ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

TWO SIDES OF THE FACE: MIDWINTER TALES

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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A Tale of Wild Justice.

I.

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Beside a high-road in the extreme West of England stands a house which you might pass many times without suspecting it of a dark history or, indeed, any history worth mention. The country itself, which here slopes westward from the Mining District to Mount's Bay, has little beauty and—unless you happen to have studied it—little interest. It is bare, and it comes near to be savage without attaining to the romantic. It includes, to be sure, one or two spots of singular beauty; but they hide themselves and are not discoverable from the road, which rewards you only by its extravagant wealth of wild flowers, its clean sea-breeze, and perhaps a sunset flaming across the low levels and silhouetting the long shoulder of Godolphin Hill between you and the Atlantic, five miles distant.

Noting, as you passed, the size of the house, its evident marks of age, and the meanness of its more modern outbuildings, you would set it down for the residence of an old yeoman family fallen on evil days. And your second thought—if it suggested a second—might be that these old yeomen, not content with a lonely dwelling in a lonely angle of the land, had churlishly built themselves in and away from sight even of the infrequent traveller; for a high wall enclosing a courtlage in front screens all but the upper story with its slated roof, heavy chimneys and narrow upper windows; and these again are half hidden by the boughs of

two ragged yew trees growing within the enclosure. Behind the house, on a rising slope, tilled fields have invaded a plantation of noble ash trees and cut it back to a thin and ugly quadrilateral. Ill-kept as they are, and already dilapidated, the modern farm-buildings wear a friendlier look than the old mansion, and by contrast a cheerful air, as of inferiors out-at-elbows, indeed, but unashamed, having no lost dignities to brood upon.

Yet it may happen that your driver—reading, as he thinks, some curiosity in your glance at Steens (for so the house is called), or politely anxious to beguile the way—pulls up his horse and with a jerk of his whip draws your attention to certain pock-marks in the courtlage wall. Or perhaps, finding you really curious but unable from your seat in the vehicle to distinguish them, he dismounts and traces them out for you with the butt of his whip-handle. They are bullet-marks, he says, and there are plenty of others on the upper front of the house within—even grooves cut by bullets in the woodwork of the windows. Then follows a story which you will find some difficulty in swallowing. That in 1734, when Walpole was keeping England at peace—that almost at the moment when he boasted, "There are fifty thousand men slain this year in Europe, and not one Englishman,"—an unmilitary pewterer was here holding at bay the Sheriff, his posse and half a regiment of soldiers, slaying seven and wounding many; and that for eight months he defied the law and defended himself, until cannon had to be dragged over the roads from Pendennis Castle to quell him—such a tale may well seem incredible to you unless you can picture the isolation of Cornwall in days when this highway was a

quag through which, perhaps twice a week, a train of pack-horses floundered. The man who brought Roger Stephen to justice, though tardily and half against his sense of right, was Sir John Piers, of Nansclowan, hard by. And when Sir John—"the little baronet," as he was called, a Parliamentman, and the one whom Walpole never could bribe—married pretty Mistress Catherine, the heiress of Sherrington across Tamar, his lady's dowry was hauled down through the Duchy to Nansclowan in waggons—a wonder to behold—and stacked in Nansclowan cellars: ten thousand pounds, and every doit of it in half-crowns. Eighty thousand half-crowns!

Be pleased to reflect upon these cellared piles of silver, and what they indicate of Cornish life in those days: and bear in mind that they were stacked in place a short ten years before Roger Stephen, a mile-and-a-half away, first let fly his bullets at the Sheriff, on the principle that an Englishman's house is his castle, and in firm conviction—shared by all the countryside and in the bottom of his heart by Sir John himself—that this particular castle was Roger Stephen's; not perhaps by law, but assuredly by right.

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Four miles south of Steens, and a trifle over, lies the market town of Helston (or 'Helleston' as men wrote it in 1734, and ought to write it still); on the road to nowhere and somnolent then as now, but then as now waking up once a year, on the 8th of May, to celebrate the Feast of Flora and welcome back the summer. She is brought in at daybreak

with green boughs and singing, and at noon the citizens dance through the streets in her honour, the Mayor himself leading off as the town band strikes up its immemorial quickstep, the staid burgesses following with their partners. At first they walk or amble two and two, like animals coming out of Noah's ark; then, at a change in the tune, each man swings round to the lady behind him, 'turns' her, regains his partner, 'turns' her too, and the walk is resumed. And so, alternately walking and twirling, the procession sways down the steep main street and in and out of the houses left open for it—along the passage from front door to court or garden, out at the back door, in at the back door of the next open house, and through to the street again—the beadles preceding with wreathed wands, the band with decorated drum, the couples 'turning' duly at the break in the tune, though it catch them in the narrowest entrance or half-way down a flight of steps.

On the 8th of May, 1734, at the foot of Coinage-hall Street, hard by the Bowling Green, a pewterer's shop stood open, like its neighbours, to admit the Flora. But the master of the shop and his assistant—he kept no apprentice—sat working as usual at their boards, perhaps the only two men in Helleston who disregarded the public holiday. But everyone knew Roger Stephen to be a soured man, and what old Malachi Hancock did was of no account.

Malachi sat at his bench in the rear of the shop turning the rim of a pewter plate, and Roger Stephen in the front, for the sake of better light, peering into the bowels of a watch which had been brought to him to be cleaned—a rare job, and one which in his sullen way he enjoyed. From youth

up he had been badly used. His father, Humphrey Stephen, owned Steens, and was a man of substance; a yeoman with money and land enough to make him an esquire whenever he chose. In those days it was the custom in Cornish families of the better class to send the eldest son to college (usually to Oxford), and thence, unless the care of his estates claimed him at home, into one of the liberal professions. Sometimes the second son would follow him to college and proceed to Holy Orders, but oftener he had to content himself as apprentice to an apothecary or an attorney. The third son would, like Roger Stephen, be bound to a pewterer or watchmaker, the fourth to a mercer, and so on in a descending scale. But Roger, though the only child of a rich man, had been denied his natural ambition, and thrust as a boy into the third class. His mother had died young, and from the hour of her death (which the young man set down to harsh usage) he and his father had detested each other's sight. In truth, old Humphrey Stephen was a violent tyrant and habitually drunk after two o'clock. Roger, self-repressed as a rule and sullen, found him merely abhorrent. During his mother's lifetime, and because she could not do without him, he had slept at Steens and walked to and from his shop in Helleston; but on the day after the funeral he packed and left home, taking with him old Malachi, a family retainer whom Humphrey had long ago lamed for life by flinging a crowbar at him in a fit of passion.

So for twelve years he had lodged and taught Malachi his trade in the dirty, low-browed shop, over which a pewter basin hung for sign and clashed against the tilt whenever a sea-breeze blew. Malachi did his marketing: Roger himself

rarely stepped across his threshold, and had never been known to gossip. To marriage he never gave a thought: "time enough for that," he had decided, "when Steens became his, as some day it must;" for the estate ever since the first Stephen acquired it in the Wars of the Roses and gave it his name ('Steens' being but 'Stephen's' contracted) had been a freehold patrimony descending regularly from father to son or next heir. All in good time Roger Stephen would marry and install his wife in the manor-house. But the shop in Coinagehall Street was no place for a woman. She would be a nuisance, sweeping the place out and upsetting him and Malachi; an expense, too, and Roger—always a penurious man—incurred no expense until obliged.

But on a day, about two years before this 8th of May, 1734, word had come down from Steens that his father wished to speak with him.

"Not dying, is he?" Roger asked the messenger in Cornish. Half his customers spoke the old language, and it came readier to his tongue.

The messenger chuckled. "Dying? He'll live to be a hundred! Eh, it's not dying he's after," and the man winked. He was near upon bursting with news—or gossip—of his own.

"That's enough," said Roger. "Go back and tell him that if he's well and wants to talk, he knows where to find me." And he turned back to his work.

Next day old Humphrey Stephen rode down into Helleston in a towering rage, reined up before his son's shop, and dismounted.

"You're a pretty dutiful kind of son," he snarled. "But I've a word that concerns you belike. I'm going to marry again."

"Ah?" said Roger, drawing in his breath and eyeing the old man up and down in a way that disconcerted him. "Who's the poor soul?"

"She lives over to Porthleven," answered his father, "and her name is Mary Nankivell. She's—well, in fact she's a fisherman's daughter; but I've lived long enough to despise differences of that kind."

"I wasn't asking *your* age," said Roger meditatively. "What's the woman's?"

"She'll be twenty next birthday." The old man was sixty-five. "Well, what's your opinion?" he asked testily, for he knew he was doing a wrong thing, and craved an excuse to work himself into a rage.

"On which?" asked Roger, "—you, or the woman?"

"On the marriage." Old Humphrey stood glowering under his eyebrows, and tapped his boot impatiently with the butt of his riding-whip. "I reckoned it might concern you, that's all."

"I can't see that it does." There was that in Roger's slow look which his father found maddening.

"Oh, can't you?" he sneered.

"No, for the life of me," answered Roger. "'Tis wickedness of course, but I've no call to interfere. Take and marry the miserable fool, if you're so minded."

Humphrey Stephen had more to say, but gulped it down and mounted his horse with a devilish grin.

Roger Stephen went back to his work-bench.

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"Pack of fools!" growled old Malachi as the thump-thump of the drum drew nearer. He rose and shifted his stool to a corner, for the way to the back premises lay through the shop. Roger looked forth into the sunny street, blinked, and, picking up a pair of pincers, returned to his watch.

The band came slowly down the street and halted outside—still in full blast; for between the Market House and the Bowling Green there must be no pause in the Flora-dance or its music. And presently the Mayor himself thrust his red face in at the shop-door.

"Good-mornin'!" he nodded, jigging away with his feet. "You'll lev' us come through, I suppose?"

"Welcome," grunted Roger.

"And, darn'ee, take care o' my cabbages!" added Malachi. "You ruined half a score of 'em last year with your May-games."

"Cab—" Here the inexorable tune forced His Worship to face about and twirl his partner. "Cabbages?" he resumed. "You dare to use such a word to me, you saucy rascal? Why, I've sent better men than you to prison for less!"

"I don't doubt it," retorted Malachi. "But King George is above us, and holds even a Mayor responsible for what he treads on. Dance along out, that's a dear man, and if you want to be frolicsome, keep to the paths."

"Of all the unpublicspirited houses I've danced into this day, this here's the unpublicspiritedest!" exclaimed the Mayor. He had reached by this time the door at the back of the shop, and would have said more; but again the tune

took him by the legs compelling him to twirl his partner, and, twirling her, he was swept out of sight.

Roger Stephen still pored over his watch. Several of the dancers—had the will to do it been enough—were minded to stop and rebuke him for his churlishness. A tradesman at work in Helleston on Flora-day in the morning was a scandalous sight. But Roger stood six-foot-three in his socks, and had been a famous wrestler in his youth.

The giddy throng went by, his hunched shoulders expressing his contempt of it. But when all the dancers had paraded through the shop and out into Malachi's cabbage garden, a man appeared in the entrance and said—

"Arise, Master Roger, and dance—or otherwise as your feelings incline you! For Doctor Gaye sends down his compliments, and your father's had a stroke."

Roger Stephen dropped his pincers. "A stroke? Is it serious?"

"Middlin'," answered the man, a woodcutter on the Steens estate. "He took it at three in the morning and never said another word, but passed away a little under two hours agone; and the funeral's on Thursday."

Roger laid down the watch and stood erect. The band in the street still thumped out the Flora tune.

"Malachi," said he, "can you dance the Flora?"

"Bejimbers!" answered Malachi, "the old man did his best to spoil my legs, but I feel like trying."

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Up at Steens the young widow spent the three days before the funeral in a flutter of the nerves. For reasons of her own she stood in fear of her stepson, and felt herself in hourly desperate need of a male champion. Yet she had pluck as well as a head on her shoulders. She might have summoned—what more natural at such a time?—her old father, the fisherman, over from Porthleven; but she argued it out with herself, and decided that his presence would be a protection rather apparent than real, and might easily set Roger suspecting. Even less politic would be the presence of her Penzance lawyer, Mr. Alfonso Trudgian. In the early morning hours after her husband's death she sat a long while with her hands in her lap, thinking. She was a young and pretty woman, and by no means a bad one. But she had not married old Humphrey for love, and she meant to have her rights now. Also her having married Humphrey was proof of that courage which she now distrusted. While her heart sank at the prospect, she resolved to meet and face Roger alone.

He came on horseback that same evening, with Malachi on horseback behind him—both in their best black clothes with hideous black streamers pinned to their hats and dangling. Mrs. Stephen, having made enquiries among the servants—it added to her helplessness that she had never prevailed on Humphrey to dismiss his old servants, though she had made more than one attempt, and they knew it and hated her for it—had Roger's old room prepared for him, and met him at the door with decorous politeness.

Roger had never set eyes on her before. But she had long ago made it her business to see him; had, in fact, put on

bonnet and shawl one day and visited Helleston on pretence of shopping, and had, across the width of Coinagehall Street, been struck with terrified admiration of his stern face and great stature, recognising at a glance that here was a stronger man and better worth respecting than old Humphrey—a very dangerous man indeed for an enemy.

Roger in return considered her merely as a hussy—a designing baggage who had sold herself to an old fool. He came with a mind quite clear about this, and was not the sort of man to dismiss a prejudice easily. But her greeting, though it did not disarm him, forced him to defer hostilities for the moment, and in his room he allowed to himself that the woman had shown sense. He could not well send her packing while the old man lay above ground, and to begin quarrelling, with his corpse in the house, would be indecent. Go the woman should, but during her three days' grace stepson and stepmother had best keep up appearances.

He did not demur, when descending to supper, he found his father's chair removed from its place at the head of the table and his own set at the side on the widow's right. She met him with a smile, too, of which he had to approve; it seemed to say, "I do not forget that we are, and must be, antagonists; but in trifles, and for the short while permitted to us, let us do each other justice." She discussed, in low tones but frankly, the old man's illness—told him what there was to tell, pausing now and then with a silent invitation to question her were he minded, and apologised very prettily for her shortcomings as a hostess.

"But you will, of course, order just what you want. Luckily the servants know you and your ways, and you will forgive

anything I have overlooked. In the circumstances—"

She broke off, and Roger found himself grunting that "she wasn't to trouble about that: he'd do well enough." He did not actually thank her for her preparations to make him comfortable, but discovered with a kind of indignant surprise that he had come very near to it. Somehow this woman, whom he had expected to find an ignorant fisher-wench, hoity-toity and brazen or tearful and sullen, was making him painfully conscious of his own boorishness. Out she must go, of course, after the funeral; but he wished he had seen a little more of good company in the past, and he kept up his temper by reminding himself that he had been ill-used and denied a college education.

The meal ended, she rose and swept him a curtsey, neither over-friendly nor standoffish. "Peggy will bring you the brandy and water," she said, "or, if you prefer it, there is rum in the house. I thought, maybe, the weather was warm for a fire; but, as you see, it is laid, and only needs a light if you feel chilly. Your father liked to sit by a fire even on summer evenings." She did not add that he had invariably come drunk to bed. "But there," she ended with a faint smile, "we have the old servants, and they are not likely to neglect you."

A second curtsey, and she was gone. Roger sat down by the cold hearth and stroked his chin. By-and-by he looked at his fingers, as if (absurdly enough) to make sure he had not shaken hands with her.

Next day this armed but almost friendly neutrality continued. Roger spent the hours in striding about his acres, planning how to improve them and curtail expenses here

and there. The farm to be sure was neglected; but here and there he noted improvements, and caught himself wondering if the credit of them belonged to the old man. He left the household to his stepmother, and returned to find his meals ready and his appetite courted by some of his favourite dishes.

At dinner Mrs. Stephen produced and handed to him a sheet of paper. "I thought it might save trouble," she explained, "if I made out a list of folks to be invited to the funeral. You understand that I've only put down those that occurred to me. Please take the list away and strike out or add any names you choose."

Roger was within an ace of telling her to look after this for herself. He had forgotten that these invitations were necessary, and the writing of them would be a nuisance. But he recollected his suspicions, took the paper, and carried it out into the fields to study it. The list was a careful one, and almost all the names belonged to neighbours or old family friends. Half a dozen at most were unfamiliar to him. He pored over these one by one, but scratched none out. "Let the poor creature invite them if they're friends of hers," he decided; "'twill be her last chance." At supper he gave her back the list, and somewhat awkwardly asked her to send the invitations.

Had he been cleverer in the ways of women, he might still have failed to read the glint in her eyes as she folded the paper and thrust it into her bodice.

So the three days passed.

V.

They buried Humphrey Stephen on the morning of the 11th, and if any of the widow's own friends attended the funeral they forbore to obtrude themselves during the ceremony or at the breakfast which followed it. While the guests drank sherry and ate cold chickens in the dining-room, Mrs. Stephen carried her grief off to her own apartment and left Roger to do the honours. She descended only when the throng had taken leave.

The room, indeed, when she entered, was empty but for three persons. Roger and the family attorney—Mr. Jose, of Helleston—stood by one of the windows in friendly converse, somewhat impatiently eyeing a single belated guest who was helping himself to more sherry.

"What the devil is *he* doing here?" asked Mr. Jose, who knew the man. He turned and bowed as the young widow entered. "I was on the point, madam," said he, "of sending up to request your presence. With your leave, I think it is time to read the deceased's will." He pulled out his watch and glanced again, with meaning, towards the stranger.

He had lifted his voice purposely, and the stranger came forward at once with the half of a pasty in one hand and his glass of sherry in the other.

"Certainly," agreed the stranger, with his mouth full of pasty. He nodded familiarly to Mr. Jose, drained his glass, set it down, and wiped his damp fingers on the lappels of his coat. His habits were not pretty, and his manners scarcely ingratiating. The foxy look in his eyes would have spoilt a pleasanter face, and his person left an impression that it had, at some time in the past and to save the expense of

washing, been coated with oil and then profusely dusted over with snuff. "Shall we begin?" he asked, drawing a parcel of papers from his breast-pocket.

Roger Stephen glared at him, somewhat as a bull-dog might eye a shrew-mouse. "Who is this?" he demanded.

"This is Mr. Alfonso Trudgian, my lawyer from Penzance," explained the widow, and felt her voice shaking.

"Then he's not wanted."

"But excuse me, Mr. Stephen, this lady's interests—," began Mr. Trudgian.

"If my father's will makes any provision for her I can attend to it without your interference." Roger glanced at Mr. Jose.

"I think," said that very respectable lawyer, "there can be no harm in suffering Mr. Trudgian to remain, as an act of courtesy to Mrs. Stephen. We need not detain him long. The will I have here was drawn by me on the instruction of my late respected client, and was signed by him and witnessed on the 17th of March, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five. It is his last and (I believe) his only one; for, like many another man otherwise sensible, the deceased had what I may call an unreasoning dislike—"

"What date?" put in Mr. Alfonso Trudgian pertly.

"I beg your pardon?—the 17th of March, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five."

"Then I'm sorry to interrupt ye, Jose, but since Mr. Roger wants me gone, I have here a will executed by Mr. Stephen on February the 14th last— St. Valentine's day. And it reads like a valentine, too. 'To my dear and lawful wife, Elizabeth Stephen, I devise and bequeath all my estate and effects,

be they real or personal, to be hers absolutely. And this I do in consideration of her faithful and constant care of me. — Signed, Humphrey Stephen. Witnesses, William Shapcott'— that's my clerk—'and Alfonso Trudgian.' That's short enough, I hope, and sweet."

Mr. Jose reached out a shaking hand for the document, but Roger was before him. At one stride he had reached Mr. Trudgian and gripped him by the collar, while his other hand closed on the paper.

The attorney shrank back, squealing like a rabbit. "Let me go! 'Tis only a copy. Let me go, I say!"

"You dirty cur!" Roger's broad palm crumpled up the paper, and with a swift backward movement tossed it at Mrs. Stephen's feet. "Out of the way, Jose; he asks me to let him go, and I will." He lifted the wretched man, and, flinging him on the window-seat, pinned him there for a moment with his knee while he groped for the latch and thrust open the broad lattice.

A moment later, as she stood and shook, Mrs. Stephen saw her legal adviser swung up by his collar and the seat of his breeches and hurled, still squealing, out upon the flagstones of the courtlage; saw him tumble sprawling, pick himself up, and flee for the gate without even waiting to pick up his wig or turning to shake his fist. Nay, without one backward look, but weakly clutching at his coat, which had been split up the back and dangled in halves from his neck, he broke for the open country and ran.

"Thank you," said she, as Roger swung round upon her in turn. Her lips were smiling, but she scarcely recognised her own voice. "Am—am I to follow by the same way?"

Roger did not smile, but took her by the wrist.

"Gently, Mr. Stephen—gently, I implore you!" interposed Mr. Jose.

Roger did not seem to hear, and the woman made no resistance. He led her through the hall, across the threshold of Steens, and up the courtlage path. At the gate, as he pushed it wide for her, his grip on her wrist relaxed, and, releasing her, he stood aside.

She paused for one instant, and gently inclined her head.

"Stepson, you are a very foolish man," said she. "Good-day to you!"

She passed out. Roger closed the gate grimly, slipped forward its bolt, and walked back to the house.

But the woman without, as he turned his back, stepped aside quickly, found the wall, and, hidden by it, leaned a hand against the stonework and bowed her head.

A moment later, and before Roger had reached the front door, her hand slipped and she fell forward among the nettles in a swoon.

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"Well, *that's* over!" said Roger, returning to the dining-room and mopping his brow. "Upon my word, Jose, that nasty varmint gave me quite a turn for the moment, he spoke so confident."

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated Mr. Jose, pacing the room with his hands clasped beneath his coat-tails.

"Do you know," Roger continued musingly, "I'm not altogether sorry the woman showed her hand. Sooner or

later she had to be got rid of, and a thing like that is easier done when your blood's up. But Lord! could anyone have thought such wickedness was to be found in the world!"

The lawyer rounded on him impatiently. "Mr. Stephen," said he, in the very words the widow had used two minutes before, "you're very foolish man, if you'll excuse my saying it."

"Certainly," Roger assured him. "But be dashed to me if I see why."

"Because, sir, you're on the wrong side of the law. Your father executed that will, and it's genuine; or the vermin—as you call him—would never have taken that line with me."

"I daresay. But what of that?"

"What of that? Why, you've cut yourself off from compromise—that's all. You don't think a fellow of that nature—I say nothing of the woman—will meet you on any reasonable terms after the way you've behaved!"

"Compromise? Terms? Why, dang it all, Jose! You're not telling me the old fool could will away Steens, that has passed as freehold from father to son these two hundred years and more?"

"The law allows it," began Mr. Jose; but his outraged client cut him short.

"The law allows it!" he mimicked. "How soon d'ye think they'll get the country to allow it? Why, the thing's monstrous—'tis as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Oh, you'll get sympathy, no doubt!"

"Sympathy? What the devil do I want with sympathy? I want my rights, and I've got 'em. What's more, I'll keep 'em—you see! Man, if that limb of Satan dared to come back,

d'ye think the whole countryside wouldn't uphold me? But he won't; he won't dare. You heard him squeal, surely?"

"Drat the very name of politics!" exclaimed Mr. Jose so inconsequently that Roger had good excuse for staring.

"I don't take ye, Jose."

"No, I daresay not. I was thinking of Sir John. He's up at Westminster speechifying against corruption and Long Parliaments, and, the pamphleteers say, doing ten men's work to save the State; but for your sake I wish he was home minding the affairs of his parish. For I do believe he'd be for you at the bottom of his heart, and, if he used his influence, we might come to a settlement."

"'Settlement'?" Roger well-nigh choked over the word. He took three paces across the room and three paces back. His face twitched with fury, but for the moment he held himself in rein. "Look here, Jose, are you my lawyer or are you not? What in thunder do I want with Sir John? Right's right, and I'm going to stand on it. You *know* I'm in the right, and yet, like a cowardly attorney, at the first threat you hum and haw and bethink you about surrender. I don't know what *you* call it, sir, but *I* call it treachery. 'Settlement?' I've a damned good mind to believe they've bought you over!"

Mr. Jose gathered up his papers. "After that speech, Mr. Stephen, it don't become me to listen to more. As your father's friend I'm sorry for you. You're an ill-used man, but you're going to be a worse-used one, and by your own choice. I wish indeed I may prove mistaken, but my warning is, you have set your feet in a desperate path. Good-day, sir."

And so Roger Stephen quarrelled with his wisest friend.

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Young Mrs. Stephen awoke in her bed of nettles, and sitting up with her back to the wall, pressed her hands to her temples and tried to think. She could not. For the moment the strain had broken her, and her mind ran only on trifles—her wardrobe, a hundred small odds and ends of personal property left behind her in the house.

She could not think, but by instinct she did the wisest thing—found her feet and tottered off in the direction of Nansclowan. She had barely passed the turning of the road shutting her off from his sight when Mr. Jose came riding out by the stable gate and turned his horse's head towards Helleston.

When Lady Piers heard that Mrs. Stephen was below in the morning-room and wished to speak with her, she descended promptly, but with no very goodwill towards her visitor. She suspected something amiss, for the maid who carried up the news had added that the widow was "in a pretty pore," and wore not so much as a shawl over her indoor garments. Also she knew, as well as her commoner neighbours, that the situation at Steens must be a difficult one. Now Lady Piers was a devoted and gentle-hearted woman, a loving wife and an incomparable housekeeper (the news had found her busy in her still-room), but her judgment of the young fisher-girl who had wheedled old Humphrey Stephen into matrimony was that of the rest of her sex; and even good and devout women can be a trifle hard, not to say inhuman, towards such an offender.