

Rupert's cogitations. He came down from his stool. A thought crossed him that George Ryle's horse might have got loose, and be speeding home riderless, at his own will and pleasure.

It was George Ryle's horse, but not riderless. To Rupert's intense astonishment, he saw Mr. Cris mounted on him, leisurely riding away.

"Halloa!" called Rupert, speeding after the horse and his rider. "What are you going to do with that horse, Cris?"

Cris turned his head, but did not stop. "I'm going to ride him home. His having been left here just happens right for me."

"You get off," shouted Rupert. "The horse was lent to me, not to you. Do you hear, Cris?"

Cris heard, but did not stop: he was urging the horse on. "You don't want him," he roughly said. "You can walk, as you always do."

Further remonstrance, further following, was useless. Rupert's words were drowned in the echoes of the horse's hoofs, galloping away in the distance. Rupert stood, white with anger, impotent to stop him, his hands stretched out on the empty air, as if their action could arrest the horse and bring him back again. Certainly the mortification was bitter; the circumstance precisely one of those likely to excite the choler of an excitable nature; and Rupert was on the point of going into that dangerous fit of madness known as the Trevlyn passion, when its course was turned aside by a hand being laid upon his shoulder.

He turned, it may almost be said, savagely. Ford was standing there out of breath, his good-humoured face red with the exertion of running.

"I say, Mr. Rupert, you'll do a fellow a service, won't you? I have had a message that my mother's taken suddenly ill; a fit, they say, of some sort. Will you finish what there is to do here, and lock up for once, so that I can go home directly?"

Rupert nodded. In his passionate disappointment, at having to walk home when he expected to ride, at being put upon, treated as of no moment by Cris Chattaway, it seemed of little consequence to him how long he remained, or what work he had to do: and the clerk, waiting for no further permission, sped away with a fleet foot. Rupert's face was losing its deathly whiteness—there is no whiteness like that born of passion or of sudden terror; and when he sat down again to the desk, the hectic of reaction was shining in his cheeks and lips.

Well, oh, well for him, could these dangerous fits of passion have been always arrested on the threshold, as this had been arrested now! The word dangerous is used advisedly: they brought nothing less than danger in their train.

But, alas! this was not to be.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAD BEAT.

NORA was at some business or other in the fold-yard, when the man-servant at Trevlyn Hold, more especially devoted to the service of Cris Chattaway, came in at the gate with George Ryle's horse. As he passed Nora on his way to the stables, she turned round, and the man spoke.

"Mr. Ryle's horse, ma'am. Shall I take it on?"

"You know the way," was Nora's short answer. She did not regard the man with any favour, reflecting upon him, in her usual partial fashion, the dislike she entertained for his master and for Trevlyn Hold in general. "Mr. Trevlyn has sent it, I suppose?"

"Mr. Trevlyn!" repeated the groom, betraying some surprise.

Now, it was a fact that at Trevlyn Hold Rupert was never called "Mr. Trevlyn." That it was his proper style and title, was indisputable; but Mr. Chattaway had as great a dislike to hear Rupert called by it as he had a wish to hear himself styled "the Squire." At the Hold, Rupert was "Mr. Rupert" only, and the neighbourhood generally had fallen into the same familiar style when speaking of or to him. Nora supposed the man's repetition of the name had insolent reference to this; as much as to say, "Who's Mr. Trevlyn?"

"Yes, Mr. Trevlyn," she resumed, in a sharp tone of reprimand. "He is Mr. Trevlyn, Sam Atkins, and you know that he is, however some people may wish that it should be forgotten. He is not Mr. Rupert, and he is not Mr. Rupert Trevlyn, but he is Mr. Trevlyn; and if he had his rights, he'd be Squire Trevlyn. There! you may go and tell your master that I said it."

Sam Atkins, a civil, quiet young fellow, was overpowered with astonishment at Nora's burst of eloquence. "I'm not

saying naught again it, ma'am," cried he, when he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak. "But Mr. Rupert didn't send me with the horse at all. It was young Mr. Chattaway."

"What had he to do with it?" resentfully asked Nora.

"He rode it home from Blackstone."

"*He* rode it? Cris Chattaway!"

"Yes," said the groom. "He has just got home now, and he told me to bring the horse back at once."

Nora pointed to the man to take the horse on to the stable, and went indoors. She could not understand it. When George returned home on foot, and she inquired what he had done with his horse, he told her that he had left it at Blackstone for Rupert Trevlyn. To hear now that it was Cris who had had the benefit of it, and not Rupert, excited Nora's indignation. But the indignation would have increased fourfold had she known that Mr. Cris had ridden the horse hard, and made a *détour* of some five miles out of his way, to transact a matter of private business of his own. She went straight to George, who was seated at tea with Mrs. Ryle.

"Mr. George, I thought you told me you had left your horse at Blackstone for Rupert Trevlyn, to save his walking home?"

"So I did," replied George.

"Then it's Cris Chattaway who has come home on it. I'd see *him* far enough before he should have the use of my horse!"

"It can't be," returned George. "You must be mistaken, Nora; Cris had his own horse there."

"You can go and ask for yourself," rejoined Nora, in crusty tones, not at all liking to be told that she was mistaken. "Sam Atkins is putting the horse in the stable, and he says it was Cris Chattaway who rode it from Blackstone."

George did go and ask for himself. He could not understand it at all; and he had no more fancy for allowing Cris Chattaway the use of his horse than Nora had. He supposed they had exchanged steeds; though why they should do so, he could not imagine: that Cris had used his, and Rupert the one belonging to Cris.

Sam Atkins was in the stable, talking to Roger, one of the men about the farm. George saw at a glance that his horse had been ridden hard.

"Who rode this horse home?" he inquired, as the groom touched his hat to him.

"Young Mr. Chattaway, sir."

"And Mr. Rupert: what did he ride?"

"Mr. Rupert, sir? I don't think he is come home."

"Where's Mr. Cris Chattaway's own horse?"

"He have left it at Blackstone, sir. It fell dead lame, he says. I be going for it now."

George paused. "I lent my horse to Mr. Rupert," he said. "Do you know how it was that he did not use it himself?"

"I don't know nothing about it, sir. Mr. Cris came home just now on your horse, and told me to bring it down here immediate. His orders was, to go on to Blackstone for his, and to mind I led it gently home. He never mentioned Mr. Rupert."

Considerably later—in fact, it was past nine o'clock—Rupert Trevlyn appeared. George Ryle was leaning over the gate at the foot of his garden in a musing attitude, the bright stars above him, the slight frost of the autumn night rendering the air clear, though not cold, when he saw a figure come slowly winding up the road. It was Rupert Trevlyn. The same misfortune seemed to have befallen him that had befallen the horse, for he limped as he walked.

"Are you lame, Rupert?" asked George.

"Lame with fatigue; nothing else," answered Rupert in that low, half-inaudible voice which a very depressed physical state will induce. "Let me come in and sit down half-an-hour, George, or I shall never get to the Hold."

"How was it that you let Cris Chattaway ride my horse home? I left it for you?"

"*Let him!* He mounted and galloped off without my knowing—the sneak! I should be ashamed to be guilty of such a trick. I declare I had half a mind to ride his horse home, lame as it was. But that the poor animal is evidently in pain, I would have done it!"

"You are very late."

"I have been such a time coming. The truth is, I sat down when I was half-way here; I was so dead tired I couldn't stir a step; and I dropped asleep."

"A very wise proceeding!" cried George, in pleasant though mocking tones. He did not care to say more plainly how *unwise*—nay, how pernicious—it might be for Rupert Trevlyn. "Did you sleep long?"

"Pretty well. The stars were out when I awoke; and I felt

ten times more tired when I got up than I had felt when I sat down."

George placed him in the most comfortable arm-chair they had, and got him a glass of wine. Nora brought some refreshment, but Rupert could not eat.

"Try it," urged George.

"I can't," said Rupert; "I am completely done over."

He leaned back in the chair, his fair curls falling on the cushions, his bright face—bright with a touch of inward fever—turned upwards to the light. Gradually his eyelids closed, and he dropped into a calm sleep.

George sat watching him. Mrs. Ryle, who was still poorly, had retired to her chamber for the night, and they were alone. Very unkindly, as may be thought, George woke him soon, and told him it was time to go.

"Do not deem me inhospitable, Rupert; but it will not do for you to be locked out again to-night."

"What's the time?" asked Rupert.

"Considerably past ten."

"I was in such a nice dream. I thought I was being carried along in a large sail belonging to a ship. The motion was pleasant and soothing. Past ten! What a bother! I shall be half dead again before I get to the Hold."

"I'll lend you my arm, Ru, to help you along."

"That's a good fellow!" exclaimed Rupert.

He got up and stretched himself, and then fell back in his chair, like a leaden weight. "I'd give five shillings to be there without the trouble of walking," quoth he.

"Rupert, you will be late."

"I can't help it," returned Rupert, folding his arms and leaning back again in the chair. "If Chattaway locks me out again, he must. I'll sit down in the portico until morning, for I shan't be able to stir another step from it."

Rupert was in that physically depressed state which reacts upon the mind. It may be said that he was as incapable of *care* as of exertion: whether he got in or not, whether he passed the night in a comfortable bed, or under the trees in the avenue, seemed of very little moment in his present state of feeling. Altogether he was some time getting off; and they heard the far-off church clock at Barbrook chime out the half-past ten before they were half-way to the Hold. The sound came distinctly to their ears on the calm night air.

"I was somewhere about this spot when the half-hour struck

last night, for your clocks were fast," remarked Rupert. "I ran all the way home after that—with what success, you know. I can't run to-night."

"I'll do my best to get you in," said George. "I hope I shan't be tempted, though, to speak my mind too plainly to Chattaway."

The Hold was closed for the night. Lights appeared in several of the windows. Rupert halted when he saw the light in one of them. "Aunt Diana must have returned," he said; "that's her room."

George Ryle rang a loud, quick peal at the bell. It was not answered. He then rang again, a sharp, imperative, urgent peal, and shouted out with his stentorian voice; a prolonged shout that could not have come from the lungs of Rupert; and it brought Mr. Chattaway to the window of his wife's dressing-room in very surprise. One or two more windows in different parts of the house were thrown up.

"It is I, Mr. Chattaway. I have been assisting Rupert home. Will you be so kind as to allow the door to be opened?"

Mr. Chattaway was nearly struck dumb with the insolence of the demand, coming from the quarter it did. He could scarcely speak at first, even to refuse.

"He does not deserve your displeasure to-night," said George, in his clear, ringing voice, which might be heard distinctly ever so far off. "He could scarcely get here from fatigue and illness. But for taking a rest at my mother's house, and having the help of my arm up here, I question if he would have got as far. Be so good as to let him in, Mr. Chattaway."

"How dare you make such a request to me?" roared Mr. Chattaway, recovering himself a little. "How dare you come disturbing the peace of my house at night, George Ryle, as any housebreaker might come—except that you make more noise about it!"

"I came to bring Rupert," was George's clear answer. "He is waiting here to be let in; he is tired and ill."

"I will not let him in," raved Mr. Chattaway. "How dare you, I ask?"

"What *is* all this?" broke from the amazed voice of Miss Diana Trevlyn. "What does it mean? I don't comprehend it in the least."

George looked up at her window. "Rupert could not get

home by the hour specified by Mr. Chattaway—half-past ten. I am asking that he may be admitted now, Miss Trevlyn."

"Of course he can be admitted," said Miss Diana.

"Of course he shan't," retorted Mr. Chattaway.

"Who says he couldn't get home in time if he had wanted to come?" called out Cris from a window on the upper story.

"Does it take him five or six hours to walk from Blackstone?"

"Is that you, Christopher?" asked George, falling a little back that he might see him better. "I want to speak to you. By what right did you take possession of my horse at Blackstone this afternoon, and ride him home?"

"I chose to do it," said Cris.

"I lent that horse to Rupert, who was unfit to walk. It had been more in accordance with generosity—though you may not understand the word—had you left it for him. He was not in bed last night; he has gone without food to-day—you were more capable of walking home than he."

Miss Diana craned forth her neck. "Chattaway, I must inquire into this. Let that front-door be opened."

"I will not," he answered. And he banged down his window with a resolute air, as if to avoid further colloquy.

But in that same moment the lock of the front-door was turned, and it was thrown open by Octave Chattaway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. CHATTAWAY'S "OLD IMPRESSION."

It was surely a scene to excite some interest, if only the interest of curiosity, that was presented at Trevlyn Hold that night. Octave Chattaway in evening dress—for she had not begun to prepare for bed, although some time in her chamber—standing at the hall-door which she had opened; Miss Diana pressing forward from the back of the hall in a hastily assumed dressing-gown; Mr. Chattaway in a waistcoat; Cris in greater dishabille; and Mrs. Chattaway dressed as was Octave.

Rupert came in, coughing with the night air, and leaning on the arm of George Ryle. There was no light, except such as was afforded by a candle carried by Miss Trevlyn; but she stepped forward and lighted the lamp.

"Now then," said she. "What is all this?"

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"It is this," returned the master of Trevlyn Hold: "that I make rules for the proper regulation of my household, and a beardless boy chooses to break them. I should think"—turning shortly upon Miss Diana—"that you are not the one to countenance that."

"No," said she; "when rules are made they must be kept. What is your defence, Rupert?"

Rupert had thrown himself upon a bench against the wall in utter weariness of mind and body. "I don't care to make any defence," said he, in his apathy, as he leaned his cheek upon his hand, and fixed his blue eyes on Miss Trevlyn; "I don't know that there's much defence to make. Mr. Chattaway orders me to be in by half-past ten. I was at George Ryle's last night, and I a little exceeded the time, getting here five minutes or so after it, so I was locked out. Cris let himself in with his latch-key, but he would not let me in."

Miss Diana glanced at Cris, but she said nothing. Mr. Chattaway interrupted. George, erect, fearless, was standing opposite to the group, and it was to him that Mr. Chattaway turned.

"What I want to know is this—by what right *you* interfere, George Ryle?"

"I am not aware that I have interfered—except by giving Rupert my arm up the hill, and by asking you to admit him. No very unjustifiable interference, surely, Mr. Chattaway."

"But it is, sir. And I ask why you presume to do it?"

"Presume?" returned George, pausing after the word. But there was no answer to it, and he went on. "I saw Rupert to-night, accidentally, as he was coming from Blackstone. It was about nine o'clock. I was at my garden-gate. He appeared terribly tired, and wished to come into the house and rest. There he fell asleep. I awoke him in time, but he seemed to be too weary to get here himself, and I came with him to help him along. He walked slowly—painfully, I should say; and it made him later than he ought to have arrived. Will you be so good, Mr. Chattaway, as to explain what part of this interference was unjustifiable? I do not see that I could have done less."

"You will see that you do less for the future," growled Mr. Chattaway. "I will have no interference of yours between the Hold and Rupert Trevlyn."

"Oh, Mr. Chattaway, you may make yourself perfectly easy," returned George, some sarcasm in his tone. "Nothing could