

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

be farther from my intention than to interfere in any way with you, or with the Hold, or with Rupert in connection with you and the Hold. But, as I told you this morning, until you show me any good and sufficient reason for the contrary, I shall certainly observe common courtesy to Rupert when he comes in my way."

"Nonsense!" interposed Miss Diana. "Who says you are not to show courtesy to Rupert, George? Do you?" she asked, wheeling sharply round on Chattaway.

"There's one thing requires explanation," said Mr. Chattaway, turning to Rupert, and drowning Miss Diana's voice. "How came you to stop at Blackstone till this time of night? Where had you been loitering?"

Rupert answered the questions mechanically, never lifting his head. "I didn't leave until late. Ford wanted to go home, and I had to stop. After that I sat down on the way and dropped asleep."

"Sat down on your way and dropped asleep!" echoed Miss Diana. "What made you do that?"

"I don't know. I had been tired all day. I had no bed, you hear, last night. I suppose I can go to mine now?" he added, rising. "I want it badly enough."

"You can go—for this time," assented the master of Trevlyn Hold. "But you will understand that it is the last night I shall suffer my rules to be set at naught. You shall be in to time, or you do not come in at all."

Rupert shook hands with George Ryle, spoke a general "Good night" to the rest collectively, and went towards the stairs. At the back of the hall, lingering there in her timidity, stood Mrs. Chattaway. "Good night, dear Aunt Edith," he whispered.

She gave no answer. She only laid her hand upon his as he passed, and so momentary was the action that it escaped unobserved, except by one pair of eyes—and those were Octave Chattaway's.

George was the next to go. Octave put out her hand to him. "Does Caroline come to the harvest-home?" she inquired.

"Yes, I think so. Good night."

"Good night," replied Octave, amiably. "I am glad you took care of Rupert."

"She's as false as her father," thought George, as he went down the avenue.

They were all dispersing. There was nothing now to remain up for. Chattaway was turning to the staircase, when Miss Diana stepped inside one of the sitting-rooms, carrying her candle with her, and beckoned to him.

"What do you want, Diana?" he asked, not in a pleasant tone, as he followed her in.

"Why did you shut out Rupert last night?"

"Because I chose to do it!"

"But suppose I chose that he should not be shut out?" returned Miss Diana.

"Then we shall split," angrily rejoined the master of Trevlyn Hold. "I say that half-past ten o'clock is quite late enough for Rupert to enter. He is younger than Cris; you and Edith say he is not strong; is it too early?"

Mr. Chattaway was right in this. It was a sufficiently late hour; and Miss Diana, after a pause, pronounced it to be so. "I shall talk to Rupert," she said. "There's no harm in his going to spend an hour or two with George Ryle, or with any other friend, but he must be home in good time."

"Just so; he must be home in good time," acquiesced Chattaway. "He shall be home by half-past ten. And the only way to insure that, is to lock him out at first when he transgresses. Therefore, Diana, I shall follow my own way in this, and I beg you will not interfere."

Miss Diana went up to Rupert's room. He had taken off his coat, and thrown himself on the bed, as if the fatigue of undressing were too much for him.

"What's that for?" asked Miss Diana, as she entered. "Is that the way you get into bed?"

Rupert rose and sat down on a chair. "Only coming upstairs seems to tire me," he said, in tones of apology. "I should not have lain a minute."

Miss Diana threw back her head a little, and looked at Rupert. The determined will of the Trevlyns shone out from every line of her face.

"I have come to ask where you slept last night. I mean to know it, Rupert."

"I don't mind your knowing it," replied Rupert; "I have told Aunt Edith. I decline to tell Chattaway, and I hope that no one else will tell him."

"Why?"

"Because he might lay blame where no blame is due. Chattaway turned me from the door, Aunt Diana, and Cris, who came

up just after, turned me from it also. I went down to the lodge, and got Ann Canham to let me in; and I lay part of the night on their hard settle, and part of the night I sat upon it. That's where I was. But if Chattaway knew it, he'd be turning old Canham and Ann from the lodge, as he turned me from the door."

"Oh no, he wouldn't," said Miss Diana, "if it were my pleasure to keep them in it. Do you feel ill, Rupert?"

"I feel middling. It is that I am tired, I suppose. I shall be all right in the morning."

Miss Diana descended to her own room. Inside, waiting for her, was Mrs. Chattaway. Mrs. Chattaway had a shawl thrown over her shoulders, and seemed to be shivering. She slipped the bolt of the door—what was she afraid of?—and turned to Miss Trevlyn, her hands clasped.

"Diana, this is killing me!" she wailed. "Why should Rupert be treated as he is? I know I am but a poor creature, that I have been one all my life—a very coward; but sometimes I think that I must speak out and protest against the injustice, though I should die in the effort."

"Why, what's the matter?" uttered Miss Diana, whose intense composure formed a strange contrast to her sister's agitated words and bearing.

"Oh, you know!—you know! I have not dared to speak out much, even to you, Diana; but it's killing me—it's killing me! Is it not enough that we despoiled Rupert of his inheritance, but we must also——"

"Be silent!" sharply interrupted Miss Diana, glancing around and lowering her voice to a whisper. "Will you never have done with that folly, Edith?"

"I shall never have done with its remembrance. I don't often speak of it; once, it may be, in seven years, not more. Better for me that I could speak of it; it would prey less upon my heart!"

"You have benefited by it as much as any one has."

"Yes: I cannot help myself. Heaven knows, that if I could retire to some poor hut, and live upon a crust, and benefit by it no more, I should do so—oh, how willingly! But there's no escape. I am hemmed in by its consequences; we are all hemmed in by them—and there's no escape."

Miss Diana looked at her. Steadfastly, keenly; not angrily, but searchingly and critically, as a doctor looks at a patient supposed to be afflicted with mania.

"If you do not take care, Edith, you will become insane upon this point, as I believe I have warned you before," she said, with calmness. "I am not sure but you are slightly touched now!"

"I do not think I am," replied poor Mrs. Chattaway, passing her hand over her brow. "I feel confused enough here sometimes, but there's no fear that madness will really come. If thinking could have turned me mad, I should have been mad years ago."

"The very act of your coming here in this state of excitement, when you should be going to your bed, and of saying what you do say, must be nothing less than a degree of madness."

"I would go to bed, if I could sleep," said Mrs. Chattaway. "I lie awake night after night, thinking of the past; of the present; thinking of Rupert and of what we did for him; thinking of the treatment we deal out to him now. I think of his father, poor Joe; I think of his mother, Emily Dean, whom we once so loved; and I—I cannot sleep, Diana!"

There really did seem something strange in Mrs. Chattaway to-night. For once in her life, Diana Trevlyn's heart beat a shade faster.

"Try and calm yourself, Edith," she said soothingly.

"I wish I could! I should be more calm if you and my husband would allow it. If you would only allow Rupert to be treated with common kindness——"

"He is not treated with unkindness," interrupted Miss Diana.

"It appears to me that he is treated with nothing but unkindness. He——"

"Is he beaten?—is he starved?"

"The system pursued towards him is altogether unkind," persisted Mrs. Chattaway. "Indulgences dealt out to our own children are denied to him. When I think that he might be the true master of Trevlyn Hold——"

"Edith, I will not listen to this," interrupted Miss Diana. "What has come to you to-night?"

A shiver passed over the frame of Mrs. Chattaway. She was sitting on a low toilette chair covered with white drapery, her head bent on her hand. By her reply, which she did not look up to give, it appeared that she took the question literally.

"I feel the pain more than usual; nothing else. I do feel it so sometimes."

"What pain?" asked Miss Diana.

"The pain of remorse: the pain of the wrong dealt out to Rupert. It seems to be greater than I can bear. Do you know," she added, raising her feverish eyes to Miss Diana, "that I scarcely closed my eyelids once last night? All the long night through I was thinking of Rupert. I fancied him lying outside on the damp grass; I fancied him——"

"Stop a minute, Edith. Are you seeking to blame your husband to me?"

"No, no; I don't blame him—I don't wish to blame any one. But I wish it could be altered."

"If Rupert knows the hour for coming in—and it is not an unreasonable hour—it is he who is to blame if he exceeds it."

Mrs. Chattaway could not gainsay this. In point of fact, though she found that things were grievously uncomfortable, wrong altogether, she had not the strength of mind to say *where* the system was deficient, or how it should be altered. On this fresh agitation, the coming in at half-past ten at night, she could only judge as a vacillating woman. The hour, as Miss Diana said, was not an unreasonable one, and Mrs. Chattaway would have fallen in with it with all her heart, and approved her husband's judgment in making it, if Rupert had only obeyed the mandate. If Rupert did not obey it—if he somewhat exceeded its bounds—she would have liked that the door should still be open to him, and no scolding given. It was the discomfort that worried her; it was mixing itself up with the old feeling of the wrong done to Rupert, rendering things, as she aptly expressed it, more miserable than she could bear.

"I'll talk to Rupert to-morrow morning," said Miss Diana. "I shall add my authority to Chattaway's, and tell him that he *must* be in."

It may be that a shadow of the future was casting itself over the mind of Mrs. Chattaway, dimly and vaguely pointing to the terrible events hereafter to arise—events which would throw their consequences on the remainder of Rupert's life, and which had their origin in this new and ill-omened order, touching his coming home at night.

"Edith," said Miss Diana, "I would recommend you to get less sensitive on the subject of Rupert. It is growing with you into a morbid feeling."

"I wish I could! It does grow upon me. Do you know," she added, sinking her voice and looking feverishly at her

sister, "that old impression has come again! I thought it had worn itself out. I thought it might have left me for ever."

Miss Diana almost lost her patience. Her own mind was a very contrast to her sister's; the two were as widely opposite in their organization as the poles. Fanciful, dreamy, vacillating, weak, the one; the other strong, practical, matter-of-fact.

"I don't know what you mean by the 'old impression,'" she rejoined, with a contempt she did not seek to disguise. "Is it not some new folly?"

"I have told you of it in the old days, Diana. I used to feel certain—certain—that the wrong we inflicted on Rupert would avenge itself—that in some way he would come into his inheritance, and we should be despoiled of it. I felt so certain of it, that every morning of my life when I got up I seemed to look for its fulfilment before the day closed. But the time went on and on, and it never was fulfilled. It went on so long that the impression wore itself out of my mind, and I ceased to expect it. But now it has come again. It is stronger than ever. For some weeks past it has been growing more present with me day by day, and I cannot shake it off."

"The best thing you can do now is to go to bed, and try and sleep off your folly," cried Miss Trevlyn, with the stinging contempt she allowed herself at rare times to show to her sister. "I feel more provoked with you, Edith, than I can express. A child might be pardoned for indulging in such absurdities of mind; a woman, never!"

Mrs. Chattaway rose. "I'll go to bed," she meekly answered, "and get what sleep I can. I remember that you cast ridicule on this feeling of mine in the old days——"

"Pray did anything come of it then?" interrupted Miss Diana, sarcastically.

"I have said it did not. And the impression left me. But it has come again now. Good night, Diana."

"Good night, and a more sensible frame of mind to you!" was the retort of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

Mrs. Chattaway crept softly along the corridor to her own dressing-room. She was in hopes that her husband by that time was in bed and asleep. What was her surprise, then, to see him sitting at the table when she entered, not undressed, and as wide awake as she was.

"You have business with Diana late," he remarked.

Mrs. Chattaway felt wholly and entirely subdued; she had felt so since the previous night, when Rupert was denied

admittance. The painful timidity, clinging to her always, seemed partially to have left her for a time. It was as though she had not the strength left to be shy; almost as Rupert felt in his weariness of body, she was past caring for anything in her utter weariness of mind. Otherwise, she might not have spoken to Miss Diana as she had just done: most certainly she could never have spoken as she was about to speak to Mr. Chattaway.

"What may your business with her have been?" he resumed.

"It was not much, James," she answered. "I was saying how ill I felt."

"Ill! With what?"

"Ill in mind, I think," said Mrs. Chattaway, putting her hand to her brow. "I was telling her that the old fear had come upon me; the impression that used to cling to me always that some change was at hand regarding Rupert. I lost it for a great many years, but it has come again."

"Try and speak lucidly, if you can," was Mr. Chattaway's answer. "What has come again?"

"It seems to have come upon me in the light of a warning," she resumed, so lucidly that Mr. Chattaway, had he been a few steps lower in social grade, might have felt inclined to beat her. "I have ever felt that Rupert would in some manner regain his rights—I mean what he was deprived of," she hastily added, in deprecation of the word "rights," which had slipped from her. "That he will regain Trevlyn Hold, and we shall lose it."

Mr. Chattaway listened in consternation, his mouth gradually opening in his bewilderment. "What makes you think that?" he asked, when he had found his speech.

"I don't exactly *think* it, James. Think is not the right word. The feeling has come upon me again within the last few weeks, and I cannot shake it off. I believe it to be a presentiment; a warning."

Paler and paler grew Mr. Chattaway. He did not understand. Like Miss Diana Trevlyn, he was very matter-of-fact, comprehending nothing but what could be seen and felt; and his wife might as well have spoken to him in an unknown tongue as of "presentiments." He drew a rapid conclusion that some unpleasant fact, bearing upon the dread which *he* had long felt, must have come to his wife's knowledge.

"What have you heard?" he gasped.

"I have heard nothing; nothing whatever. I——"

"Then what on earth are you talking about?"

"Did you understand me, James? I say that the impression was once firmly seated in my mind that Rupert would somehow be restored to what—to what"—she scarcely knew how to frame her words with the delicacy she deemed due to her husband's feelings—"to what would have been his but for his father's death. And that impression has now returned to me."

"But you have not heard anything? Any plot?—any conspiracy that's being hatched against us?" he reiterated.

"No, no."

Mr. Chattaway stared searchingly at his wife. Did he fancy, as Miss Diana had done, that her intellects were becoming disordered?

"Then, what do you mean?" he asked, after a pause.

"Why should such an idea arise?"

Mrs. Chattaway was silent. She could not tell him the truth; could not say that she believed it was the constant dwelling upon the wrong and injustice, which had first suggested the notion that the wrong would inevitably recoil on its workers. They had broken alike the laws of God and man; and those who do so cannot be sure in this world of immunity from punishment. That they had so long enjoyed unmolested the inheritance gained by fraud, gave no certainty that they would enjoy it to the end. She felt it, if her husband and Diana Trevlyn did not. Too often there were certain verses of Holy Writ spelling out their syllables upon her brain. "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."

All this she could not say to Mr. Chattaway. She could give him no good reason for what she had said; he did not understand imaginative fancies, and he went to rest after bestowing upon her a sharp lecture for indulging in them.

Nevertheless, in spite of her denial, the master of Trevlyn Hold could not divest himself of the impression that she must have picked up some scrap of news, or heard a word dropped in some quarter, which had led her to say what she did. And it gave him terrible discomfort.

Was the haunting shadow, the dread lying latent in his heart, about to be changed into substance? He lay on his bed, turning uneasily from side to side until morning, wondering from what quarter the first glimmer of the mischief would come,