

"Oh! you needn't blame me, Mr. Trelyon," said Mabyn, rather hurt. "You know I did everything I could for you."

"I know you did, Mabyn; I wish it had turned out better."

What was this, then, that Wenna heard, as she sat there, bewildered, apprehensive, and sad-hearted? Had her own sister joined in this league to carry her off? It was not merely the audacity of young Trelyon that had led to their meeting? But she was altogether too frightened and wretched to be angry.

As they got down into Eglosilyan, and turned the sharp corner over the bridge, they did not notice the figure of a man who had been concealing himself in the darkness of a shed belonging to a slate-yard. So soon as they had passed, he went some little way after them until, from the bridge, he could see them stop at the door of the inn. Was it Mrs. Rosewarne who came out of the glare, and with something like a cry of delight caught her daughter in her arms? He watched the figures go inside, and the phaeton drive away up the hill; then, in the perfect silence of the night, he turned and slowly made his way towards Basset Cottage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ANGRY INTERVIEW.

NEXT morning George Rosewarne was seated on the old oak bench in front of the inn, reading a newspaper. Happening to look up, he saw Mr. Roscorla hurrying towards him over the bridge, with no very pleasant expression on his face. As he came nearer, he saw that the man was strangely excited.

"I want to see your daughter alone," he said.

"You needn't speak as if I had tried to run away with her," Rosewarne answered, with more good-nature than was his wont. "Well, go indoors. Ask for her mother."

As Roscorla passed him there was a look in his eyes which rather startled George Rosewarne.

"Is it possible," he asked himself, "that this elderly chap is really badly in love with our Wenna?"

But another thought struck him. He suddenly jumped up, followed Roscorla into the passage, where the latter was standing, and said to him—

"Don't you be too harsh with Wenna. She's only a girl; and they're all alike." This hint, however discourteous in its terms, had some significance as coming from a man who was six inches taller than Mr. Roscorla.

Mr. Roscorla was shown into an empty room. He marched up and down looking at nothing. He was simply in an ungovernable rage.

Wenna came, and shut the door behind her; and for a second or so he stared at her as if expecting her to burst into passionate professions of remorse. On the contrary, there was something more than calmness in her appearance—there was the desperation of a hunted animal that is driven to turn upon its pursuer in the mere agony of helplessness.

"Well!" said he—for, indeed, his passion almost deprived him of his power of speech—"what have you to say? Perhaps nothing? It is nothing, perhaps, to a woman to be treacherous—to tell smooth lies to your face, and to go plotting against you behind your back? You have nothing to say? You have nothing to say?"

"I have nothing to say," she said, with some little sadness in her voice, "that would excuse me, either to you or myself—yes! I know that. But—but I did not intentionally deceive you——"

He turned away with an angry gesture.

"Indeed, indeed I did not," she said piteously. "I had mistaken my own feelings—the temptation was too great. Oh, Mr. Roscorla! you need not say harsh things to me, for indeed I think worse of myself than you can do."

"And I suppose you want forgiveness now?" he added bitterly. "But I have had enough of that. A woman pledges you her affection, promises to marry you, professes to have no doubts as to the future; and all the while she is secretly encouraging the attentions of a young jackanapes who is playing with her and making a fool of her——"

Wenna Rosewarne's cheeks began to burn red: a less angry man would have taken warning.

"Yes—playing with her and making a fool of her. And

for what? To pass an idle time, and make her the byword of her neighbours."

"It is not true! it is not true!" she said indignantly; and there was a dangerous light in her eyes. "If he were here, you would not dare to say such things to me—no, you would not dare!"

"Perhaps you expect him to call after the pretty exploit of last night?" asked Roscorla, with a sneer.

"I do not," she said. "I hope I shall never see him again. It is—it is only misery to every one——"

And here she broke down in spite of herself. Her anger gave way to a burst of tears.

"But what madness is this?" Roscorla cried. "You wish never to meet him again; yet you are ready at a moment's notice to run away with him, disgracing yourself and your family. You make promises about never seeing him; you break them the instant you get the opportunity. You profess that your girlish fancy for a barber's block of a fellow has been got over; and then, as soon as one's back is turned, you reveal your hypocrisy——"

"Indeed I did not mean to deceive you," she said imploringly. "I did believe that all that was over and gone. I thought it was a foolish fancy——"

"And now?" said he hotly.

"Oh, Mr. Roscorla, you ought to pity me instead of being angry with me. I do love him—I cannot help it. You will not ask me to marry you! See, I will undertake not to marry him—I will undertake never to see him again—if only you will not ask me to keep my promise to you. How can I! How can I?"

"Pity you! and these are the confessions you make!" he exclaimed. "Why, are you not ashamed of yourself to say such things to me? And so you would undertake not to marry him? I know what your undertakings are worth!"

He had struck her hard—his very hardest indeed; but she would not suffer herself to reply, for she believed she deserved far more punishment than he could inflict. All that she could hope for—all that her whole nature cried out for—was that he should not think her treacherous. She had not intentionally deceived him. She had not planned that effort at escape. But when, in a hurried and pathetic

fashion, she endeavoured to explain all this to him, he would not listen. He angrily told her he knew well how women could gloss over such matters. He was no school-boy to be hood-winked. It was not as if she had had no warning; her conduct before had been bad enough, when it was possible to overlook it on the score of carelessness, but now it was such as would disgrace any woman who knew her honour was concerned in holding to the word she had spoken.

"And what is he?" he cried, mad with wrath and jealousy. "An ignorant booby! a ploughboy! a lout who has neither the manners of a gentleman nor the education of a day-labourer——"

"Yes you may well say such things of him now," said she, with her eyes flashing, "when his back is turned. You would not say so if he were here. But he—yes, if he were here—he would tell you what he thinks of you; for he is a gentleman and not a coward."

Angry as he was, Mr. Roscorla was astounded. The fire in her eyes, the flush in her cheeks, the impetuosity of her voice—were these the patient Wenna of old? But a girl betrays herself sometimes, if she happens to have to defend her lover.

"Oh! it is shameful of you to say such things!" she said. "And you know they are not true. There is not any one I have ever seen who is so manly, and frank, and unselfish as Mr. Trelyon—not any one; and if I have seen that—if I have admired too much—well, that is a great misfortune, and I have to suffer for it."

"To suffer?—yes," said he, bitterly. "That is a pretty form of suffering that makes you plan a runaway marriage—a marriage that would bring into your possession the largest estates in the North of Cornwall. A very pretty form of suffering! May I ask when the experiment is to be repeated?"

"You may insult me as you like—I am only a woman," she said.

"Insult you?" he cried, with fresh vehemence. "Is it insult to speak the truth? Yesterday forenoon, when I saw you, you were all smiles and smoothness. When I spoke of our marriage, you made no objection. But all the same you knew that at night——"

"I did not know—I did not know!" she said. "You ought to believe me when I tell you I knew no more about it than you did. When I met him there at night—it was all so sudden, so unexpected—I scarcely knew what I said; but now—but now I have time to think—Oh, Mr. Roscorla, don't think that I do not regret it! I will do anything you ask me—I will promise what you please—indeed, I will undertake never to see him again as long as I live in this world—only, you won't ask me to keep my promise to you—"

He made no reply to this offer; for a step outside the door caused him to mutter something very like an oath between his teeth. The door was thrown open, Mabyn marched in—a little pale, but very erect.

"Mabyn, leave us alone for a moment or two," said Wenna, turning away so as to hide the tears on her face.

"I will not. I want to speak a word or two to Mr. Roscorla."

"Mabyn, I want you to go away just now."

Mabyn went over to her sister, and took her by the hand.

"Wenna, dear, go away to your own room. You've had quite enough—you are trembling all over. I suppose he'll make me tremble next."

"Really, I think your interference is rather extraordinary, Miss Mabyn," said Mr. Roscorla, striving to contain his rage.

"I beg your pardon," said Mabyn, meekly. "I only want to say a word or two. Wouldn't it be better here than before the servants?"

With that she led Wenna away. In a minute or two she returned. Mr. Roscorla would rather have been shut up in a den with a hungry tigress.

"I am quite at your service," he said with a bitter irony. "I suppose you have some very important communication to make, considering the way in which you—"

"Interfered? Yes, it is time that I interfered," Mabyn said, still quite calm and a trifle pale. "Mr. Roscorla, to be frank, I don't like you, and perhaps I am not quite fair to you. I am only a young girl, and don't know what the world would say about your relations with Wenna. But

Wenna is my sister, and I see she is wretched; and her wretchedness—well, that comes of her engagement to you."

She was standing before him, with her eyes cast down, apparently determined to be very moderate in her speech. But there was a cruel frankness in her words which hurt Mr. Roscorla a good deal more than any tempest of passion into which she might have worked herself.

"Is that all?" said he. "You have not startled me with any revelations."

"I was going to say," continued Mabyn, "that a gentleman who has really a regard for a girl would not insist on her keeping a promise which only rendered her unhappy. I don't see what you are to gain by it. I suppose you—you expect Wenna to marry you? Well, I dare say if you called on her to punish herself that way, she might do it. But what good would that do you? Would you like to have a wife who was in love with another man?"

"You have become quite logical, Miss Mabyn," said he, "and argument suits you better than getting into a rage. And much of what you say is quite true. You *are* a very young girl. You don't know much of what the world would say about anything. But being furnished with these admirable convictions, did it never occur to you that you might not be acting wisely in blundering into an affair of which you know nothing?"

The coldly sarcastic fashion in which he spoke threatened to disturb Mabyn's forced equanimity.

"Know nothing?" she said. "I know everything about it; and I can see that my sister is miserable—that is sufficient reason for my interference. Mr. Roscorla, you won't ask her to marry you!"

Had the proud and passionate Mabyn condescended to make an appeal to her ancient enemy? At least she raised her eyes; and they seemed to plead for mercy.

"Come, come," he said, roughly. "I've had enough of all this sham beseeching. I know what it means. Trelyon is a richer man than I am; she has let her idle girlish notions go dreaming day-dreams; and so I am expected to stand aside. There has been enough of this nonsense. She is not a child; she knows what she undertook of her own

free will ; and she knows she can get rid of this school-girl fancy directly if she chooses. I for one won't help her to disgrace herself."

Mabyn began to breathe a little more quickly. She had tried to be reasonable ; she had even humbled herself and begged from him ; now there was a sensation in her chest as of some rising emotion that demanded expression in quick words.

"You will try to make her marry you?" said she, looking him in the face.

"I will try to do nothing of the sort," said he. "She can do as she likes. But she knows what an honourable woman would do."

"And I," said Mabyn, her temper at length quite getting the better of her, "I know what an honourable man would do. He would refuse to bind a girl to a promise which she fears. He would consider her happiness to be of more importance than his comfort. Why, I don't believe you care at all whether Wenna marries you or not—it is only you can't bear her being married to the man she really does love—it is only envy, that's what it is. Oh ! I am ashamed to think there is a man alive who would force a girl into becoming his wife on such terms—"

"There is certainly one considerable objection to my marrying your sister," said he, with great politeness. "The manners of some of her relatives might prove embarrassing."

"Yes, that is true enough," Mabyn said, with hot cheeks. "If ever I became a relative of yours, my manners no doubt would embarrass you very considerably. But I am not a relative of yours as yet, nor is my sister."

"May I consider that you have said what you had to say?" said he, taking up his hat.

Proud and angry, and at the same time mortified by her defeat, Mabyn found herself speechless. He did not offer to shake hands with her. He bowed to her in passing out. She made the least possible acknowledgment, and then she was alone. Of course, a hearty cry followed. She felt she had done no good. She had determined to be calm ; whereas all the calmness had been on his side, and she had been led into speaking in a manner which a discreet and

well-bred young lady would have shrunk from in horror. Mabyn sat still and sobbed, partly in anger and partly in disappointment ; she dared not even go to tell her sister.

But Mr. Roscorla, as he went over the bridge again, and went up to Basset Cottage, had lost all his assumed coolness of judgment and demeanour. He felt he had been tricked by Wenna and insulted by Mabyn, while his rival had established a hold which it would be in vain for him to seek to remove. He was in a passion of rage. He would not go near Wenna again. He would at once set off to London and enjoy himself there while his holiday lasted ; he would not write a word to her ; then, when the time arrived, he would set sail for Jamaica, leaving her to her own conscience. He was suffering a good deal from anger, envy, and jealousy ; but he was consoled by the thought that she was suffering more. And he reflected, with some comfort to himself, that she would scarcely so far demean herself as to marry Harry Trelyon, so long as she knew in her heart what he, Roscorla, would think of her for so doing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE OLD HALF-FORGOTTEN JOKE.

"HAS he gone?" Wenna asked of her sister, the next day.

"Yes, he has," Mabyn answered, with a proud and revengeful face. "It was quite true what Mrs. Cornish told me—I've no doubt she had her instructions. He has just driven away to Launceston, on his way to London."

"Without a word!"

"Would you like to have had another string of arguments?" Mabyn said, impatiently. "Oh, Wenna, you don't know what mischief all this is doing. You are awake all night ; you cry half the day ; what is to be the end of it? You will work yourself into a fever."

"Yes, there must be an end of it," Wenna said, with decision, "not for myself alone, but for others. That is all the reparation I can make now. No girl in all this country

has ever acted so badly as I have done—just look at the misery I have caused—but now——”

“There is one who is miserable, because he loves you,” Mabyn said.

“Do you think that Mr. Roscorla has no feelings? You are so unjust to him. Well, it does not matter now: all this must come to an end. Mabyn, I should like to see Mr. Trelyon, just for one minute.”

“What will you say to him, Wenna?” her sister said, with a sudden fear.

“Something that it is necessary to say to him, and the sooner it is over the better.”

Mabyn rather dreaded the result of this interview; and yet, she reflected to herself, here was an opportunity for Harry Trelyon to try to win some promise from her sister. Better, in any case, that they should meet than that Wenna should simply drive him away into banishment without a word of explanation.

The meeting was easily arranged. On the next morning, long before Wenna's daily round of duties had commenced, the two sisters left the inn, and went over the bridge, and out to the bold promontory of black rock at the mouth of the harbour. There was nobody about. This October morning was more like a summer-day; the air was mild and still; the blue sky without a cloud; the shining sea plashed around the rocks with the soft murmuring noise of a July calm. It was on these rocks, long ago, that Wenna Rosewarne had pledged herself to become the wife of Mr. Roscorla; and at that time life had seemed to her, if not brilliant and beautiful, at least grateful and peaceful. Now all the peace had gone out of it.

“Oh, my darling!” Trelyon said, as she advanced alone towards him—for Mabyn had withdrawn. “It is so good of you to come. Wenna, what has frightened you?”

He had seized both her hands in his; but she took them away. For one brief second her eyes had met his, and there was a sort of wistful and despairing kindness in them; then she stood before him, with her face turned away from him, and her voice low and tremulous.

“I did wish to see you—for once—for the last time,”

she said. “If you had gone away, you would have carried with you cruel thoughts of me. I wish to ask your forgiveness——”

“My forgiveness?”

“Yes, for all that you may have suffered; and—for all that may trouble you in the future—not in the future, but for the little time you will remember what has taken place here. Mr. Trelyon, I—I did not know! Indeed, it is all a mystery to me now—and a great misery——”

Her lips began to quiver; but she controlled herself.

“And surely it will only be for a short time, if you think of it at all. You are young—you have all the world before you. When you go away among other people and see all the different things that interest a young man, you will soon forget whatever has happened here.”

“And you say that to me,” he said, “and you said the other night that you loved me. It is nothing, then, for people who love each other to go away, and be consoled, and never see each other again?”

Again the lips quivered: he had no idea of the terrible effort that was needed to keep this girl calm.

“I did say that——” she said.

“And it was true?” he broke in.

“It was true then—it is true now—that is all the misery of it!” she exclaimed, with tears starting to her eyes.

“And you talk of our being separated for ever!” he cried. “No!—not if I can help it! Mabyn has told me of all your scruples—they are not worth looking at. I tell you you are no more bound to that man than Mabyn is; and that isn't much. If he is such a mean hound as to insist on your marrying him, then I will appeal to your father and mother, and they must prevent him. Or I will go to him myself, and settle the matter in a shorter way——”

“You cannot now,” she said; “he has gone away. And what good would that have done? I would never marry any man unless I could do so with a clear and happy conscience; and if you—if you and Mabyn—see nothing in my treatment of *him* that is wrong, then that is very strange; but I cannot acquit myself. No; I hope no woman will ever treat you as I have treated him. Look at

his position—an elderly man, with few friends—he has not all the best of his life before him as you have—or the good spirits of youth—and after he had gone away to Jamaica, taking my promise with him—oh! I am ashamed of myself when I think on all that has happened.”

“Then you’ve no right to be,” said he, hotly. “It was the most natural thing in the world, and he ought to have known it, that a young girl who has been argued into engaging herself to an old man should consider her being in love with another man as something of rather more importance—of a good deal more importance, I should say. And his suffering? He suffers no more than this lump of rock does. That is not his way of thinking—to be bothered about anything. He may be angry, yes!—and vexed for the moment, as is natural; but if you think he is going about the world with a load of agony on him, then you’re quite mistaken. And if he were, what good could you do by making yourself miserable as well? Wenna, do be reasonable, now.”

Had not another, on this very spot, prayed her to be reasonable? She had yielded then. Mr. Roscorla’s arguments were incontrovertible, and she had shrinkingly accepted the conclusion. Now, young Trelyon’s representations and pleadings were far less cogent; but how strongly her heart went with them!

“No!” she said, as if she were shaking off the influence of the tempter, “I must not listen to you. Yet you don’t seem to think that it costs me anything to ask you to bid me good-bye once and for all. It should be less to you than to me. A girl thinks of these things more than a man—she has little else to think of—he goes out into the world and forgets. And you—you will go away, and you will become such a man as all who know you will love to speak of and be proud of; and some day you will come back, and if you like to come down to the inn, then there will be one or two there glad to see you. Mr. Trelyon, don’t ask me to tell you why this should be so. I know it to be right; my heart tells me. Now I will say good-bye to you.”

“And when I come back to the inn, will you be there?” said he, becoming rather pale. “No; you will be married to a man whom you will hate.”

“Indeed no,” she said, with her face flushing and her eyes cast down. “How can that be after what has taken place? He could not ask me. All that I begged of him before he went away was this—that he would not ask me to marry him; and if only he would do that, I promised never to see you again—after bidding you good-bye as I do now.”

“And is that the arrangement?” said he, rather roughly. “Are we to play at dog in the manger? He is not to marry you himself; but he will not let any other man marry you?”

“Surely he has some right to consideration,” she said.

“Well, Wenna,” said he, “if you’ve made up your mind, there’s no more to be said. I think you are needlessly cruel—”

“You won’t say that, just as we are parting,” she said, in a low voice. “Do you think it is nothing to me?”

He looked at her for a moment with a great sadness and compunction in his eyes; then, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, he caught her in his arms, and kissed her on the lips.

“Now,” said he, with his face white as death, “tell me that you will never marry any other man as long as you live!”

“Yes, I will say that,” she said to him, in a low voice, and with a face as white as his own.

“Swear it, then!”

“I have said that I will never marry any other man than you,” she said, “and that is enough—for me. But as for you—why must you go away thinking of such things? You will see some day what madness it would have been—you will come some day and thank me for having told you so—and then—and then—if anything should be mentioned about what I said just now, you will laugh at the old half-forgotten joke—”

Well, there was no laughing at the joke just then; for the girl burst into tears, and in the midst of that she hastily pressed his hand, and hurried away. He watched her go round the rocks, to the cleft leading down to the harbour. There she was rejoined by her sister; and the two of them went slowly along the path of broken slate, with the green

hill above, the blue water below, and the fair sunshine all around them. Many a time he recalled afterwards—and always with an increasing weight at his heart—how sombre seemed to him that bright October day and the picturesque opening of the coast leading in to Eglosilyan. For it was the last glimpse of Wenna Rosewarne that he was to have for many a day; and a sadder picture was never treasured up in a man's memory.

"Oh, Wenna, what have you said to him that you tremble so?" Mabyn asked.

"I have bid him good-bye—that is all."

"Not for always?"

"Yes, for always."

"And he is going away again, then?"

"Yes, as a young man should. Why should he stop here to make himself wretched over impossible fancies? He will go out into the world; and he has splendid health and spirits; and he will forget all this."

"And you—you are anxious to forget it all too?"

"Would it not be better? What good can come of dreaming? Well, I've plenty of work to do; that is well."

Mabyn was very much inclined to cry: all her beautiful visions of the future happiness of her sister had been rudely dispelled. All her schemes and machinations had gone for nothing. There only remained to her, in the way of consolation, the fact that Wenna still wore the sapphire ring that Harry Trelyon had sent her.

"And what will his mother think of you?" said Mabyn, as a last argument, "when she finds you have sent him away altogether—to go into the army, and go abroad, and perhaps die of yellow fever, or be shot by the Sepoys and the Caffres?"

"She would have hated me if I had married him," said Wenna, simply.

"Oh, Wenna, how dare you say such a thing!" Mabyn cried. "What do you mean by it?"

"Would a lady in her position like her only son to marry the daughter of an innkeeper?" Wenna asked, rather indifferently: indeed, her thoughts were elsewhere.

"I tell you there's no one in the world she loves like you—I can see it every time she comes down for you—and she

believes, and I believe too, that you have changed Mr. Trelyon's way of talking and his manner of treating people in such a fashion as no one would have considered possible. Do you think she hasn't eyes? He is scarcely ever impertinent now—when he is it is always in good-nature, and never in sulkiness. Look at his kindness to Mr. Trewhella's granddaughter; and Mr. Trewhella a clergyman too. Did he ever use to take his mother out for a drive? No, never! And of course she knows whom it's all owing to; and if you would marry Mr. Trelyon, Wenna, I believe she would worship you and think nothing good enough for you—"

"Mabyn, I am going to ask something of you."

"Oh, yes, I know what it is," her sister said. "I am not to speak any more about your marriage with Mr. Trelyon. But I won't give you any such promise, Wenna. I don't consider that that old man has any hold on you."

Wenna said nothing; for at this moment they entered the house. Mabyn went up with her sister to her room; then she stood undecided for a moment; finally she said—

"Wenna, if I've vexed you, I'm very sorry. I won't speak of Mr. Trelyon if you don't wish it. But indeed you don't know how many people are anxious that you should be happy—and you can't expect your own sister not to be as anxious as any one else—"

"Mabyn, you're a good girl," Wenna said, kissing her. "But I am rather tired to-day—I think I shall lie down for a little while—"

Mabyn uttered a sharp cry, for her sister had fallen back on a chair, white and insensible. She hastily bathed her forehead with cold water; she chafed her hands; she got hold of some smelling salts. It was only a faint, after all; and Wenna, having come to, said she would lie down on the sofa for a few minutes. Mabyn said nothing to her mother about all this, for it would have driven Mrs. Rosewarne wild with anxiety; but she herself was rather disquieted with Wenna's appearance, and she said to herself, with great bitterness of heart—

"If my sister falls ill, I know who has done that."