

Fenn George Manville

The Vicar's People



George Fenn

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Chapter One

Penwynn, Banker

“H’m! ah! yes! of course! ‘Clever young engineer – thoroughly scientific – may be worth your while.’ Geoffrey Trethick! Cornishman by descent, of course.”

“It sounds like a Cornishman, papa.”

“Yes, my dear, Rundell and Sharp say they have sent me a paragon. Only another adventurer.”

“Poor fellow?” said Rhoda Penwynn, in a low whisper.

“What’s that?” said the first speaker, looking up sharply from his letters to where his daughter sat at the head of his handsomely-furnished breakfast-table.

“I only said, ‘Poor fellow!’ papa,” and the girl flushed slightly as she met the quick, stern look directed at her.

“And why, pray?”

“Because it seems so sad for a young man to come down here from London, full of hopefulness and ambition, eager to succeed, and then to find his hopes wrecked in these wretched mining speculations – just as our unhappy fishing-boats, and the great ships, are dashed to pieces on our rocky shored.”

Mr Lionel Penwynn, banker of Carnac, took the gold-rimmed double eye-glass off the bridge of his handsome aquiline nose, leaned back in his chair, drew himself up, and stared at his daughter.

She was worth it, for it would have been hard to find a brighter or more animated face in West Cornwall. Her father’s handsome features, high forehead, dark eyes, and well-cut mouth and chin were all there, but softened, so that where there was eagerness and vigour in the one, the other was all delicacy and grace, and as Rhoda gazed at the gathering cloud in her father’s face the colour in her cheeks deepened.

“Wretched mining speculations – unhappy boats! They find you this handsomely-furnished house, carriages and servants, and horses,” said Mr Penwynn, sharply.

“Oh, yes, papa,” said the girl; “but sometimes when I know the troubles of the people here I feel as if I would rather – ”

“Live in a cottage, and be poor, and play the fool,” exclaimed Mr Penwynn, angrily. “Yes, of course. Very sweet, and sentimental, and nice, to talk about, but it won’t do in practice. There, don’t look like that,” he continued, forcing a smile to hide his annoyance. “Give me another cup of coffee, my dear.”

Rhoda took and filled his cup, and then carried it to him herself, passing her hand over his forehead, and bending down to kiss it afterwards, when he caught her in his arms, and kissed her very affectionately.

“That’s better,” he said, as his child resumed her seat, “but you make me angry when you are so foolish, my dear. You don’t know the value of money and position. Position is a great thing, Rhoda, though you don’t appreciate it. You don’t understand what it is for a man to have been twice mayor of the borough, even if it is small.”

“Oh, yes, I do, papa; and it is very nice to be able to help others,” said Rhoda, sadly.

“Yes, yes, of course, my dear; but you give away too much. I would rather see you fonder of dress and jewellery. People should help themselves.”

“But some are so unfortunate, papa, and – ”

"They blame me for it, of course. Now, once for all, Rhoda, you must not listen to this idle chatter. They come to me and borrow money on their boats, or nets, or fish, or their expectations. I tell them, and Mr Tregenna, who draws up the agreements, fully explains to them, the terms upon which they have the money, which they need not take unless they like, and then when they fail to pay, the boat or fish, or whatever it may be, has to be sold. I never took advantage of any of them in my life. On the contrary," he continued, assuming an ill-used, martyred air, "I have been a great benefactor to the place, and the good opinion of the people is really important to a man in my position."

Rhoda looked across at him with rather a piteous face as he went on.

"They would often be unable to make a start if it were not for me; and I always charge them a very moderate rate of interest. You must not do it; Rhoda; you must not indeed. I thought you a girl of too strong sense to listen to all this wretched calumny. You mix too much with the people, and are too ready to believe ill of me."

"Oh, no, no, papa!" cried the girl, with tears in her eyes, and she rose once more to go to his side, but he motioned her away.

"There, there: that will do, my dear," he said, forcing a laugh. "You spoil my breakfast. Give me one of those fried soles. There, of course, half cold with our talking. Dear me, dear me, what a lot of grit and sand we foolish people do throw into our daily life."

He smiled across the table, and poor Rhoda smiled back; then her eyes dropped, and she saw her face so grotesquely reproduced in the highly-polished silver coffee-pot that she felt ready to burst into a hysterical fit of laughing; which she checked, however, as her father chatted on, and read scraps from his other letters, talking pleasantly and well, as his handsome face brightened, and the sun that shone in upon the silver and china upon the fine white damask gave a sparkle to his short, crisp grey hair, though, at the same time, it made plain the powder upon his cleanly-shaven face.

He had so many pleasant things to say on that sunny, spring morning that the breakfast-table was soon as bright as the dappled opalescent sea that sparkled and flashed as it played round the rocky promontory upon which stood the ruins of Wheal Carnac Mine, or lifted the dark hulls of the fishing-luggers moored to the buoys, some of which had their dark cinnamon-hued sails hung out to dry, forming, through the heavily-curtained window, with its boxes of ferns, a charming bit of sea, like some carefully-selected specimen of the painter's art.

Rhoda had forgotten the little cloud in the present sunshine, when, after a preparation of pleasant words, Mr Penwynn suddenly said, —

"Oh! by the way, I did not tell you about Tregenna."

"About Tregenna, papa?" said Rhoda, whose face suddenly lowered.

"Yes, my dear," said Mr Penwynn, putting on his glasses and taking up the paper, as he shifted his chair sidewise to the table, "he's coming here this morning. By the way, Rhoda, you are twenty-one, are you not?"

"Yes, papa, of course, but —"

"I told Tregenna you were," he said, quietly, and with an averted face. "He's thirty-three."

"I don't understand you, papa," said Rhoda, quietly.

"Has Tregenna been attentive to you lately?"

"Oh, yes, papa," said Rhoda, impatiently; "but what do you mean?"

"Of course he would be," said Mr Penwynn, as if to himself. "What's this alarming earthquake in Peru? Ah! they're always having earthquakes in Peru; but it's a fine mining country."

"Papa, you are not paying any attention to what I say," cried Rhoda. "What do you mean about Mr Tregenna?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing, my dear," said Mr Penwynn, re-adjusting the gold-rimmed glasses upon his nose. "Some nonsense of his. He declares that he is terribly smitten with you."

"Papa!"

"And that he can never be happy without you."

“Papa!”

“And I told him he had better come and talk to you himself.”

“You told him that, papa?” said Rhoda, pushing back her chair.

“To be sure, my dear,” said Mr Penwynn, rustling the newspaper in the most unruffled way. “Of course it is all nonsense.”

“Nonsense, papa? You know Mr Tregenna is not a man who talks nonsense.”

“Well, perhaps not, my dear. He certainly is a very clever, sensible fellow.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Rhoda, beneath her breath, as she gazed at the handsome profile before her.

“You might do worse, my dear,” continued Mr Penwynn, skimming the paper.

“Do I understand you, papa, that you sanction Mr Tregenna’s proposal?”

“Sanction?” he said, looking up from the paper for a moment to glance over his glasses at his child. “Oh, yes, my dear: of course.”

“I can not – I will not, see Mr Tregenna,” said Rhoda, firmly, and one of her little feet began to beat the thick Turkey carpet.

“Don’t be foolish, my dear. He is desperately taken with you, and will make you a capital husband.”

“Husband?” cried the girl, passionately. “Oh, papa, you cannot mean this. Mr Tregenna is – ”

“A gentleman, my dear, a great friend of mine – of ours, I should say – of great assistance to me in my business arrangements, and I think the match most suitable – that is, if he is in earnest.”

“In earnest? Oh, papa?” cried Rhoda, piteously, “have you thought – have you considered Mr Tregenna’s character?”

“Character?” said Mr Penwynn, turning his head in astonishment.

“Yes, papa. People – Miss Pavey, Mr Paul, Dr Rumsey – all say – ”

“Bah! rubbish! stuff! you silly goose! All sorts of things, of course, as they do about every handsome, well-to-do young bachelor. They are a set of whist-playing, gossiping, mischief-making old women, the lot of them, and if Rumsey don’t mind what he’s about he’ll lose what little practice he has. He don’t come here again.”

“No, papa, you will not visit my hasty words on poor Dr Rumsey,” said Rhoda, with spirit.

“And as for old Paul,” continued Mr Penwynn, from behind the paper, “he’s a bilious, chronic, ill-tempered, liverless old capsicum, who would rob his own mother of her good name – if she had one.”

“I believe he is a true gentleman at heart,” said Rhoda, quickly.

“Then I’d rather not be a gentleman,” said Mr Penwynn, laughing, “or a lady either like Miss Pavey. Poor little red-nosed thing. Pity she wasn’t married twenty years ago. I see: I see: that’s it,” he said, laughing heartily, and taking off and wiping his glasses. “Poor little Martha Pavey, of course! She fell desperately in love with Tregenna, and – and – ha! ha! ha! ha! – he – he did not return the passion. Heavens! what a wicked wretch.”

Rhoda had risen, and stood with her hand upon the back of her chair, looking very much agitated, but cold and stern, as she watched her father, and waited till his assumed gaiety was at an end.

“Papa,” she said, at length, in a tone that taught him that he was on the wrong tack, and that he must speak to his daughter upon this important point as if she were a woman, and not as a silly, weak girl, “I do not base my objections to Mr Tregenna upon what people say alone.”

“Then on what, pray?” he exclaimed, with his glass now falling inside his open vest. “What has he done? Did he once upon a time kiss some pretty fisher-girl, with bare legs? or a nice-looking miner’s daughter? If so, it was very bad taste, but very natural.”

“Mr Tregenna is a gentleman I could never like,” retorted Rhoda, without condescending to answer this banter, “and I believe he is already engaged to Margaret Mullion.”

“Engaged? Madge Mullion? Now, my dear Rhoda, what nonsense. Is it likely that if Tregenna were engaged to Madge he would talk as he has several times talked to me? How can you be so absurd?”

“But he must be, papa,” said Rhoda, quickly.

“Nonsense! Absurd!”

“I have myself met them on the cliffs and up An Lowan.”

“Well, and if you did, it was only a bit of silly flirtation with a very handsome girl. Tregenna could not care for her. Besides, she is a notorious flirt.”

“I have nothing to say to that, papa,” replied Rhoda, quietly.

“But I have,” he said, now angrily, “and I really am surprised at you – a girl of so much sense – bringing up some silly flirtation against a man who proposes for your hand. What do you want to marry – an archangel?”

“No, papa,” said Rhoda, coldly.

“Now look here, Rhoda,” exclaimed Mr Penwynn, growing angry at the opposition he was encountering, “you have some reason for this.”

“I have given you my reasons, papa. I do not, and never like Mr Tregenna.”

“Then,” he cried, passionately striking the table with his fist, “there is some one in the way. Who is it?”

“Who is it, papa?”

“Yes; I insist upon knowing who it is. And look here, if you have been entering into an engagement with some beggarly up start, who – ”

“Papa,” said Rhoda, looking him full in the face, “why do you speak to me like that? You would not if you were not in a passion. You know perfectly well that I keep nothing from you.”

This was a heavy blow for Mr Penwynn, and it made him wince. It cooled him, and he shook his head, muttered, and ended by exclaiming, —

“Sit down, Rhoda. What is the use of your being so obstinate and putting me out? You make me say these things. Come, be reasonable. See Mr Tregenna, and let him speak to you.”

“I would far rather not, papa,” said Rhoda, firmly.

“But you must. I insist; I beg of you. It is not courteous to him. Come; see him, and hear what he has to say. There, there, I knew you would. Look here, Rhoda, tell me this. I ask it of you as your father. Had your sweet mother been alive, it would have come from her; I would not intrude upon the secrets of your heart. Have you cared, do you care, for any one else?”

Rhoda smiled sadly.

“I have no secrets in my heart, papa,” she said, quietly, “and I feel urged to say that I will not answer your question; but I will answer it,” she continued with her dark, clear eyes fixed on his. “No, papa, I never have cared for any one else, neither do I. I might almost say that I never thought of such a thing as marriage.”

Mr Penwynn uttered a sigh of relief.

“And you will see Tregenna when he calls. I beg, I implore you to, Rhoda.”

“I will see him then, papa; but – ”

“No, no. Let me have no hasty declarations, my dear,” he said, rising, and taking her hand. “Marriages are a mystery. See Mr Tregenna, and take time. Hear what he has to say; give him time too, as well – months, years if you like – and, meanwhile, shut your ears against all paltry scandal.”

“I will, papa.”

“And, my darling, if it should come off, you will have won a good husband for yourself, and a valuable friend and counsellor for me.”

“But – ”

“No more now, my dear; no more now. We have said enough. Take time, and get cool. Then we shall see.”

Evidently with the idea of himself getting cool he began to walk slowly and thoughtfully up and down the room, his hands behind him, his feet carefully placed one before the other, heel to toe, as if he were measuring off the carpet, – rather a ridiculous proceeding to a stranger, but his daughter was accustomed to the eccentricity, and now saw nothing absurd in his struggles to retain his balance.

“Yes,” he said suddenly, after pacing up and down the carpet a few times, “take time, and get cool.”

As he spoke he left the room, and Rhoda Penwynn seated herself in the window, with her eyes apparently fixed upon the dancing boats at sea, though they saw nothing but the dark, handsome face of John Tregenna, with the slight puckering beneath his eyes, and the thin, close red line of his lips, as he appeared to her last when he took her hand to raise it respectfully to the said thin lips; and, as she, seemed to meet his eyes, she shuddered, and wished that she could change places with the poorest girl upon the cliff.

“Miss Pavey, ma’am,” said a footman, and she started, for she had not heard him enter; “in the drawing-room, ma’am.”

Rhoda rose hastily, and tried to smooth away the lines of care, as she hurried into the room to meet her visitor.

Chapter Two

The Adventurer

“How much farther is it, coachman?”

“Carnac, sir? Just four miles. There it lies! Yonder white houses, by the cove, with the high rocks o’ both sides.”

“Four miles? Why, it does not seem two.”

“It’s all four, sir,” said the driver, giving his long whip a *whish* through the air, making the leaders of the four-horse coach shake their heads and increase their speed, as he deftly caught the end of the lash, and twisted the thong around the whip-shaft by a turn of his wrist.

“Ah!” said the first speaker, a young man of about thirty, “the air is so fine and clear. I presume that you are going on to Felsport?”

“No, no,” said the gentleman addressed, in a hesitating tone of voice; “I am going to stop at Carnac.”

His long black coat, broad-brimmed round-topped hat and tassel, suggested that he was a clergyman of advanced – or retrogressive – views, and he paused wearily, as if annoyed at being interrupted, as he spoke —

“How strange! Do you know the place?”

“N-no; I have never seen it.”

The clergyman lowered his eyes, and began once more reading a little book, with very small type, while the first speaker raised his eyes in wonder that a stranger could read while passing through the wild beauties of the grand Cornish region spread around. He then leaned forward once more to speak to the coachman, who was ready enough to answer questions about that mine, in full work, where a tall granite building, like a clumsily-formed church tower, stood up on the bleakest point of wind-swept barren hill, with what seemed like a long arm thrust out on one side, the said arm being apparently engaged in telegraphing to them mysterious signs as it slowly rose up and stopped, then went half-way down and stopped before descending to the earth, and finally rose, but all in the most peculiar and deliberate manner.

“That’s Wheal Porley, sir. Bringing a good bit of copper to grass there just now.”

“And what mine’s that on the next hill?”

“Oh! that’s tin, sir. Old Friendship they call it; but there’s little doing now. Tin’s very low. I hear they bring over such a lot from Peru, and ‘Stralia, and Banky, and them other gashly outlandish places.”

“Peru, eh? I did not know that was a tin country.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t Peru, sir. I arn’t sure. That’s a rare old place yonder,” the driver continued, pointing with his whip to a large granite engine-house, with towering chimney, standing on a point running out into the sea.

“But it isn’t working. It seems to be in ruins.”

“Ruins, sir? Ah! and it’s put lots o’ people in ruins too. There’s a heap o’ money gone down that mine.”

“Yes, there are failures, I suppose; but is it a tin-mine?”

“Yes, sir, – tin. That’s what it is, or what it was meant to be by the adventurers; but they never got any thing out that would pay. They’re a bad lot, those adventurers.”

“Are they?” said the young man dryly, and he smiled as he let his eyes wander over the country, with its deeply-scored ravines, into which the whole of the fertile soil of the high ground seemed to have been washed, for they were as rich in ferns and lush foliage as the granite heights were bare.

To his left swept away the soft blue sea, dotted with the warm brown sails of the fishing-luggers, and with here and there the white canvas of a yacht or passing ship.

The young man drew back, and seemed to inflate his chest with the fresh, pure air. His dark eyes brightened, and a pleasant smile began to play about his lips, but it was half hidden by his crisp, short beard. As they went on he glanced sharply from place to place, eager to take in the surroundings of a land that was to be his future home; and the result seemed to be satisfactory, for he took off his hat, let the sea-breeze blow through his short curly hair, and once more turned to his reading companion.

They formed a striking contrast, the one sitting hatless, dark, eager, and apparently full of repressed vitality, his muscles standing out from arm and leg, and his whole aspect bespeaking the informal and natural; while the other was a pale, delicate, handsomely-featured, fair man, apparently of the same age, with his face smoothly shaven, his hair very closely cut, the hand that held the book tightly gloved in black, the other that turned down a leaf that seemed disposed to dally with the wind, delicate, long-fingered, white, and with nails most carefully trimmed. Formality, culture, and refinement were visible at every turn, and as he became aware that his travelling-companion was watching him, he looked up with a half-haughty, half-annoyed air, and met the sharp, keen glance.

"Book interesting?" said the other, in a quick, imperative way.

"I always find my studies interesting," said the young clergyman coldly, and speaking as if compelled to answer in spite of himself. He then lowered his eyes, and was about to continue his reading.

"What is it?" said the other. "Ah! I see, 'Early Fathers,' and the rest of it. My word! what a lot of time I did waste over that sort of thing!"

"Waste?" said the clergyman, indignantly.

"Yes: I call it waste. You don't."

"I never knew that study could be considered a waste of time, sir."

"No, of course not, when it is to do yourself or somebody else good."

A hot, indignant retort was on the young cleric's lips, but he checked it, and was taking refuge in reserve, when the other went on, —

"Don't think me rude: it's my way. I saw you were an Oxford man; that's why I spoke. Is old Rexton still at Maudlin?"

"The Dean, if you mean him, is still at Magdalen College, sir," said the clergyman, frigidly.

"Rum old fellow. How he used to sit upon me. Not a Maudlin man, I suppose?"

"I had the honour of being at that college, sir, when at Oxford."

"Indeed! then it couldn't have been very far from the time when I was there."

"You – were you an Oxford man?" said the clergyman, staring blankly at his companion, who smiled at his astonishment.

"To be sure I was. You'll find my name there – Geoffrey Trethick."

"I – I have heard the name."

"And I am addressing –"

For answer, after a little hesitation, the clergyman drew out a small pocket-book, with red edges to the diary, and carefully extracted a card, on which the other read aloud, —

"'Reverend Edward Lee, Carnac.' Humph! that's odd," he said. "I'm going to live at Carnac. Do you know a Mr Penwynn there?"

"Penwynn, the banker, sir?" said the coachman, turning his head sharply, and pointing to a grey house just above the town, sheltered amongst some trees at the head of the little bay. "That's his house, sir – An Morlock."

"Thanks, coachman. Did you say you knew him, Mr Lee?"

"Not at present," said the clergyman, still keeping up his reserve, but all the time feeling, in spite of himself, drawn towards his travelling-companion. "I am a stranger here."

"I hope we shall be strangers no longer. Beautiful country, is it not?"

“Ye-es. Very picturesque,” said the clergyman, gazing vacantly around, the other watching him in an amused way, as, after letting his eyes rest for a few moments on the beautiful expanse of rocky hill, shady ravine, and glistening sea, he once more raised his book and went on reading.

“Books always, and not men’s minds,” muttered Geoffrey Trethick. Then, bending forwards, he once more engaged the coachman in conversation, to the clergyman’s great relief; and, putting a set of leading questions, he drew from the driver all the information he could about the neighbourhood and its people, the man finishing with, —

“Ah, sir, it’s as fine and good a country as any in England, if it wasn’t for the adventurers, and they about ruin it.”

“Indeed!” said the young man, with the air of being once more very much amused; and then the coach drew up at the door of the principal inn. There was a little bustle, and the occupants of the various seats climbed down, luggage was handed out of the boots, and the two travellers stood together on the rough paving-stones.

“Take my portmanteau in, boots,” said Trethick, sharply. “Do you breakfast here at the hotel, Mr Lee?”

“Sir,” said the clergyman, distantly, “I have not yet made my plans.”

“Oh! all right; no offence. I was going to say, let us breakfast together for company. I’m off to present my letters of introduction. Good-day; I dare say we shall meet again.”

“I hope not,” thought the Reverend Edward Lee, upon whom his travelling-companion seemed to act like a strong blast, bending him bodily and mentally as well, and he turned into the hotel, hearing, as he did so, the voice of one of the hangers-on exclaiming, in a sing-song tone, —

“Mr Penwynn’s, An Morlock, sir? Right up street, and out by the hill I’ll show you the way.”

“Thanks; no, my lad, I shall find it. Catch!” There was the ring of a small piece of silver falling upon the pavement, and the young clergyman sighed with relief to think his travelling-companion had gone.

Chapter Three

The Carnac Gazette

Rhoda Penwynn's visitor was in the drawing-room at An Morlock, making the most use possible of her eyes while she was alone. She had seen who had called and left cards, and what book Rhoda was reading. She had also mentally taken the pattern of the new design of embroidery, and meant to work a piece exactly the same; and now she was filling up the time before Rhoda entered by gazing at herself in one of the large mirrors.

It was not a bad reflection – to wit, that of a refined, fair face, that must have been very pretty fifteen or twenty years before; but now there was an eager sharpness in the features, as if caused by expectancy never gratified; the fair white skin had a slight ivory – old ivory – tinge, and the pretty bloom that once hid beneath the down of her cheeks had coalesced and slightly tinted the lady's nose. It was but slight, but it was unmistakable.

Miss Pavey was well and fairly, even fashionably, dressed, and generally she wore the aspect of what she was – a maiden lady who loved colour, and had, after sundry matrimonial disappointments, retired to a far-off west-country, sea-side place, where her moderate independency would be of so much more value than in a large town.

She sighed as she contemplated herself in the glass, and then held her handkerchief to her face and bent her eyes upon a book as she heard the rustle of a dress, and the door opened, when she rose to meet Rhoda with effusion, and an eager kiss.

"My dearest Rhoda, how well you do look!" she exclaimed. "What a becoming dress!"

"Do you think so, Miss Pavey," said Rhoda, quietly. "Miss Pavey again! Why will you keep up this terrible distance? My dear Rhoda, is it never to be Martha?"

"Well then, Martha," said Rhoda, smiling. "I did not expect to see you so early."

"It is early for visitors, my dear; but I thought you would like to know the news. We have so little here in Carnac."

"Really, I trouble very little about the news, Miss Martha," said Rhoda, smiling. "But what is the matter?" she added, as her visitor once more held her handkerchief to her face.

"That dreadful toothache again," sighed Miss Pavey. "I really am a martyr to these nervous pains."

"Why not boldly go to Mr Rumsey and have it out?"

"Oh, no! oh, dear no!" cried Miss Pavey, with a look of horror, "I could not bear for a man to touch my mouth like that. Don't mind me, dear, it will be better soon;" and it seemed to be, for it was a pleasant little fiction kept up by Miss Pavey – that toothache, to add truthfulness to the complete set she wore, and whose extraction she carefully attended to herself.

"Of course you don't care for news, my dear," continued the lady; "I used not when I was your age. But when one comes to be thirty-two one's ideas change so. One becomes more human, and takes more interest in humanity at large than in one's self. You are such a happy contented girl, too; nothing seems to trouble you."

"But your news," said Rhoda, to change the conversation, as Miss Pavey smoothed down her blue silk dress.

"To be sure, yes, my dear. I saw the coach come over from the station – what a shame it is that we don't have a branch railway! – and what do you think?"

"Think?" said Rhoda, looking amused, "I really don't know what to think."

"Pylades and Orestes!"

"I don't understand you."

"They've come, my dear, – they've come?"

“Pylades and Orestes?”

“Well, of course, that’s only my nonsense; but, as I told you, I saw the coach come in, and two gentlemen got down, both young and handsome – one fair, the other dark; and one is evidently our new vicar, and the other must be his friend. I am so glad, my dear, for I have been exceedingly anxious about the kind of person we were to have for our new clergyman.”

“Indeed!” said Rhoda, looking amused. “Why, I thought you went now to the Wesleyan chapel?”

“What a dear satirical girl you are, Rhoda. You know I only went there on account of Mr Chynoweth, and because Mr Owen stared at me so dreadfully, and was so persistent in preaching about dress.”

“But surely that was only at the mining and fishing women, who have been growing dreadfully gay in their attire.”

“Oh dear, no, my dear! oh dear no!” said Miss Pavey, shaking her head. “I have the best of reasons for believing it was all directed at me. You remember his text the last Sunday I was at church?”

“I am sorry to say I do not.”

“Dear me, I wonder at that. It was so very pointed. It was – ‘Who is this that cometh with dyed garments from Bozrah?’ and he looked at me as he spoke. I think it was disgraceful.”

“But, my dear Martha, I think you are too sensitive.”

“Perhaps I am, my dear; perhaps I am. I have had my troubles; but that Mr Owen was dreadful. You know, my dear, he had – perhaps I ought not to say it, but I will – he evidently wanted to make an impression upon me, but I never could like him. He was so coarse, and abrupt, and short-sighted. He used to smoke pipes too. Mrs Mullion has told me, over and over again, that he would sit for hours of a night smoking pipes, and drinking gin and water, with that dreadfully wicked old man, Mr Paul. Really, my dear, I think some one ought to warn our new clergyman not to go and lodge at Mrs Mullion’s. You see there is hardly any choice for a gentleman, and for one who looks so refined to go and stay at Mrs Mullion’s would be dreadful.”

“Mrs Mullion is very good and amiable,” said Rhoda.

“Yes, my dear, she is; but Mr Paul is not a nice person; and then there is that Madge – dreadful girl!”

Rhoda’s heart gave a higher-pressure throb at this last name, and Miss Pavey ran on, as she could if she only obtained a good listener, —

“I do think that girl ought to be sent away from Carnac; I do, indeed. Really, my dear, if I had felt disposed to accept any advances on the part of Mr Tregenna, his conduct with that flighty creature would have set me against him.”

Rhoda’s heart beat faster still, and the colour went and came in her face as she listened. She blamed herself for hearkening to such petty gossip, but her visitor was determined to go on, and added confidence to confidence, for, as it may be gathered, Miss Martha Pavey’s peculiar idiosyncrasy was a belief that was terribly persecuted by the male sex, who eagerly sought her hand in marriage, though at the present time a gossip of Carnac had told another gossip that Miss Pavey was “setting her gashly old cap now at Methody Parson.”

“Don’t you think, my dear,” continued the visitor, “that your papa ought to interfere?”

“Interfere? About what?” exclaimed Rhoda, whose thoughts had run off to her conversation with her father that morning.

“Why, what are you thinking about, Rhoda?” cried Miss Pavey. “Oh, you naughty, naughty girl, you! You were thinking about our handsome young clergyman and his young friend. Oh, for shame, for shame?”

“Indeed, I was not!” exclaimed Rhoda, half amused, half indignant at her visitor’s folly.

“Oh, don’t tell me, dear,” said Miss Pavey, shaking her head. “It’s very shocking of you, but I don’t wonder. See how few marriageable gentlemen there are about here.”

“Miss Pavey, pray don’t be so absurd,” exclaimed Rhoda.

“Oh, no, my dear, I will not,” said the visitor, blushing, and then indulging in a peculiar giggle; “but after all, there is a something in wedlock, my dear Rhoda.”

“A something in wedlock?”

“Yes, dear, there is, you know, speaking to one another as confidantes – there is a something in wedlock after all, as you must own.”

“I never think of such a thing,” said Rhoda, laughing, for Miss Pavey’s evident leanings towards the subject under discussion were very droll.

“Of course not, my dear,” said Miss Pavey, seriously. “We none of us ever do; but still there are times when the matter is forced upon us, as in this case; and who knows, my dear, what may happen? You did not see them, I suppose?”

“See? whom?”

“My dear child, how dense you are this morning! The two new-comers, of course. And don’t you think that something ought to be done to warn them about where they are to take apartments?”

“Certainly not,” said Rhoda. “It would be the height of impertinence.”

“Oh, really, I cannot agree with you there, my dear Rhoda. I think it would be grievous to let this young clergyman go to Mullion’s, and really there is not another place in Carnac where a gentleman could lodge. In fact, I would sooner make the offer that he should board at my little home.”

“Board – take apartments at Dinas Vale?”

“Certainly, my dear. He is a clergyman, and we ought to extend some kind of hospitality to him. I regret that my limited income does not permit me to say to him, ‘Take up your home here for the present as a guest.’ Of course I would not open my doors to any one but a clergyman.”

“Of course not,” said Rhoda, absently; and soon after Miss Pavey took her leave, Rhoda going with her to the door, and on re-crossing the hall noticing a card lying upon the serpentine marble table, against whose dark, ruddy surface it stood out clear and white.

At another time it would not have attracted her attention, but now, as if moved by some impulse beyond her control, she went up close and read upon it the name, —

“Geoffrey Trethick.”

Nothing more – no “Mr” and no address.

Chapter Four

The Wrong Place for the Right Man

“Well, Chynoweth,” said Mr Penwynn, entering his office which was used as a branch of the Felsport bank, “any thing fresh?”

Mr Chynoweth, the banker’s manager, generally known as “The Jack of Clubs,” was a little man, dark, and spare, and dry. He was probably fifty, but well preserved, having apparently been bound by nature in vellum, which gave him quite, a legal look, while it made him thick-skinned enough to bear a good many unpleasantries in his daily life. He was rather bald, but very shiny on the crown. His face was cleanly shaved, and he had a habit of bending down his head, and gazing through his shaggy eyebrows at whosoever spoke, and also when he took up his parable himself.

Mr Chynoweth had been busy inside his desk when he heard his principal’s step, and there was plenty of room beneath the broad mahogany flap for him to do what he pleased unseen.

What Mr Chynoweth pleased that morning was to play over again a hand of whist, as near as he could remember – one that had been played at Dr Rumsey’s house the night before, when one of the guests, Mr Paul, had, to use his own words, “picked the game out of the fire,” Mr Chynoweth being, in consequence, five shillings out of pocket.

He kept a pack of cards and a whist guide in this desk, and it was frequently his habit to shuffle, cut, and deal four hands, spread them below the flap, and play them out by himself for practice, the consequence being that he was an adversary to be feared, a partner to be desired, at the snug little parties held at two or three houses in Carnac.

On this particular morning he had just arrived at the point where he felt that he had gone astray, when Mr Penwynn’s step was heard, the mahogany flap was closed, and “The Jack of Clubs” was ready for business.

“Fresh? Well, no. Permewan’s time’s up, and he wants more. Will you give it?”

“No: he has made no effort to pay his interest. Tell Tregenna to foreclose and sell.”

Mr Chynoweth rapidly made an entry upon an ordinary school slate on one side, and then crossed off an entry upon the other, refreshing his memory from it at the same time.

“Dr Rumsey wants an advance of a hundred pounds,” he said next, gazing through his shaggy eyebrows.

“Hang Dr Rumsey! He’s always wanting an advance. What does he say?”

“Pilchard fishery such a failure. Tin so low that he can’t get in his accounts.”

“Humph! What security does he offer?”

“Note of hand.”

“Stuff! What’s the use of his note of hand? Has he nothing else?”

“No,” said Mr Chynoweth. “He says you hold every thing he has.”

“Humph! Yes, suppose I do.”

“Without you’d consider half-a-dozen children good security?”

“Chynoweth, I hate joking over business-matters.”

“Not joking,” said Mr Chynoweth, stolidly. “That’s what he said.”

“Rubbish! Can’t he get some one else to lend his name?”

“Said he had asked every one he could, and it was no use.”

“Confound the fellow! Tut-tut-tut! What’s to be done, Chynoweth?”

“Lend him the money.”

“No, no. There, I’ll let him have fifty.”

“Not half enough. Better let him have it. You’ll be ill, or I shall, one of these days, and if you don’t let him have the money, he might give it us rather strongly.”

“Absurd. He dare not.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Chynoweth. “When one’s on one’s back one is in the doctor’s hands, you know.”

“There: let him have the money, but it must be at higher interest. But stop a moment,” continued Mr Penwynn, as his managing man’s pencil gave its first grate on the slate. “You’re a great friend of Rumsey: why not lend him your name to the note?”

Mr Chynoweth had no buttons to his trousers pockets, but he went through the process of buttoning them, and looked straight now at his employer.

“How long would you keep me here if you found me weak enough to do such a thing as that, Mr Penwynn? No, no,” he said, lowering his head once more, and looking through his eyebrows, “I never lend, and I never become security for any man. I shall put it down that he can have the money.”

Mr Penwynn nodded, and his manager wrote down on one side and marked off on the other.

“Any thing else?”

“Wheal Carnac’s for sale.”

“Well, so it has been for a long time.”

“Yes, but they mean to sell now, I hear; and they say it would be worth any one’s while to buy it.”

“Yes, so I suppose,” said Mr Penwynn, smiling; “but we do not invest in mines, Chynoweth. We shall be happy to keep the account of the company, though, who start. How many have failed there?”

“Three,” said Chynoweth. “There has been a deal of money thrown down that place.”

Mr Penwynn nodded and entered his private room, when Chynoweth gave one ear a rub, stood his slate upon the desk, raised the flap and let it rest on his head, and then proceeded to finish his hand at whist, evidently with satisfactory results, for he smiled and rubbed his hands, placed the cards in a corner, and next proceeded to write two or three letters, one of which, concluded in affectionate terms, he afterwards tore up.

Some hours passed, when a clerk brought in a card.

“For Mr Penwynn, sir.”

“Geoffrey Trethick,” said Mr Chynoweth, reading. “Take it in.”

The clerk obeyed, and a few minutes later he ushered the new visitor to Carnac into Mr Penwynn’s private room, where the banker and the stranger looked hard at each other for a few moments before the former pointed to a chair, his visitor being quite a different man from what he had pictured.

“Glad to see you, Mr Trethick,” he said. “I have read the letters you left for me, and shall be happy to oblige my correspondent if I can; but they seem to be quite under a misapprehension as to my powers. In the first place, though, what can I do for you?”

“Do for me?” said Geoffrey, smiling. “Well, this much. I come to you, a leading man in this great mining centre.”

Mr Penwynn made a deprecatory motion with his hand.

“Oh, I am no flatterer, Mr Penwynn,” said the visitor, bluffly. “I merely repeat what your correspondents told me, and what find endorsed here in this place.”

“Well, well,” said Mr Penwynn, as if owning reluctantly to the soft impeachment, “Penwynn and Company are a little mixed up in mines – and the fisheries.”

“Fisheries? Ah, that’s not in my line, Mr Penwynn. But to be frank with you, sir, I want work. I am a poor younger son who decided not to take to church, law, or physic, but to try to be a mining engineer. I am a bit of a chemist, too, and have studied metallurgy as far as I could. My education has taken nearly all my little fortune, which I have, so to speak, sunk in brain-work. That brain-work I now want to sell.”

“But, my dear sir,” said Mr Penwynn, “I am a banker.”

“Exactly. To several mining companies. Now, sir, I honestly believe that I am worth a good salary to any enterprising company,” said Geoffrey, growing animated, and flushing slightly as he

energetically laid his case before the smooth, polished, well-dressed man, whose carefully-cut nails gently tapped the morocco-covered table which separated him from his visitor.

"May I ask in what way?" said Mr Penwynn, smiling. "Labour is plentiful."

"Certainly," said Geoffrey. "I have, as I tell you, carefully studied metallurgy, and the various processes for obtaining ore, especially tin, and I am convinced that I could save enormously by the plans I should put in force; and, what is more, I know I could save almost half the expense in some of the processes of smelting."

"Indeed!" said Mr Penwynn, coolly.

"Yes; and also contrive a good many improvements in the sinking and pumping out of mines."

"Then you have come to the right place, Mr – Mr – Mr Geoffrey Trethick," said the banker, raising his gold-rimmed pince-nez to glance at the visiting-card before him.

"I hope so," said Geoffrey, with animation. "Ours is an old Cornish family, and I ought to be at home here."

"Exactly," said Mr Penwynn, sarcastically, "and you have come at the right time."

"Indeed?" said Geoffrey, eagerly.

"Most opportunely; for most of our great milking companies are in a state of bankruptcy."

"Yes, so I have heard. Well then, Mr Penwynn, if you will give me a letter or two of introduction, I should think there ought to be no difficulty in the way."

"My dear sir," said Mr Penwynn, smiling, "I'm afraid you are very sanguine."

"Well – perhaps a little, sir, but –"

"Hear me out, Mr Trethick. It seems to me you have come to the worst place in the world."

"The worst! Why so?"

"Because every one here will look upon your schemes as visionary. If you had a vast capital, and liked to spend it in experiments, well and good. People would laugh at your failures, and applaud your successes – if you made any."

"If?" said Geoffrey, smiling. "Then, sir, you are not sanguine?"

"Not at all," said the banker. "You see, Mr Trethick, you will not find any one in this neighbourhood who will let you run risks with his capital and machinery, or tamper with the very inadequate returns that people are now getting from their mines. If you wanted a simple post as manager –"

"That's what I do want," said Geoffrey, interrupting. "The other would follow."

"I say, if you wanted a simple post as manager," continued the banker, as calmly as if he had not been interrupted, "you would not get it unless you could lay before a company of proprietors ample testimonials showing your experience in mining matters. Believe me, Mr Trethick, you, a gentleman, have come to the wrong place."

"Let us sink the word *gentleman* in its ordinary acceptance, Mr Penwynn," said Geoffrey, warmly. "I hope I shall always be a gentleman, but I come to you, sir, as a working man – one who has to win his income by his brain-directed hands."

"You should have gone out to some speculative mining place, Mr Trethick," said the banker, taking one leg across his knee and caressing it. "Nevada or Peru – Australia if you like. You would make a fortune there. Here you will starve."

"Starve! Not if I have to help the fishermen with their nets, Mr Penwynn. I can row well, sir," he said, laughing, "and I have muscle enough to let me pull strongly at a rope. Starve? I've no fear of that."

"No, no; of course not. I mean metaphorically. But why not try the colonies or the States?"

"Because I have a mother who impoverished herself to complete my expensive university education, Mr Penwynn; and it would almost break her heart if I left England."

"Exactly," said the banker, with a slight sneer; "but you have come as far from civilisation as you could get in visiting Carnac. Now then, take my advice. Come up to An Morlock, and dine with me this evening – seven sharp. I can give you a bed for a night or two. Then have a run round the district,

see a few of the mines, and spy out the nakedness of the land. You will soon get an indorsement of what I say. You can then go back to London with my best respects to Rundell and Sharp – most worthy people, by the way, whom I would gladly engage – and tell them you have returned a sadder but a wiser man.”

He rose as he spoke to indicate that the interview was at an end, holding out his hand, one which Geoffrey gripped heartily, as he sprang, full of energy, to his feet.

“Thank you, Mr Penwynn. I’ll come and dine with you this evening. Most happy. As to the bed – thanks, no. I am going to hunt out lodgings somewhere, for I cannot take your advice. You don’t know me, sir,” he said, looking the banker full in the eyes. “I’ve come down here to work, and, somehow or other, work I will. I have enough of the sturdy Englishman in me not to know when I am beaten. No, sir, I am not going to turn back from the first hill I meet with in my journey.”

“As you will,” said Mr Penwynn, smiling. “Till seven o’clock then. We don’t dress.”

“Thanks; I will be there,” said Geoffrey, and the door closed as he left the room.

“He has stuff in him, certainly,” said the banker, gazing at the door through which his visitor had passed. “Such a man at the head of a mine might make a good deal of money – or lose a good deal,” he added, after a pause. “He’ll find out his mistake before he is much older.”

With a careless motion of his hand the banker threw his visitor’s card into the waste-paper basket, and, at the same time, seemed to cast the young man out of his thoughts.

Chapter Five

A Look Round Carnac

"Tell'ee what, Tom Jennen, you fishermen are more nice than wise."

"And I tell'ee, Amos Pengelly, as you miner lads are more nasty than nice. Think of a man as calls hisself a Christian, and preaches to his fellows, buying a gashly chunk of twissening snake of a conger eel, and taking it home to eat."

"And a good thing too, lad. Why, it's fish, ar'n't it?"

"Fish? Pah! I don't call them fish."

"Why, it's as good as your hake, man?"

"What, good as hake? Why, ye'll say next it's good as mack'rel or pilchar'. I never see the like o' you miner lads. Why, I see Joe Helston buy a skate one day."

"Ay, and a good thing too. But look yonder on Pen Point! There's some one got hold of the bushes. I say, Tom Jennen, who's yonder big, good-looking chap?"

"I d'no'. Got on his Sunday clothes, whoever he be. Don't call him good-looking, though. Big awk'ard chap in a boot. He'd always be in the way. He's a 'venturer, that's what he is. Whose money's he going to chuck down a mine?"

"What a chap you are, Tom Jennen! What should we mining folk do if it wasn't for the 'venturers? We must have metal got up, and somebody's obliged to speck'late in mines."

"Speck'late in mines, indeed," said the other, contemptuously. "Why don't they put their money in boots or nets, so as to make money out of mack'rel or pilchar'?"

"Ah, for the boots to go down and drown the poor lads in the first storm, and the nets to be cut and swept away."

"Well, that's better than chucking the money down a hole in the ground."

"Hey, Tom, you don't know what's good for others, so don't set up as a judge," and the speaker, a short, lame, very thick-set man, in a rough canvas suit, stained all over of a deep red, showed his white teeth in a pleasant smile, which seemed like sunshine on his rough, repellent face.

"Maybe I do; maybe I don't. I say I don't call him a good-looking chap."

"Just as if you could tell whether a man's good-looking or not, Tom Jennen. That's for the women to do."

"Ha – ha – ha! yes. Bess Prawle says you're the plainest man she ever see."

The miner flushed scarlet, and an angry light flashed from his eyes, but he seemed to master the annoyance, and said cheerfully, —

"I dare say she's right, Tom. I never set up for a handsome man."

"Like yonder 'venturer chap. He's the sort as would please old smuggler Prawle's lass."

The angry flush came into the miner's face again, but he mastered his annoyance, and said, rather hoarsely, —

"Hold your tongue, lad; the gentleman will hear what you say."

"What's that man doing up on the cliff?" said Geoffrey Trethick, who had walked down by the harbour in making a tour of his new home. "The one waving those things in his hands."

"Sighting a school," said Tom Jennen, in a sing-song tone, as, after the manner of sea-side men, he leaned his back against the stout rail which guarded the edge of the cliff.

"Sighting a school, eh? Of fish, of course?"

"Mack'," said Tom Jennen, so curtly that he cut the word in half, and then proceeded to add to the brown stains at the corners of his mouth by hacking off a piece of tobacco with his big knife.

"They do it in partnership like, sir," said the miner, eagerly, as he gazed in the new-comer's face, as if attracted by the sound of the word "adventurer."

“One of them goes up on the highest part of the cliff yonder, Pen Dwavas that is, and he watches till he sees a school coming.”

“How can he see a school of fish coming?”

“Colour,” growled Tom Jennen, who had now turned round, and was trying to spit upon a particular boulder on the shore below.

“Yes, by the colour, sir,” said the miner, Amos, or more commonly Preaching Pengelly – “colour of the water; and then he signals to his mates. That’s them gone off in yon boat.”

“I see.”

“They have their boot ready with the seine in – long net, you know – and rows out, just as you see them now.”

“Yes; but what’s the use of his waving those things now?”

“Them’s bushes, sir,” continued the miner, who was talking, and reading the new-comer at the same time. “Don’t you see, them in the boot being low down, couldn’t see which way to go, so he waves them on with the bushes.”

“To be sure, yes,” said Geoffrey. “I see now. They are throwing something over – yes, of course, the net. So that dark, ripply patch, then, is where the fish lie?”

“Yes, sir, that’s them,” said the miner, who seemed strangely attracted; “but you’ve got good eyes.”

“Think so?” said Geoffrey, smiling. Then, nodding his thanks, he walked farther along the cliff to watch what was a novelty to him – the taking of the shoal of mackerel.

“Ha, ha, ha?” laughed Tom Jennen. “On’y to think o’ the ignorance o’ these foreigners! Here’s a big, awkward chap of a good thirty year of age, and knowed nothing about bushes and a seine boat. If it had been you, Amos Pengelly, as is always grubbing down under the earth, like a long lug-worm, I shouldn’t have wondered; but a man as dresses up fine, and calls hisself a gentleman. Lor’, such gashly ignorance do cap me.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Amos, staring down at his section of conger eel, which he was carrying by a string. “Some folks seem to know a deal too much, Tom;” and, with a good-humoured nod, he followed the new-comer as if eager to see more of one who might be an adventurer, and the opener out of some great vein of tin or copper, till he saw him stop.

Geoffrey Trethick found that he was not the only one interested in the seine boat, for silvery mackerel meant silver coin to the fisher-folk of Carnac. The news had spread, and group after group began to assemble, and to note the progress of those shooting the net.

For, after rowing in various directions, as guided by the waving bushes on the point, the men in the boat had begun to pass their dark brown net rapidly over the stern, while those in the bows rowed steadily on, forming the arc of a circle, which was to enclose the fish; while these latter, having swum closer in, could now be seen to make the bright waters of the bay all a ripple of blue and silver sheen, with here and there a dash of pink and gold, as if the fish had left upon the surface the impress of their glowing sides.

It was an interesting sight to a stranger from town, and as Geoffrey Trethick watched he could hear the remarks of old hands around him canvassing the probability of the fish escaping, or the nets getting entangled among the rocks.

But the boat went steadily on, the men cautiously dipping their oars so as not to alarm the mackerel, and fathom after fathom of the piled-up brown stack of net glided into the sea, being passed out so skilfully that as the corks dotted the water the meshes stretched and fell softly down lower and lower till they formed a frail fence of umber thread in the bright waters of the calm bay, every fathom increasing the wall that was soon to encircle the shoal.

One dart of a frightened fish towards the unenclosed part, and away would have gone the whole school; but the mackerel seemed to be intent on playing near the surface, and the seine boat went

on shaking out fathom after fathom of the net till seaward there was a half-circle of brown corks, ever increasing to three-quarters.

And now Geoffrey Trethick, who had become deeply interested, unaware of the fact that he was the chief object of attraction to the people on the cliff, saw for the first time that a small boat, managed by a couple of men, remained by the other end of the net, and that as the first boat came nearer towards making a circle, the lesser boat was put in motion.

These were the most anxious moments, and the little crowd upon the cliff seemed to hold its breath. Then as the dark dots that represented the corks were seen to have nearly joined, the two boats being in the open space, there was a bit of a cheer.

"Tchah! Fools!" said a harsh voice close to Trethick's ear. "They have not caught them yet!"

Geoffrey turned, and found that the words proceeded from a little, withered, yellow-faced man, in a very old-fashioned dress. He was well-to-do, evidently, for a bunch of heavy gold seals hung from a black watch-ribbon, his Panama hat was of the finest quality, and there was something dapper and suggestive of the William the Fourth gentleman, in the blue coat, with gilt buttons, and neat drab trousers.

"I said, Tchah! Fools!" repeated the little man, on noticing Geoffrey's inquiring gaze. "They have not got them yet!"

"Many a slip betwixt cup and lip, eh?" said Geoffrey, quietly. "Yes: one pull of the net over a rock – one blunder, and away goes the school; and that's life?"

"You mean that's your idea of life," said Geoffrey. "No, I don't, boy. I mean that's life!"

"According to your view," said Geoffrey, smiling.

"According to what it is," said the old man, testily. "What the devil do you know of life, at your age?"

"Ah! that would take some telling," replied Geoffrey. "You and I would have to argue that matter out."

"Argue? Bah! Do I look a man with time to waste in argument?"

"Well, no; nor yet in getting out of temper, and calling people fools," said Geoffrey, with a smile.

The old man thumped his thick malacca cane upon the stones, and stared aghast at the stranger who dared to speak to him in so free and contradictory a manner in a place where, after a fashion, he had been a kind of king.

"Here, you: Rumsey!" he cried, panting with anger and pointing at Geoffrey with his cane, as a fair, fresh-coloured man in grey tweed came slowly up; "who the devil is this fellow?"

"Don't be cross, old gentleman," said Geoffrey, laughing. "I will tell you my name if you like."

"Confound your name, sir! What the deuce are you – a bagman?"

"No," said Geoffrey; "but look," he added quickly, as he pointed to the circle of nets. "What does that mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I told you so," chuckled the old man, whose face underwent a complete change. "They've got on a rock, and the whole school has gone."

"Poor fellows! What a disappointment," said Geoffrey.

"Bah! A man must expect disappointments here. Rumsey, I'm horribly bilious this morning," he continued, turning to the fresh-coloured man.

"Yes, so you seem," was the reply; and Geoffrey smiled at the frank confession. "Exceeded your dose last night."

"Dose?" said the old gentleman. "Hang it, man, don't call a glass of spirits and water by the same name as your filthy drugs. Good-morning, boy! and don't you laugh at me."

Hooking the fresh-coloured man by the arm, he was moving off.

"Good-morning," said Geoffrey, smiling. "But stop a moment. Perhaps you gentlemen can help me."

"Come away, Rumsey!" cried the old fellow, with mock horror in his thin face. "He's a book canvasser, or a collector for some confounded charity. Who the devil are you, sir; and what do you want?"

"Why, what a jolly old pepperbox you are!" cried Geoffrey, merrily. "Have you been out in India?"

"Yes, sir – I have been out in India," cried the old man, turning yellow with anger once more. "Confounded puppy!" he muttered, thumping down his stick.

"I thought so," replied Geoffrey, coolly; "I had an uncle just like you."

"Confound your uncle, sir!" cried the choleric old man. "Hang it all, Rumsey, don't you hear the fellow insulting me? Why don't you knock him down, or poison him?"

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Dr Rumsey?" said Geoffrey.

"That is my name," said the fresh-coloured man, looking suspiciously at the speaker as one who seemed too lusty and well to be in his way.

"I am coming to live here, doctor," said Geoffrey, in a free, frank way that seemed to set him at ease with those whom he had addressed. "I only came in by the coach this morning. Where can I get comfortable, inexpensive apartments – just a bed and sitting-room, you know? I have been asking everywhere, but there seems to be no such thing to be had."

The doctor glanced at the old gentleman, and the old gentleman returned the look, following it up by poking Geoffrey in the side with his cane.

"Here, young fellow – you, sir! Who are your – what are you?" he exclaimed.

"Who am I, my unceremonious old friend, and what am I? Well, my name is Trethick, and I'm a mining engineer."

"But are you respectable?"

"No," said Geoffrey, solemnly. "I am very poor; so I don't think I am."

"Confound you, sir!" cried the old gentleman. "Your eyes are twinkling. You're laughing at me."

"True, oh, king," said Geoffrey.

"But can you pay regularly for your lodgings?"

"I hope so," replied Geoffrey, whom the choleric old fellow thoroughly amused.

"Come here," cried the latter, dropping the doctor and hooking Geoffrey by the arm, as if taking him into custody. "You're good for the bile! Rumsey, I'll take him up to Mrs Mullion's, or she'll be letting her rooms to the new parson out of spite."

Chapter Six

Apartments to Let

Geoffrey looked in astonishment at the old gentleman, and then glanced at the doctor.

"You can't do better, Mr Trethick," said that individual, "for those are the only decent apartments you are likely to get here."

"Of course," said the old gentleman. "Come along, boy;" and thumping the ferrule of his cane down upon the granite paving-stones, which in rough irregular masses formed the path, he led the way along the cliff, and then turned off up a very steep zigzag path, which led up higher and higher, the old fellow pausing at every turn to get breath, as he pointed with his stick at the glorious prospects of sea and land which kept opening out.

"Lovely place, boy," he panted. "Come along. Takes my breath away, but it's better for the bile than old Rumsey's drugs. Suppose you could run up here?"

"I dare say I could," said Geoffrey; "or carry you up if I tried."

"Confound your ugly great muscles! I dare say you could. But look yonder – that's some of your work."

"My work?" cried Geoffrey, as the old man pointed to the great granite engine-house on the promontory already known to the new arrival as Wheal Carnac.

"Well, the work of you engineering mining fellows. Thousands of pounds have gone down that hole."

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Geoffrey, as they still ascended, until the old gentleman stopped short before a pretty granite-built house in a nook of the huge cliff that sloped down to the sea. It was well sheltered from the north and east, and its broad terrace-like garden was blushing with bright-hued flowers. In one corner was a well-built summer-house, which served as a look-out over the shimmering sea, and from which the putting out of the fishing-fleet, or the sailing to and fro of the great vessels in the Channel, could be plainly seen.

"Ah! this looks homely and snug," said Geoffrey, as he noticed the clean windows, white curtains, and pleasant aspect of the place.

"Yes, it's pretty well," said the old gentleman, who was always furtively watching his companion, and as he spoke he laid his hand upon the green gate at the foot of a rough granite flight of steps. "This is the way up from the cliff; there's a road from Carnac town on the other side. Will it do?"

"Depends on terms and accommodation," said Geoffrey, sharply, as he followed his guide up to the pleasant green terrace lawn.

"Humph! Go and see Mrs Mullion, then, and say Mr Paul sent you. I am going in here to smoke a cheroot," and he pointed to the summer-house.

"Do you live here, then?" said Geoffrey, for the old man seemed quite at home.

"Live here?" said the choleric old fellow, sharply. "Of course I do. Didn't see a shell on my back, did you? Where the deuce do you suppose I lived?"

As he spoke he drew out a handsome silver cigar-case, and selecting a very long, black cheroot, held it out to his companion.

"Here," he said, "can you smoke one of these?"

"To be sure I can," said Geoffrey. "Try one of mine."

"It's strong. Mind it don't make you sick, boy," said the old fellow grimly, as Geoffrey took the black cheroot, and then opened his own case – an effeminate silk-worked affair – which he handed to his companion.

The old man turned it about with the yellow corners of his lips curled down in disgust.

"Girl work that for you?" he said, with quite a snarl.

“No! Mother,” said Geoffrey, abruptly.

“Ho!” said the old gentleman, picking and turning over one cigar after another, and then replacing it. “There, take your case, boy; I can’t smoke your town-made trash.”

“Town-made trash, eh?” said Geoffrey, laughing. “Why, they’re as good as your Trichinopolies.”

“Rubbish!” said the old fellow.

“Real Havanas, given me by old Sir Harry. Dunton.”

“Not Harry Dunton, Governor of Ginjaica?”

“Yes! Do you know him?”

“Did once,” said the old fellow, with asperity. “Here, boy, I’ll have one. Now go and see about your lodgings; and come back to me,” he added imperatively.

Geoffrey stood smiling at him for a few moments.

“I say, old gentleman,” he said, “how many coolies used you to have under you in the East?”

“Over a thousand, sir,” said the old gentleman, irascibly.

“I thought so,” said Geoffrey, and he turned on his heels, and walked up to the clematis-covered porch that shaded the open door.

“I’d give some thousands to be as young and strong, and – and yes, confound him! – as impudent as that fellow. Hang him! he hasn’t a bit of veneration in him,” muttered the old gentleman, entering the summer-house, and striking a match for his cheroot. “He’ll just be right for them, as they’ve lost the parson. Hang ’em, how I do hate parsons!”

He took a few pulls at his cheroot, and emitted cloud after cloud of smoke, as he stood in the shade of the summer-house, looking at Geoffrey’s back.

“He’s a good-looking fellow, too, and – phew!” he added, with a long-drawn whistle, “what a fool I am. There’s Madge, of course, and at the door first thing.”

“If I am any thing of a judge, you are a very pretty girl,” said Geoffrey to himself, as his summons was answered by a merry-looking brunette, in a very simple morning dress and print apron, a book in one hand, a feather dusting-brush in the other. Her rather wilful hair, of a crisp, dark brown, had evidently been touched by the sea-breeze, for a waving strand was brushed hastily back as the girl saw the visitor; and the same, or other breezes, had given a rich tone to her complexion, which was heightened by the flush which came to her cheeks, as she hastily threw brush and book on to a chair, and gave a tug at the string of her apron, which absolutely refused to come off.

“Can I speak to Mrs Mullion?” said Geoffrey, unable to repress a smile at the girl’s vanity and confusion.

“Oh! yes. Please will you step in?”

“Who’s that, Madge?” cried a voice from somewhere at the back. “If it’s Aunt Borlase, we don’t want any fish to-day, and tell her – ”

“Hush, mamma!” exclaimed the girl, turning sharply, but without checking the voice, whose owner – a very round, pleasant-looking little matron – came forward, with a piece of black silk in one hand, a sponge in the other, and bringing with her a peculiar smell of hot irons lately applied to the material she held.

“Well, my dear,” she said, volubly, “how was I to know that it was company? Oh! good-morning, sir.”

“Good-morning,” said Geoffrey, who was pleasantly impressed by the mother and daughter, who now led the way into a comfortable old-fashioned parlour, whose window looked direct upon the foam-fringed promontory on which stood the ruined mine. “A Mr Paul, whom I have just left, advised me to see you about your apartments.”

“Oh! yes,” said the elder lady, smoothing herself down in front, as if trying to free herself from a little exuberance – the younger lady having now got rid of brush, book, and apron, and given a furtive touch to her pretty hair. “You are Mr Lee, our new clergyman,” she continued volubly, “and – ”

"Indeed I am not!" said Geoffrey, laughing, and glancing at the younger lady, who blushed, and gave her head a conscious toss.

"But I sent word to the hotel that I should be glad to take him in," said the elder lady; "and now that's just the way with that Aunt Borlase. Madge, dear, they never got the message."

"Is this one of the rooms?" said Geoffrey, to stem the flood of eloquence.

"Yes, sir; and Mr Paul, who is my late husband's half-brother, has the other front parlour, which we sometimes share with him when he is in a good temper. When he isn't, my daughter and I – this is my daughter, sir – sit in the –"

"Oh, mamma, hush!" exclaimed the younger lady, acknowledging Geoffrey's bow.

"Well, my dear, it's the simple truth," said mamma. "I hope you don't object to the smell of black silk being ironed, sir?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Geoffrey, smiling.

"It's the being sponged over with beer first," continued the little woman. "It makes it so stiff, and when it's done it looks almost as good as new."

"But, mamma," remonstrated the younger lady.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, my dear. Quite superior people turn their black silks, and have them re-made over and over again. There really is no cheaper wear than a good black silk."

"But about the apartments," said Geoffrey, to the younger lady's great relief.

"Oh! yes; of course. To be sure," continued the little lady. "I let the bedchambers over the rooms, sir. One to each."

"Exactly," said Geoffrey, who was much amused at the simplicity of the elder lady, and the assumption of gentility on the part of the younger; "but do I understand you to say that the apartments are engaged?"

"Well, sir, I feel as if I ought to wait and see if Mr Lee, our new clergyman, wants the rooms, especially as there are no other apartments fit for a gentleman to be had in Carnac, and where he could get proper attention. Not that I make a profession of letting lodgings, sir. Oh, dear, no! Mr Paul is a relative, and he occupies –"

"Mamma, dear," said the younger lady, "I don't think this gentleman will care to hear that."

"But how can he understand my position, Margaret, if I do not explain it?" remonstrated the elder.

"You hold out very pleasant prospects," interposed Geoffrey, hastily. "No other apartments to be had. But suppose Mr Lee does not take them?"

"Who the deuce is Mr Lee?" said a sharp voice at the open window. "Come: what is it – terms? Haven't you settled yet?"

"Mr Lee is the new clergyman, brother Thomas," said the plump little lady, giving herself another smooth down, "and if he wants the rooms that Mr Owen had, dear, why of course –"

"He'll have to want them," said the old gentleman, sharply, as he sent a puff of smoke into the room. "I won't have another parson in the house while I stay. If you mean to have him here, I go."

"Oh, pray don't talk like that, brother Thomas!" cried Mrs Mullion, hastily, her aspect showing plainly enough that she was greatly in awe of the old man. "Of course you know, dear, that I will do precisely as you wish."

"What I wish? Do what I wish?" snapped out the old gentleman. "Do what you like. But you told me distinctly that you were very eager to let these two rooms, and I take the trouble to put myself out, and go out of my way when I had a pressing engagement with Dr Rumsey, to bring up a – a – somebody who wants them. What more would you have? You, Madge," he added fiercely, "don't make eyes at strangers like that: it's rude."

"Oh, uncle?" cried the girl, indignantly, and her face was scarlet.

"So you were. Give me that letter off the chimney-piece."

The girl obeyed, fetching a large blue missive ready directed for the post, and stood holding it while the old gentleman, smoking away the while, took some stamps from his pocket-book, and tore one off.

“Now then,” he continued, sharply, and to Geoffrey Trethick’s great astonishment, “put out your tongue.”

“I’m – I’m quite well, uncle,” stammered the girl.

“Put out your tongue, miss!” cried the old fellow, sharply. “I don’t care how you are: I want to wet this stamp.”

“Oh, uncle!” cried the girl, in confusion, and she rushed out of the room, leaving the old man chuckling with satisfaction.

“Ah, well; I must lick it myself,” he said. “I hate licking stamps. Here, Jane, you put it on,” he continued, handing letter and stamp to the little woman, who proceeded to obey his command. “Well, now then, are you going to let the rooms, or are you not? This gentleman can’t stop shilly-shallying all day.”

“I shall be very happy to let them, I’m sure,” stammered the poor woman; and, after the settlement of a few preliminaries, it was arranged that the new-comer’s luggage should be fetched from the hotel, and he took possession at once, after the old gentleman had suggested that a month in advance should be paid for, which was done.

Chapter Seven

Uncle Paul Utters Warnings

"You see, you are quite a stranger," said the old gentleman, in a kind of gruff apology; "and I'm obliged to look after that poor woman's interests. Now, then," he continued, leading the way into the garden, "light up and come into the look-out, boy; I want to talk to you."

Geoffrey followed him, and as soon as they were seated they smoked and stared at each other in silence for a time, the young man rather enjoying his elder's keen scrutiny.

"Pleasant woman, my sister-in-law," said Mr Paul, at last.

"Yes; she seems homely and nice. Takes pride in her house."

"Humph! Yes."

"Widow, of course?"

"Yes: didn't you see she was?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you ask?"

"For confirmation. Is yours a bad cigar?"

"No. Why?"

"Because it don't seem to act as a sedative. A good one always makes me calm and agreeable."

"Then you think I am disagreeable?" said the old man, sharply.

"Not to put too fine a point upon it – yes; very."

"I always am," said the old gentleman, with a harsh laugh. "What do you think of my niece?"

"Very pretty," said Geoffrey, quietly.

"Oh! You think so?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"Humph! Yes. But, look here, young man, you are from London, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Then none of your town manners, please. No putting silly notions in that girl's head. It's full enough already."

"Who? I? Put silly notions in her head?" said Geoffrey, showing his white teeth as he removed his cigar from his lips and exhaled a great cloud of smoke. "Don't be afraid, old gentleman. I'm a man without a heart. Besides which, I'm engaged."

"More fool you. Bah! Look at me."

"I have looked at you," said Geoffrey, coolly; "I know you by heart already."

"Bah!" ejaculated the old gentleman, testily. "Engaged – married – insanity! A young man madly makes up his mind to keep a woman and a lot of children in bread and butter, like poor Rumsey, our doctor. Thinks it is going to be a pleasant burthen, and dreams on till he wakes – poor devil!"

"You don't approve, then, of matrimony?"

"Approve? No, I don't. I have seen too much of it in others. Young half-brother of mine marries that woman there; keeps poor in consequence; dies poor, leaving her and her child poor – paupers both of 'em."

"Hah! yes," said Geoffrey; "there are more poor than rich in the world."

"Their own fault. Don't you make a poor man of yourself."

"Don't mean to," said Geoffrey, quietly. "My mistress – my wife, if you like – is Science. Do you like bad smells?"

"Do I like *what*?"

"Bad smells. Because my chemicals will be down in a few days. I try experiments, and sometimes strong odours arise."

“Humph!” growled Uncle Paul. “Open the window, then. So your wife’s Science, is she?”

“Bless her: yes,” cried Geoffrey, emphatically. “She’s a tricky coquette, though.”

“So’s Madge, there,” said the old man.

“Is she?” said Geoffrey, looking at him, curiously. “I say, old gentleman, you are not very complimentary to your relatives; but I understand your hints: so look here. I’m not a lady’s man, and your niece will be free from any pursuit of mine; and if she gets – what do you call it? – setting her cap at me, she’ll give me up in four-and-twenty hours in disgust.”

“On account of Miss Science, eh?” said the old gentleman, grimly. “But I thought you said you were an engineer?”

“I am.”

“Then – then, why are you here? got an appointment?”

“Look here, Mr Paul,” said Geoffrey, laughing, “as we are to be such near neighbours, and you evidently would like me to make a clean breast of it, here it all is: – I am a mining engineer; a bit of a chemist; I have no appointment; and I have come down to get one.”

“Then you’ve come to the wrong place, young man.”

“So Mr Penwynn told me.”

“Oh, you’ve been there, have you?”

“Yes.”

“Seen his daughter?”

“No, nor do I want to see her,” said Geoffrey, throwing the end of his cheroot out of the window. “I’ll take another of those cheroots, sir. They’re strong and full-flavoured; I like them. So you think I’ve come to the wrong place, do you?”

“Yes,” said Uncle Paul, passing the blackest and strongest cheroot in his case. “Of course I do. The mining is all going to the dogs. The companies are one-half of them bankrupt, and the other half pay no dividends. The only people who make money are a set of scoundrelly adventurers who prospect for tin, and when they have found what they call a likely spot – ”

Here there was a pause, while the old gentleman also lit a fresh cheroot.

” – They get up a company; play games with the shares, and get fools to take them, whose money goes down a big hole in the earth.”

“And never comes up again, eh?”

“Never?” said the old man, emphatically.

“Ever been bitten that way?” said Geoffrey, smiling.

“Yes: once,” snarled the other. “They got a hundred pounds out of me over a promising-looking affair – that mine down yonder on the point – Wheal Carnac. Smooth-tongued scoundrel talked me over. Just such a fellow as you.”

“Indeed!” said Geoffrey, smiling.

“Been a lesson to me, though, that I’ve never forgotten.”

“And yet there is money to be made out of mines,” said Geoffrey, quietly. “With proper care, judgment, and good management there are plenty of lapsed undertakings that could be revived, and would pay their shareholders well.”

“Make Wheal Carnac pay, then, and my hundred pounds something better than waste paper.”

“I do not see why not,” said Geoffrey, earnestly.

Old Mr Paul pushed back his chair and made it scroop loudly on the summer-house floor, as he bared his yellow teeth in a grin.

“I thought so,” he exclaimed, with a harsh chuckle. “There, out with it, man! What’s the mine? Is it Wheal Ruby, or Bottom Friendship, or Evening Star, or what? How many shares are you going to stick into some noodle or another?”

“I sell shares? Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Geoffrey. “I never held or sold one in my life. No, sir, I am no share-jobber. I have come down here to carve my way in quite different fashion.”

“In granite?” sneered the old man.

“In the world, Mr Paul,” said Geoffrey, rising. “And now I must be off. I want to have a good look round. I see that you and I will get on capitally together. Whenever you are in the humour throw open your door, and I’ll open mine, and we’ll quarrel. I enjoy a good row.”

He nodded shortly, and strode off, his stout boots rattling the shingle stones of the path, and the gate giving a loud bang behind him, while directly after the echo of his steps could be heard as he clattered down over the rough granite paving towards the shore.

“Curse him!” cried the old man, getting up and craning his neck out of the summer-house window to stare after his late companion. “He’s a great ugly, overgrown puppy: that’s what he is, and I was an old idiot to bring him up here. Insulted me. Laughed in my face. As good as told me that I was an old fool. Never mind: I’ll bring him down, big as he is, and he’ll do to keep out the parson. Here! hi! somebody, Madge, Madge,” he shouted, reseating himself, and banging the floor with his cane.

There was no reply.

“Madge!” roared the old man again, beating the table for a change.

“Madge has gone out, dear,” said plump Mrs Mullion, hurrying out to the summer-house.

“Where’s my newspaper?” cried the old man, angrily. “I never get my newspaper to the time. Do you hear, I want my newspaper. If you can’t have me properly attended to by that cat of a girl, I declare I’ll go. Do you hear? I’ll go. I’m looking out now for a plot of land to build a house where I can be in peace and properly attended to. Do you hear? I want my newspaper – ‘The Times.’”

“There it is, dear,” said Mrs Mullion, upon whom this storm did not seem to have the slightest effect, “you are sitting upon it.”

“Then why, in the name of Buddha, was the paper put in my chair? A table’s the place for a paper. Where’s Madge?”

“Gone out for a walk, dear.”

“She’s always gone for a walk. I wish to good – ”

Rustle – rustle – rustle of the paper.

” – To goodness I had nev – ”

Rustle – rustle – rustle —

” – Had never come to this con – ”

Rustle – rustle – rustle. Bang in the middle and double up.

” – Come to this confounded place. Hang Madge! She’ll get into disgrace one of these – and – eh – um – oh. Hah! at last! um – um – um. ‘North-west provinces. This important question came on last night,’ um – um – um.”

The old man’s irritable voice toned down into a hum like that of a gigantic bee, for Uncle Paul was safe now to be in peace and good temper for a couple of hours at least over the debates in his newspaper, and Mrs Mullion, as unruffled as ever, was already back indoors, thinking over her half-brother’s words, and wondering whether they would ever prove true.

Chapter Eight

Geoffrey Makes a Discovery

There were plenty of heads thrust out of the granite cottages on either side of the steep way as Geoffrey strode on, ready to give back frank, open look for curious gaze, and to take notice that the people were dark and swarthy; that there were plenty of brown fishing-nets, and blackened corks, and swollen bladders, hanging from the walls, in company with a pair or two of skulls, a hitcher and a mast from some small boat, with now and then what seemed to be a human being split and hung up to dry after the fashion of a haddock, but which proved to be only an oilskin fishing-suit.

At one cottage door a huge pair of fisher's boots stood out in the sun, as if they were being worn by some invisible prince or Cornish giant. At another door sat a woman cleaning a long, snaky-looking hake, opposite to a neighbour who was busily counting pilchards, which had evidently been brought up from one of the boats by a big, brown, bluff-looking man, who, from top to toe, seemed as if he had some idea of going into the harlequin profession, so spangled was he with silver scales.

"Can I get down to the beach this way?" Geoffrey asked of the latter.

"Can 'ee get down to ba-ach this way! Iss my son," said the man, in a sing-song tone; and, after a very steep descent, Geoffrey found himself where he desired to go.

Not upon a soft, sandy, or pleasant shingly beach, but upon one literally paved with great masses of rock – black shale, granite, and gneiss – over which the huge Atlantic waves came foaming in stormy weather, rolling and polishing the surface with the rounded boulders, which seemed to average the size of a goodly cheese. Even now the rocky promontory that ran out and sheltered the little place and its tiny harbour was fringed with foaming water as the blue waves came slowly rolling in, to break on the black rocks, run up and fall back in silvery cascades to the heaving sea.

Geoffrey's keen eyes scanned the rocks, with their great white veins of milky quartz; running through the beautiful sea-scape on his left, the piled-up rocks upon his right, and then they rested on the grey engine-house upon the promontory – the mark of the great disused unsuccessful mine that had been pointed out to him as Wheal Carnac.

This place had a sort of fascination for him, and, clambering up, as he drew nearer he noticed every thing – the roughly blasted-out road, the furnace-house, so arranged that its chimney trailed over the ground like a huge serpent along the slope of the cliff, and higher and higher, till, quite a hundred and fifty yards away, it ended in a masonry shaft, towering up on the very summit of the cliff.

"What a blast they could get up here!" muttered Geoffrey, as he leaped from rock to rock, till, quite breathless, he reached the great tongue of land, and found that by clambering laboriously up a rough path he could stand on the chine of the promontory and look down upon the deep blue sea upon the other side, quite a mile away, and where the rugged shore was one mass of foam.

But though the sight was grand it was not practical, and, soon descending, he made his way towards the great engine-house, to find everywhere traces of wasted enterprise, followed by ruin and neglect. A deep mine shaft had been sunk close to the edge that sloped down to the shore, and from a platform of rock where he stood he could see quite a vast embankment of the *débris* that had been toilsomely dug out and allowed to run down into the sea.

There were granite buildings, but they were windowless, and a glance showed that the machinery had been torn out, to leave the place a ruin.

"I wonder how many thousands were sunk here," said Geoffrey, half aloud, "before the heart-sick proprietors gave it up, perhaps just on the eve of a great discovery. What a chance now, if there are good tin-bearing strata, for a fresh set of proprietors to take up the others' work and carry it on to success."

"It looks tempting!" he muttered, as he went on from place to place, picking up specimens of the rock that had been chipped out and thrown from the shaft, and examining each piece attentively with a pocket-lens. "That's antimony; yes, that's tin," he continued, as he examined a piece of reddish quartz, on one side of which sparkled some black grains, looking as unlike tin as can be imagined.

"Dash of copper there," he said, after a time, as he went on and on, till he stopped at the edge of the profound square shaft, which went down into darkness, right below where the waves beat upon the shore.

"How deep, I wonder?" he said, as he gazed down into the pitchy blackness, and then threw in one of the fragments of rock which he held in his hand, listening attentively for some considerable time till there came up a weirdly strange, hollow, echoing splash, full of strange whisperings, each telling of the terrible depth down to where the water lay, filling up the profundities of the awe-inspiring place.

"Thousands upon thousands of pounds must have gone down that hole?" mused Geoffrey, seating himself on the very edge, with his legs hanging down into the shaft, into which he gazed as if it fascinated him and something was drawing him downward to his death.

"What a pit for a fellow to fall into!" he said, with a shudder. "He might slip or jump in, or throw in his enemy or any one he wanted to get rid of, and not a soul would be the wiser. It's a regular gateway into the other world.

"What stuff!" he said directly after, with a half-laugh. "Why, I'm turning morbid. It's a gateway to the golden land of success, and if I had a chance I'd make it pay."

He rose directly after, and with each wave as it broke below making his steps inaudible even to himself, he went on, peering first into one building and then into another, all seeming to be built on a goodly, if not extravagant, scale, which he noted at once for future purposes.

He crossed a patch of heathery turf next, and had nearly reached the doorway of a low shed-like place, probably the stables for the horses that had been used in connection with the mine, when he stopped short, for mingled with the low roar of the sea he seemed to hear voices.

He stopped short and listened, but heard nothing more.

"Ghosts of dead and gone disappointed shareholders, or the noises of the Kobolds of the mine," he said laughingly, and stepping forward he entered the doorway to find that to him, coming out of the full blaze of the sun, the place was very dark. He stretched out his hands to avoid running against any thing, and hardly knowing why, only that he seemed to be drawn on to investigate the place, he went forward, with the darkness growing lighter, when he stopped short again.

This time there was no mistake, for he heard a sob, and before he could make up his mind what to do, he heard a woman's voice speaking in tones of appeal.

Chapter Nine

More of the Vicar's People

"I really cannot come again!" exclaimed somebody, piteously, as Geoffrey stood there half-paralysed by surprise.

"What nonsense!" said a man's voice. "You can if – "

Geoffrey heard no more, for he beat a rapid retreat back into the sunshine, and hurried away, with a comical expression of vexation upon his countenance.

"Lovers, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Hang 'em, they're everywhere! Fancy finding them in this out-of-the-way, forsaken place of all others in the world. Why, hang me! if I don't believe that's why some women go up Mont Blanc – they go up to court."

He strode away, whistling a merry air, little thinking what an influence all this would have upon his future life; and, thrusting his hands down into his pockets, he went on, leaping from rock to rock, making for the other side of the promontory, evidently intending to see as much of the country as he could before returning to dinner.

"Why, hallo!" he suddenly exclaimed, stopping short. "Surely I've heard one of those voices before? No: impossible!" he said, "I don't know any ladies down here."

Going on again, he soon crossed a sort of heathery down, dotted with masses of rock, which cropped up here and there; sent several couples of agile sheep bounding away, and noted that they were linked together at the neck; drew long, bracing breaths of the fresh, pure air; and, after skirting along the edge on the far side of the promontory, he went on inland, comparing the glorious sea to violet and gold, as it gleamed in the sunshine and reflected the brighter tints of the cliffs.

He soon hit upon a foot-track, which evidently led towards Carnac if he turned to the right, while on the left it led —

"Let's see where!" said Geoffrey.

Half an hour's walking showed that it led onward to a farther point on the sea, and he hesitated as to whether he should go on. A glance at his watch told him that he had ample time, and as there was another ruined engine-house evidently by the track, he walked on, finding that the path led direct to the side of another mining venture, but evidently of much older date, and he quite started as he found how near the path went by a yawning shaft.

It had probably once been protected by a wall of loosely piled-up stones, but these lay scattered here and there, while the great engine-house had half fallen, the chimney only being intact.

"How dangerous," thought Geoffrey, as he gazed down into the shaft, and noted how the grass and heath had grown over the embankment of *débris* which ran down in a slope landward, joining a precipitous descent from the engine-house, which stood upon a ridge quite a hundred and fifty feet above the sea, which ran in diamond sparkling cascades over the rocks that fringed the shore nearly a quarter of a mile away.

"They seem to have always perched these places on a ridge," he mused, as he looked into the ruined engine-house, and laughingly wondered whether there would be any lovers there.

"Quite a wonder!" he exclaimed, as he glanced round the ruin, and, finding nothing to excite his interest, he returned to the well-worn edge of the shaft.

He could not look straight down, for the top had crumbled in, making a sharp slope all round the edge; so, laughing at himself, he picked up one of the great lichen-covered pieces of granite that had formed the protecting wall, hurled it from him, and listened till with a roar came up the sound of a tremendous plash.

“That’s about a hundred and fifty feet down to the water,” he said aloud. “I believe it comes natural to a fellow to want to throw stones down every hole he sees. I’ll be bound to say that Cain and Abel used to do just the same. Adam never was a boy.”

He stood thinking for a few minutes, these old mine shafts attracting him greatly.

“I wonder whether any one was ever thrown down that shaft?” he said aloud. “She would never come out alive.”

He found himself wondering again why his thoughts had taken such a turn, and why he should have said “she.”

“What nonsense!” he exclaimed. “I shall be writing a romance of a ruined mine directly,” and going on to the slope of *débris* he began kicking out and examining the old fragments that had been dug from the bowels of the earth, taking out his pocket-lens, and minutely inspecting each piece for traces of metallic ore, but finding little to reward his pains.

“There was a lot of money wasted here, I’ll be bound,” he exclaimed, as he turned off and once more began to follow the track.

“It’s a grand coast-line,” he thought, as he walked on past and under the huge masses of grey granite, dotted with green fern and pink stonecrop, till he found the path begin to descend rapidly into a ravine, full of ferny nooks and spots made musical by the dripping water of the springs. The place had very precipitous sides, with a bright rushing stream foaming on towards the sea, where it spread its waters over the pure sands of a tiny cove.

There were a couple of boats drawn up below a large straggling granite cottage, built evidently a portion at a time upon a shelf of rock well out of the reach of the waves; and upon a platform in front of the unlovely place, hedged in with stones, was some attempt at a garden.

So steep was the track down as he approached the place, Geoffrey could easily have leaped from this slope on to the cottage roof, which was as rugged as the walls, and altogether the dwelling had a wild, uncouth aspect, in no wise improved by some old ship wood and lumber lying about.

But this was all redeemed by the beauty of the little cove, with the breaking waves which seemed to sweep up the waters of the little stream after its gurgling course, amidst lichenous stones from where it had sprung high up the ravine out of a bower of many-tinted greens.

“Just the spot for a smuggler or a wrecker, or a fellow to build a house to boat and fish, and live away from the world. I should like to lodge here,” he continued, as his eyes wandered over the scene. “Wish I could paint, and – ah! you would come in capitally. Hallo! she’s coming to me. No, my lass,” he said, as if speaking to her, though she was too distant to hear, “it’s labour in vain. I don’t want a guide to any caves or dripping wells, or to buy specimens of ore, spar, or the like. By Jove, though, she’s very handsome. Why, she must be a gypsy.”

This was said as a young woman came into sight from the cottage below, looked up, and on catching sight of the visitor seemed to speak to some one within, and then hurried up to meet him.

As Geoffrey remarked, she was very handsome, but it was a wild, rugged, half-savage kind of beauty. Dark-eyed, brown-skinned, with a ruddy flush which showed how little she sheltered from the weather, while her abundant black hair was carelessly twisted up, and hung down in a massive knot between her shoulders. Her dress was of the commonest cotton, and slovenly made, a short print gown being tied round her waist, over a bright-coloured serge petticoat, while in one hand she held a print hood. But, in spite of her ungraceful clothing, Geoffrey could see that she was lithe, strong, and active, and there was no little natural grace in the undulations of her unfettered form, as she hurried up to meet him.

“Come here and buy some sweets,” she said, in a voice as full of command as entreaty, and as she looked him boldly yet curiously in the face, he saw that her lips were red and full, over large but beautifully white teeth.

“Sweets? Nonsense, my lass. I don’t eat sweets. What cove is this?”

“Gwennas,” said the girl. “Come down and buy some sweets. Here’s the money.”

Geoffrey stared, as the girl held out a penny in her large, well-shaped hand.

"Poor lass! A love case for a sovereign. She's crazy," said Geoffrey to himself, and, changing his manner, he took the coin from the girl's hand, receiving, at the same time, a smile for reward. "What's your name, my lass?" he said aloud.

"Bessie – Elizabeth Prawle," said the girl, shortly. "You're a stranger."

"Yes," he said, looking at her sidewise. "Do they sell sweets here?"

"Yes," said the girl, sharply.

"And you are very fond of them, eh?"

They were going side by side towards the cottage, when the girl faced round, looked at him in a puzzled way for a moment, and then laughed merrily.

"They are not for me," she said, sharply, as they reached the rough rocky platform in front of the cottage. "Here, father, this gentleman is going to buy some sweets."

"Is he? Oh!"

This was uttered in a low, hoarse growl, by a strongly-built, rugged fisher-looking man, in a blue Jersey, and very thick flannel trousers, braced up right over his chest. He wore no hat, but a shaggy crop of grizzled hair shaded his weather-beaten, inflamed face, as he sat on a block of granite, as rugged as himself, overhauling a long fishing-line, whose hooks he was sticking in pieces of blackened cork.

He looked up for a moment frowningly at the visitor, with a pair of dark piercing eyes, drew a great gnarled hand across his mouth to wipe away the tobacco-juice, lowered his eyes, got up, stooped, and displayed an enormous patch upon his trousers, reseated himself, and went on with his work.

"Come in," said the girl, quickly, and she led the way into a large low room, roughly but well furnished, and scrupulously clean. It was a compound of rustic farmhouse kitchen with a flavour of parlour and ship's chandlery or boating store. For along the massive beams, and wherever a great peg could be driven in, hung nets, lines, and other fishing gear. A ship's lantern hung here; there was a binnacle there. Odds and ends of cabin furniture were mingled with well-polished Windsor chairs, and brass decorated chests of drawers. There was plenty of ornamentation too. Shells, a sword-fish, dried marine animals, sponges and seaweeds, masses of coral, fragments of bright spar, and some gay pieces of china, lay upon chimney-piece and shelves; in addition to which there was the model of a full-rigged ship in full sail, fitted up in a great glass case.

"Quite an old curiosity shop," thought Geoffrey, as he saw all this at a glance, and noted that the well-cleaned floor was sprinkled with sand, save where a great home-made shred rug lay in front of the bright black fireplace, on whose hob a great copper kettle shone from its dark corner like a misted sun.

The light came through the open door, and formed quite a Rembrandtish picture in the low, darkened room, falling as it did in mote-sparkling rays, like a band of sunbeams, right across a bent figure in an old well-washed chintz-covered armchair.

The first thing that struck Geoffrey was the figure's occupation. The day was warm, but she was seated very close to the fire, airing a garment carefully spread over her knees, and from which came a most unmistakable odour of scorching, reminding the visitor very strongly of his late visit to Mrs Mullion's on the cliff. A pair of very thin white hands were busy adding mesh after mesh to a herring net, while as they entered, the bent down head was eagerly raised, and Geoffrey saw a face whose white hair and pallid, piteous look, told its own tale, as the weary-looking eyes scanned his face.

"Another customer, mother," said the girl, quickly. "Oh, why don't you be more careful? you'll burn yourself to death."

"It's cold, Bessie; it's cold, dear, but that's well – that's well," said the invalid, whose hands began to tremble, so that she missed a stitch or two in her net. "Be quick, dear, be quick."

"Yes, mother. Did you say a pen'orth, sir?"

"No, I want sixpen'orth, my lass," said Geoffrey.

The girl darted a grateful look at him as she took a covered glass jar from the window-sill, and as she rattled the coloured sticks of candy which were its contents, Geoffrey heard a sigh of satisfaction from the invalid, a glance showing him that the head was once more bent down over the net.

"Fine weather, Mrs Prawle," said Geoffrey, hazarding a shot, as the girl busily rustled a paper bag.

"Yes, yes," said the invalid, looking up at him, "I suppose it is, sir. I hope you will come again."

The girl darted a quick look at him.

"Oh, yes! of course," replied Geoffrey, whose eyes wandered over the pitiable picture before him. "I shall come again."

"I'm so anxious to get up a connection, sir," continued the invalid, "and Gwennas Cove is rather out of the way."

"I should think it is – rather!" said Geoffrey to himself, and he could hardly refrain from smiling at the poor woman's idea of getting up a connection in that wild spot.

"Yes, Bess, take the money. Thank you kindly, sir. Good-day, sir; good-day;" and the invalid began to carefully turn the airing garment upon her knees, though there was no more dampness in it than in one of the red-hot pieces of wood over which she hung.

Geoffrey felt disposed to stay, but his time was short, and, after a cheery "good-day," he strode out, followed by the girl, to find that the rugged-looking old man was gone, patch and all; but the girl hurried on before him for a few yards, as if to be out of hearing at the cottage, and then held out her hand.

"What? Good-by!" said Geoffrey, smiling, and he held out his own.

"No, no, nonsense," said the girl, flushing. "Give me the sweeties, and take your money back."

"Then you carry that on to please the old lady, eh?" said Geoffrey.

"Yes, of course," replied the girl, sharply. "Didn't you know?"

"Not I; but I guessed as much."

"Mother's been ill these twenty years, and has to be carried to her bed. She thinks she's a burthen, so we do it to humour her."

"I thought as much."

"Then why don't you take your money?" said a hoarse, rough voice, that chased away all the sentiment of the affair, and Geoffrey started round to see that the fierce-looking old man was leaning over a block of granite, his arms crossed, and his chin resting upon them. "Take your money and go."

"No," said Geoffrey, in his off-hand way. "No: thanks. I want the sweets for the children."

"Yours?" said the old fellow, roughly.

"Mine? Hang it, man; no."

Geoffrey turned to the girl, and looked at her, laughing merrily; but this seemed to irritate the old man, who came fiercely from behind the granite block, thrusting his hands far down into his pockets, and scowling angrily.

"Look here, young man," he said, hoarsely, "you're a stranger here, and don't know us."

"Not yet," said Geoffrey, "but I dare say I soon shall."

"Take your money, and don't come again," said the old man, hoarsely.

"You are a nice, pleasant-spoken old gentleman," said Geoffrey, nonchalantly, as he coolly opened the paper bag, and took out one of the sticks of candy. "Have a sweet?"

The man uttered a fierce growl that sounded like an oath, and took a step forward in a menacing way, but the girl sprang forward, and threw her arm across his chest.

"D'yer want me to hurl you off the rocks?" he said savagely.

"Be quiet, father," cried the girl. "The gentleman means no harm."

"Go in, Bess," he shouted, and, shaking her off, he went close up to Geoffrey, who did not give way an inch, but looked full in the fierce, repulsive face thrust close to his, till the old man lowered his eyes, and stepped on one side, muttering angrily.

“Do you always treat strangers like this, Master Prawle?” said Geoffrey, smiling.

“Go away, I tell ye,” said the old man, fiercely. “We want no dealings with the people.”

“Don’t anger father, sir,” said the girl, who, however, seemed to be in no wise put out by the old man’s savage resentment.

“Not I, my girl,” replied Geoffrey; “but what is the matter with your mother?”

“She fell off the cliff one night,” said the girl, quickly.

“Tell him to go, Bess,” growled her father. “We don’t want him here.”

“I asked the gentleman to come, father,” said the girl. Then, turning to Geoffrey, “Thank you kindly, sir. It pleases mother.”

“Don’t name it, my lass,” replied Geoffrey, smiling, and the girl looked at him very fixedly, as she watched every turn in his frank, open face. “Good-day,” he continued. “Good-day, Master Prawle.”

The old man scowled at him by way of reply, and then stood watching him till he had climbed back to the edge of the ravine, where, turning to glance down, Geoffrey saw father and daughter below, the latter returning his salute, as he waved his hand before passing out of their sight.

“Old boy thought I was a hawk after his pigeon,” said Geoffrey, lightly. “What an ill-conditioned old ogre! But there must be some good under his rough bark. Prawle, eh? Elizabeth, otherwise Bess. And the old woman! What a piteous face! Twenty years an invalid! Ah, well! I don’t think Mr Prawle, of the hoarse voice and fierce tone, need be afraid; but I’d rather not offend him, say about the fair Elizabeth, and then meet him – angry – say beside the shaft of one of those old mines.”

He glanced then at his watch, and hastened his steps, for the time of his engagement at An Morlock was drawing near.

Chapter Ten

Geoffrey Makes a Discovery

"You are an extremely handsome young woman, and I like the bright, intelligent look in your eyes," said Geoffrey Trethick to himself; "but I'll swear you have got a temper."

"You are a nice, frank, manly fellow," said Rhoda Penwynn to herself; "and I wonder whether you are as sensible and not so stubborn as you look."

Introductions were just over in Mr Penwynn's drawing-room, and Geoffrey, who was in no wise taken aback by the splendour of his host's surroundings, walked across to where, cold and stiff and quiet, his travelling-companion stood, with one arm upon the mantelpiece, looking uneasily on.

"It seems as if we are to be thrown together," said Geoffrey, offering the young clergyman his hand, which the latter took as if under protest, and then glanced from Mr Penwynn to his daughter, as if in apology for allowing himself to be claimed as an acquaintance by his bluff travelling-companion.

"You have met Mr Lee, then?" said the host stiffly.

"Yes – yes," said the new vicar; "Mr Trethick is an old Oxford man."

"And you don't like him," said Rhoda to herself, as she observed every thing; "and I don't like you."

"We were fellow-passengers by the coach this morning," said Geoffrey, and as he spoke he glanced by Mr Penwynn at where Rhoda was re-arranging some flowers, and found that the Reverend Edward Lee had brought his spectacles to bear in the same direction. Then, looking back at his host, he fancied that this gentleman had not been unobservant of the glances of his guests.

Mr Penwynn smiled to himself directly after as Geoffrey moved towards Rhoda, and began talking to her about the view from the drawing-room window and his walk along the coast; but the young clergyman looked at his host as if in remonstrance at his allowing this stranger to make so free, when the door opened, and the servant announced, —

"Mr Tregenna!"

"Ah, Tregenna! You are late. Glad to see you."

"Business, my dear sir. The old story – business. My dear Miss Penwynn, you must forgive me," he continued, speaking in a low voice full of deference, but with lips that did not seem to move as he spoke, as Rhoda turned from Geoffrey, and took a couple of steps towards the fresh comer – a tall, handsome man of *distingué* appearance, but with a rather sallow complexion, made deeper by his jet black hair and whiskers.

Geoffrey started slightly, and then gazed keenly at this man, who bent down over Rhoda Penwynn's hand as he took it, and retained it just a moment longer than custom dictates, and smiled in her face directly after as, in a quiet, self-possessed way, she said that they had not been waiting.

"Waiting? No!" said Mr Penwynn smiling; "but I should have thought you would have been first."

"I hurried all I could," said Tregenna, as a slight flush came over Rhoda's cheek; "but one cannot always command one's time, even to devote it to one's aims."

Geoffrey Trethick half-closed his eyes, as he looked on trying to think out something which had puzzled him, but without avail, and for the moment he gave it up, and began to turn over the leaves of an album, but taking ample notice the while of what was going on.

"If I were interested in mine host's daughter," mused Geoffrey, "I should feel uncomfortable about that dark, smoothly-shaven gentleman. I don't like the look of his mouth, and I don't like his eyes, and – Most happy!"

This last in answer to his host's introduction to the last comer, who smiled upon him in the most friendly of ways, asked him what he thought of Carnac, seemed to be particularly refined, and

then turned to go through a little preliminary chat with the new clergyman, who was more bland and agreeable than he had been to his travelling-companion.

“Ah! the parson gets on better with you, my fine fellow,” said Geoffrey. “You haven’t so many corners as I have. Humph! I don’t like you, though. You seem to be the man in possession, though, here, and certainly she is a very charming girl.”

He met Rhoda’s eyes as these thoughts passed through his mind, and she encountered his gaze with a frank, open look, though he fancied that she seemed a shade paler than when he was talking to her a few minutes before.

Just then dinner was announced, and Mr Penwynn turned to speak to Geoffrey, but bit his lip and glanced at Tregenna, who, however, only smiled back and nodded, as if amused; for Rhoda, acting the part of mistress of the house, extended her gloved hand so unmistakably that Geoffrey stepped forward, the hand was laid upon his arm, and, passing the others, he led her across the hall to the handsome dining-room, thinking to himself that by rights the Reverend Edward Lee ought to have occupied his place.

The dinner was good and well served, every thing making it evident that Mr Penwynn was a wealthy man, and one who liked to show it; but the ostentation was a good deal toned down by his child’s refined taste, and was not obtrusive. The conversation kept up was such as would be heard at any gentleman’s table, and it soon became evident that the West-country banker and his daughter were well-informed, and loved and cultivated refinement.

Geoffrey particularly noted how clever and gentlemanly Mr Tregenna could be. By degrees it dawned upon him that he was the principal solicitor of the place, and without its troubling him in the slightest degree, he made out that Tregenna was evidently a suitor for Rhoda Penwynn’s hand. Both father and lover showed this, the former being plainly in favour of the match; while, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, Rhoda Penwynn displayed her consciousness of Tregenna’s expressive looks by redoubling her attention to Geoffrey and the new vicar – Geoffrey chatting freely, and in the most unembarrassed way, so different to any young man she had met before, and questioning her largely about the place and people.

“A glass of wine with you, Mr Trethick,” said the host, who, in spite of advances, adhered somewhat to old customs. “Tregenna, will you join us?”

“With pleasure,” said the latter, looking up and smiling, and as he did so the thought that had been puzzling Geoffrey all through the dinner met with a solution.

He had been wondering – his wonder running like a vein through the whole of the conversation – where he had met Tregenna before; but now it came to him that for certain they had never met, but that it was that smooth, deep, mellow voice that he had heard, but where?

“I have it,” he mentally exclaimed, as, raising his glass, he looked full in John Tregenna’s eyes. “You were the fellow I heard talking to that girl by the ruined mine?”

Chapter Eleven

An Opinion of Tregenna

"You're a nice, smooth scoundrel," said Geoffrey to himself, as he set down his glass, "and I have been drinking with you when I ought to have thrown the wine in your face, and told you that you were a blackguard. – But we don't do this sort of thing in society. As long as there is a good thick coat of whitewash over the sepulchre, society does not mind, but smiles on ladies with no reputation if they are rich, and never opens its ears to the acts, deeds, and exploits of our nice young men. I wonder whether mine host knows your character, and what my fair young hostess feels? Don't seem very sentimental about him, anyhow; and here's my reverend friend quite cottoning to black whiskers, and enjoying his small talk. Ah! it's a strange world."

A brisk little conversation was just now going off between Rhoda Penwynn and the new vicar, Tregenna throwing in a word here and there, Mr Penwynn smiling approval as he listened, while Geoffrey went on eating heartily, and following his thought.

"I may be wrong," he went on, "but I feel pretty sure I could say something that would make you change colour, my smooth, cleanly-shaven gentleman, and if I did I should make you my enemy for life. Well, perhaps I could bear that, but I don't want enemies, I want friends. If I'm right, though, I don't think you ought to win ma'mselle unless you reform, probationise, and she condones. There, what a string! As the old women say – 'tain't no business of mine."

He glanced across at Tregenna just then, and that gentleman met his eye, smiled, and the discussion being over, asked him how long he meant to stay in the west.

"Stay?" said Geoffrey sharply. "Altogether."

Tregenna raised his eyebrows a little, and just then the young vicar, in reply to a question from Mr Penwynn, began speaking, in slow measured accents, about the vicarage to be built, and the alterations he meant to make at the church. A bright colour suffused his smooth pale face, as he found that Rhoda was listening to him, and that he was now monopolising the attention of the rest. However, he seemed to master his nervousness, and spoke out firmly and well to the end.

"You may try," said Mr Penwynn, smiling, "but I am afraid, my dear sir, that your ideas are as Utopian as those of Mr Trethick there. However, experience teaches, as the Latin proverb goes; but, as an old inhabitant, I venture to say that before many weeks are over, both of you gentlemen will confess that you have undertaken a Herculean task. Religiously, the people of the lower orders are as wedded to Wesleyanism as in their mining tactics they are to their old-fashioned ways. Our rough Cornish folk, gentlemen, are as hard to move as our own granite."

"Perhaps so, papa," said Rhoda; "but we have not had many efforts made here to move them."

"Thank you, Miss Penwynn," said Geoffrey, flushing, and speaking with animation. "Those are the first encouraging words I have heard. Your daughter has touched the very point, Mr Penwynn. I don't want to talk like an egotist, but, speaking as an engineer, if you will show me one of your biggest pieces of Cornish granite, I'll find a means of giving it a start; and I'll be bound to say that if Mr Lee here is as determined as I, he will find a way of moving the hardest of your Cornish hearts. Sir, I believe in that little word 'Try!'"

The Reverend Edward Lee coloured slightly, and turned his glasses with more of interest upon the speaker, but he did not interpose.

"I wish you both every success," said Tregenna, smiling first on one and then on the other, and Mr Penwynn nodded his head, and laughed, saying, —

"Youth is sanguine, Mr Trethick. Try!"

"I will, Mr Penwynn," said Geoffrey, in a voice that, though quiet, was so full of the spirit expressed by those two determined words that Tregenna glanced sharply at him, and then at Rhoda, to see what effect they had had upon her.

She was bending a little forward, her lips parted, and a curious look in her face, as she gazed in the guest's countenance, till, instinctively becoming aware that Tregenna's eyes were fixed upon her, she let her own fall, but only to raise them directly after with a half-offended look of inquiry, as if asking why she was watched, and soon after she left the table.

The gentlemen stayed but a short time over their wine, for Tregenna, after exchanging glances with Mr Penwynn, rose and made for the drawing-room, while Mr Penwynn suggested a cigar in the garden.

"Yes, I should enjoy a smoke," said Geoffrey, who suspected that this was a manoeuvre to give Tregenna an opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*, but the vicar declined.

"I have not smoked now for many years," he said, and he glanced to the door as if to escape to the drawing-room in Tregenna's wake, but Mr Penwynn proceeded to endorse Geoffrey's suspicions.

"Then I will not smoke either," he said, passing his arm through that of his guest. "We'll have a look round at the ferns and flowers till Mr Trethick has finished his cigar. They'll bring us coffee directly, and then we will join them in the drawing-room."

There was no escape, so the young clergyman was marched off to inspect the peculiarities of his host's choice ferns, with the beauties of the various sub-tropical plants that the banker had collected in his well-kept, rock-sheltered terrace. These being ended, the various points of interest in the distance about the bay were pointed out, evidently to gain time.

Meanwhile Geoffrey, who felt somewhat amused, sat upon a rock, smoked an excellent cigar, and thought a good deal as he gazed out to sea.

"Parson's bored," he said to himself. "He wants to get off to the drawing-room, and beam through his glasses on Miss Penwynn, who is unmistakably being courted by the smooth, dark gentleman. Most likely he is just now, with papa's consent, popping the question. If she accepts him I should think it's a pity, for somehow Mr Tregenna is not my *beau-ideal* of a gentleman, while she is a bright, clever girl. However, it is no business of mine."

He paused to knock the very long, carefully-preserved ash off the end of his cigar, which process seemed to be looked upon as one of very great importance, the cigar being petted and carefully smoothed down at the moist end where a little of the leaf was loose, lest this opening should at all interfere with the drawing; after which he tenderly replaced the roll of weed in his lips, uttered a sigh of satisfaction, such as might be given by any young man whose digestion was in perfect order, and exhaled a soft blue cloud of smoke.

"Curious thing this love," he continued to himself. "Every one seems to go in for it, to the ruffling of a calm, smooth life, and gets into trouble. What a blessing it is that I have no inclinations in that direction! Humph! I wonder what the lady has said? Bah! stuff! nonsense! what is it to me? I'm not going to set up as head moralist, and meddle with these affairs. Her father must know best."

He rose, and strolled down to the end of the terrace, to lean over a rugged mass of granite, and he was still there, enjoying the delicious calm of the evening, and marvelling at the beauty of the shadowy, phosphorescent sea, when he heard his host's voice, and throwing aside the fragment of the cigar whose aroma was beginning to be marred by touches of burnt moustache, he turned to meet him.

"Tea is ready, Mr Trethick," he said. "Really I ought to apologise for my neglect."

"Neglect, eh?" said Geoffrey, laughing. "Why, I could bear to be neglected like this every night. You gave me one of the best cigars I ever lit, and let me lounge here and smoke it in peace. Don't apologise, Mr Penwynn; I am quite satisfied."

In spite of his indifference, however, Geoffrey could not refrain from looking curiously at Rhoda and Tregenna as he entered the drawing-room, but their unruffled features told no tales.

Rhoda was seated near the window, and Tregenna on the opposite side, looking more gentlemanly and polished than ever; while Rhoda at once rose, and began talking to the new vicar, leaving Geoffrey to chat over the handed-round tea to Tregenna about mines, their few successes, and their many failures.

"Parson's happy now, I hope," thought Geoffrey, as Mr Penwynn came and carried off Tregenna, after a word of apology about business; and then, as they stood talking at the other end of the room, Mr Penwynn's face was so fully in the light, that Geoffrey could not help noticing that he changed countenance.

"Master Tregenna's saying something unpleasant about business," thought Geoffrey. "The glorious uncertainty of the law is, perhaps, having mine host upon the hip."

"Do you like music, Mr Trethick?" said a voice at his side, and he found that Rhoda Penwynn had left the vicar and approached unobserved.

"You wicked young puss," he said to himself. "You've come to make a buffer of me. That's it, is it? Papa is turning angry about you, eh? and you fear a collision? Well, you shall find me full of spring." Then, smiling – "Yes, I love music," he said aloud. "I am a worshipper at a distance – rather a mild one, I should say. You will sing something, I hope?"

Rhoda crossed readily to the piano, and sang a couple of ballads very sweetly, her voice being rich and resonant, and then it seemed to Geoffrey, who was turning over the music for her, that, in spite of a very brave effort to appear unconcerned, she was growing extremely nervous, for, instead of leaving the piano, she began to pick up piece after piece of music, glancing sharply from her father to Tregenna, and then at the vicar, who was placidly examining an album of scraps.

"I wish you sang, Mr Trethick," she said at last.

"Do you?" he said, looking down at her troubled face.

"Yes. Do you? Will you?"

"Nature has not been very generous to me in the matter of voice. At least she has given me plenty, but the quality is coarse. I'll try something though – with you."

"A duet? Oh, yes!" she said eagerly. "What have we? Could you – do you like Italian?"

"Yes," he said quietly, as he noticed how agitated she was growing, and how bravely she fought to keep it down, and preserve her composure towards her father's guests. "Shall we try that *Trovatore* piece that you just turned over — *Ai nostri monti*."

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, and there was a silence in the room as the rich harmony of the well-blended voices floated out upon the night air. For, in spite of his modest declaration, Geoffrey Trethick possessed a full deep voice, and, being a good musician, he thoroughly enjoyed his task.

"Rather hard on a baritone to set him to sing tenor, Miss Penwynn," he said, laughing. "But I say, what a delicious voice you have!"

Rhoda glanced at him sharply, but the expression of admiration she could see was perfectly sincere, and she knew at once that he was not a man likely to flatter.

That duet gave Rhoda Penwynn time to recover herself, and she was perfectly calm by the end – a calm she managed to maintain until the guests were about to depart.

"By the way, Mr Lee," said the banker, "have you obtained apartments? It is a disgrace to our place that the vicarage is not rebuilt."

"Oh, yes!" said the vicar, mildly, "I have obtained rooms."

"At Mrs Mullion's, I presume?"

"No," said the vicar, turning his glasses for a moment on Geoffrey. "Mr Trethick has taken those."

"Indeed! Then you are at the hotel?"

"No; I have made arrangements to board with a Miss Pavey, at a very pleasant cottage – Dinas Vale. Good-night!"

"I'll walk as far as your rooms with you, Mr Trethick," said Tregenna, as they stepped out into the road. "Have a cigar?"

They lit up, and strolled along the up-and-down ill-paved way, Tregenna evidently laying himself out to make friends with the new arrival, who made himself frank and pleasant, but, somehow, not cordial.

"Drop in and have a chat with me, Mr Trethick," said Tregenna, at parting. "I may be able to further your views. Any one will show you my place."

"Know it," said Geoffrey. "Saw the brass plate on the gate."

"Yes," laughed Tregenna, "one has to put out a sign. But come and see me; perhaps I can help you."

"I don't like after-dinner promises," laughed Geoffrey. "They are rash. I may put you to the test."

"Rash? Oh, no! We are not like that in the west. I shall be only too glad to help you to the best of my power. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Geoffrey remained at the garden gate thinking that his companion had spoken a great deal more loudly than was necessary. Then, as he had not finished his cigar, he resolved to smoke it out, and enjoy for a few minutes the cool night air.

"I don't like to be hasty," he thought, "but I scarcely think that I shall trust you, Mr Tregenna, beyond the reach of my hand. If I am not very much mistaken your civility has a meaning, and you are a confounded scoundrel. If not, I beg your pardon."

"Yes," he said, half aloud, after smoking on for a few minutes and thinking deeply, "it was your voice that I heard down in that old building. Now I wonder who was the girl?"

As the thought crossed his mind, the faint sound of a closing casement smote his ear, when, like a flash, the light came.

"By George! of course," he said. "The other voice was familiar, too. It was our pretty little maiden here. Hang it all! I've tumbled into the thick of a mystery, and if I don't take care I shall be in the middle of the mess."

"Hah?" he exclaimed, as he tapped at the door, "As I said before, it's no business of mine, and her father knows best; but this love-making is the greatest nuisance under the sun, or I ought to say the moon."

Chapter Twelve

Cold Water

Mr John Tregenna had lost no time upon leaving the dining-room, but joined Rhoda, who sat looking rather pale, but prepared for the attack.

She knew that it must come, and, in spite of a feeling of dread, she felt almost glad, when, seating himself beside her, he began, with plenty of calm, quiet assurance, to plead his cause, she listening patiently the while to all he had to say.

Every word he uttered was to Rhoda as so much trouble over, and she would not look nor speak until he had finished, being determined to hear all he had to say, and to let him say it without hinderance, so that the matter should be ended once and for all.

He was too cunning a man – too well versed in human nature – to attempt heroics with such a girl as Rhoda, and there was no enraptured catching of hands, no falling upon one knee, no passionate adjuration. Tregenna began by telling her that he had her father's consent, and that he only wanted hers. That for years past he had loved her with a patient, growing love, which now permeated – he said permeated – his very being, and that it was his only desire that she should become his wife.

As he spoke he held ready in one hand a very handsome diamond hoop ring, which was to be the token of their betrothal, for he felt no doubt upon the subject. Rhoda might make a little demur, and be a bit distant and coquettish, but he felt sure that she had been well schooled by her father, and she was just the woman to become his wife. She attracted him with her handsome face and fine *svelte* figure; she would look well at the head of his table; she would give him position; and, what was more, her father was very wealthy, and that wealth must finally come to him.

Rhoda caught a glimpse of the ring in his hand, for as he fidgeted it about a ray flashed from it betraying its presence, and she knew what it was, for her lips tightened, and a hard look came into her eyes.

At last he was silent, and waiting her reply.

It was a hard task, but she was now well strung up, and turning to him quietly, she said, —

“Don't you think, Mr Tregenna, that it is necessary in such a case for there to exist a mutual feeling of attachment?”

There was something so terribly cold and matter-of-fact in this – something, so to speak, so ungirlish – that it came upon Tregenna like a thunder-clap; but he was equal to the emergency.

“No,” he said eagerly; “certainly not, if the lady has no prior attachment, which you, dear Rhoda, I am sure, have not.”

“No, Mr Tregenna, I certainly have not,” she replied, quietly.

“It is only necessary,” he exclaimed, “that the man should love. The love of the woman will grow.”

“I do not agree with you, Mr Tregenna,” she replied, quietly.

“But, my dearest Rhoda – ”

“Mr Tregenna,” she said firmly, “let us understand one another at once. From a feeling of respect for my father's friend I have heard you to the end, and my respect for you has grown as I have noticed the gentlemanly manner in which you have made known to me your unfortunate attachment.”

“Unfortunate?” he exclaimed, looking at her almost stunned.

“Yes, unfortunate; because I must tell you frankly, Mr Tregenna, that I cannot give you the slightest hope.”

“My dear Rhoda,” he exclaimed, “you mistake me. I do not ask you to be my wife now, but by-and-by. I only ask for time.”

"Time can make no difference, Mr Tregenna," said Rhoda, firmly; "and I have to ask you now, as a gentleman, to accept my refusal of your suit. Once, Mr Tregenna, for all, I can never become your wife."

"Then you do love some one else," he cried, his rage for the moment mastering him.

"Mr Tregenna," said Rhoda, coldly, "this is a matter I am not bound to confess to you, but you will please recollect that I told you I had no prior attachment."

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed hastily. "I had forgotten. I was mad. Pray forgive me, Rhoda. But listen, pray listen. You cannot think how cruelly this cuts me to the heart."

"I grieve to cause you pain, Mr Tregenna," said Rhoda, "but you must give me credit for the fact that this has been none of my seeking. I must ask you now to let me bring what has been a most painful interview to an end."

"Painful?" he cried passionately. "It is death to all my hopes. But I cannot accept this as final. Time will work a change."

"Time will work no change, Mr Tregenna," said Rhoda, firmly. "As my father's friend I have heard you out, and I have tried to reply as kindly as I could."

Tregenna saw that he would be only injuring his cause by pressing his suit, and he desisted; but there was a curious look in his eye, which made Rhoda shiver, as he exclaimed, —

"But the future, Rhoda — Miss Penwynn — dear Miss Penwynn? I am not to take this as a complete dismissal from your presence."

"Mr Tregenna," replied Rhoda, "I have told you plainly that I can never become your wife. If I have been too blunt, or seemed unmaidenly, you must forgive it, and recollect that I have never known a mother's care, but from a child had to assume a woman's duties as the mistress of this house. As to the future — you are my father's friend."

"And yours," he cried eagerly.

"My father's friends are my friends," said Rhoda, rather coldly. "We will then henceforth consider the words which you have addressed to me to-night as having never been spoken."

"As you will," he said hoarsely; "but so long as this heart continues to beat I shall —"

"Mr Tregenna," exclaimed Rhoda, rising, and speaking with dignity, "you are hurt and grieved, but I must ask you forbearance in this."

"Forgive me," he said humbly, as he bent down his head, and hid the strange look that crossed his face, "it shall be as you wish. We are friends, then. What shall we talk about now," he added, with an almost imperceptible sneer, "books or flowers?"

"I was about to ask you what you think of our guests," said Rhoda, trying to be calm and unconcerned, for Tregenna made no effort to leave her.

"Indeed!" he said listlessly, sinking back in his seat as Rhoda took a chair at a short distance. "Do you wish to know?"

"Yes, I should be glad to hear."

"Well," he said cynically, "my honest conviction about our new vicar is that he is a conceited, self-sufficient University prig, stuffed full of classics, and no more suited to manage the people of these parts than that rather obtrusive, stubborn-looking gentleman, Trethick, is to make his way amongst our miners. They will both come to grief."

"Do you think so?"

"Undoubtedly. One will stay three months, and then exchange; the other three weeks, and then probably go abroad."

"Am I to take that as a prophecy?" said Rhoda, smiling.

"Yes; and mark its fulfilment," he replied, trying to speak lightly.

"I think differently," said Rhoda. "As to Mr Lee, I will hazard no conjecture; but Mr Trethick seems to me the kind of man who will force his way by sheer energy."

Tregenna's eyes glistened as he watched the face before him with jealous suspicion, but it was as placid and emotionless as could be.

"Do you think so?"

"I do indeed," replied Rhoda.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "He is an interesting-looking youth."

He felt ready to bite off his own tongue as he uttered this sneer, which escaped him in the bitterness of his spirit, and he awoke to the falseness of the step he had taken by the look of surprise and resentment that appeared in Rhoda's face.

"Then we are to be friends," he hastened to say eagerly; "always to be the best of friends?"

"Yes, Mr Tregenna," replied Rhoda, coldly; and their *tête-à-tête* was ended by the entry of the party from the garden.

Chapter Thirteen

A Visit Underground

“Well, boy!”

“Well, old gentleman!”

The old gentleman, to wit, Uncle Paul, very yellow, very clean-shaven, and carefully got up, seemed disposed to resent this bluff manner of address; but he swallowed his annoyance with a gulp, thumped his cane on the gravel, and went on, —

“Up early, then. The early bird gets the first pick of the worms.”

“Yes, and stands the best chance of being caught by a prowling cat,” said Geoffrey.

“Never mind; get up early and work. Be industrious, and save your money. That’s the way to get on. Take care of the pennies; the pounds will take care of themselves.”

“Nonsense!” replied Geoffrey. “While you are scraping for pennies, you are missing your pounds.”

“Rubbish!” said the old man, sharply. “Get up early, sir, and work. Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, and wealthy, and wise.”

“Which is duly proved, as *Punch* says,” laughed Geoffrey, “by the enormous fortunes accumulated, the health enjoyed, and the wisdom displayed by chimney-sweeps, and other people who rise before the lark.”

“Why, you’re a sceptic, sir,” said the old man, showing his yellow teeth. “Do you know that’s a time-honoured proverb?”

“Yes; but I don’t believe in time-honoured proverbs,” replied Geoffrey. “Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, and wealthy, and wise, indeed!”

“And you are neither of the two last,” chuckled Uncle Paul, “even if you are the first.”

“Quite right, old gentleman,” said Geoffrey, good-humouredly; “but I get up early on principle.”

“Well, then, you didn’t have too much wine last night?”

“No.”

“Dine with Penwynn?”

“I did.”

“Any one else there?”

“Yes.”

“Who?”

“A Mr Tregenna. Like to know what we had for dinner?”

“No?” roared Uncle Paul. “Hang the dinner, sir. Any one else there?”

“The new vicar.”

“Hang the new vicar. The other fellow had some sense. He never asked me why I didn’t go to church.”

“Don’t you go?”

“I? no. It’s very odd,” said the old man, grimly; “but I always have a fit of bile coming on about Saturday night, and it lasts all Sunday. So you saw Tregenna?”

“Yes, I saw Mr Tregenna.”

“Slimy serpent. Hang him.”

“By all means, if you like,” said Geoffrey, laughing, for the choleric ways and speeches of the old man amused him.

“What did you think of the daughter, eh?” said the old fellow, with a croak that was evidently intended to do duty for a chuckle.

“Very nice, sensible girl.”

“Oh! you think so, do you?”

“I do certainly.”

“Marry her,” said Uncle Paul, giving him a poke with his cane. “Plenty of money. Couldn’t do better.”

“But she could,” replied Geoffrey, laughing. “No, old gentleman, I’m not a marrying man.”

“Or look here,” chuckled the old man, “I can find you a wife. No need though, she’ll fall in love with you herself without asking. Lovely woman, sir. Martha – Martha Pavey. Patty you know, but she’s not plump. He! he! he! Well matured and has a little income of her own. She isn’t above forty-four. Good-looking once. Nice shaped mouth till she set up in it a couple of rows of enamelled tombstones to the memory of so many departed teeth. Looks hard and unkissable now. I laughed at ’em when I saw ’em first. Never forgiven me since, and she always looks at me as if she would bite. Poor thing! Thinks I didn’t detect ’em, and goes about complaining of toothache.”

“Poor woman,” said Geoffrey.

“Poor fool!” snarled the other. “She thinks of nothing else but men.”

“Woman’s nature,” said Geoffrey, “but I suppose it is the privilege of the old to be severe. You are old, you know.”

“Devilish,” said the other. “Ah, boy, when you lean your face on your hand, and can feel your skull easily through your skin, you may take it for granted that you are pretty old.”

“Suppose so,” said Geoffrey. “Going my way? No, I suppose not.”

“How the devil d’you know where I’m going?” cried the old fellow, fiercely. “I am going your way, sir; I am.”

“Come along, then,” said Geoffrey, coolly.

“Where?” said Uncle Paul, who was thrown off his guard.

“I’m going underground.”

“Bah! That’s very clever, I suppose you think. That’s modern sharp, fast wit, is it? I’m going underground when my time comes, sir, like a man, and perhaps that won’t be till after you, sir.”

The old man wiped his face upon his orange bandanna here, and looked fiercer than ever.

“Why, what a jolly old pepperbox you are!” cried Geoffrey, laughing outright. “You are all cayenne and gunpowder. Wit be hanged! I said I was going underground, and so I am. I’m going down Horton Friendship mine. Mr Tregenna gave me his card for the manager.”

“Ho!” ejaculated the old gentleman, calming down. “Nice man, Tregenna. Smooth and polished. Make a great friend of him; I would if I were you. He’ll show you how to go to the devil faster than any man I know.”

“I’m afraid I want no teaching, Mr Paul,” said Geoffrey, gravely. “I say, by the way, whose cottage is that down in the cove about a couple of miles along the cliff?”

“Oh! you’ve been there, have you,” said the old man, chuckling. “You are making some nice acquaintances, boy! Did you see pretty Bess?”

“I saw a fine, handsome-looking lass.”

“That’s she. Did she ill-wish you?”

“Not that I know of. Does she do that sort of thing?” said Geoffrey, smiling.

“Oh, yes!” sneered the old gentleman. “They say she’s a witch, and her father’s as scoundrelly an old wrecker and smuggler as ever breathed. He’s one of your kidney, too. Been a miner.”

“A nice character to give a neighbour,” said Geoffrey.

“Confound him! He’s no neighbour of mine, sir. You’d better get your new friend to go down Horton mine with you.”

“What – Tregenna?”

“No, no; Smuggler Prawle. He knows more about the mines than any one here.”

“Does he?” said Geoffrey, eagerly. “Well, perhaps I may ask him some day.”

They were standing just in front of the cottage, and as he spoke Geoffrey glanced upward, to see that Madge Mullion was at the upper window, standing back, but evidently gazing intently down upon him, ready to dart back, though, the moment he raised his eyes; and he went away thinking of his little adventure at Wheal Carnac the previous day, and of how strangely he had become possessed of a secret that might, if it were known, raise him up one, two, if not three, bitter enemies during his stay.

It was a great nuisance, he thought, this bit of knowledge, for his conscience pricked him, and he asked himself whether he ought not to make some communication to Uncle Paul or Mrs Mullion.

“And be called a meddlesome fool for my pains!” he exclaimed angrily. “No; I will not interfere with other people’s business. I have my hands full enough as it is.”

His way out of the little town was over a rough granite-strewn hill, where the wind blew briskly, and the grass and heather seemed to be kept cut down close by the sharp Atlantic gales. His goal was a gaunt-looking building, perched on the highest point of the eminence, and of the customary Cornish mining type – a square, granite engine-house, with tall chimney, and a great beam projecting from the side, rising and falling at slow intervals as it pumped the water from the depths below, to send it flowing in a dirty stream towards the sea.

Geoffrey went swinging along as if he had all the work in the world upon his shoulders, till he became aware of a figure coming in his direction by another track – one which evidently joined his a little on ahead – and he noted that the figure carried a fly-rod over his shoulder.

“Why, it’s the doctor off fishing!” said Geoffrey to himself, as he recognised the fresh-coloured face surmounting the light tweeds. “What a horribly healthy place this must be. Morning, doctor!”

“Good-morning. Did you get your lodgings all right?” said the new-comer, scanning Geoffrey’s face as if in search of the seeds of disease, and looking disappointed.

“Yes, thanks.”

“Well, don’t fall in love with Madge Mullion, or old Mr Paul will be setting me to work to poison you.”

“Confound it all!” cried Geoffrey, facing round as he stopped short. “Do you people here think of nothing else but falling in love?”

“Well, I don’t know,” said the doctor, dreamily, as he pushed his soft hat on one side, and gave his head a rub. “Fortunately for me they do think a great deal of that sort of thing.”

“So it seems. I’ve heard enough of it during the past four-and-twenty hours to make it seem as if your people thought young women were gunpowder, and I was a match.”

“Ah, yes!” said the doctor, sadly. “It’s the old story, you know – marrying and giving in marriage. What should we do for our population without?”

“Population don’t seem to keep you very busy, doctor.”

“Pretty well,” he said quietly: “pretty well; people have very large families about here, but they emigrate.”

“Do they?” said Geoffrey.

“Yes, the mining trade has been bad. But people have very large families about here,” said the doctor, with a sigh. “I’ve got ten of them.”

“Fruitful vine and olive branches round the table, eh?” said Geoffrey.

“Ye-es,” said the doctor, making an imaginary cast with his fly-rod over the heather; “but when the vine is too fruitful it rather shades the table, you know.”

“So I should suppose,” replied Geoffrey, with a slight grimace. “Have you good fishing here?”

“No – oh no! Nothing but small trout in the little streams, and they are getting poisoned by the mining refuse.”

“I’ll try them some day,” said Geoffrey.

“I wouldn’t if I were you,” said the doctor, nervously. “It isn’t worth your while, and it’s very hard work to get a dish now-a-days,” and he glanced with anxious eyes at his companion. For, on non-busy mornings, Mr James Rumsey, MRCSE – the “doctor” being a local degree – found it useful

to take his rod and capture a dish of trout for the home dinner, if he did not go out in the bay, in a borrowed boat, in search of something more substantial.

“Ah well, we’ll see,” said Geoffrey. “Yonder’s Horton Friendship, is it not?”

“Yes, that’s it,” said the doctor, who seemed relieved. “That’s the manager’s office close by. They’ve got a manager there.”

“Oh! have they?” said Geoffrey, who was amused by the doctor’s subdued, weary way. “All right; I’m going to see it, though. Good-morning.”

“Good-morning,” said the doctor, and making dreamy casts with his rod, he went on over the heather.

“Looks dull, and as if he had lived too much in the shade – of the vine and olive branches,” said Geoffrey, as he strode along. “Well, ten branches would keep off a good deal of the sun of a man’s life. What a row those stamps make!”

The rattling noise was caused by a row of iron-faced piles, which were being raised and let fall by a great cogged barrel upon a quantity of pieces of tin ore, with which they were fed, and as he drew nearer to watch them, the noise was almost deafening; but all the same he stopped to watch them curiously, and evidently dissatisfied with the primitive nature of the machine.

Farther on he paused to watch where a dozen women and boys were busy directing the flow of a stream of muddy water over a series of sloping boards, so as to wash the crushed ore free from earthy particles and powdered stone, till it fell of its own gravity into a trough prepared for its reception, where it looked like so much coffee-grounds waiting to be taken out and dried.

“Very, very primitive, and full of waste,” muttered Geoffrey then, as he noted the ruddy, healthy look of the people who ceased working to stare at the stranger, an example followed by a couple of men whose clothes seemed reddened by some mineral.

The manager welcomed the visitor in the most civil manner, and furnished him with a rough suit of flannel for the descent, as well as a stiff, solid kind of hat, which did duty for helmet, to protect his head from falling stones, and also for holder of a large tallow candle, which was stuck in front, so as to leave his hands at liberty.

The necessity for this was shown as soon as they reached the great square shaft, which was divided by a stout wooden partition into two. Up one of these came and went, by means of a rusty iron chain running over a wheel, a couple of long iron skeps or buckets, one of which, full of tin ore mingled with quartz rock and the ruddy mineral which Geoffrey had noted, came to the surface as they reached the pit.

“We go down here,” said Geoffrey’s companion, as a man lifted a heavy trap-door in a framework of planks, worn by many feet, and disclosing a dark hole up which came a hot, steaming vapour, which floated away in a thin cloud.

Geoffrey was as brave as most men, but he could not avoid a feeling of shrinking, as he saw what he had undertaken to do. He had expected to step into a cage such as was in use at coalpits, or perhaps have had to make use of the peculiar machine which lowered the miners from platform to platform ten or a dozen feet at a time; but here, as he gazed down into the dark, misty heat, he found that he would have to trust entirely to his own nerve and strength, for the descent was by a series of wet, greasy, nearly perpendicular ladders, placed zigzag from platform to platform, and with very little to save him from a fall too awful to contemplate.

The manager watched him narrowly before asking if he was ready, and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, he went down to the first wet, rotten-looking platform, where he stopped, and on being joined by Geoffrey he struck a match, and lit the candles in their caps.

“How deep is the mine?” asked Geoffrey.

“Two hundred fathom,” was the reply.

“Twelve hundred feet!” said Geoffrey. “A good long descent by ladders. How is it you have no chain and cage?”

“Money!” was the abrupt reply, and after a warning to him to hold tight, the manager, a rough-spoken Cornishman, continued the descent, Geoffrey following, and finding every thing of the most primitive character. The ladders were clumsily made, splashed with candle grease, and terribly worn; the platforms so old and rotten that they seemed unsafe; and yet down for twelve hundred feet stretched these ladders, one after the other, in apparently interminable length.

Geoffrey Trethick’s nerves were strong, but they were well put to the test, for every now and then a step of the ladder gave, or rattled beneath his weight. Now he would find a round so greasy that his foot would slip, while his candle sputtered, and several times nearly became extinguished, as they passed some shower of water that forced itself out of a vein in the rock.

“Rather rough work,” said the manager, and his voice sounded echoing and strange in the gloomy shaft, seeming to whisper past him, and die away amidst the maze of ladders overhead.

“Rather!” replied Geoffrey, who was beginning to be drenched with perspiration. “How much farther?” he continued.

“Farther! Oh, we are not half-way down yet, sir – nothing like it,” was the reply. “Like to rest?”

“No. Go on.”

Down – down – down – lower and lower, in one apparently endless descent, with the noise of the trickling water growing louder and louder, and ever and again a hoarse, rattling, clanging noise as the chain bore buckets up and buckets down, and the great pump worked its mighty piston to free the mine from the water collected in the sump.

At times it was impossible not to feel that the bucket coming rushing through the darkness was descending upon the heads of those who laboriously climbed down, or that the enormous piston-rod would crush them to death at its next movement, instead of working steadily on the other side of the stout dividing boards. But the rod worked on, and the chain rattled as the buckets rose and fell, and with the trickling and plashing of the water growing louder, the ladders more wet and coated with grease, the platforms more slippery and rotten, Geoffrey sturdily kept on descending, but with the thought always forcing itself upon his brain that every ladder would have to be climbed before he could see the light of day.

But Geoffrey possessed all the stubborn determination of a true Englishman. He was truly one of those who did not know when he was beaten, and he was ready to go on with a task he had begun until brain and muscle completely gave way, and then only would he have paused and waited for strength before beginning again.

They had stopped on one of the platforms to snuff the flaring candles, a supply of which the manager carried in a tin box slung from his shoulder, when once more from the other part of the shaft came the rushing noise of the ascending and descending buckets, and so close did they sound that Geoffrey involuntarily shrank, feeling that they must strike against him and crush him on the narrow platform where he stood. But after this his ears grew more accustomed to the sound, and he began again plodding steadily downward, the frantic desire to cling tightly to the ladder and ask for help growing weaker as he became more used to the task.

At last the manager stopped, and pointed to a black opening before him like a little arch in the side of the shaft.

“Here’s one of the old galleries,” he said. “Would you like to see it?”

“Are the men at work here?”

“Work? No! Nor haven’t been these fifty years. But there’s enough to see there to give you an idea of the mine, and it would save you from going down farther if you are sick of it.”

“I’m not sick of it,” said Geoffrey, stoutly. “I’m only warm. Go on down to the bottom, and let’s see the workings.”

“All right!” said the manager, smiling, as he gave Geoffrey a peculiar look; and a fresh start was made.

“That fellow Tregenna has done this to try me,” thought Geoffrey. “He could have given me an introduction to some mine where there was a regular cage. Never mind: I’m not chicken enough to give it up!” and, regardless of the rotten, wet ladders, he steadily went on, his spirits rising and his confidence increasing – for as he kept on noting the primitive way in which every thing was done, he felt more and more satisfied that if science were brought to bear in such a mine as this the profits must be largely increased.

For instance, he reasoned, here were the miners forced to undergo a long and arduous piece of toil before they could reach their work, and when their spell was over they had a fresh task to climb patiently up at a time when they were exhausted with toil, thus spending fruitlessly many hours every week.

“I’ve come to the right place,” he thought, with a feeling of exultation coming over him, “and if I don’t make my way it is my own fault.”

“Tired?” said the manager, from below.

“No,” was the sturdy answer. “Are you?”

A low, chuckling laugh came up to Geoffrey as he glanced down at the descending-light in the manager’s hat.

“Well, if you put it in that way, sir, I am; and we’ll get a little wind here by this old lode.”

He stopped on the next platform, and, Geoffrey joining him, he once more snuffed the candles. There was another opening going horizontally into the bowels of the earth, where a lode of tin had been followed until it had become worthless. The roof glistened with huge crystals, which flashed in the light of the candles as they were held inside what looked like a subterranean passage into a castle, the abode of some giant of the nether world.

“I suppose the workings below are just like this?” said Geoffrey.

“Just the same, sir,” was the eager reply; “and if you’d like to give up now, we could inspect this drive for a few hundred yards, and then go back. It’s rather dangerous, though, for there have been some falls from the roof, and the galleries are like a net.”

“But I don’t want to give up,” said Geoffrey, laughing, “and am ready as soon as ever you like.”

“I never got any one to get down farther than this,” said the manager, who started again, descending in silence, broken only by the occasional echoing whirr of the ascending and descending buckets, and the hiss and splash of the falling water. The heat seemed to increase, and the depth might have been miles, so endless seemed the ladders, and so tedious the descent.

“Give me a word if you feel likely to let go,” said Geoffrey’s guide just when they were on one of the wettest, weakest, and most slippery ladders of the descent. “There was a man once fell off this very ladder, and knocked off the man below him as well.”

“Were they hurt?” said Geoffrey.

“Don’t suppose as they were,” was the cool reply. “They broke through platform after platform, for the woodwork was very rotten just then. They couldn’t have known any thing after they fell, for they were quite dead when they got them up. It was a gashly job.”

“Pleasant incident to relate now,” thought Geoffrey. Then aloud – “You don’t often have accidents?”

“Well, not very. We get a fall of rock sometimes, or a ladder breaks, or a man falls down the shaft. Now and then, too, there’s a bit of an accident with the powder when they are blasting. But we do pretty well. We’re not like your coal-mining folks, with their safety-lamps and gas.”

“The mines are, of course, free from foul air?”

“Oh, yes; sweet as a nut.”

“But how much farther is it?” said Geoffrey. “Surely we’ve come down a thousand feet.”

“Well, yes; I suppose we have,” said the man, coolly. “I don’t think there’s more than a half-dozen more ladders. Yes, seven,” he said.

These were steadily climbed down, but seemed the longest of them all. At last, however, they stood beside the great sump or water-cistern, which received the end of the vast pumping apparatus, all of which Geoffrey carefully examined with a look of disgust at its primitive character and clumsiness.

Chapter Fourteen

Pengelly – Miner

"I should just like to shake hands with you, sir," said Geoffrey's guide, wiping his hand carefully upon his flannel trousers after using his fingers to snuff both candles. "I never thought you'd come down half-way – that I didn't. You're a plucked un, sir. That's about what you are, if you'll excuse me."

Geoffrey laughed, and shook hands with his guide, finding that he had risen wonderfully in the man's estimation, the manager looking at him quite admiringly.

"My name's Curnow," he said, "Richard Curnow, and I'd like to see you again, sir. Now what can I show you?"

"Every thing!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "Let me see all the workings, and what sort of stuff you are sending up."

"Why, you've been down a mine before, sir?" said the manager, curiously, and he gazed inquiringly in Geoffrey's face with a look of suspicion, gradually growing plainer; but he remained very civil, and led the way through the maze of passages through which for many a generation the ore had been picked out – laboriously hewn out of the solid rock as the veins of tin were patiently followed. Every now and then some dark, echoing gallery struck off at right angles, till Geoffrey felt, as he stumbled on, that a stranger would soon lose his way in such a terrible labyrinth, if not his life through falling down one of the well-like pits yawning here and there at his feet.

Sometimes the way had a lofty roof, and the floor was clear; sometimes they had to stoop and wade through mud and water, and crawl round buttresses of rock to avoid a fall, or to step from sleeper to sleeper of a very primitive tramway.

"Let me see," said the manager. "Amos Pengelly ought to be somewhere about here. Wait a minute, and let's try if we can hear him."

There were only a few distant echoing noises to be heard, as they stood in the midst of that black darkness, their candles just shedding a halo of light round them, and casting grotesque shadows of their forms upon the glistening walls, and they once more groped more than walked along, Geoffrey pausing now and again, though, to examine with his light the various tokens of minerals that could be seen cropping out on wall and roof, to all of which actions the guide gave an impatient shrug.

"They don't mean any thing," he said. "We've pretty well worked the old place out. There's Amos!"

Geoffrey turned from the place he was examining, and could hear a confused sound; but after journeying on for about a hundred yards the manager stopped and touched his arm.

They had just reached a low side passage, at the end of which there was a faint glow, and there, keeping time to the clicking sharp strokes of a pick, came the sounds of a rich tenor voice, whose owner seemed to be throwing his whole soul into what he was singing.

"Hal – le – hal – le – lu – i – jah. Hal – le – hal – le – lu – i – jah."

And so on slowly, every other syllable being accompanied by a stroke of the pick. Then, as the verse of the old-fashioned anthem being sung came to an end, there was a pause, the light seemed to be shifted, and the singer began again, but this time choosing Luther's hymn as an accompaniment to the strokes of his pick.

"Here's a gentleman come to see you, Amos! Creep out, my lad; we can't get in to you."

They had approached the singer till the ceiling was so low that it would have necessitated crawling to where Geoffrey could see by the light of a candle, stuck with a lump of clay against the rocky wall, a dark figure, half lying upon one side, vigorously working a sharp-pointed steel pickaxe, and chipping down fragments of glistening tin-grained quartz.

On hearing the summons, the figure gave itself a roll over and crawled slowly out, when in the short, lame, thick-set miner Geoffrey recognised the man with the piece of conger eel who had explained the fishing to him on the cliff.

"This is our Amos Pengelly," said the manager, as if he were showing one of the curiosities of the mine; "works all week-days and sings psalms; goes out preaching on Sundays."

"Well," said Geoffrey, bluntly, "he might do worse."

Amos nodded and looked curiously at the speaker, who went down on hands and knees to creep to where the miner had been at work; took down the candle from the wall, and examined the vein of glistening tin and the fragments that had been chipped off.

"Very poor stuff," said Geoffrey, as he returned.

"Ah, we work out poorer stuff than that," said the manager, "don't we, Amos?"

"Ay," said the miner, looking eagerly at the visitor. "Was you thinking of buying this mine, sir?"

"No!" said Geoffrey, shortly.

"Surveying it for some one else, perhaps?"

"What's the good of talking like that, Amos," said the manager, "when it is not for sale?"

"I heered as it was," said Amos, still gazing searchingly at the well-built young man before him. "But whether it be or not, sir, if you wants to buy a good working and paying mine, you buy Wheal Carnac."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the manager, a man who had evidently been himself a working miner. "Oh, come, Amos! I wonder at you who call yourself a Christian man trying to persuade a stranger to buy that old swindle."

"I don't care!" cried Amos, excitedly, "Christian or no Christian," and he gave his pick a blow on the rock which made the sparks fly, "I know there's good stuff down that shaft, and if it arn't been found yet it's because they haven't looked in the right place. You go and look at it, sir, and see what you think."

"Don't you do nothing of the sort, sir," said the manager. "It's a gashly old hole, down which thousands of pounds have been thrown, and machinery wasted over. Don't you take any notice of what Amos says."

"All right," said the miner, making the sparks fly again as he smote the rock angrily. "I haven't worked underground man and boy for five and twenty year without knowing something about it, and as I'm a honest man, why Wheal Carnac's a fortune to them as know'd how to work it."

"I'll have another look at the place," said Geoffrey, who was struck by the man's earnestness.

"You just do, sir, you just do, and if that place don't turn out right, I'll – I'll –"

"Swallow your pick heft, eh, Amos?" said the manager, tauntingly.

"Nay, I won't; but I'll never believe in any thing again. But you can't look at the stuff they got up, sir, she's full of water."

"And it would take hundreds of pounds to get her dry, eh, Amos? Don't you worry your head about Wheal Carnac, sir, unless you want a place to work a company, and draw a salary until they are sick of it."

"As some rogues down in these parts do," said Amos, making the sparks fly again.

"I don't know about rogues," said the manager, laughing. "There's always plenty of fools with heaps of money, which they want to invest in mines, and I don't see why the adventurers shouldn't have it as well as any one else."

Geoffrey turned in disgust from the manager, and held his candle so that its light should fall upon the frank, honest face of the miner, whose ways rather won upon him.

"Look here, Pengelly," he said, "you and I will have a chat about Wheal Carnac and a look at the ore together."

"Will you, sir? will you?" cried the miner, excitedly. "I can show you some of the ore. When will you look?"

"Any time you like," said Geoffrey. "I don't suppose any thing will come of it, but I came to see all I can."

"I've – I've waited years upon years to see that mine fairly tried," cried Pengelly, "but every one laughs at me."

"Of course they do, Amos," said the manager, banteringly. "Why, you did trick one party into fooling away thousands."

"Trick? trick? I tricked any one?" cried the miner, who had for the last few minutes been writhing under the lash of the other's tongue. "It's a lie – a cruel lie!" he exclaimed, and in a furious burst of passion he whirled up his steel pick as though it had been a straw, to strike at the cause of his annoyance.

Amos Pengelly's furious burst of passion was but of momentary duration. As Geoffrey made a step forward to seize his arm, the pick dropped from the man's hand, his face became convulsed, and all token of menace had gone. One moment he had been ready to strike down the manager for hinting that he was dishonest; the next his arms fell to his sides, his head drooped, his shoulders heaved, and he turned away into the darkness of the mine, uttering a low, piteous moaning as if torn by some great agony that he wished to hide from the sight of man.

"Come away, sir," said the manager, quietly, "he won't like to face us again to-day," and as Geoffrey rather unwillingly followed him, the manager went on towards the foot of the shaft. "Poor old Amos! I believe he's a bit touched in the head. I haven't seen him in one of his fits of passion like that for months. He's off now into one of the darkest corners he can find, and he'll be down on his knees praying as hard as ever he can. His temper gets the better of him sometimes, and he's such a religious chap that he won't forgive himself for getting in a rage; but when he comes up to grass to-night he'll walk straight to my office, as humble as a child, and beg my pardon."

"And you'll forgive him?" said Geoffrey.

"Forgive him? Oh, yes! poor chap. Why not? He can't help it."

"He seems an honest fellow," said Geoffrey, musingly.

"Honest? Oh, yes! he's honest as the day's long, sir. I'd trust him with all our sales' money without counting it. His failing is that he's gone off religious crazy; and what's as bad, he's in love with a handsome girl who don't care for him. Bess Prawle, down at the Cove, is as straight as an arrow, and poor Amos is quite a cripple, and not the sort of fellow to take the fancy of a dashing girl like she."

"Poor fellow," said Geoffrey, softly, as he followed his guide, who kept on conversing.

"Then, too, sir, poor old Amos got that craze on about Wheal Carnac, and wanting people to believe in it, so that altogether it's no wonder he turns queer. People say that Bess Prawle, who's a bit of a witch, has ill-wished him, but I don't know. One thing I do know, though – poor old Amos is about as good a workman as ever handled a pick."

"Then," said Geoffrey, thoughtfully, "you think Wheal Carnac is worthless?"

"Worthless? Worthless? Ha-ha-ha!" roared the manager. "If you had lived down here you'd have laughed as I do to see what money's been wasted there. No end of people have been took in with that mine. Just you go and have a look at it yourself, sir. You seem to know a bit about mining. Of course you can't do much, but you can turn over a few of the stones and see what was dug out last. Now, sir, what do you say – would you like to see any more of the place?"

"No," replied Geoffrey, who had been in several parts of the mine, and spoken to different men at work, "no, I have seen all I wish to see for one day," and, following his guide to the foot of the shaft, the terrible array of ladders was attacked; and at last, with wearied and strained muscles, Geoffrey reached the mouth in safety, feeling as if he had never seen the sky look so pure and blue, or felt the breath of heaven so sweet.

He was drenched with perspiration, and only too glad to accept the manager's hospitality, and have a wash and rest. But he was well satisfied with his visit, in which he had learned no little, but above all, he could not help dwelling upon the words of the miner, and feeling deeply impressed about

the deserted mine – so deeply indeed that what had been merely a visit of curiosity proved to be the turning-point in his future career.

An hour afterwards he was striding back towards Carnac, while Amos Pengelly was still upon his knees in the darkest part of Horton Friendship, the great tears streaming from his eyes as he prayed, in all the sincerity of his great soul, for forgiveness of his burst of anger, and for strength to control the temper that mastered him from time to time, lest the day should come when he should go forth into the world with the curse of Cain upon his brow – for that was the black shadow that haunted the poor fellow's life.

Chapter Fifteen

Mr Penwynn Makes a Friend

"I cannot help it, papa. You know how obedient I have always been to you; but in this case I really cannot give way."

"Yes, yes, yes, Rhoda! you obey me in a thousand unimportant things, but now there is something upon which a great deal of our future turns you refuse."

"I cannot – I never could love Mr Tregenna, papa."

"He is a thorough gentleman, is he not?"

"Yes – oh, yes!"

"And handsome, and well-informed, and clever. A thoroughly polished – there, quite a ladies' man."

"Ladies' man!" exclaimed Rhoda, in tones of disgust. "Handsome and well-informed, of course, papa."

"Well then, my dear," said Mr Penwynn, ignoring Rhoda's peculiar look. "What more do you want?"

"Papa! do you think I want to marry a ladies' man?" said Rhoda, scornfully.

Mr Penwynn looked at the bright flushed face, and felt as proud as he did vexed. He was seated at a writing-table, and the blotting-paper before him bore testimony to his annoyance, for it was covered with the initials of unpleasant words, which he kept dotting down to relieve his feelings – a habit in which he indulged sometimes at the office, as Mr Chynoweth was well aware. He nearly spoiled a new quill pen in dashing down another letter, and then went on, —

"No, no, of course not, Rhody; but Tregenna is not a silly dandy. Besides, as I have before told you, he is very useful to me, and an alliance with him would be most valuable. There, there – you must think the matter over."

"I cannot, papa. I have told Mr Tregenna plainly that he must not hope."

"Nonsense, my dear; take time. Let the matter rest awhile. Be friends with him, and in a few months you will be ready to regret this hasty decision."

"No, papa," said Rhoda, decidedly. "Mr Tregenna can never be more to me than an acquaintance."

"You have not heard any thing – any serious – there, any scandal?"

"I, papa? I have heard that he is too attentive – there, it is not that."

"Then try not to be so foolish, my dear. I am going down to the office, and I shall see Tregenna again to-day. Let me tell him that he is not to look upon the matter as finally closed. Poor fellow! I never saw a man look so dejected. I could not have believed that he would take it so to heart."

"Papa," said Rhoda, impetuously, "I have promised Mr Tregenna that we should continue friends. If you lead him to believe that he is to persevere with his suit, I shall absolutely hate him."

Mr Penwynn turned upon her angrily, but as she stood before him, with heightened colour and flashing eyes, gazing full in his face, he felt that she was no weak girl to be subdued by a burst of parental anger, and forced into a course against which her spirit rebelled. For some reason or other she evidently felt an intense repugnance to Tregenna, and, though he would gladly have gained the day, and made the solicitor his ally, he felt that at present there was not the slightest chance for such a consummation of his plans. He knew his child's character only too well, and seeing how hopeless it was at present to persevere, he made a virtue of necessity and gave way.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, quietly, "God knows that I would not force on this affair against your prospects of happiness. There, there," he continued, taking her in his arms, "we must not fall

out, Rhody. I can't afford to have clouds come between us. Wicked tyrant," he said, laughing, "and oppressor of the poor as you think me, Rhody, I want your love, my child, and I must have it."

"Papa, papa!" she cried, clinging to him, "pray forgive me. I could not love Mr Tregenna. And why should you wish to rob yourself? I have only enough love for you, dear," she continued, taking his face between her hands, and kissing him passionately. "If I reproach you sometimes about the poor people, it is because I am so jealous of my father's good name, and it cuts me to the heart to think that the people should not look up to, and venerate him as I do myself."

"Tut-tut-tut! my darling. If I were a saint they would still talk. Am I not working for you? I want you to be rich, and to stand as high in the world as I can contrive."

"Yes, yes, I know, dear," she said, with her hand playing about his face and caressing his grey hair; "but I would rather be poor than lose the people's respect."

"Well, well, Rhody, my darling," he said, smiling, "we'll be rich and respectable as well. There, there, I must go. John Tregenna must get some one else to cure his broken heart. Good-by, my dear, good-by."

"And you are not angry with me, papa?"

"Not a bit, Rhody," he said, kissing her affectionately, and looking at her with eyes suffused, but full of pride. "Angry? no! God bless you, my dear! I'm disappointed, but I don't know but what I like you all the better for your spirit."

He hurried away to hide his weakness, for his love for his child was the one soft spot in his nature.

"I'm glad, and yet I'm sorry," he said. "Tregenna would have been a powerful friend, and now what I have to hope is that he will not prove to be a bitter enemy. I must fight it out, I suppose, just as I have fought out far worse troubles."

"Any one been, Chynoweth?" he said to his confidential clerk, as he entered his office.

"Mr Tregenna's waiting to see you, sir."

"Humph! so soon," muttered Mr Penwynn, who was somewhat taken aback; but he put a good face upon it, entered his private room, and shook hands with the solicitor, whose eyes were fixed upon him inquiringly.

"Well," he said, "what news?"

"Bad," replied Mr Penwynn, quietly.

"You have had a long talk with her?"

"Yes – a very long talk."

"What does she say?"

"She is immovable." John Tregenna's face grew very dark, and he rose from his chair to walk excitedly up and down the office.

"Did you – did you ask for time?" he said hoarsely.

"I did indeed, Tregenna."

"Did you tell her that I was your best friend?"

"I did, Tregenna. I pleaded your cause as hard as if it had been my own; but she is as firm as so much granite. My dear fellow, I am very sorry, but I am afraid you must give it up."

"It's a lie – a cursed lie!" roared Tregenna, who could not control his rage and disappointment. "You have been fighting against me all along, and it is by your orders that she throws me over. I see it all now. You have been playing a cursed, double-faced, traitorous part, and I was a fool to trust to your smooth tongue. But mark my words, Penwynn –"

"John Tregenna," said Mr Penwynn, rising and speaking with dignity, "you are now in a passion, produced by what is, of course, a bitter disappointment; but pray in what manner have I failed towards you that you should make such an unfair charge?"

“What have you done?” cried Tregenna, grinding his white teeth. “Did you not lead me on for your own ends to believe that she would accept me, and submit me to the humiliation of this second refusal, which I feel sure now was at your instigation.”

“Mr Tregenna,” said the banker, quietly, but with anger striving for the mastery, “will you have the goodness to go now. Some other time when you are cool I shall be willing to talk to you. We cannot discuss the matter now, for it would be better that we two should not come to an open quarrel.”

Tregenna snatched up his hat, darted a fierce look at the speaker, and strode towards the door, passed out, but in the act of banging it after him he recovered the mastery over his maddened brain.

He came back, closed the door after him softly, threw himself into a chair, and sat down with his forehead resting upon his hands.

Mr Penwynn stood by the table, with one hand in his breast, watching him, and for a time there was an impressive silence in the room.

At the end of a few minutes Tregenna drew a long, deep breath, and rose with his face calm, and a saddened look softening his eyes. He let fall his hands, rose, and advanced towards Rhoda's father.

“Forgive me, Penwynn,” he said, humbly. “Let me apologise for what I said just now. Forgive me. You cannot tell the agony I suffered, nor conceive the utter feeling of despair and disappointment, nor the rage which seemed to force me to speak as I did. It is over,” he said, as if to himself, “over now. But you will forgive me, Penwynn?”

“Yes,” said the banker, quietly, “I forgive you, Tregenna.”

“My words,” continued the latter, “were as false and cruel as they were undeserved, and I cannot reproach myself enough for my mad folly. Can I apologise more humbly, Penwynn?” he added, with a sad smile.

“You acknowledge, then, that I did my best for you?” said Mr Penwynn.

“I do,” cried Tregenna, eagerly; “and I believe that you acted in all sincerity. Penwynn, you and I must not quarrel. As to Rhoda – Miss Penwynn – if I am not to have her love, let me enjoy her friendship and esteem.”

Mr Penwynn looked at the speaker coldly and searchingly for a few moments, but he could see nothing to indicate that the man before him was not perfectly sincere, and ready to say and do any thing in reparation of the past outbreak.

“You don't believe me, Penwynn,” cried Tregenna, bitterly. “For heaven's sake, have a little feeling for a man. Here am I thrown in an instant from a state of hope that I might realise my fondest wishes into a state of utter, abject despair. I am not an angel, man, that I can bear such a disappointment unmoved.”

Mr Penwynn still continued his scrutiny.

“It is a bitter – a cruel overthrow,” continued Tregenna, “and a few moments back I feel as if I must have been mad – I was mad. I could have said and done any thing. Even how I can hardly keep calm. Have some pity on me.”

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