater. At that time, you know, they used to give you as many buns as ever you liked on Shrove-Tuesday: and the Houses used to eat against each other, and this fellow Barnes was our champion; and, oh Lord! the number he stowed away that morning. When we went to chapel afterwards, he was as green as a leek."

"But do you dislike clergymen because Master Barnes ate too many buns?" Wenna asked, with a gentle smile, which rather aggrieved her companion.

"Do you know," said he, "I think you are awfully hard on me. You are always trying to catch me up. Here am I walking to church with you, like an angel of sub-

mission, and all the thanks I get— Why, there goes my mother!"

Just in front of them, and a short distance from the church, the road they were following joined the main highway leading up from Eglosilyan, and along the latter Mrs. Trelyon's brougham was driving past. That lady was very much astonished to find her son walking with Miss Wenna Rosewarne on a Sunday morning; and still more surprised when, after she was in church, she beheld Master Harry walk coolly in and march up to the family pew. Here, indeed, was a revolution. Which of all the people assembled—among whom were Miss Mabyn and her mother, and Mr. Roscorla—had ever seen the like of this before? And it was all the greater wonder, that the young gentleman in the rough shooting-coat found two clergymen in the pew, and nevertheless entered it, and quietly accepted from one of them a couple of books.

Mrs. Trelyon's gentle and emotional heart warmed towards the girl who had done this thing.

And thus it was, on this same day, just before luncheon, when she found her son in the library, she said to him, with an unusual kindness of manner—

"That was Miss Rosewarne, Harry, wasn't it, whom I saw this morning?"

"Yes," he said, sulkily. He half expected that one or other of his friends, the parsons, had been saying something about her to his mother.

"She is a very quiet, nice-looking girl; I am sure Mr. Roscorla has acted wisely, after all. And I have been thinking, Harry, that since she is a friend of yours, we might do something like what you proposed, only not in a way to make people talk."

"Oh," said he, "I have done it already. I have promised to lend Roscorla 5000*l.* to help him to work his Jamaica estates. If you don't like to sanction the affair, I can get the money from the Jews. I have written to Colonel Ransome to tell him so."

"Now why should you treat me so, Harry?" his mother said.

"I took you at your word—that's all. I suppose now you are better disposed to the girl merely because she got

me to go to church this morning. If there were more people like her about churches, in the pulpits and out of them, I'd go oftener."

"I was not quite sure who she was," Mrs. Trelyon said, with a feeble air of apology. "I like her appearance very much; and I wish she or anybody else could induce you to go to church. Well now, Harry, I will myself lend you the 5000*l.* till you come of age. Surely that will be much better; and, if you like, I will make Miss Rosewarne's acquaintance. You might ask her to dinner the first time Mr. Roscorla is coming; and he could bring her."

Master Harry was at last pacified.

"Make it Thursday," said he, "and you will write to her, won't you? I will take down the letter and persuade her; but if she comes she shan't come under the wing of Mr. Roscorla, as if he were the means of introducing her. I shall go down for her with the brougham, and fetch her myself."

"But what will Mr. Roscorla say to that?" his mother asked, with a smile.

"Mr. Roscorla may say whatever he particularly pleases," responded Master Harry.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SIE BAT SO SANFT, SO LIEBLICH."

"To dine at Trelyon Hall?" said George Rosewarne to his eldest daughter, when she in a manner asked his consent. "Why not? But you must get a new dress, lass; we can't have you go among grand folks as Jim Crow."

"But there is a story about the crow that went out with peacock's feathers," his daughter said to him. "And, besides, how could I get a new dress by Thursday?"

"How could you get a new dress by Thursday?" her father repeated mechanically, for he was watching one of his pet pigeons on the roof of the mill. "How can I tell you? Go and ask your mother. Don't bother me."

It is quite certain that Wenna would not have availed herself of this gracious permission, for her mother was not very well, and she did not wish to increase that tender

anxiety which Mrs. Rosewarne already showed about her daughter's going among these strangers; but that this conversation had been overheard by Mabyn, and that young lady, as was her habit, plunged headlong into the matter.

"You can have the dress quite well, Wenna," she said, coming out to the door of the inn, and calling on her mother to come too. "Now, look here, mother, I give you warning that I never, never, never will speak another word to Wenna if she doesn't take the silk that is lying by for me and have it made up directly: never a single word, if I live in Englosilyan for a hundred and twenty-five years!"

"Mabyn, I don't want a new dress," Wenna expostulated. "I don't need one. Why should you rush at little things as if you were a squadron of cavalry?"

"I don't care whether you want it or whether you don't want it; but you've got to have it, hasn't she, mother? Or else, it's what I tell you: not a word—not a word, if you were to go down before me on your bended knees." This was said with much dramatic effect.

"I think you had better let Mabyn have her own way," the mother said, gently.

"I let her?" Wenna answered, pretending not to notice Mabyn's look of defiance and triumph. "She always has her own way; tomboys always have."

"Don't call names, Wenna," her sister said, severely; "especially as I have just given you a new dress. You'll have to get Miss Keam down directly, or else I'll go and cut it myself, and then you'll have Harry Trelyon laughing at you; for he always laughs at people who don't know how to keep him in his proper place."

"Meaning yourself, Mabyn," the mother said; but Mabyn was not to be crushed by any sarcasm.

Certainly Harry Trelyon was in no laughing or spiteful mood when he drove down on that Thursday evening to take Wenna Rosewarne up to the Hall. He was as pleased and proud as he well could be; and when he went into the inn he made no secret of his satisfaction and of his gratitude to her for having been good enough to accept his mother's invitation. Moreover, understanding that Mrs. Rosewarne was still rather ailing, he had brought down for her a brace of grouse from a hamper that had reached the Hall from