Hocking Joseph

The Birthright

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
TELLS HOW THE PENNINGTONS LOST PENNINGTON

I am writing this story at the wish of many friends, who tell me it is my duty so to do. Certain stories have been afloat, which are anything but true, and it has been urged upon me again and again to set down in plain terms the true history of events which have set people's tongues wagging. I must confess that, in spite of the pleasure I have in recalling the memories of past years, it is with great diffidence that I at last commence my work. Not because I have any difficulty in remembering what took place. My memory, thank God, is as good as ever, and the principal scenes in my history are as clear to me as if they happened yesterday. It is not that. The truth is I was never clever at putting things on paper, and somehow, while the facts are clear enough in my mind, I feel a great difficulty in relating those facts in a way that is clear and understandable. You see I have lived an open-air life, and have spent more hours with the bridle-reins in my hands than the pen, and although I had a fair amount of schooling I was never considered a quick learner.

Still, as John Major said to me only yesterday, it seems a duty to clear up certain matters which are altogether misunderstood, and what is more, to clear my name from scandal. Moreover, as he truly insisted, there are others besides myself upon whom clouds rest, and one especially about whom the truth ought to be told.

"People are saying," asserted John Major, "that the land you call yours is not yours by right, and that in order to get your will you were in league with the devil. It is also said that you broke the laws of God and man in your dealings with your relations, and that Parson Inch refuses to give you the right hand of fellowship until you can prove in a fair and straightforward way that you are not the man some take you to be."

Now I am quite aware that many things have happened to me which happen to but few men. I know, too, that I have had experiences which, to say the least of them, are strange, neither am I sure that I can explain certain matters to Parson Inch's satisfaction. At the same time I am not afraid of the light, and so I am determined to set down truthfully, to the best of my ability, the true account of those events in my life which are misunderstood, so that no stigma shall rest upon those who are as dear to me as my own heart's blood.

Let it be understood, however, that I make no pretence at fine writing, neither must it be expected that I, who never boasted great learning, can explain that which has puzzled Parson Grigg, who was in the parish before Mr. Inch came – aye, even puzzled the Bishop himself who came to visit the rectory some years since. All I undertake to do is to put down in plain, homely words the story of my life, in so far as it affects my good name and the good name of those who are associated with me. It may be that I shall have to touch upon matters peculiar to the part of the country in which I was born and reared, and to which I am proud to belong. As far as I can I will make them clear; but even concerning these I will make no great promises.

To begin at the beginning then, for I must do this to make everything clear, and I desire above everything to make matters plain. My father, Jasper Pennington, died when I was nineteen, leaving me as I thought Elmwater Barton, a farm of about three hundred acres. I am called Jasper too; indeed, for generations back there has always been a Jasper Pennington. Elmwater Barton is by no means a bad farm. Nearly all the land is under cultivation, and the house is roomy and substantial. You must not imagine, however, that the Barton is the principal place in the parish of St. Eve. Far from it. The

parish contains twelve thousand acres, and is, on the whole, the richest parish in Cornwall, and so three hundred acres do not count much. Up to the time of my father living at Elmwater Barton the place had always been held by a family of yeomen by the name of Quethiock, respectable people, of course, but not regarded as gentry. No, the principal house in St. Eve is Pennington, which, when my father died, was owned by Richard Tresidder. My father was born at Pennington, and my grandfather and great-grandfather were born there; indeed, the estate, which is a very valuable one, has been owned by the Penningtons for many generations.

The question, therefore, naturally arises, How did a Tresidder get into the possession of the estate which has always belonged to the Penningtons? It is well to explain this because evil tongues have told lies concerning it.

My father's mother died soon after his birth, when my grandfather was a comparatively young man; and when my father was about five years old, his father called him into the library one day, and told him that it was his intention to give him a mother.

"A mother?" said my father, "you told me my mother was dead."

"Yes, she is," said my grandfather, "and is in heaven if ever it is possible for a woman to get there; that is why I want to give you another, Jasper, one who will take care of you better than I can."

"Will she be kind to me?" asked my father.

"That she will," was the reply; "but more than that, she will bring you a brother, who is about your own age, and he will be a playfellow for you."

My father was greatly pleased at this, and so he welcomed his new mother very eagerly, thinking all the time, of course, of his new playfellow.

The lady my grandfather married was a widow. Her husband, Richard Tresidder, had been a lawyer in Falmouth, but he had died of cholera about four years after my grandmother died. Her little boy, too, was called Richard, or Dick, as they named him for short, and in a little while the two boys became friends.

Now the widow of lawyer Tresidder brought my grandfather no property at all, not a pennypiece, but she brought a great deal of discord instead. She was always jealous for her son, and she hated my father. The very sight of him used to vex her, especially as after several years she did not bear my grandfather a son. There were three daughters born, but no son, which greatly disappointed my grandfather, and made his wife exceedingly bitter toward my father.

As years went by it seemed to be the great purpose of her life to cause quarrels between the father and son, and at the same time to show up the excellencies of her own son, Richard Tresidder. I suppose the wisest and best men are clay in the hands of women; at any rate, such has been my experience in life, especially if that woman is clever, and has a will of her own, which latter quality few women are short of. Anyhow, after many years, she succeeded in setting my grandfather against his only son Jasper. How she managed it I don't know, for my grandfather always had the name for being a just man, but then, as I said, what can a man do when a woman gets hold of him? Just before my father was twenty-one this widow of Tresidder got her husband to make a new will. She persuaded him to let her husband's brother be present when Mr. Trefry, the old family lawyer, was writing the document, and a good many hard words passed even then.

You see, Mr. Trefry couldn't bear to see my father defrauded, and yet he had no right to interfere. The upshot was that the will gave my father the sum of £500, while all the Pennington estates were to be held in trust for Richard Tresidder. This of course seems very strange, but it goes to show how a woman can twist a man around her finger when she sets out to do it. There was a clause in the will, however, which my grandfather, in spite of James Tresidder, who was also a lawyer, would have inserted. I think the old man's love for justice, and perhaps his love for his son, caused him to have a mind of his own in this case, for in the face of lawyer Tresidder's objections and his wife's entreaties he stood firm. The clause was to this effect – that if Jasper Pennington or his heirs were ever in a position so to do, they could demand to buy the Pennington estates, as they existed at

the date of the will, at half the value of the said estates. And that in the case of such an emergency, five representatives of five county families be asked to make the valuation. My grandfather further stipulated that none of the Pennington lands should be sold at any time for any purpose whatever.

Now, the widow of Tresidder greatly objected to this, and even after it was duly signed did her utmost to get my grandfather to have this clause expunged. But the Pennington blood asserted itself, and although he had given way to his wife in such a degree that he had almost disinherited his son, he still held to this clause.

Not that it could be worth anything to my father. How could he, with only £500, expect to gain many thousands?

As I said, the will was made some few months before my father was twenty-one, and it was stipulated that he was to receive the £500 on his twenty-first birthday.

And now comes a stranger part of the business. About a week before my father came of age, my grandfather grew angry at what he had done. The thought of his only son being disinherited in favour of a stranger just because a woman had twisted him around her finger made him nearly mad. He saw now what his wife had been aiming at for years; he saw, too, that the quarrels he had had with my father were of his wife's making; and anxious to do justly, he wrote a letter to Mr. Trefry telling him that he desired his presence at Pennington, as he wanted to make a new will, which should be duly signed and sealed before his son Jasper's twenty-first birthday. This letter was given to a servant to take to Truro. Now this servant, like almost every one else she had in the house, had become a tool of the solicitor's widow, and there is every reason to believe she saw the letter. Be that as it may, before Lawyer Trefry reached Pennington, my grandfather, who the day previous had been a hale, strong man, was dead, and the doctor who was called said that he died of heart disease.

My father, however, believed that his father had been poisoned, or in some other way killed, because the woman he had married feared that he would make a new will in favour of his son Jasper.

And now I have told why Pennington, which had been in the possession of the Penningtons for many generations, passed out of our hands, and became the property of the Tresidders.

After my grandfather's funeral £500 were paid to my father, and he was ordered with many bitter words to leave the home of his fathers. The clause in the will to which I have referred, however, comforted him greatly. He was young and strong, and he determined to save up enough money to get back the Pennington estates according to the provisions laid down. At that time Elmwater Barton was to let. Old Mr. Quethiock, who had just died, had left one son who had a shop in Falmouth. This son did not like farming, and he willingly agreed to let the Barton to my father, who spent nearly the whole of his capital in stocking it. Meanwhile, Richard Tresidder lived in state at Pennington, and sneered at my father, who toiled hard at the Barton, and thus, if my father hated Richard Tresidder, was it to be wondered?

Now, joining the Pennington lands are those belonging to the Lantallick estates, which belong to the Archer family, a family as old as the Penningtons and as greatly respected. Squire Archer had five sons and one daughter, and my father, who was always friendly with the people at Lantallick, visited the house often, and all the more because he loved Mary Archer. Concerning Mary Archer I will pass no opinion. I will only state facts. I have been told that she was a beautiful young woman, and that my father loved her dearly. Indeed, it was generally understood that he should marry Mary when he came of age. It has been said, too, that Mary was simply crazy in her love for my father; but about that I have my doubts.

Not long after my father settled down at Elmwater Barton, he asked Mary to be his wife, and it was then that Squire Archer told him to leave the house, and informed him, moreover, that his daughter would be shortly married to Richard Tresidder.

"But," said my father, "Mary has promised to be my wife, promised again and again."

"And do you think," asked the Squire, "that I would allow my only daughter to marry a tenant farmer, a wild young scamp that his father disinherited? Leave the house, I tell you!"

I have heard that Mary pleaded with her father, but I will not vouch for the truth of that. Certain it is that some time after she became married to Richard Tresidder.

Thus it was that Richard Tresidder robbed Jasper Pennington not only of his home and lands, but his love.

Now, my father prospered at Elmwater Barton. He was a clever man, and fortune favoured him. He began to lay by money, and he farmed the land so well that folks said he would in a few years, by the blessing of God, have enough to buy back the Pennington estates, according to the terms of his father's will. This was told Richard Tresidder and his mother one day, and they both laughed. About this time my father's cattle began to die. No one could explain why, but die they did, until many rumours were afloat, and people whispered that the cattle were bewitched. Anyhow, it was asserted that Richard Tresidder had been seen talking with Betsey Fraddam, the witch, while many delicacies had been taken to Betsey's cottage from Pennington.

Now, as I said, there will be many things in this narrative which I, an unlearned man, cannot explain. Still, I must tell of matters as they occurred, this, among others, especially as my relations with Eli Fraddam, Betsey's son, have been condemned by Parson Inch. It is said that the Fraddam family has witchcraft in its veins. Anyhow, it is well known that Betsey was regarded as a witch, while Eli, her son – but of the poor gnome I will tell later on.

My father tried everything to cure his cattle, but could not, and what was more perplexing was the fact that other people's cattle in fields adjoining suffered not at all. In a few months he was driven to extremities; he saw his chances of buying back his old home slipping through his fingers, and what maddened him most was that whenever he passed Richard Tresidder, the man who lived on his estates, laughed him in the face.

One day my father was in a field adjoining the Pennington lands when he saw Richard Tresidder.

"Well, farmer," said Tresidder, with a sneer, "and how are you getting on?"

Whereupon my father accused him of having dealings with Betsey Fraddam, and told him he was a black-hearted knave, and other things concerning himself, which maddened Richard Tresidder so that he jumped over the hedge that divided them and struck my father with his heavy riding-whip.

Now the Penningtons have always been a large-limbed, powerful race, and, while they have been slow to anger, they have – thank God – always had a strong sense of what is just, and have always been regarded as brave men. Richard Tresidder was a slim, wiry man, and, while strong and agile, was no match for a man who, when he hadn't an ounce too much flesh, weighed over eleven score pounds. What my father would have done by him I know not, but while he was in the act of thrashing him two of Tresidder's men came up, and thus the business ended, at least for the time. A little while later my father was summoned for attempted murder.

The affair was the talk of Cornwall for some time – at least, that part of Cornwall – and most people thought my father would be hanged. The magistrates, who knew the Penningtons and liked them, however, did not allow this; but he had to pay Tresidder a sum of money which, unless he were helped, meant his utter ruin.

Again had Richard Tresidder and his mother, who, I believe, was behind all this, got the upper hand of my father, and again by unfair means. Was it a wonder, then, that Jasper Pennington should regard them as enemies? Was it any wonder that I, when I came to know about these things, should feel bitterly?

After the sentence was passed my father, wondering what to do, went to see Betsey Fraddam, the witch.

"Betsey," said my father, "tell the truth about my cattle. You can't harm me, because I'm the oldest son, indeed the only son, but I can harm you. Did Tresidder hire you to ill-wish the cattle?"

"Jasper," said Betsey, "ded 'ee bait un – ded 'ee bait un, now, right bad? Zay you ded, now."

"Yes, I did," said my father. "I'm glad the two men came up, or I should have murder on my conscience, and that's not right, even when the man is your enemy."

"But you ded bait un! Aw! aw! Jasper; ther's they that can kill, an' ther's they that can cure. Some can do both."

"You can, Betsey."

"P'raps I can, Jasper. Ave 'ee seed my boy Eli, Jasper?"

"No," replied my father.

"Then come in and zee un – come in, Jasper," and she led the way into the cottage.

My father, who told me this years after, said he should never forget the curious feeling that came over him as he saw Betsey Fraddam's son. He looked even as a child like an old man, and he had a wild look in his eyes that made him shudder.

"He 'ed'n wot you may call a purty cheeld, es a, then?" asked Betsey.

My father did not reply.

"Well, we ca'ant expect for Betsey Fraddam to 'ave purty cheldern, can us, then?"

My father was still silent, for Betsey had a strange way with her that made people afraid. Even I can remember that.

"You may have a son some day, Jasper."

"No," said my father.

"But you may," said Betsey, "you may; I do'ant main nothin' wrong, Jasper. Margaret Quethiock es well off, and her father do oan the Barton. Think about it, Jasper. And then ef you do ever have a son, you'll tell 'im to be kind to Eli, wa'ant 'ee now, Jasper?"

"Yes," said my father, wondering all the time why he should give the promise. And that was all the conversation they had together at that time, for my father told me, and he was always a truthful man. But his cattle got better from that time, and as Mr. Quethiock, of Falmouth, lent him £300 he was able to tide over his difficulty.

A little while later my father married Margaret Quethiock, and the fortune that her father gave her was £200, besides the £300 he had borrowed, and Elmwater Barton rent free during her lifetime. If she died before my father, the question of rent was to be considered. They had been married about two years when I was born; but my mother died at my birth, so I never knew a mother's care and love.

My grandfather Quethiock said nothing about rent after my mother's death, but my father did not become a rich man. Somehow things were constantly going wrong with him, and he was in endless trouble about money matters. It was his stepmother, he told me, who was constantly persecuting him, because she feared his getting rich, while her son, who enjoyed my father's wealth, had all sorts of people ready to do his will. Only for him to hint at a thing, and his satellites would do it. Thus, one day a herd of cattle would get into a cornfield and destroy it; and on another, without any apparent reason, a corn-mow would catch fire. We could never trace it to them, but we always knew by the jeering laugh on Tresidder's face when he passed us who was the cause of our trouble.

All this shortened my father's life. When I was nineteen, at the time when he should have been in his prime, he was a worn-out old man; and so, when sickness overtook him, he had no strength to fight against it. It was during this sickness that he told me some of the things I have written, and also informed me of other matters which will be related later.

I was with him shortly before he died, and then he said to me very earnestly, "I leave you Elmwater Barton, Jasper, for I don't think your grandfather Quethiock will ever charge you rent, and he told me it should be yours completely at his death; but your real property is Pennington, my boy. Now I want you to make me a promise."

"I will promise anything in my power, father," I said.

"Then," he replied, quietly, "I want you to promise me that you will never rest until you get back your own. Never rest until you are back at Pennington as master and owner. You have been robbed, my son. I have tried to get your rights and have failed, but you must not fail."

"No, father, I will not fail," I replied. "I will never rest until I have got back Pennington."

"And never trust a Tresidder, Jasper; they are all as deep as the bottomless pit, and as cruel as the fiend who rules there."

"I hear, father," was my reply, "and you shall be obeyed."

This was in the month of July, in the year 1737, when I was nineteen years of age.

What I have to tell is how I tried to get back my home, of the battles I had to fight, of the love which came into my heart, of many mysteries which I cannot explain, and of the strange experiences through which I passed in seeking to obey my father's will.

Whether I shall be believed or no I cannot tell, but I will tell only the truth, strange as it may all seem. Moreover, let God be the judge whether my quarrel with the Tresidders was not a just one, and whether I did not fight fairly, as every honest man should.

CHAPTER II
TELLS HOW I, JASPER PENNINGTON, TRIED TO GET MY OWN

I do not think I have as yet mentioned it, but Richard Tresidder – I mean the man who entered into my father's possessions – had three sons and one daughter, and each of these was brought up with the thought that I was their natural enemy. Of course, they were informed that my grandfather's will provided the means whereby I, if I were sufficiently fortunate, could buy back the estate at half its valued worth. And they were in constant suspense about it. If I were to marry a rich wife it could be done; if I were to have some stroke of fortune their home might be taken from them, they having only a given sum of money. And thus it was to their interest to keep me poor, as well as to damage my reputation in the neighbourhood.

The eldest son was a year or more older than I, and was, of course, respected as the heir to the Pennington lands, for it is strange how people's sympathies veer around on the side of the people who are in power. My father has told me many times how, when he was thought to be the prospective heir of Pennington, people could not make enough of him, while Richard Tresidder had but scant courtesy paid him. When it became known that my father was disinherited, no matter how unjustly, these same folks discovered that Richard Tresidder was a very mine of wit and goodness, while my father was made a butt for fools' jokes.

And so I discovered that my being a Pennington counted but for little, while it seemed to be forgotten that but for the wiles of a clever, selfish woman, I should be the Squire of the parish.

When I was old enough I was sent to Tregony grammar school, my father being determined to give me a schooling befitting the position he hoped, in spite of his misfortunes, I should some day occupy. Now Nick Tresidder had been attending this same school for some months when I went. For this I was very glad, because I thought it would give me an opportunity for testing him. I had not been in the school a week, however, when my father came to fetch me away. The reason was that Richard Tresidder had demanded it, as he would not allow his son to be educated at the school where the son of a tenant-farmer was admitted. He told the schoolmaster that he had two other sons whom he intended to send, but that he should immediately withdraw his patronage if I were not sent away.

All this angered me as well as my father, but there was no help for it, and I was sent to Probus instead, where the education was as good, but where I had no chance of meeting the Tresidders.

I have said that Elmwater Barton was a good farm, but I must confess to looking longingly at Pennington. This was in the nature of things very reasonable on my part, for I always looked upon it as my home. But besides this, I doubt if the whole country can present a stretch of land so fair, or a house so pleasantly situated. There may be bigger and more imposing houses, but there are none more comfortable. Besides, Pennington faces a beautiful glen that is about half a mile wide. I know of no grass as green as that which grows there, or of trees so fine and stately. Besides, the river which winds its way downward, and which sometimes runs side by side with the drive leading from the house to the main road, is the most beauteous stream of water I ever saw. Then sloping away from this glen are wooded hills, the sight of which in the early summer time is enough to make a man sing for joy; and in addition to all this, while standing at the main entrance of the house you can see the blue sea, say a mile and a half away. I, who have seen something of the world, say there is nothing finer in the way of green and pleasant land, while all the world knows that nowhere are cliffs so fine and the sea so blue as that which is to be seen in this part of my native county. Besides, all that land from the house where my father was born right to the sea belongs to the Pennington estates, while at the back of the house it stretches just as far, and just as fair.

One day – it was before my father died – I had climbed Trescowal Tor, just to feast my eyes upon so much loveliness, when I saw Richard Tresidder walking with his mother toward the Pennington woods. Now a great desire came into my heart, not to see Tresidder, but to speak to his mother, whom I knew to be the evil genius of my family. And so I made my way to the woods, and stood in the pathway as they came up.

They both knew me, not only through my likeness to my father, but because of my size, for it is well known that the Pennington family on the male side are at least six inches taller than the ordinary run of men.

"Do you know you are trespassing?" asked Tresidder.

"My name is Jasper Pennington," I said, proudly.

"Then get off my lands at once," he said, sternly, and with a black look.

"Not until I have had a good look on the man and woman who have robbed my father and me," I said – and I knew I had aroused the devil in them as I spoke. For the woman who had robbed us fairly glared at me, while Tresidder grasped his stick as though he would strike me. The woman was nearing seventy, but she was strong and hale, and her eyes flashed like those of a young girl. I saw, too, that she must have been handsome when she was young. I marked the cruel, resolute expression of her mouth, and I did not wonder at the difficulty my grandfather had in resisting her.

"I will have you put in the stocks, and then taken to the lockup, if you are not gone at once," said Tresidder, savagely.

"I will give your three sons the chance of doing this," I said, with a laugh. "Three Tresidders against one Pennington isn't bad in fair fight. Of course, where cunning and cheatery comes in I should be nowhere. Or perhaps," I continued, "you would like to try yourself. I am only eighteen, and you are in the prime of your life; still, I should be pleased to give you the chance."

But he laid no hands on me; instead, he put a whistle to his mouth and blew.

"Yes," I said, "get some one else to do the work you are afraid to try yourself; that's a Tresidder all over. Well, I'll go now; I've had a good look at you both, and I shall know you again."

With that I turned and walked away, for, if the truth must be told, I did not care about fighting with Tresidder's minions, and my father had told me many times to be careful.

The path was very crooked, and the foliage was very thick, so that I had not gone more than a few steps before I was out of their sight. Acting on the impulse of the moment, I stopped and listened.

"A regular Pennington," I heard the old woman say. "You must be careful, Richard, for he has more brains than his father. He has all the good looks of the family, too. We must be silent about all our plans, for if he knows he will spoil them. Remember the will."

"I do remember; that is why I am anxious about our boys. Still, there can be no fear, and it will not be so very long before we shall get her. That settled, and Nick will be all right."

I heard no more after that, but I wondered often what he meant. I told my father, too, but he could give me no hint toward the solution of Tresidder's words.

After my father's death I ceased to think so much of Pennington; for I had Elmwater Barton to look after. I was determined to make the farm pay, and now that all the responsibility rested on me, I made up my mind that the Tresidders should not play fast and loose with me, as they had done with my father. In order to do this I looked carefully around me for a man in whom I could trust; for, be it remembered, this was a very difficult matter. My father had engaged two hinds, and each of these had been bribed by the Tresidders to injure his property. You see, his enemies had almost supreme power in the parish, and they used it to his injury. Still, I knew that the Tresidders must have enemies as well as other people, and it was for me to find out who they were. This I had no great difficulty in doing. A man named William Dawe had farmed a place named Treviscoe, on the Pennington estate, and the poor fellow had several seasons of bad luck. One year his turnip crop failed; the next the foot and mouth disease got hold of his cattle; and the next, during the lambing season, he lost a great number of sheep. Indeed, so bad was his luck that he was unable to pay his rent. Perhaps Tresidder

would have been lenient with him but for two things: one was that he had refused to take sides with him against my father, and another was that when Nick Tresidder insulted William Dawe's daughter the farmer gave him a thrashing. The end of all this was that William Dawe was sold up, and even then he was not free from all his difficulties.

One of the first important things I did after my father's death, therefore, after a serious conversation with the farmer, was to lure him to come to Elmwater Barton, with his wife and son and daughter, in order to manage the farm. I do not think in all my life I have ever seen a man so grateful.

"Will you come, William?" I asked, when I told him what wages I could afford to give.

"Come, Maaster Jasper, come! I reck'n I will! Why – " And then he caught at my hand, and behaved in a way that made me think for the time that I was serving him only, and not myself at all.

In a few days William was settled down at the Barton, and right well did he arrange for the harvest, and right hard did both he and his son work for me. Indeed, both William and his son George seemed ready to work their arms off for me, and were both anxious to serve me night and day. George Dawe was a strapping fellow of twenty-five, nearly as tall and strong as myself, though not quite. This was proved one day when we wrestled down in the calves' meadow. I had hard work to master him, for George had taken the wrestling prize at St. Eve's Feast for three years in succession. I was proud to have thrown him, especially as I had not yet got my full strength, not being twenty years of age. George had had a varied experience. He had been to sea in a trading vessel, and, if the truth must be confessed, had done a fair amount of smuggling. Be that as it may, George Dawe loved me like a brother, and nothing was too much for him to do for me. Thus I regarded myself as very fortunate. Eliza Dawe, too, was a careful, sensible woman, while Selina, her daughter, was a strapping, healthy wench who could do as much work as two ordinary women.

Now, I say this was a great help to me, for they all watched my interests closely.

"Lev any ov the Trezidders try any ov their dirty capers now," said George to me, "and we'll laive 'em knaw."

Those who know nothing about farming can have no idea what a great amount of harm a seemingly little mistake can do. Suppose, for instance, there are two ten-acred fields side by side. Suppose the month is early July, when the corn has nearly reached its full height, and the heads have all bursted ready to ripen. Well, suppose, again, that one of these ten-acred fields has barley, or oats, or wheat, while the other is a browsing field in which twenty or thirty head of cattle are feeding. Then let some evil-disposed person open the gate between these two fields, and the thirty head of cattle get into the cornfield – what happens? Why, £20 worth of damage can be done in a single night. And things like this were often happening in my father's days, and thus he was kept poor.

But things changed after I got George Dawe on the Barton. His eyes seemed to be everywhere, and always in my interests.

Let me give one example (and then I will soon get on to my story proper) how George Dawe saved me a large amount of money, and at the same time helped me to teach the Tresidders a lesson.

It was the June after I had got William Dawe's family to live with me. We had had several dry weeks, so that the fields had become parched and bare, and we were anxious lest the sheep should not have enough grass. One field had been planted with vatches, which, as every farmer knows, grow quickly and are cut for the horses.

"William," I said to Dawe one day, "I am afraid we shall have to sacrifice a hay field. The browsing fields are all brown; the sheep can't get enough to eat. We must be careful not to turn them there when the dew is on the grass, though, or they'll get vlayed."

"I wudden trouble, Maaster Jasper; ship c'n nibble a lot on a dewy mornin', and we sh'll git rain zoon, I reck'n."

"Well, as you think best; but I fancy we'd better turn the biggest lot into the 'Sheeps' Close' to-night." The "Sheeps' Close" was the name of one of the best meadows, which at this time was very bare owing to the long spell of dry, hot weather.

Well, I had to ride to Truro that afternoon, so I did not get home till late at night. I found George Dawe waiting up for me.

"Anything the matter, George?" I asked.

"Iss, ther es, Maaster Jasper."

"What?" I asked.

"The Trezidders be up to the ould gaame. When I wos comin' 'ome from St. Eve two or dree 'ours agone, I 'eared young Nick plannin' ev it weth Buddle."

"Explain, George," I said.

George told his story, with the result that we made our way to the "Sheeps' Close" and hid behind the hedge. Just before dawn – that is, about three o'clock in the morning – we saw two men coming toward the gateway. We saw them unfasten the gate and open it wide, then we heard one say to the other, "Now let's fetch up the sheep, and the fool will be worth a bit less money in a few hours."

Then they went away, and in a little while we heard them "whishing" up the sheep. George closed the gate, and we both waited until they came up. There were a hundred and seventy-five sheep in the flock, and they brought them up for the purpose of turning them into the vatches. Here they would be knee-deep in rank vegetation, and the poor things, glad to get to such juicy meat, would eat ravenously. The result of this would be that they would get filled with wind and would swell horribly, and if not immediately relieved would die a painful death. If the design succeeded in this case I should be hundreds of pounds poorer before the men would be at their work.

It may be imagined, therefore, that my blood was pretty hot, and that my feelings toward the Tresidders were not those of a lover, and I will leave it to any fair-minded man whether my anger was not reasonable.

As I said, George and I waited by the gate until they came up. The sheep came close to the gate, as if waiting to be let in, and the two men stood behind, not knowing, evidently, why the poor creatures did not go to their death.

"What's the matter, Jacob?" asked young Nick Tresidder.

"Dunnaw, aw'm zure," answered Jacob, who was the eldest son of Tresidder's "head man" and the worst rake in the parish. "Lev us go up an' zee."

So they came up, as we expected they would.

"Why, the gaate es cloased and apsed!" cried Jacob. "The devil must 'a 'bin 'ere."

"Nonsense," said Nick, "you couldn't have opened it; you must have been dreaming. There, open it."

"You tackle Nick Tresidder, an' I'll 'ave a go with Buddle," said George to me, in a whisper; "he's allays a-braggin' as 'ow 'ee c'n bait me. Now then, jump out!"

At this we both leaped forward. I took Nick Tresidder by the scruff of the neck, while George gripped Buddle like a blacksmith's vice.

The sheep jumped away frightened, while these two blackguards cried out as if the judgment day had come.

"Es et the devil?" asked Buddle.

"No," I roared out, "it isn't the devil; we're not related to you in any way, and your master won't help you."

By this time they found out who we were, and began to wriggle finely.

"Look you, Nick Tresidder," I said; "the law will do nothing for us, so we are going to take the law in our own hands."

"What do you want?" asked Tresidder.

"Nothing unfair," I said. "We are man to man. You are on my land, and you were doing a trick worthy only of the devil, your master. We will wrestle fair, as becomes Cornishmen, and you must show no mercy, for as God is above me I'll show none."

Now I will do these men justice. They were not afraid of us, and when they knew that we were people of this world and not ghosts from the other, they showed no desire to run away. Nick Tresidder was a year older than I, while Buddle always sneered when folks said that George Dawe was a better man than he. Besides, they both saw that we did not mean playing at wrestling.

But Nick Tresidder, Tresidder-like, was not fair; he jumped upon me before I was ready, a thing always regarded as cowardly at a wrestling match. I saw in a minute, too, that he knew the tricks of the art, and were I not a wrestler, too, and a strong man to boot, my arm must have been broken before I could put forth my strength. This angered me more than I like to be angered, for now, when we were to meet man to man, I felt not so bitter about the sheep. So I put forth all my strength and made him let go his vantage hold, then I put my arm around his chest, and right glad was I when I found him a strong man; so I played with him for the pleasure of wrestling, just as any true Cornishman will. But I was wrong in doing this. My father had told me never to trust a Tresidder, and I did trust him to wrestle fairly, even although he had tried to kill my sheep. While I wrestled, merely for the pleasure of wrestling, I felt a stab at my side, and I knew that a knife had entered my flesh just under my arm.

"You are a coward, Nick Tresidder," I said, "a coward in every way;" then, not knowing whether I was dangerously wounded or no, I played with him no longer, for a man cannot bear everything. I caught him in both my arms and lifted him from the ground; then I wrestled in earnest. I heard one of his ribs snap, but he did not cry out, then another, and he became but a child to me; so I let him go, and he staggered away like a drunken man.

"Now go home and tell your father what you have done," I said, "and tell him who you found in Elmwater Barton 'Sheeps' Close.'"

Then I turned to George, who was still struggling with Buddle, and who, just as I came to him, threw him heavily.

"George," I said, "I have been stabbed. Just tie this cloth tightly around my chest."

"The coward!" said George, panting; "but where es a, Maaster Jasper?"

"He won't wrestle any more for a month or two," I replied; "but I would not have hurt him so if he had not stabbed me."

So there, in the early morning light, while the birds began to sing, and the sheep tried to find food on the dewy ground, George Dawe tied a cloth tightly across my naked chest, and I could not help wincing at the pain. Just as he was finishing, Jacob Buddle got slowly up from the ground. He had been badly stunned, but no bones were broken.

"Look after your master," I said; then I saw the knife with which Nick had stabbed me lying on the ground. "There," I said, "you know that knife, I expect; your master used it while we wrestled."

But Buddle was dazed, and did not reply. So when I had put on my coat I went to Nick Tresidder, who was very faint and unable to walk, so ill had he become. Then my heart softened, and together we took him up to Pennington, and Buddle, who was by this time better, said he could manage him.

The next day I heard that Nick Tresidder had fallen from his horse and broken his ribs, and Dr. Hawke, who had been called in, said that he must remain in bed many days. But of this I am sure, although neither George Dawe nor I said a word, Richard Tresidder knew the truth.

Now I have told this, not because I delight in such things, but because I want it to be known how I was treated, and what I had to contend with, for this was but a sample of the many ways in which the Tresidders had tried to harm me. I have often wondered why they felt so evilly toward me, seeing that they were rich at my cost, and I have come to the conclusion that it is a law of human nature for a man to hate those whom he has treated unjustly. But I am an unlearned man, and the heart of man – and woman – is past finding out.

And now I must tell how, in spite of myself, I was drawn more and more into contact with the Tresidders, with other matters which strangely affected my life later on.

CHAPTER III
HOW I WAS ROBBED OF ELMWATER BARTON; HOW I FLOGGED THE TRESIDDERS, AND WAS PILLORIED BECAUSE OF IT

A month after the event I have just related I was walking down toward the sea, for my wound, which was but slight, had healed up, when, passing by Betsey Fraddam's cottage, I saw the old woman sitting by the door mending a garment.

"'Ere, Maaster Jasper, I want 'ee," said Betsey.

So I went toward her, not caring to offend her. Now I am not a superstitious man, neither did I ever believe in some of the stories told about Betsey. At the same time, I knew better than to offend her. Even Parson Grigg was civil to her, and admitted that she had powers which could not be trifled with. It is also a fact that she had cured some of my cattle which had been stung by adders, by charming them, while, on the other hand, my father believed that she had, at Richard Tresidder's bidding, ill-wished his cows. She had on several occasions cured terrible diseases which the doctor from Falmouth said were incurable, and I have heard it said that when Mr. John Wesley visited Cornwall, and was told about her, the great man looked very grave, and expressed a belief in her power. This being so, it is no wonder I did not like to offend her; neither had I any reason for doing so. She had been kind to me, and once, when I had scarlet fever, gave me some stuff that cured me even when Dr. Martin said I should be dead in a few hours. Besides, according to my father's promise, I had been friendly with Eli, her son. Now, Eli was several years older than I, but he never grew to be more than about four feet high, and was the most ill-formed creature I have ever seen. He had bow legs, a hump back, and was what was called "double-chested." His thick black hair grew down close to his eyes, which eyes, in addition to being very wild and strange-looking, were wrongly set, so that no one could tell which way he was looking. He was rather sickly-looking, too, and was thought to be very weak. But this I know to be wrong. Eli, ill-formed as he was, was much stronger than most men, nature having endowed his sinews with wondrous hardness and powers of endurance. Eli did no work, but lived by poaching and begging food at the farmhouses. As Betsey's son he was never refused, especially as some believed he had inherited his mother's powers.

Well I entered the cottage and sat on a wooden stool while Eli sat in a corner of the open fireplace and looked at me steadfastly with one eye, and with the other saw what was going on out in the road.

"Well," said Betsey, "and so you found out what Nick Tresidder wanted to do, then? An' I 'ear as 'ow you've nearly killed 'im."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"How do I knaw? How do I knaw everything? But you'll be paid out, Maaster Jasper! Tell y' Dick Tresidder 'll pay 'ee out. I c'n zee et comin'."

"See what coming?" I asked.

"Look 'ee, Maaster Jasper; 'ave 'ee bin to zee yer Granfer Quethiock lately?"

"No."

"Then you be a vool, Jasper – tell y' you be a vool. Wy, 'ee's nearly dead; he may be dead by now. What 'bout the Barton, Jasper? 'Ave 'a willed et to 'ee?"

At this my heart became heavy. Up to now no rent had been charged, and I hoped that my grandfather would make it over to me. My uncles, I knew, did not like me.

"Old Mester Quethiock es dead, es dead, es dead," said Eli, in his funny, grunting kind of voice.

"How do 'ee knaw, Eli?" asked his mother.

"I knaw, I knaw," grunted Eli, and then he laughed in his funny way, but he would tell nothing more.

"What ought I to do?" I asked, for I felt a great fear come into my heart, although my father had told me that my Grandfather Quethiock meant to give me the Barton.

"Go and zee, go and zee," said Betsey.

So I went back home and saddled my mare and rode to Falmouth. When I got into Falmouth town I saw an ironmonger whom I knew, and he looked as though he would speak, so I stopped my horse.

"Well, and so yer poor gran'father is gone," he said.

"Is he?" I replied; "I did not know till now."

"Iss, he's gone, and a good man he wos, too. His two sons, yer uncles, 'ave been waitin' a long time to git into his shoes. Ah, there'll be a change now! Th' ould man was the soul of generosity; but the sons, Peter and Paul, nobody'll be able to rob one to pay the other of they two. But I 'ear as 'ow you'm safe, Maaster Jasper. The Barton es yours, I'm told."

This cheered me, so I rode on toward my grandfather's house. Just before I got there I saw my two uncles coming down the street, and with them was Richard Tresidder. I checked my horse and watched them, and saw that they entered a lawyer's office, and the lawyer who owned it was the son of the man who was present when Lawyer Trefry drew up my grandfather's will.

I got to know nothing by going to my grandfather's house, save to find out the day of the funeral, which was fixed for three days later, and which I attended. After the funeral was over the will was read, and the lawyer who read it was Nicholas Tresidder, a bachelor after whom young Nick was called.

Now, I do not pretend to be a learned man, but I do love honesty, and I do say that the will was drawn up to defraud me. Neither do I believe that my grandfather ever intended the words written down, to read as the lawyer said they read, for he had told my father that Elmwater Barton was to be left to me. According to Lawyer Tresidder, however, the whole of my grandfather's property was left to his two sons, Peter and Paul Quethiock, and it was left to their generosity as to whether I, his grandson, Jasper Pennington, should remain at the Barton free of all rent, and whether the land should be eventually mine. Thus, according to the lawyer's explanation, it was left to my uncles' generosity and judgment as to whether my grandfather's desire should be carried out. I desired that this part of the will should be read again, but so many words were used that I had difficulty in making head or tail of it. All the time I noticed that my uncles looked very uneasy.

Now, I know that my grandfather was very fond of me, and in spite of the fact that I had been robbed of my rightful heritage, he was proud that he had a Pennington for a grandson. Thus I am sure that it was his will that I should have the Barton for my own. But during the last few years he had been very feeble and infirm, and thus in the hands of a clever lawyer he could easily be deceived as to what was legal.

I will not attempt to give a lengthy account of what followed. Indeed, I have not a very distinct remembrance. I was not long in seeing what was in the minds of my two uncles, and I quickly realised that they had been in league with the Tresidders; and so, feeling that it was their intention to defraud me, I became dazed and bewildered. I have a confused recollection of asking some questions, and of the replies given, and after hearing them I left the house, with the consciousness that I was not the owner of Elmwater Barton, but a tenant liable to be dismissed by my uncles, both of whom were, I was sure, tools of Richard Tresidder.

Still, I determined not to give up without a struggle, so I rode to Truro that same day and saw Lawyer Trefry, the son of the old lawyer who drew up my grandfather's will. He listened to my story very attentively, and when I had finished declared that Nicholas Tresidder was a clever fellow.

"I think it is possible you may have a case though, Jasper," he said; "I think you may have a case. I will see to it at once. I will examine the will, and if there is a chance you may depend that I

will seize on it. But remember this: Nicholas Tresidder is a clever fellow, and when he sets his mind on a thing it's a difficult thing to find him napping."

That night I went back to the Barton with a sad heart, speaking not a word to any one. I longed to ease my pain by denouncing the people who sought to work my ruin, but in spite of William Dawe's anxious solicitations I held my peace. It is true Lawyer Trefry gave me some little hope, but I did not sleep that night, and for the next few days I wandered around the farm like one demented. Presently I saw Lawyer Trefry again, and I knew directly I caught the look on his face that my case was hopeless.

"Nicholas Tresidder is a smart fellow," he said, with a grunt, "a very smart fellow. There is no doubt but that your grandfather meant you to have the Barton – not the slightest doubt; but then, you see, it is not legally yours. Let us hope that your uncles will abide by your grandfather's evident desire and make it yours."

But I had no hope of that, and I shook my head sadly. "As well expect water from a stone," I said. "For a long time I have wondered why Richard Tresidder should be so friendly with Peter and Paul Quethiock; now I know. He has been for years trying to ruin me, and now he has accomplished it."

"How old are you?" asked Lawyer Trefry, suddenly, as though a new thought had struck him.

"Twenty next month," I replied.

"Bah! why did not old Quethiock live a month longer?" grunted the lawyer.

"Why, what would have been the use?" I asked.

"Use? Why, if you could prove that you had held the land for twenty years, you could lawfully claim it as yours."

And thus everything was against me, and although we talked over a dozen things together, no ray of light came to cheer the darkness.

The next thing that happened was the event of a letter which I got from Nicholas Tresidder, the Falmouth lawyer. This letter was to the effect that as I was neither a lawful tenant of Elmwater Barton, nor the owner thereof, I must immediately vacate the place, as Paul Quethiock intended to take possession thereof immediately. I had expected this, and had been for days trying to value the stock on the place. As I have before stated, I was barely twenty years of age, and although my father had appointed as my guardians two neighbouring farmers, they took but little interest in my affairs – indeed, I do not think they understood what their duties were. Anyhow, they took no steps to help me, neither did they interfere with me in any way.

On the receipt of this letter, which was brought from Falmouth by messenger, I saddled my mare, and immediately rode to see Lawyer Trefry.

He read the letter very carefully, and then asked me if I had received nothing else.

"Nothing," I replied; "what is there else to receive? They have taken away the farm, they have ordered me to leave it; now I am come to you to arrange with James Trethewy and John Bassett about selling the stock. I suppose the crops will have to be valued, too, and a lot of other matters before I can realise on my property."

He looked very grave, but said nothing for some time.

"I will do what I can at once," he grunted, at length; "but believe me, Jasper, my boy, Nicholas Tresidder is a clever dog – a very clever dog. He's been set to work on this bone, and he'll leave nothing on it – mark my words, he'll leave nothing on it."

"He *has* left nothing," I replied; "I doubt if the stock will fetch very little more than the £500 my father spent when he took Elmwater Barton from my Grandfather Quethiock."

Lawyer Trefry shook his head and grunted again; but he made no remark, and so I left, thinking that I knew the worst. I imagined that when the stock was sold I should be worth several hundred pounds, and with this as a nucleus, I should have something to give me a fair start.

And so the day of the sale of the stock on the Barton was fixed, but before that day came another letter was brought by a messenger of Lawyer Nicholas Tresidder from Falmouth. This letter

stated that as no rent had been paid since the death of Margaret Pennington, the heirs of the late Peter Quethiock claimed six years' rent, as they were entitled to do by the law of the land.

I knew now what Lawyer Trefry meant when he said that Lawyer Tresidder would pick the bone clean. He had seen this coming, while I, young and ignorant of the law, had never dreamed of it. Old Betsey Fraddam had said that Richard Tresidder would pay me out, and he had done so now. Six years' rent would swallow up the value of the stock, and would take every penny I possessed. Thus at twenty I, who, but for the fraud and deceit of the Tresidders, would be the owner of Pennington, would be absolutely homeless and penniless. Then for the first time a great feeling of hate came into my heart, and then, too, I swore that I would be revenged for the injury that was done to me.

Again I went to Lawyer Trefry, and again he grunted.

"I expected this," he said; "I knew it would come. Nick Tresidder is a clever dog; I was sure he would pick the bone clean."

"And there is no hope for me?" I asked, anxiously.

"You will have your youth, your health and strength, and your liberty," he replied. "I do not see how they can rob you of that; no, even Nick Tresidder can't rob you of that!"

"But the rest?"

"It will have to go, it must all go; there is no hope for it – none at all," and the lawyer grunted again.

I will not describe what took place during the next few weeks – there is no need; enough to say that all I had was taken, that I was stripped of all I possessed, and was left a homeless beggar.

As Lawyer Trefry told me, they had done their worst now, at least for that time. Richard Tresidder had been undoubtedly working in the dark for years to accomplish this, and in his kinsman the lawyer he had found a willing helper. It was plain to see, too, that it would be to Peter and Paul Quethiock's advantage to try and take the Barton from me. It was a valuable piece of land, and would enrich them considerably. There was no difficulty, either, in seeing Richard Tresidder's motives. He had wronged me, and, as I said, it seems a law of life that a man shall feel bitterly toward one he has wronged; and besides all that, his safety lay in keeping me poor, and to this end he brought all his energies to bear.

When it was all over I think I became mad. While there was a straw to which I could hold I managed to restrain myself, but when the last was broken I think I gave myself over to the devil. I behaved in a way that frightened people, until even those who were inclined to be friendly avoided me. By and bye only one house was open to me, and that was old Betsey Fraddam's. It was true I visited the taverns and beershops in the neighbourhood, and formed companionships with men who years before I despised; but Betsey Fraddam's house was the only one open to me which I could regard as anything like a home. Even Betsey grew angry with me, and would, I think, have bidden me leave her doors but for her son Eli, who seemed to love me in a dumb, dog-like sort of way.

"Why doan't 'ee roust yerzelf up, Jasper?" she would say. "Spoase you be put upon, spoase Squire Trezidder 'ave chaited 'ee – that ed'n to zay you shall maake a maazed noodle of yerzelf. Roust yerzelf up, an' begin to pay un back."

"How can I do it, Betsey?"

"'Ow? Better do a bit a smugglin' than do nothin'."

"Yes; and isn't that what Tresidder wants? If he can get me in the clutches of the law that way it will just please him. Mad I am, I know, but not mad enough for that."

"Then go to Plymouth, or go to Falmouth, my deear cheeld. Git on board a shep there, an' go off to some furrin country and make a fortin."

"There are no fortunes to be made that I know of, Betsey; besides, I don't want to get away from St. Eve. I want to stay here and keep my eye upon Tresidder."

"And what good will that do? You ca'ant 'urt 'ee by stayin' 'ere. 'E's too clever for you; he c'n allays bait 'ee while you stay 'ere, especially when you do behave like a maazed noodle."

"Very well, Betsey. I will leave your house," I said after she had been talking to me in this fashion one day; "I can manage to live somewhere."

"Jasper mus'n't go 'way," said Eli; "Jasper stay with me. Ef Jasper go 'way, I go 'way. I help Jasper. I knaw! I knaw!" and then the poor gnome caught my hands and laughed in a strange way which was half a cry.

And so, because Betsey loved Eli with a strange love, and because Eli clung to me with a dog-like devotion, I made Betsey's cottage my home. Plan after plan did I make whereby I might be able to make Richard Tresidder and all his family suffer for their behaviour to me, but I saw no means. What could I do? I had no friends, for when I left Elmwater Barton William Dawe and his family left the parish. For a long time I could not make up my mind to ask for work as a common labourer in a parish where I had been regarded as the owner of a barton. It seemed beneath me, and my foolish pride, while it did not forbid me to idle away my days and live in anything but a manly way, forbade me to do honest manual work. But it would have made no difference even if I had been less foolish, for when I on one occasion became wiser, and sought work among the farmers, I was refused on every hand. The fact was, every one was afraid to offend Richard Tresidder, and as every tenant farmer in the parish was in his power, perhaps their conduct was reasonable.

And thus it came about that my manhood slipped away from me, and I became a loafing outcast. I would have left the parish but for a seemingly unreasonable desire to be near Richard Tresidder, who day by day I hated more and more. I know I was mad, and forgot what was due to my name in my madness.

When a year had gone, and I was nearly twenty-one years of age, there were few more degraded sights in the parish than I. My clothes had become worn out, and my whole appearance was more that of a savage than of anything else. People said, too, that the look of a devil shone from my eyes, and I saw that people avoided me. And as I brooded over this, and remembered that I owed it all to the Tresidders, I vowed again and again that I would be revenged, and that all the Tresidder brood should suffer a worse hell than that through which I passed.

Nothing cheered me but the strange love of Eli Fraddam, who would follow me just as a dog follows its master. When I could get a few pence I would go to the alehouse and try and forget my sorrow, but I nursed my anger all the time, and never once did I give up my dreams of harming the Tresidders. I write all this because I want to tell my story faithfully, and because I will give no man the chance to say that I tried to hide the truth about my feelings toward my enemies.

The day before my twenty-first birthday I was loafing around the lanes when I saw Richard Tresidder and his son Nick drive past me. They took the Falmouth road, and, divining their destination, I followed them in a blind, unreasoning sort of way. As I trudged along plans for injuring them formed themselves in my mind, one of which I presently determined I would carry into effect. It was the plan of a savage, and perhaps a natural one. My idea was to wait outside the town of Falmouth, to waylay them, and then to thrash them both within an inch of their lives. I remember that I argued with myself that this would be fair to them. They would be two to one, and I would use nothing but my fists.

When I got into Falmouth I spent the few pence I possessed in food, and then I made inquiries about the time they would return. I discovered that they intended to leave the George Inn about five o'clock in the evening, so I spent the time loafing around the town, and repeating to myself what I would do with them both that night.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, however, my plans became altered. As I stood at a street corner, I saw Richard Tresidder, with his son Nick, besides several other gentlemen, coming down the street. Scarcely realising what I did, for the very sight of him made me mad, I went toward them, and as Richard Tresidder came up I spat in his face.

"Who's a thief? Who's a cheat? Who got Pennington by cheatery and lying?" I shouted.

"Get out of the way, you blackguard," cried Nick Tressider, the lawyer.

"I'll not get out of the way," I cried; "I'll tell what's the truth. He killed my grandfather; he hocussed him into making a false will, and he and you have robbed me. Ah, you lying cowards, you know that what I say is true!"

Then Richard Tresidder lifted his heavy stick and struck me, and before the bystanders knew what had happened there was a street brawl; for I struck Richard Tresidder a heavy blow on the chin which sent him reeling backward, and when his son Nick sprang upon me I threw him from me with great force, so that he fell to the ground, and I saw the blood gush from his nose. After that I remember nothing distinctly. I have a dim recollection of fighting madly, and that I was presently overpowered and taken to the lock-up.

I remained in the lock-up till the next morning, when I was taken before the magistrates. I don't know what was said, and at the time I did not care. I was angry with myself for not biding my time and flogging the Tresidders in the way I had planned, and yet I was pleased because I had disgraced Tresidder – at least, I thought I had – before the whole town. I have an idea that questions were asked about me, and that one of the magistrates who knew my grandfather said it was a pity that a Pennington should come to such a pass. Richard Tresidder and his friends tried to get an extreme sentence passed upon me, but the end of it all was that I was sentenced to be pilloried for six hours, and then to be publicly flogged.

Soon after I was taken to the market-place, where the pillory was set up, and I, in face of the jeering crowd, was tied to a pole. Then on the top of this pole, about six feet from the platform on which I stood, a stout piece of board was placed, which had three hollow places cut out. My neck was pressed into one socket and my wrists in the two others. Then another stout piece of board, with hollow places cut out to correspond with the other, was placed on the top of it. This pressed my neck very hardly, and strained it so that I could hardly breathe; it also fastened my hands, and hurt my wrists badly. I know of nothing nearer crucifixion than to be pilloried, for the thing was made something like a cross, and my head and arms were crushed into the piece of board which corresponds with the arms of a cross in such a way that to live was agony.

And there I stood while the jeering crowd stood around me, some howling, some throwing rotten eggs at me, and others pelting me with cabbage stumps and turnips. After I had stood there about three hours some one came and made the thing easier, or I should not have lived through the six hours, and after that time, the mob having got tired of pelting me, I was left a little time in peace.

When the six hours were nearly up, I saw Nick Tresidder come to the market-place with two maidens. One I saw was his sister, the other was a stranger to me. I knew they had come to add to my shame, and the sight of them made me mad again. I tried to speak, but the socket was too small, and I could not get enough breath to utter a word. Still, anger, I am sure, glared from my eyes as I looked at Nick and his sister; but when I looked at the other maiden, a feeling which I cannot describe came over me. She was young – not, I should think, quite eighteen – and her face was more beautiful than anything I have ever seen. Her eyes were large and brown, while her hair was also brown, and hung in curls down her back. Her face, thank God! was not like that of the Tresidders; it was kind and gentle, and she looked at me in a pitying way.

"What has he done?" she asked, in a voice which, to me, was as sweet as the sound of a brook purling its way through a dell in a wood.

"Done!" said Nick Tresidder. "He is a blackguard; he nearly killed both me and my father."

She looked at me steadfastly, and as she did so my heart throbbed with a new feeling, and tears came into my eyes in spite of myself.

"Surely no," she replied; "he has a kind, handsome face, and he looks as though he might be a gentleman."

"Gentleman!" cried Nick. "He will be flogged presently, then you will see what a cur he is."

"Flogged! Surely no."

"But he will be, and I wish that I were allowed to use the whip. Why, he belongs to the scum of the earth."

By this time I felt my degradation as I had never felt it before, for I felt that I would give worlds, did I possess them, to tell her the whole truth. I wondered who she was, and I writhed at the thought of Nick poisoning her mind against me.

Seeing them there others came up, and I heard one ask who this beauteous maiden was.

"Don't you know?" was the reply. "She is Mistress Naomi Penryn."

"What is his name?" asked this maiden, presently.

"Can't you see?" replied Nick. "Ah! the eggs have almost blotted out the name. It is Jasper Pennington, street brawler and vagabond."

And this was the way I first met Naomi Penryn.

CHAPTER IV
I ESCAPE FROM THE WHIPPING-POST, AND FIND MY WAY TO GRANFER FRADDAM'S CAVE

No words can describe the shame I felt at the time. Before Naomi Penryn came there and looked upon me I was mad with rage and desire for vengeance. I longed to get to a place where I could meet the whole Tresidder brood face to face. But now a new feeling came to me. Had I not after all been a brute, and had I not acted like a maniac? For the look on her face made me love goodness and beauty. I could do nothing, however; my hands were numb, and my tongue was dry and parched. All I was capable of at this moment was to listen and to look into the fair maid's face, and feel a great longing that she might not despise me as Nick Tresidder evidently intended that she should.

The crowd did not pelt me while she stood there; I think it was because there was something in her presence that hindered them. Every one could see at a glance that she was different from the host of laughing things that cared nothing for my disgrace.

I waited eagerly for her to speak again; her words seemed to ease my pain, and to make me feel that I, too, was a man in spite of all I had suffered.

"Jasper Pennington," she said, presently; "why, Pennington is the name of your house, Nick!"

"Yes," replied Nick, savagely.

"He's young, too," she continued, looking at me curiously, and yet with a pitying look in her eyes.

Then I remembered I was twenty-one that day, and that my father had been dead barely two years. Thus, on my twenty-first birthday, I was pilloried as a vagabond and a street brawler, while this beauteous girl looked at me.

"Where does he live?" she asked again, as though she were interested in me.

"Up to a year ago he lived in St. Eve's parish," replied Nick. "He managed to stay by fraud on Elmwater Barton; he was a brute then, and tried to kill me. He would have succeeded, too, but for Jacob Buddle. I hope the man who flogs him will lay it on hard."

She gave me one more look, and in it I saw wonder and pity and fear. Then she said, "Let us go away, Nick. I do not care to stay longer."

"No, we will not go yet!" cried Nick; "let us see him get his lashes. He will be taken down in a few minutes. There, the constables are coming."

I saw the tears start to her eyes, while her lips trembled, and at that moment I did not feel the sting of the lies Nick had told.

The whipping-post was close to the place where the pillory had been set up, and I saw that the constable held the rope with which I was to be tied. Then two men came and unfastened the piece of wood which had confined my head and hands. At first I felt no strength either to hold up my head or to move my hands, but while they were untying my legs the blood began to flow more freely, and I knew that my strength was coming back. The ropes being removed I was allowed to stand a minute, so that my numbed body might become sensitive to the lash of the whip, but I thought not of it. I kept my eyes steadily on Naomi Penryn, and fed upon the look of pity on her face. I knew that she must think of me as a savage brute, and yet she felt kindly toward me. She did not ask to go away again; she seemed to be held by a strange fascination, and watched while the rope was fastened to the ring in the whipping-post. Then I saw Richard Tresidder come up. He had a scar on his cheek, and from his eyes flashed a look of anger, as though he gloated over the thought of my shame and suffering. No sooner did she see him than she came to him and asked that I might be spared the whipping, but Tresidder would not listen to her.

"He deserves to be hanged, my dear," he said; "if such low fellows as he are allowed to bully gentlemen in the streets, what is to become of us?"

Now this was hard to bear, for as all the world knows the Pennington family is one of the best in the county, but I saw that he wanted to embitter her mind against me.

Then I saw Lawyer Trefry come up, and two justices with him, and while my old friend did not speak to me, I knew that he thought of me kindly.

"The lad hath been much provoked," he said. "I have known him as a good lad for years, and but for unfair treatment, matters would be reversed."

At this two of the justices nodded their heads, while Richard Tresidder called out for the constables to do their work, for he saw that people began to sympathise with me.

Again I turned to Naomi Penryn, and as I saw the look on her face I determined that I would not bear the lash. Not that I feared the pain of body, but I could bear the degradation no longer. Then they lifted me from the platform on which I had been standing, and the people could see that my neck was cruelly discoloured, while my hands were blue.

"He hath suffered much," I heard it whispered, "and Squire Tresidder hates him. He's a Pennington, and his father was robbed. Isn't he a fine, strapping fellow; no wonder they are afraid of him."

This and other things I heard, until I knew that Lawyer Trefry had been making the mob friendly; for I have noticed again and again that ignorant people are easily changed from one state of feeling to another.

Now when I came to the whipping-post I began to look around for a means of escape, and to think how I should deal with the two constables that held me.

"Fasten him tight!" cried Richard Tresidder; then, just as the constables released my hands in order to put the rope on me, I gave a desperate struggle, and feeling great strength at that moment, I threw the constables from me, and made a great leap through the crowd. Not a man laid hands on me in spite of Richard Tresidder's commands, for which I knew I had to thank Lawyer Trefry, who with others had changed the feelings of the people. So I quickly got away from the town, and ran as hard as I was able to the River Fal. I knew that I should be followed, for I had not undergone my full penalty, and the law was on Richard Tresidder's side, so I determined that I would get among the woods that slope up westward from the river, and hide as best I might.

I knew I should be safe for the night, for the woods there were very thick, and night would soon be upon me. My only fear was that my strength would not hold out, for having eaten nothing for many hours I was hungry and faint.

After more than an hour's running I reached the woods, and, as far as I knew, little trouble had been taken to follow me, so having hidden myself among some very thick branches I laid down and rested. Could I have obtained some food I think I should have been fairly contented, for I felt neither so angry nor friendless as I had felt in the morning. Presently I heard a rustling among the bushes, and I fancied that my pursuers must be near me, so I lay very quiet and listened, but could hear no sound of human voices. So I became curious to know what made the noise, and to my delight I saw a cow that had evidently strayed away from its field, having probably got into the wood to be under the shade of the trees, and away from wasp-flies. At first she was frightened at me, but I had been used to cattle all my life, so I soon quieted her, and she let me approach her. I saw that it was time for her to be milked, so, making the palm of my hand into a cup, I got enough milk to refresh me considerably and to give me strength to carry out any plans I could make.

Scheme after scheme passed through my mind, but every one of them was driven away by the memory of Naomi Penryn's face and the kind words she had spoken. I knew that in going back to St. Eve I was going back to danger, and yet I determined I would go. I wanted to be close to the Pennington lands. I wanted to watch Richard Tresidder. Besides, I remembered that Naomi Penryn was probably a guest at Pennington. Then I began to ask myself why she should be with the Tresidders,

and what relationship she bore to them. For I did not know her at all. The name of Penryn was well known in the county, but I did not know to what branch of the family she belonged. What connection had she with Nick Tresidder? Why should he bring her to see me that day? And what were the Tresidders' plans concerning her?

It came to me suddenly. She was intended for Nick Tresidder. I remembered the conversation I had heard between Richard Tresidder and his mother, and I thought I understood its meaning. Then my heart gave a wild leap, while hot blood rushed madly into my head, for I knew then that a new life had entered mine. I felt that I loved Naomi Penryn with a great love, and that this love would never leave me while my heart continued to beat. For I had not been given to walking out with maidens; my life had been filled with other things, and so the love I felt was new to me – it filled my whole life, and every breath I drew increased it.

For a long time I lay and dreamed of my love; I did not think of the way in which she must have regarded me, neither did I for a long while remember my degradation. I lived in happy forgetfulness of everything, save the love-joy that filled my life. The birds fluttered hither and thither on the twigs which grew so thickly around, and finally settled to rest, while the insects ceased to hum as the night descended, but I scarcely heeded them. I lay among the ferns, my head pillowed on a moss-covered stone, and thought of Naomi Penryn. I did not care who she was; I did not think. Why should I? For I believe that when God sends love into our hearts, it does not matter as to name and lineage. I had seen the flash of her eyes, and remembered the tear drops that glistened. I had seen the beauteous face, so full of tenderness and truth; I had heard her voice, sweeter than the sighing of the night wind as it played among the wild flowers, and I cared for nothing else. Hour after hour passed away, the woods became darker and darker, but I could still see Naomi's face. Then the eastern sky became streaked with golden light, and the birds sang to welcome the advent of day, but their songs were not so sweet as the memory of Naomi's voice. For my love was the gift of God, and I thought then only of what was beautiful and true.

But with the dawn of day other memories came to me. I thought of my shame; I remembered that she had been told to regard me as a vagabond and a street brawler. I knew that Nick Tresidder would seek to poison her mind against me, and that even now I was being searched for that I might be degraded by the lash of a whip; and then a great pain and bitterness filled my heart, for I felt that my love was hopeless. While I had rejoiced in loving I thought not of this, but after a time my love became a desire, an overmastering desire to woo Naomi Penryn, to make her love me as I loved her.

And this was hopeless. Had she not seen me pilloried as a shameful vagrant? Had she not seen me persecuted, tormented – the byeword, the laughing-stock for the offals of Falmouth town? Had I not been pelted by refuse? Was I not made hideous by disfigurement? How could I win her love? Then I hated the Tresidder tribe more than ever. They had robbed me of my home, my heritage, my all, and now through them I must be loathed by the one, the light of whose eyes burned into my heart like fire. But more than all this she would be with Nick Tresidder day by day. He would walk with her, ride with her, talk with her. They would roam among the woods and pluck the wild flowers that should be mine, while I – I was hiding from the men who held a whip to lash me.

These thoughts kept me from lying still any longer, so I got up and walked along under the great trees until I came down to the river. Perhaps the world can show more beauteous sights than the river which runs between Truro and Falmouth, but I have my doubts. Nature here is at the height of her loveliness and spreads her riches with no niggard hand. For the clear water coils its way through a rich countryside, where green woods and rich meadows slope down to the river's bank. Here the flowers come early in the springtime, and scent the air through the summer; and here, too, winter is tardy in making its appearance, as if loth to shrivel the shining leaf, or to cause the gaily-painted flower to wither and die.

Even I, as I stood by the river's bank at early sunrise, torn as my mind and heart were with conflicting passions, was soothed by the blessedness of the scene, for my heart lost something of its

bitterness and love became triumphant. But the feeling was not for long. As I stood by the still water I saw the reflection of myself, and the sight made me more hopeless than ever. I saw in the water a tall, wild-looking youth, with bare head, save for a mass of unkempt hair; a face all scratched and bruised, and made to look savage and repulsive by vindictiveness; the clothes were dirty, bedraggled and torn, while the riding boots were torn and muddy.

And Naomi Penryn had seen me thus – ay worse. I went to the river and washed, and then looked at myself again. My face was still scratched and bruised, but I had the Pennington features. After all, there was nothing mean and cunning about them. The eyes were wild, and perhaps fierce, but they were honest and frank still. The clothes were much worn and torn, but the body they covered was strong and shapely. There was nothing weak or shambling in those six feet three inches.

Then I remembered what I had been a year before, and what I had become through injustice. Could I not make myself worthy? But how? I faced, or tried to face, facts truthfully. I was without home or friends, if I except the friendship of Eli Fraddam the gnome, who was at once despised and feared on every hand. I had no money, I had no clothes. Moreover, I had no means of getting any. I had no trade; I had no thorough knowledge of anything save farming, and no farmer dared to hire me. It was true I had some little experience of fishing, and could manage a boat fairly well, but not well enough to gain a livelihood by such work.

And yet a love had come into my life for one who was tenderly nurtured, one doubtless accustomed to abundant riches; I, who was an outcast, a beggar. And I owed my poverty, my disgrace, to the Tresidders. Let God who knows all hearts judge whether there was not an excuse for my hatred. And yet, although the Tresidders had made my very love a seeming madness, that same love made me see beauty, and led me to hope with a great hope.

I turned my face toward Pennington, wondering all the while if I should see Naomi again. For I called her Naomi in my own heart, and to me it was the sweetest name on earth. I repeated it over to myself again and again, and the birds, who sang to me overhead, sang to me songs about her. And as I trudged along, I tried to think again how I should buy back Pennington, not for revenge, but because of my love. But no ray of light shone to reveal to me the way. I could see nothing for it but that I, poor and friendless, must forever remain poor and friendless still. And yet all the while birds sang love songs and told me of Naomi Penryn.

When I at length saw Elmwater Barton, I began to think of the steps I must take for my immediate future. I had determined that I would live within sight of Pennington, but how? Even Betsey Fraddam would be afraid to give me shelter when she had heard the truth, for Betsey knew Richard Tresidder's power. For let me tell here that while Betsey was much sought after, she was hated by many. Betsey admitted to being a witch, but claimed only to be a white witch. Now as all Cornish folks know, there is a difference between a white witch and a black witch. A white witch is one who is endowed by nature to cure by means of charms, and passes and strange signs. She can also read the future, and find out secrets about those who do evil. Thus a white witch is looked up to, and her calling is regarded as lawful, even by the parsons, save of a very few who are narrow in their notions. A black witch, on the other hand, is said to have dealings with the evil one, and her power is only gained by a signed compact with the king of darkness.

Now if Betsey were suspected of the evil eye, and of being a black witch, her life might be in danger, and if Richard Tresidder as the chief man in the parish were to turn against her, 'twould go hard with her. Thus I knew that while Betsey did not love Tresidder she would do nothing to offend him. Only her love for Eli caused her to give me a home during the past months, and I knew that now she would not dare to have me in her house.

Thus I made many plans as to what I should do, and presently I had made up my mind. My plan was to go into a cave which I knew of, and spend my days there, and by night I would go to Betsey's house and get food. I should thus have shelter and food, and I should be near Pennington. I should also have means of finding out whether Naomi Penryn stayed at Pennington, as well as other matters

which lay near to my heart. What I should do when winter came on I knew not, neither could I tell how I could make myself worthy of my love. I felt sure that Richard Tresidder's great desire was to drive me from Cornwall, and thus be freed from the sight of one who must always remind him of his fraud. As for my getting back the home of my fathers, it was out of all question.

So I made my way to the cave. It was called Granfer Fraddam's Cave, because he died there. Granfer Fraddam had been a smuggler, and it was believed that he used it to store the things he had been able to obtain through unlawful means. He was Betsey Fraddam's father, and was reported to be a very bad man. Rumours had been afloat that at one time he had sailed under a black flag, and had ordered men to walk a plank blindfolded. But this was while he was a young man, and no one dared to reproach him with it even when he grew old. When Granfer was alive the cave was a secret one, and none of the revenue officers knew of its existence. Only a few of Granfer's chosen friends knew how to find it. It was said, too, that he died there while hiding from the Preventive officers, and that ever since he had haunted the place, and that his voice might be heard at night calling for food and water, and praying for vengeance on the King's servants. Rumour also reported that he died a terrible death, because no clergyman or man of God could get near to help him from the clutches of the Evil One. As far as I was aware, its whereabouts was a secret when I was young, although it was generally supposed to be in what was known as Granfer's Cove, although some said it fell in at Granfer's death. Anyhow, no one visited it – indeed, such was my belief at the time, neither was it a pleasant place to reach. When the tide was up it was difficult to reach by water because of the great rocks which abounded; besides, you might be within six feet of it and not see it, because its mouth was so curiously covered.

Eli Fraddam, who seemed to know everything, took me to it by the upper way; by that I mean the way of the cliff. He also showed me how I might know it from the beach, and by what rocks I could distinguish it. I did not enter the cave at the time, at least very far; but I remember that it was large, and that my voice echoed strangely when I spoke. I remember, too, that a strange fear was upon me, especially as in the dim light I saw Eli's strange form and face, and caught the gleams of his wild cross eyes.

It was to this spot that I determined to go now, and for the time, at least, rest free from Richard Tresidder's persecutions. I think I should have gone away altogether at this time, and perchance have tried to obtain a post as a common sailor, but I remembered Naomi Penryn; and the yearning that was in my heart to see her again and, if possible, to speak to her, was so strong, that I was willing to brave anything to be near her.

Granfer Fraddam's Cave was very lonely. There was not a house within a long distance of it, and, with the exception of two cottages, Pennington was the nearest dwelling. I was, therefore, able to get there unmolested. No one had seen me on my journey, because I had kept to the woods and fields. I took with me some swede turnips to eat, and when I had eaten, not thinking of the strange stories told about Granfer's Cave, I lay down on the shingle and fell asleep and dreamt that I was the owner of Pennington, and that I went to an old house on the cliffs to woo Naomi Penryn.

When I awoke I knew not where I was. My mind was strangely confused, and there was a sound like unto many thunders roaring in my ears. I had a choking sensation, too, and felt it hard to breathe. Then I felt myself to be covered with water, while pebbles pelted my face. I struggled to my feet, and my senses coming to me, I understood the reason. I had not thought of the tide, which was now rushing into the cave with terrific force. A great fear got hold of me, and, as fast as I was able, I fled into the interior of the cavern. It was very dark, but in the darkness I fancied I saw strange, moving creatures; and at that moment all the stories told about Granfer Fraddam's evil spirit were true to me. A mad desire to escape possessed me, but how to do so I did not know. I heard the waves thundering up the cave, while a terrible wind blew, which drove me further into the darkness. I dared not venture to go seaward, so, keeping my hand against the side of the cavern, I allowed myself to follow the strong current of air. Presently the cave began to get smaller; indeed, so narrow was it that I could feel

both sides at the same time by stretching out my hands. All the while the wind blew tremendously. At this I wondered much, for it seemed strange to me that I should feel the wind when I was so far away from the mouth of the cave. As I became calmer, I began to understand this. I knew that the waves as they rushed into the aperture must carry with them a great force of wind, and that naturally they would force the air inward. Thus the strong current which blew me further from the sea would indicate that there was an outlet somewhere. So, unmindful of danger, I followed the wind-current, and shortly I found myself ascending. The road was slimy and hard to climb; but I struggled on, and erelong found myself in a coppice. I looked around me, and remembered the place well. On one side of the coppice was a meadow which belonged to a fisherman named Ikey Trethewy – a strange, silent man who spoke but little, and who possessed a fast-trotting horse. On the other side the coppice sloped up to the spongy headland, where a curious kind of grass grew, and where rabbits dug their holes, and frolicked on summer nights.

I had passed by the place often, and had never thought much of it. The little patch of trees and thick undergrowth which grew in a kind of sheltered gully seemed of no importance; but now the place possessed a strong interest for me.

The coppice was much sheltered, but the wind, as it came up the hole through which I had passed, made a wild, moaning sound, which explained many of the stories I had heard. It was very dark by this time, and, although it was summer, the sky was covered with black clouds, and I heard the wind and sea roaring furiously. By the time I got to the headland I knew that a storm of great violence was raging. For some time a feeling of indecision possessed me; then I made my way toward Betsey Fraddam's cottage.

CHAPTER V
I SEE NAOMI PENRYN ON ROCK CALLED THE SPANISH CAVALIER, AND RESCUE HER – WE ESCAPE FROM THE TRESIDDERS

When I entered Betsey's cottage, she was sitting with her son beside the open fireplace, watching a crock which steamed over a wood fire, and from which came a strange smell.

"'Twas cowld and wet at Granfer's caave, I spoase?" was her first greeting, after looking at me very carefully.

Now how she knew I had been in the cave I know not, neither will I pretend to explain; at the same time, I felt rather fearful at the thought that she should have been aware of the place where I had spent the day, when no one had told her.

"How do you know where I have been?" I asked.

"How do I knaw?" sneered Betsey; "how do I knaw everything?"

So I said no more, but looked toward a loaf of bread which lay on the table.

"Iss, you've 'ad nothin' but a swede turmut, and that ed'n rastlin' mait," said Betsey. "You do look vine and faint, too. 'Ere's summin that'll do 'ee good, my deear," and going to a cupboard, she took a two-gallon jar, and poured out a tumbler full of liquor. "There, drink that," she said, putting it before me.

It was raw spirits, and when I had swallowed one mouthful I could take no more, it was too strong for me.

"Aw, aw!" laughed Betsey; "'tes nearly as strong as the broth I do make, ed'n et, then? Here, Eli, put some milk in the pan, and het it for 'un. He was in the pillory yesterday, and he seed Richard Trezidder and Neck Trezidder and Emily Trezidder, and another maid, a very purty one. Then 'ee runned away, and after that he got to Granfer Fraddam's Cave. Make a good quart of eggiot for 'un, Eli. That'll be better'n sperrits. He's too waik for that."

Then Eli got the milk, and began to beat up eggs in a basin, grunting strangely, while he watched me with his strange, wild-looking eyes. But I did not speak, for Betsey made me afraid; besides, I felt cold and ill.

"I knaw what you be thinking," said Betsey; "you be wonderin' how I got so much sperrits. Well, p'raps I shall tell 'ee zoon. We sh'll zee, Jasper, we sh'll zee." And with that the old crone chuckled.

Then Eli came to me, and felt me, and fondled me. He smoothed my wrists where they had been bruised the day before, and got some ointment which he rubbed around my neck. Then, when the milk and egg was ready, he poured it in a huge basin, and put it before me.

"I'd 'a killed 'un ef you wos dead," he repeated many times, until I wondered at his apparent love for me.

When I had drunk what Eli had prepared I felt better. My head began to get clear again, and my strength came back to me.

"Naow," wheedled Betsey, when I had finished, "tell me oal about et. Tell me, Jasper, my deear."

"You know everything," I replied.

"No, not everything; tell me, for ould Betsey'll ave to 'elp 'ee, my deear."

So I told her everything, save my love for Naomi Penryn; of that I could not speak to her, it was a secret for my own heart, and I vowed that I would never tell of it until I poured the words in the sweet maid's own ears. At that time I felt sure that the story of my love would remain forever untold.

"Do 'ee knaw what this do main, Jasper?" said Betsey, when I had finished.

"He bait 'em boath, boath!" laughed Eli, gleefully.

"Now, Eli," said Betsey, "hark to Jasper, and hark to me. Now tell me, Jasper."

"I think I know," I said.

"He mustn't knaw that you've come back to St. Eve," said Betsey. "I tell 'ee, you musn't show yer faace. 'Ee'll never rest till you'm out ov the way. You'll jist be found dead some day, tha's wot'll 'appen. Ef 'ee caan't do et with the law 'ee'll do et wi'out."

"Yes," I said.

"Well, wot be 'ee goin' to do?"

"I'll go back to Granfer Fraddam's Cave. No one can find me there."

"Tha's true, but what 'bout yer mait?"

"I'll bring 'un mait," said Eli. "I'll bring 'un mait. I knaw, I knaw!" And the poor gnome laughed joyfully.

"But that caan't last," said Betsey. "Two months more an' winter'll be 'ere. Besides, you caan't git back Pennington by stayin' in a cave. You knaw what you promised your vather, Jasper; you zaid you wudden rest night nor day 'till you got back Pennington."

"I remember," I said.

"Bezides," cried Betsey – then she stopped, and looked at me steadily. She had keen, whitey-gray eyes, which shone very brightly. "Do'ee knaw who thicky maid wos that you zeed in Fa'muth 'esterday?"

I shook my head.

"Purty, ed'n she?" sniggered Betsey. "She's for Nick Trezidder, my deear, tha's wot she's for. Her vather an' mawther's dead, my deear, and she've got piles o' money, an' Richard Trezidder es 'er guardian, an' they main 'er to marry Nick. Her vather was Squire Penryn, my deear, an' 'ee was killed, an' 'er mawther died a bit agone, so the Trezidders 'ev got 'er body and soul."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"'Ow do I knaw!" sneered Betsey. "'Ow do I knaw everything?" and this was the way she always answered when I asked her such a question.

"Where is her home?" I asked.

"Where? Up the country somewhere on the north coast. A big 'ous cloas to the say, my deear."

"But Penryn is close to Falmouth."

"'Nother branch ov the fam'ly, my deear; but ther', she nothin' to you. She's good, she's purty, an' she's rich, but she's for Nick Trezidder. Thews Trezidders do bait the Penningtons, don't 'em?" And Betsey laughed again.

But I held my tongue. I determined that I would not tell the secret of my heart, although Betsey's words hurt me like knife-stabs.

"Well, an' when winter do come, what be 'ee goin' to do then, Jasper, an' 'ow be 'ee goin' to git 'nough to buy back Pennington?"

"I must think, Betsey," I said. "I must think. But I'll do it – I'll do it!"

"Aisy spok, but not so aisy done. How?"

"I'll help 'un," said Eli.

"You! 'Ow can you 'elp 'un?"

But Eli only hugged himself and laughed, as though he were tickled. After that but little was said that I can remember.

Before daylight came I went back to the cave. I was sure that neither Betsey nor Eli would tell of my hiding-place. I was glad for this, because I knew that if Dick Tresidder knew where I was I should be taken back to the whipping-post, and perhaps imprisoned. Besides, I was sure that he feared me, and that he would do everything in his power to make me suffer. So I determined to stay in Granfer Fraddam's Cave as long as I could, and I knew that Eli would find out everything about what went on at Pennington and tell me. Looking back now, my conduct seems foolish in the extreme. I could

do no good by staying in the cave, I could not get an inch nearer my purpose. It would have been far more sensible to have sailed to some distant land and sought for fortune. And I will admit that I was tempted to do this, and should have left St. Eve, but for a strange longing to stay near Pennington, knowing as I did that Naomi Penryn was there, and that, although I had never spoken to her, I loved the dear maid every hour of my life more and more.

One day, I think it was about a week after I had taken up my abode in the cave, I was sitting at its mouth and looking across the narrow bay, and watching the tide come up, when I was strangely startled. I remember that in dreaming of Naomi Penryn a feeling of despair had come into my heart, for I saw no chance whatever of ever seeing her again, much less speaking to her. Besides, even if it were possible for me to win her love I had no right to do so. Pennington seemed further from my grasp than ever, while Richard Tresidder's hold on it grew stronger day by day. I was thinking of these things when I saw, two or three hundred yards out at sea, standing on a rock, a woman's form. The rock was a large one, and went by the name of "The Spanish Cavalier." It rose from the beach to the height of fifteen feet, and was never covered save at high tides. There was, moreover, a curious place in the rock, not unlike an arm-chair, in which one might sit and watch the shining waves. All around it was grouped a number of smaller rocks, which boatmen always avoided, because driving on them was dangerous.

As I said, I saw on "The Spanish Cavalier" a woman's form, and above the sound of the breakers I heard a cry for help. I did not hurry to the rescue, for the delay of a few seconds could make no difference, the rock was now several feet under water; besides, I was not sure what it meant. At first I could not discern who the woman was, and fancied it might be one of the Misses Archer, or perhaps Richard Tresidder's daughter. But then, I thought, they would know the coast, and would not allow themselves to be caught by the tide in such a way. On looking again, however, my heart gave a great leap – the woman on the rock was Naomi Penryn. A feeling of joy surged through me. At last I had my chance, I should be able to speak to her without let or hindrance. As I have before stated, the cave had but few houses near. Ikey Trethewy's cottage stood at some little distance away from the coppice where the land entrance to the cave had been made, but it was not visible from "The Spanish Cavalier;" another cottage stood further along the coast, but that was more than a mile away; while the other house was Pennington, which was nearly two miles off. Seemingly, there was no other help than my own near, and I rejoiced that it was so. There was no real danger, but she needed my help, and that was all I cared for. So I plunged into the water and was able to wade nearly all the way to the rock. She saw me coming toward her, and I think my presence gave her confidence.

"Do not be afraid," I said, as I came up; "there is no danger. I can easily take you to the shore."

By this time, only my head was visible above the water, but she recognised me. I saw that she shrank from me, too, as though she were afraid. At this a coldness crept into my heart, for I remembered where I stood at the only time she had seen me before.

"I will not hurt you," I said; "I know my way among the rocks, and I can take you easily."

She looked at me again, doubtfully. Most likely she remembered what the Tresidders had said about me.

"I will be very careful," I went on; "and you had better come quickly, for the tide is rising every minute. I know you distrust me, for the Tresidders hate me; but if I did not desire to help you I should not have let you see me, for when they know where I am I shall be in danger."

She lifted her head proudly as though I had angered her, then she looked at me again steadily, and came toward me.

"Is the water very deep?" she asked.

"It is over five feet here," I replied, "but it is shallower a few yards nearer the shore."

"You are sure you can swim with me to shore?" she said.

"I shall not try," I said. "If you will let me, I will hold you above my head. You are not heavy and I – " Then I hesitated, for I did not want to boast.

"Yes, I know you are very strong," she laughed, half fearfully I thought; "but how can you do this?"

"Look," I said; "if you will stand on my shoulders so" – and I placed my back against the rock. "I am afraid your feet will have to be wet, just a little, for my shoulders are in the water. There, that is it; now hold my hands," and I lifted my hands as high above my head as I could.

She did as I bade her; thus we both stood with our faces toward the shore, she standing on my shoulders and stooping a little in order to hold my hands tightly.

It was joy unspeakable to feel the little fingers in mine, for this was the first time that my flesh touched hers, and with the touch a thrill of gladness, the like of which I had never felt before, passed through my whole being.

I carried her safely. At that time rocks and roaring breakers were nothing to me, the buffeting of the waves against my body I felt not one whit! I think she must have felt my great strength, for when I had carried her a few yards she laughed, and the laugh had no fear.

"You feel quite safe?" I asked presently, when I had got away from the rocks.

"Quite safe," she said, and so I carried her on until I stood on the smooth yellow sands, and although the waves still broke, I felt their force not at all, for the thought of her trusting me made my sinews like willow thongs.

Right sorry was I when the water no longer touched my feet, and I must confess that I lingered over the last part of the journey, so pleasant was my burden, and so glad a thing was it to feel her fingers fastening themselves around mine. Perhaps she regarded me as she might regard a fisherman who might have rendered her a similar service, but it did not matter. I, whom she had seen pilloried as a vagrant and a street brawler, held her fast, and my love grew stronger minute by minute.

When I put her on the sands, only her feet were wet, and no one could tell of the position in which she had been.

I shook myself after I had put her down, and I was almost sorry I had done so immediately afterward, for I could see that my condition made her sorry for me, and I did not want to be pitied.

"You must get dry clothes at once," she said.

"I have none," I said, unthinkingly, "save my jacket and waistcoat, which lie on yon rock."

"But you will be very cold."

I laughed gaily. "It is nothing," I said, "the sun will not go down for three hours yet, and before that time my rags will be dry."

"I am very thankful to you," she said; "I cannot swim, and but for you I should have been drowned."

"Oh, no," I replied; "you could have climbed to the top of the rock, and waited till the tide went out again."

"No, I should have been afraid. You have been very kind and very good to me. I was very foolish to get there, but it was very tempting to climb on the rock and sit and watch the sea. I must have fallen asleep in the sun, for I remembered nothing until I felt the cold water beat on me."

"I was not kind or good," I said, roughly. "I thought first it was Emily Tresidder. Had it been, I should not have gone."

"Yes, you would," she said; "you have a kind face. Besides, you should not hate the Tresidders. Mr. Tresidder is my guardian."

"I am sorry for you," I said.

She looked at me steadily, but did not speak.

"I know what you are thinking about," I said. "I was pilloried at Falmouth when you saw me before, and I just escaped being flogged before the crowd. Even now, I suppose, I am being searched for."

"Indeed you are. Do you think you are safe in staying here?"

"It doesn't matter, I suppose; I shall soon be taken."

"Why do you think so?"

"You will, of course, tell Tresidder where I am, and then my liberty must soon come to an end."

I hated myself for speaking so, for I saw her lips tremble, as though I had pained her.

"Is not that unkind?" she said, presently, "and do you not judge the Tresidders wrongly? Have you not provoked them to anger?"

"They have told you about me, then; they have told you that I am a thief, a vagabond, a bully?"

She did not reply, but I knew from the look on her face that I had spoken the truth.

For a second there was a silence between us, then she said, "I thank you very much, and now I must go back to Pennington."

"Not until you hear my story," I said, eagerly.

"Why should you tell me?" she asked.

"Because I do not wish you to judge me wrongly," I said; "because you have known me only as one who is evil and revengeful. Let me tell you the truth."

She did not speak, but she looked at me as if expecting me to go on. So I told her my story eagerly, told it truly, as I have tried to tell it here, only in fewer words.

"And this is true?" she asked, eagerly. "That is," she said, correcting herself, "you are sure you are not mistaken?"

"As God lives, it is true," I replied. "Is it any wonder, then, that I hate the Tresidders, is it any wonder that I should thrash them as I would thrash a yelping, biting cur?"

"Is it brave for a strong man to pounce upon a weaker one?" she asked.

"They were two to one," I replied; "besides, the street was full of people, and he has everything on his side, and I am alone, an outcast, a beggar in my own parish."

"But he has the law on his side."

"Yes; and he has twisted the law to serve his own ends. He and his mother have used vile tools to cheat me."

"And if you could save up half the worth of Pennington you could buy it back."

"I could demand to buy it back. Lawyer Trefry has the copy of the will. I have seen it. That is why they have tried to ruin me."

"And do you say that Nick tried to stab you?" she asked, anxiously.

"I have the knife yet," I replied. "His name is on it. I trusted him to wrestle fair, even though he sought to ruin me. Perhaps I was wrong to hurt him, but I was mad with pain. The mark of the wound is on my chest now. Look," and I showed her the scar.

She shuddered, then she said, "Hate always brings misery, and love always brings joy. You should love your enemies."

"Yes; if a man will fight openly and fairly, I will not hate him. If I wanted to touch an adder with my hand I would not catch him by the tail so that it could curl around and sting my hand; I would catch it just behind the head. It might writhe and wriggle, but I should know that it could not bite me. That is how I want to treat the Tresidders. You despise me," I went on; "you see me now a thing that has to hide like a rabbit in burrow. Well, perhaps it is natural – you live with the Tresidders."

"No, I do not despise you," she said. "I feel for you; I am an orphan just as you are. Of course, Mr. Tresidder is very kind to me, but Pennington is not like home – that is – " Then she stopped as though she had said more than she had intended. "I felt sorry for you when I saw you in Falmouth. Did – did you see me?"

"I saw you – I – I – look, there is Nick Tresidder and his father coming now. I must away!"

We were only partially hidden by the rock, at the side of which we stood. I could see them with sufficient clearness for me to recognise them. They could see us, but I did not think it would be possible for them to tell who we were.

"They are searching for me," she cried. "I have been away from the house a long time."

"Well, go to them," I said.

"But they have seen that there are two of us. Do you think they know us from this distance?"

"No, we have been partly hidden."

"But if I go, they will ask who has been with me."

"Do you not wish to tell them?"

"If I do you will be in danger. If they know you are near you will be hunted down. They think you have left the country."

"You can save me if you will," I cried, eagerly.

"I will do what I can!"

"Come, then – there, keep behind these rocks until we get to the cliffs. Go quickly."

She obeyed me eagerly, and a few seconds later we stood behind a great jagged promontory.

"Did they see us, do you think?"

"Yes, they saw us, but they could not have recognised us; or I fancy not," I added, for I had my fears; "but come, walk on the shingle so that they cannot trace your footsteps. That is it."

We came close to the cave where my clothes lay. These I picked up with a feeling of relief.

"We are safe now," I said.

"No," she cried; "they will soon come up, and can easily find us."

For she had not seen the mouth of Granfer Fraddam's Cave, although it was close to her. I was glad of this, for it told me how safe my hiding-place was, and showed that the opening was so curiously hidden that a stranger might pass it a hundred times and not see it. So I helped her to climb up the cliff until I got to a small platform, and afterward passed along the fissure between the rocks and drew her after me, and then, when she had followed me a few steps, she saw how cunningly Nature had concealed the place, and fearful as she was, she uttered a low exclamation of pleased surprise. For from this place we could see without being seen, even although we were not inside the cave itself.

Excited as I was, for my heart was beating fast and my head throbbed at the same rate, I wondered at my good fortune in making her my friend. For her willingness to come with me, rather than to expose me to the Tresidders, showed that she was my friend, and my gladness at the thought was beyond all words. At the same time I could not help fearing for her. If either Nick Tresidder or his father had recognised her, she would be exposed to many awkward questionings, which would be hard for her to answer; neither did I desire that she should have to suffer for me. I marvelled greatly, too, that she should have understood the situation so easily, and that, in spite of all my enemies must have said, she seemed to trust me so implicitly. I remembered, however, that she would, perhaps, feel grateful to me for rescuing her from her awkward position on "The Spanish Cavalier," and that she would be anxious that my action should not bring any harm to me. And while this thought did not bring me so much pleasure as it ought, it showed me that the Tresidders had not altogether poisoned her mind against me.

Although it has taken me some minutes to write down these thoughts, they passed through my mind very rapidly.

"They cannot see us here," she said, questioningly, "neither can they find us?"

"Not unless they know the cave," I replied.

"Oh, I hope not," was her response, and although Tresidder was her guardian and Pennington was her home, it did not feel strange at that moment that she should be hiding with me, who was being sought for by the minions of the law.

The sea was by this time getting nearer the foot of the cliff, and there was now only twenty feet of shingle between water and land. So I stood and watched, but I could not as yet see them, for the promontory, behind which we had first hidden, stood between us and them.

"Do you see them?"

"Not yet," I replied, "they have had scarcely time to get here yet, but I think they will soon be here."

As I spoke I looked on her face, the most beauteous I had ever seen, and when I remembered what she had done to shield me my love grew more fervent. For I had no claim on her, who was a stranger, save that I had carried her to the shore, which of course was nothing. By that I mean to say it was nothing for which she should serve me; rather it was I who owed gratitude to her, for my joy at serving her made my heart leap in my bosom, until I could even then have sung aloud for gladness.

"Are they coming?" she asked again, presently.

"Yes, they are close to us," I replied, for at that moment they had passed the rock by which we had at first stood.

CHAPTER VI
I DISCOVER ANOTHER CAVE, AND HEAR A CONVERSATION BETWEEN RICHARD TRESIDDER AND HIS SON

"I am sure I saw a man and woman," I heard Nick Tresidder say.

"I thought I did, too," replied his father; "but we must have been mistaken, I suppose. Of course, they could have got behind Great Bear and then kept along under the cliff."

"Then they must have gone past, for they are nowhere to be seen."

"Perhaps they wanted to hurry to be before the tide."

"Yes; I suppose that must be it," replied Nick, doubtfully.

"Still, I don't know that it matters. We should not have troubled at all if we hadn't thought it might be Naomi."

"No; where can she be, I wonder?"

"She's a strange girl, Nick. She doesn't seem to feel happy at Pennington, neither does she make friends with Emily. She's always roaming among the woods or along the beach. I shouldn't wonder at all if she hasn't lost herself among the woods. You must be careful, my lad."

"Oh, it's all right, there's no danger. I say, do you know that Jacob Buddie told me he believed he saw Jasper Pennington in the lane outside Betsey Fraddam's house last night?"

"I don't believe it; we've got rid of him effectually. But we must hurry on, Nick, we've just time to get to Granfer Fraddam's path before the tide gets in."

"Yes, it's a good way on. Isn't Granfer Fraddam's Cave here somewhere?"

"I've my doubts whether there is such a place. There may have been such a cave in the old man's time, but lots of ground has fallen in during the past fifty years. Anyhow, I've often searched along the coast and could never find it."

"But it's around here that the noises have been heard. You know people say it's haunted by the old man's ghost."

"Well, I've never been able to find it."

They hurried on, and I gave a sigh of relief.

"Are they gone?" asked Naomi.

"Yes, they are gone; they don't know anything. It will take them a long while to get home. It's a long way to Pennington by Granfer Fraddam's path. The cliff is steep, too."

"But I must go now," she said, anxiously.

"You shall get home before they can," I said, eagerly.

"I will take you through another opening. You will know another secret of this cave then. You see, I trust you wholly, and you will know my hiding-place almost as well as I know it myself."

"But do you live here?"

Then I told her what I had to do, and how Eli Fraddam brought food to me, and how when winter came I should have to make other plans.

She listened quietly, and said no word, but allowed me to lead her up the cave until we reached the copse of which I have spoken. We were still hidden from sight, for the bushes grew thick, and the trees were large and had abundant foliage. She held out her hand to say good-bye.

"I shall remember your kindness," she said.

"And do not think too hardly about me," I pleaded, "remember what I have had to suffer."

"I shall think of you very kindly," was her response; "not that it matters to you," she added. "We are strangers, most probably we shall never meet again, and the opinion of a stranger cannot help you."

"It is more than you can think," I answered, eagerly. "When I saw that look of sympathy on your face when I stood in the pillory at Falmouth it made everything easier to bear. Besides, you say you will stay at Pennington, and I look upon Pennington as my home."

"Yes; but surely you will not stay here. It cannot be right for a man to idle away his time as you are idling it; besides, you can never win back Pennington thus. If I were you I would find work, and I would honourably make my way back to fortune."

"But the Tresidders will not allow me," I replied, stung into shame by her words, "they have always put obstacles in my path."

"Then I would go where the Tresidders could not harm me," she cried, and then she went away, as though I were the merest commonplace stranger, as indeed I was.

I mused afterward that she did not even tell me her name, although she had no means of knowing that I had found it out, neither did she tell me that she would keep the secret of my hiding-place from my enemies. And more than all this, she bade me leave St. Eve, where I should be away from her, although my longings grew stronger to stay by her side. All this made me very weary of life, and I went back to the mouth of the cave and sat watching the sea as it rose higher and higher around "The Spanish Cavalier," and wondered with a weary heart what I should do.

When night came on Eli Fraddam brought me food, and sat by me while I ate it, looking all the while up into my face with his strange wild eyes.

"Jasper missuble," he grunted, presently.

"Yes, Eli," I said, "everything and everybody is against me."

"I knaw! I knaw!" cried Eli, as though a new thought had struck him, "I'll 'elp 'ee, Jasper; I'll vind out!"

"Find out what, Eli?"

But he would not answer. He hugged himself as though he were vastly pleased, and laughed, in his low guttural way, and after a time took his departure.

When I was left alone, I tried to think of my plans for the future, for Naomi's words kept ringing in my ears, "If I were you I would find work, and I would honourably make my way back to fortune." I saw now that for a year I had acted like a madman. Instead of meeting my reverses bravely, I had acted like a coward. I had sunk in the estimation of others as well as in my own. I had loafed around the lanes, and had made friends with the idle and the dissolute. Even my plans for vengeance were those of a savage. I, Jasper Pennington, could think of no other way of punishing my enemies than by mastering them with sheer brute force. Besides, all the time I had made no step toward winning back my home, and thus obeying my father's wishes. I felt this, too; I had deservedly lost the esteem of the people. I had become what the Tresidders said I was. I saw myself a vagrant and a savage, and although my fate had been hard, I deserved the punishment I was then suffering. I had forgotten that I was a Pennington, forgotten that I was a gentleman.

But what could I do? Houseless, homeless, friendless, except for the friendship of Eli Fraddam and his mother, and practically outlawed, what was there that I, Jasper Pennington, could put my hand to? I could not tell. The possibility of honourably making my way back to fortune seemed a dream impossible to be fulfilled.

For a long time I sat brooding, while the candle which Eli had brought burnt lower and lower, and finally went out. The darkness stirred new thoughts within me. Hitherto I had not troubled about Granfer Fraddam's ghost haunting the cave. The wind which wailed its way up through the cave till it found vent in the copse above explained the sounds which had been heard. But now all the stories which I had heard came back to me. Did Granfer Fraddam die there? and did his ghost haunt this dreary cavern? Even then I might be sitting on the very spot where he had died.

I started up and lit another candle. I looked around me, and shuddered at the black, forbidding sides of the cavern, then leaving the candle to cast its ghostly light around I crept toward the entrance. I saw the sea lapping the black rocks around, and heard its dismal surge. Then I heard a rushing

noise whir past me, and it seemed as though a ghostly hand had struck my face. Directly afterward I heard a cry which made the blood run cold in my veins. Most likely it was only a seagull which I had frightened from its resting-place among the rocks, but to me it was the shriek of a lost soul.

Trembling, I found my way back to the cave again, where the candle still burnt, and cast its flickering light around. I was afraid to stay there any longer, and determined to get out by way of the copse. I had gone but a few steps in this direction, when I saw what had hitherto escaped my notice. It was a hole in the side of the cave, large enough for anybody to pass easily. For a moment curiosity overcame my fears, and I made my way toward it. Holding my candle close to the hole, I found that I was out of the current of air, and I saw that this was the entrance to another cave. But it was different from the one in which I had been hiding. It looked as though it had been hollowed out by the hands of man rather than by nature. This fact lessened my ghostly fears, and I entered it, and in doing so thought I detected a strange smell. A minute later, and my astonishment knew no bounds. Lying at my feet in this inner cave were casks of spirits and wines. There were, I afterward discovered, many other things there too. There were great packages of tobacco, and bales of stuff which at that time I did not understand. It was evident that Granfer Fraddam's trade was not abandoned, although it was thought that smuggling was not carried on to any extent in the neighbourhood of St. Eve. It is true that many things were obtained in the neighbourhood which the Preventive officers could not account for, but that was understood to be owing to Jack Truscott's gang, who defied the law, and did many wild deeds down by the Lizard and at Kynance. At Polventor the Preventive men were very keen, so keen were they that the dozen or two fishermen who lived there were not, as far as I knew, in any way suspected of unlawful deeds. And Polventor was the only fishing village within three miles of our parish where it seemed possible for smuggling to be carried on.

Not that we thought hardly of the smugglers, even of Jack Truscott and his men. We all regarded the law as very unjust, and owing to the fact that many things were obtained in the parish very cheaply by them, we winked at their doings, and looked sourly on the Preventive men and their doings. At the same time, as far as I knew, no one dreamed of smuggling being carried on near the coast of St. Eve. Thus it was that Granfer Fraddam's Cave was a mere tradition, and many people thought that the King's officers ought to be removed to some other part of the coast, where there would be some necessity for their existence.

I thought long of these things, and presently came to the conclusion that this cave was used as a kind of storage-place by some smuggler's gang. Probably this was one of Jack Truscott's many hiding-places, and would be used by him when the Government spies were busy watching elsewhere.

Anyhow, my discovery made me think of the cave more as the home of the living than the dead, and thus fears were dispelled. It is true my solitude might at any time be broken by a gang of desperate men, but that did not trouble me. So I fetched the blanket which old Betsey had lent me and took it into this inner cave, and after a while went to sleep.

Eli Fraddam brought some food to me again in the morning, but I did not tell him what I had discovered through the night, neither did I encourage him to stay. Usually he had sat with me for hours, and had talked with me in his strange disconnected way, but this morning he saw that I wanted to be alone, so, after patting and fondling my hands lovingly, he left me. All through the day I tried to make up my mind what to do, but no feasible plan came into my mind. I did not fear any difficulty in getting food and clothes, but how to raise money to buy back Pennington I knew not.

Toward evening I left the cave and clambered down the rocks until I got to the beach. I had scarcely done so when a package lying by a rock caught my eye. I tore off the wrapper, wondering what it was, and soon discovered that it contained food. I eagerly examined it, and presently saw a scrap of clean white paper. On it was written these words:

"To stay where you are must be useless. Search has not been abandoned, for you have been seen. There can be no hope of success while you remain in St. Eve. You saved me, and I would help you. Good-bye."

Now this comforted me greatly, for it told me that Naomi Penryn had not forgotten me, and that she felt friendly toward me. The food, delicate as it was compared with what I had been eating, I cared not for, except only because she had brought it. My excitement took away all desire to eat, and again I went back to the cave to think of what I should do. For this thought came constantly into my mind, the Tresidders intended her for Nick, and my determination was that she should never marry a Tresidder. Moreover, I fancied, from her own words, and from what I had heard Richard Tresidder say to his son, she was not happy at Pennington. If I went away I should be powerless to help her if she needed help. She was but a girl of eighteen, and she was wholly under the control of the Tresidders. Yet how could I help her by remaining where I was; nay, rather, it was impossible for me to do this.

After some time I settled on a plan; I would leave my cave before it was light, and would walk to Fowey. When there, I would try and get a place as a sailor. I thought I knew enough of a sailor's duties to satisfy the captain of a trading ship. Then, by the time the first voyage was over, I should no longer be sought by the Tresidders, and the affair at Falmouth would be forgotten. I would then come back and see if Naomi Penryn needed help. I should not be away more than a few months, and I did not think that Nick Tresidder or his father would seek to carry out their plans concerning her for at least a year.

I had scarcely settled this in my mind when I heard voices outside the cave. Wondering what it might mean I crept to the opening, and, looking out, saw Richard Tresidder and his son, Nick, standing and talking with two Preventive men. A great rock hid me from their sight, besides which I was at least twelve feet above them.

"You say you've searched all around here for a cave?" asked Richard Tresidder.

"All round, sur," replied one of the officers. "Ther's smugglin' done 'long 'ere right 'nough, but I've my doubts 'bout Granfer Fraddam's Caave as et es called. Ther's not an inch 'long the coast here that we 'ain't a-seed; we've found lots of caaves, but nothin' like people do talk about. As for this cove, where people say et es, why look for yerself, sur, ther's no sign of it. We can see every yard of the little bay here, but as fer Granfer Fraddam's Caave, well, that's all wind, I'm a-thinkin'."

"I'm of the same opinion myself. Still, I thought we'd better come and make sure, that was why I asked you to come."

"That's oal right, sur, glad are we to do anything to 'elp 'ee. But ther's plaaces furder down, sur, and they must be watched."

"Do you not think you are mistaken?" I heard Richard Tresidder say; "there has been no smuggling done here since Granfer Fraddam's days. There is plenty of it done at the Lizard, and at Kynance, and right down to St. Michael's Mount to Penzance Harbour, but there is none here."

"But there es, Maaster Tresidder. Not a week agone a boat-load of sperits was landed at Polventor."

"At Polventor! Why, I thought you kept a sharp look-out there. Besides, only fisher folk live there."

"'Iss, but tes they fishermen that do do et. Ye see, they go out so they zay to catch fish, and then afore mornin' they do come across the big smugglers' boats, and taake the things to the coves they do know 'bout. They be all of a piece, Maaster Tresidder."

"Well, keep a sharp look-out, Grose, and bring them before me, and I'll see that they don't do any more smuggling for a few months."

"I'm glad we've 'ad this 'ere talk, sur, you bein' a majistraate. But we must be off, sur."

"Good-afternoon. By the way, if you call at Pennington to-night about ten I shall be glad to see you. You will perhaps be able to report progress by that time."

"Thank 'ee kindly, sur. Good afternoon."

Richard Tresidder and his son Nick then sat down on a rock near, and both began to smoke, and then, when the Preventive officers were out of sight, they laughed merrily.

"I wonder if they know that the grog they have drunk at Pennington was made of smuggled brandy?" asked the father.

"Not they. Why, you are noted for your hardness on law-breakers."

"Just so. By the way, you have heard no more about Jasper, I suppose? I heard last night he was hiding in Granfer Fraddam's Cave, that was why I got those fellows to search for the place."

"Nothing definite. It's believed that he's around here somewhere, but where I don't know. The fellow is mad, I think. It would be better for him to clear off altogether. The sentence is a flogging and then another trial, isn't it?"

"Yes; but nothing is being done. I believe if he were caught he would be allowed to go free. I don't believe they want to catch him."

"You see, the people think he's been badly treated, and Lawyer Trefry has blabbed about old Pennington's will. Everybody says now that you've done your utmost to keep him poor. Why in the world didn't grandmother get him to give it you out and out? If the beggar should have a stroke of luck he might get it for a few thousands."

"But where can he get them now? His last chance is gone. What can a lad, without money, home, or friends, do? That's settled all right."

"I don't know about that. He's clever and he's determined. Why did he continue to stay around here? He must have something in his mind."

"He's a fool, that's all. He has a savage sort of idea that by watching me he's taking care of his own interests. That shows what a short-sighted fellow he is. If he'd brains he'd have acted otherwise. You will see, he'll get himself in the clutches of the law again, and then – I'll manage him."

"But if we can't find him? I tell you Jasper isn't a fool, and he knows our purposes by this time."

"Well, Nick, you've got your chance. A rich wife and three years to win her in, my boy. I'm her guardian till she's twenty-one, and I'll take care no one else gets her. A pretty girl is Naomi, too; rather awkward to manage, and a bit fiery, but all the better to suit you."

"And she doesn't like me," replied Nick.

"Make her like you, my boy. Be a bit diplomatic, and play to win. Besides, you must win!"

"Did you notice how funny she was last night? I asked her where she had been, and she seemed to regard my question as a liberty. And did you see how eager she was when we were talking about Jasper afterward?"

"But she knows nothing about him. She never saw him."

"Yes, she saw him pilloried in Falmouth. She thinks him treated badly. She has all sorts of funny ideas about justice."

"Of course, all silly girls have; that's nothing. At the same time, Nick, this shows you must play carefully. I don't want any complications in getting her money, and mind you, that money I must have, or we are all in deep water."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.