

By the Side of the Cornish Sea.

(Mabel Quiller Couch in the 'Sunday Companion'.)

I think of all the pretty girls I have ever seen the prettiest was Mercy Pendray, as I saw her when first she came to keep house for her father, Zekiel Pendray, after her mother's death.

I am quite sure when poor Jane Pendray knew that death was coming for her she had but one regret, and that was that someone would have to look after Zekiel, and she knew from bitter experience that to whomsoever that lot fell there was little of peace or happiness from without in life.

She knew, too—or, at least, she feared—that almost without doubt the lot would fall to Mercy—pretty, happy Mercy! her only child, as she often thanked God—from whom, thinking she was doing the best and kindest thing, she had kept as much as possible the knowledge of her father's character and

selfish brain, was to keep Mercy at home, instead of letting her go back to her situation. Poor Mercy, who had come home dazed and overcome with grief at the suddenness and awfulness of her loss, had, so far, mistaken her father's half stupid manner for grief. And Mercy, longing to be with someone who could sympathize, and only desiring to do what was right and best, and what she thought her mother would have wished, consented without hesitation to give up her situation—where she had been as happy and comfortable as a girl could be—her independence, and her liberal wages, to come back to settle in Pensallas in a tiny, dilapidated cottage; to scrub and scour and dig; to be up late at night and early in the morning—though all this she did not know when she so gladly consented to stay at home.

Like all Pensallas folk, she had been dreadfully homesick at times, and the thought of being back in the dear old place was very comforting to her just now.

That she was sorry to leave her situation

her broad, low forehead, beneath which shone two calm, beautiful eyes, full of intelligence and strength.

In a higher station Mercy would have been talked of as one of the most beautiful women of the day. As it was, she was almost unconscious that she was beautiful, for the round-faced, fluffy-haired type of beauty appealed far more than her refined style to the tastes of the people she had been brought up amongst. So no one, or very few, had told her she was beautiful. That I thought so I am sure she must have guessed, for when I was with her I could scarcely keep my eyes off her, it was such a pleasure to watch her.

So Mercy settled down happily enough at Pensallas, and at first the thought of making her father happy and comfortable helped to banish the traces of her own grief from her face.

Their cottage stood at the very end of the village, almost alone, by the side of the wide road which lay between Pensallas and Trenarth, the next village. Poor Jane Pendray's funeral took place the very day before my boy Michael was driven over and nearly killed, so that I did not see Mercy or her father for some weeks after she had settled down at home.

Directly I did I noticed the change in her. The home was as clean and spotless, the gardens as trim and well-cared for, as ever. From the look of the place one would not have known that death had come and stilled the hand which had cared for it. And Mercy, in her pretty pink frock, gave a freshness and picturesqueness to the spot which made it a treat to look at. She was standing in her little garden when I reached the gate, but with her back to me, cleaning the little windows of the one living-room.

She looked around when the gate clicked, and smiled pleasantly; but instead of the peaceful happy look I knew so well, her eyes were anxious and harassed, her whole face sad.

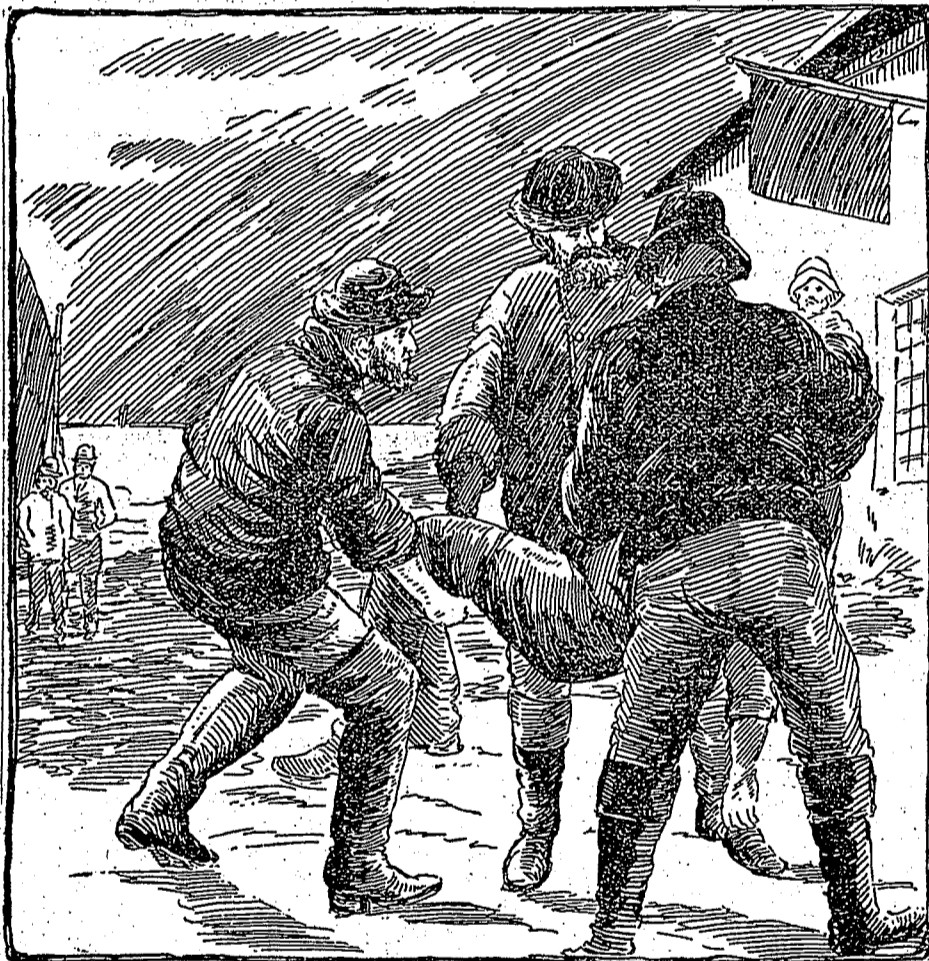
She seemed relieved when she saw who it was coming in, and very glad to see me, and led me to the cottage where the blue slate-floor, with its film of yellow sand over it, the shining stove, and the cleanliness of everything looked most cheery and inviting.

We sat and talked of the strange things that had happened in Pensallas while Mercy was away. But all the time there was with me a consciousness that this was only surface talk—that there were other things filling our hearts and minds—things we both would speak of, but which I could not touch upon until she spoke first.

By and by, when the light began to fade, and all the world to grow misty and sad with the end of another day, we reached the subject we both had nearest our hearts just then, and Mercy told me her tale: How she had given up her independence to come home to her father, and how happy she had been to do so; how strangely he had acted from the first—never coming in, save to meals, and then scarcely ever speaking to her. How by degrees he was getting from her all her savings, never giving her a penny of his wages to provide things with.

'I have not said a word to anyone but you, ma'am,' she said, with a look of shame on her pale face—shame for the father she had loved so much. 'I couldn't talk of it to others, but I had to tell you, ma'am. I felt I must tell you. You see, I—I can't go on here unless he mends his ways. I don't know how mother managed, but I don't see where or how I'm to get food.'

'Poor mother!' said Mercy, echoing my thought alouds. 'I know she did for the best, but I wish—I wish she had warned me. I



JOB TRUMAN'S BODY WAS CARRIED HOME.

weakness, not being able to endure the thought of the grief it would be to the girl.

It is doubtful if Mercy would ever have known if poor Jane herself had not broken down at last under the strain of trouble and want and hard work—broken down so suddenly and hopelessly, that she was dead and at rest before anything could be done for her.

When Zekiel was brought home, sulky at having been called away from The Wreckers' Arms before closing-time, Jane was safe from any display of temper on his part, and at peace for the first time for twenty years. He seemed to be a little frightened when he saw her lying on the bed, still and unconcerned, at his arrival, instead of being up and about, with the supper comfortably prepared for him. But by the time she was laid in Pensallas Churchyard, he had got over his first awe and dread of a like fate overtaking him, and began to think of some means for providing against future discomfort.

The only plan that entered his muddled,

there is no denying, and more, too, than she had anticipated; for not only had she to part from one of the kindest mistresses a girl could have, but she had a lover in the town where she had been living—a lover whom she loved with all the depth of her quiet, deep nature, and of whom she was most justly proud.

A steadier, more respectable lover no girl could desire, and many a girl in the place—girls of higher position than Mercy—envied her the love of the prosperous young tradesman, and regretted that tall, graceful Mercy had ever appeared on the scene.

I called Mercy 'pretty' just now, but 'pretty' never seems the right word with which to describe her looks, which were uncommon and striking in a girl of her station. She was tall and graceful, with a carriage and bearing that were almost stately; her head was small and well shaped, and her features were refined and almost classical; her thick, glossy hair was drawn back smoothly from