pose them as being at their own home, Trevlyn Hold, sheltered by their appointed guardian."

"What appointed guardian?" cried Miss Diana.

"Yourself."

"I! I was not the appointed guardian of the Trevlyns."

"Indeed, Miss Trevlyn, you were. You were appointed by their mother. The letter—the deed, I may say, for I believe it to have been worded in all legal form—was written when she was dying."

Miss Trevlyn had never heard of anything of the sort; of any deed. "Who wrote it?" she asked, after a pause.

"I did. When dangerous symptoms set in, and she was told that she might not live, Mrs. Trevlyn sent for me. She had her little baby baptized Rupert, for it had been her husband's wish that the child, if a boy, should be so named, and then I sat down by her bedside at her request, and wrote the document. She entreated Miss Diana Trevlyn—you, madam—to reside at Trevlyn Hold as its mistress, when it should lapse to Rupert, and be the guardian and protector of her children, until Rupert should be of age. She besought you to love them, and be kind to them for their father's sake; for her sake; for the sake, also, of the friendship which had once existed between you and her. This will prove to you, Miss Trevlyn," he added in a different tone, "that poor Mrs. Trevlyn, at least, never supposed there was a likelihood of any other successor to the estate."

"I never heard of it," exclaimed Miss Diana, waking up as from a reverie. "Was the document sent to me?"

"It was enclosed in the despatch which acquainted Squire Trevlyn with Mrs. Trevlyn's death. I wrote them both, and I enclosed them together, and sent them."

"Directed to whom?"

"To Squire Trevlyn."

Miss Diana cast her thoughts back. It was Chattaway who had received that despatch. Could he—*could he* have dared to suppress any communication intended for her? Her haughty brow grew crimson at the thought; but she suppressed all signs of annoyance.

"Will you allow me to renew my acquaintance with little Maude?" resumed Mr. Daw. "Little Maude then, and a lovely child; a beautiful young lady, as I hear, now."

Miss Diana hesitated—a very uncommon thing for her to do. It is strange what trifles turn the current of feelings: and this

last item of intelligence had wonderfully softened her towards this stranger. But she remembered the interests at stake, and thought it best to be prudent.

"You must pardon the refusal," she said. "I quite appreciate your wish to serve Rupert Trevlyn, but it can only fail, and further intercourse will not be agreeable to either party. You will allow me to wish you good morning, and to thank you."

She rang the bell, and bowed him out, with all the grand courtesy belonging to the Trevlyns. As he passed through the hall, he caught a glimpse of a lovely girl, with a delicate bloom on her cheeks and large blue eyes. Instinct told him it was Maude; and he likewise thought he traced some resemblance to her mother. He took a step forward involuntarily, to accost her, but recollected himself, and drew back again.

It was scarcely the thing to do: in defiance of the recent direct refusal of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPROMPTU JOURNEY.

THE dew had been wet upon the grass in the autumn morning as the Squire of Trevlyn Hold rode from his door. He had hurried over his breakfast, his horse waiting for him, and he spurred him impatiently along the avenue. Ann Canham had not yet opened the gate. Upon hearing a horse's hoofs, she ran out to do so; and stood aside holding it back, and dropped her humble curtsey as Mr. Chattaway rode past. He vouchsafed not the slightest notice of her: neither by glance nor nod did he appear conscious of her presence. It was his usual way.

"He's off to Blackstone early," thought Ann Canham, as she fastened back the gate.

But Mr. Chattaway did not turn towards Blackstone. He turned in the opposite direction—to the left—and urged his horse to a gallop. Ann Canham looked after him.

"He have business at Barmester, maybe," was the conclusion to which she came.

Nothing more sure. Mr. Chattaway *had* business at Barmester. He rode briskly to the town, and pulled up his horse

almost at the same spot where you once saw him pull it up before—the house of Messrs. Wall and Barnes.

Not that he was about to visit that flourishing establishment this morning. Next to it was a private house, on the door-plate of which might be read, "Mr. Flood, Solicitor:" and he was the gentleman whom Mr. Chattaway had come to see.

Attracted probably by the clatter of the horse—for Chattaway had pulled up suddenly, and caused more noise than he need have done, the animal rather resenting the summary check, being fresh and somewhat restive—there came a face to the shop-door and looked out. It was that of Mr. Wall. He stepped forth to shake hands with Chattaway.

"How are you this morning? You are in Barmester betimes. What lovely weather we are having for the conclusion of the harvest!"

"Very; it has been a fine harvest altogether," replied Chattaway; and from his composure no one could have dreamt of the terrible care and perplexity that were running riot in his heart. "I want to say a word to Flood about a lease that is falling in, so I thought I'd start early and make a round of it on my way to Blackstone."

How subtle are the workings of the human heart! Had that been Chattaway's real business with the lawyer, he would not have gratuitously bestowed it on Mr. Wall: never was there a man less open in the ordinary affairs of life than Chattaway. Some vague feeling of wishing to divert suspicion or unpleasant conjecture from what he did want, was swaying him.

"An accident occurred yesterday to your son and Madam Chattaway, did it not?" asked Mr. Wall. "News of it was flying about last evening. I hope they are not much hurt?"

"Not at all. Cris was so stupid as to attempt to drive a horse unbroken for harness—one with a vicious temper, too. The dog-cart is smashed half to pieces. Here, you! come here."

The last words were addressed to a boy in a tattered jacket, who was racing after a passing carriage, having a mind to take a ride behind. Mr. Chattaway wanted him to hold his horse; and the boy changed his course with alacrity, believing the office would be good for sixpence at least.

The outer door of the lawyer's house was open. There was a second door in the passage, furnished with a knocker; the office opened on the left. Mr. Chattaway tried the office-door:

more as a matter of form than anything else. It was fast, as he expected, and would be until nine o'clock. So he gave an imposing knock at the other.

"I shall just catch him after his breakfast," soliloquized he, whilst he waited for it to be answered, "and can have a quiet quarter-of-an-hour with him, undisturbed by cli—— Is Mr. Flood at home?"

As he had tried the door in a mere matter of form, so he now put this question as one, and was passing in without ceremony. But the servant arrested him.

"Mr. Flood's out, sir. He is gone to London."

"Gone to London!" ejaculated Chattaway.

"Yes, sir, not an hour ago. He went by the eight-o'clock train."

It was so complete a check to all his imaginings, that for a minute the master of Trevlyn Hold found speech desert him. A great many bad men fly on the first threat of evil to a lawyer, in the firm belief that he can, by the exercise of his craft, bring them out of it. Chattaway, after a night of intolerable restlessness, had come straight off to his lawyer, Mr. Flood, with the intention of confiding the whole affair to him, and asking what was to be done in it; never giving so much as a glance at the possibility of that legal gentleman's absence.

"Went up by the eight-o'clock train?" he repeated when he found his voice.

"Yes, sir."

"And when's he coming home?"

"He expects to be away about a week, sir."

A worse check still. Chattaway's terrible fear might have waited in abeyance for a day; but for a week!—he thought he would go mad before its end. He was a great deal too miserly to spend money upon an unnecessary journey, but there appeared to be nothing for it but to follow Mr. Flood to London. That gentleman had heard perplexing secrets of Chattaway's before, had always given him the best advice, and remained faithful to the trust; and Chattaway believed he might safely confide to him this new and most dangerous fear. Not to any other would he have breathed a word. In short, the only confidential adviser he possessed in the world was Mr. Flood.

"Where will Mr. Flood put up in London?"

"I can't say, sir. I don't know anything about where he stays. He goes up pretty often."

"At the old place, I dare say," muttered Chattaway to him-

self. "If not, I shall learn where, through his agents in Essex Street."

He stood a moment in consideration on the pavement before mounting. There was a train—a slow and cheap one, that would leave Barmester in half-an-hour for London. Should he go by that train?—go from Barmester, instead of returning home to give them warning, and take the train at the little station near his own home? Was there need of haste so great? In Chattaway's present frame of mind the utmost haste he could make was almost a necessary relief to it: but, on the other hand, would his departing in this sudden and unaccountable manner excite suspicion at home and abroad, or draw unwelcome attention to his movements? Deep, deep in thought was he, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder. Turning sharply, he saw the honest hearty face of the linen-draper close to his.

"The queerest thing was said to me last night, Chattaway. I stepped into Robbins the barber's, to have my hair and whiskers trimmed, and he told me a great barrister was down here, a leading man from the Chancery court, come upon some business connected with you and the late Squire Trevlyn. With the property, I mean."

Chattaway's heart leaped into his mouth.

"I thought it a queer tale," continued Mr. Wall. "His mission here—the Chancery messenger's—being to restore Rupert Trevlyn to the estates of his grandfather, Robbins said. Is there anything in it?"

Had the public already got hold of it, then? Was the awful thing no longer a fear but a reality? Chattaway turned his face away, and tried to be equal to the emergency. At another time, the fanciful aspects that gossip acquires in spreading, might have afforded him amusement.

"You are talking great absurdity, Wall. Robbins! Who's Robbins? Were I you, I should be ashamed to repeat the lies propagated by that chattering old woman."

Mr. Wall laughed. "He certainly deals in news, does Robbins; it's part of his trade. Of course one only takes his marvels for what they are worth. He got *this* from Barcome, the tax-collector. The man had arrived at the scene of accident to the dog-cart shortly after its occurrence, and he heard this barrister—who, as it seems, was also there—speaking publicly of the object of his mission."

Chattaway snatched the bridle of his horse from the ragged

boy's hands, and mounted; his air, his face, expressing all the scorn he could command. "When they can impound Squire Trevlyn's will, then they may talk about altering the succession. Good morning, Wall."

A torrent of howls, interspersed with words that a magistrate on the bench must have shown himself cognizant of, saluted his ears as he rode off. They came from the aggrieved steed-holder. Instead of the sixpence he so fondly reckoned on, Chattaway had flung him a halfpenny.

He rode to an inn near the railway station, went in and called for pen and ink. The few words he wrote were to Miss Diana. He found himself obliged to go unexpectedly to London on the business *which she knew of*, and requested her to make any plausible excuse for his absence that would divert suspicion from the real facts. He should be home on the morrow. Such was the substance of the note.

He addressed it to Miss Trevlyn of Trevlyn Hold, sealed it with his own seal and marked it "private." A most unnecessary additional security, the last. No inmate of Trevlyn Hold would dare to open the most simple missive, bearing the address of Miss Trevlyn. Then he called one of the stable-men.

"I want this letter taken to my house," he said. "It is in a hurry. Can you go at once?"

The man replied that he could.

"Stay—you may ride my horse," added Mr. Chattaway, as if the thought that moment struck him. "You will get there in half the time that you would if you walked."

"Very well, sir. Shall I bring him back for you?"

"Um—m—m, no, I'll walk," decided Mr. Chattaway, stroking his chin as if to help his decision. "Leave the horse at the Hold."

The man mounted the horse and rode away, never supposing that Mr. Chattaway had been playing off a little *ruse* for his especial benefit, and that he had no intention of going to Trevlyn Hold that day, but was bound for a place rather farther off. In this innocent state of unconsciousness, he reached the Hold, while Mr. Chattaway made a *détour* and gained the station by a cross route, where he took train for London.

Cris Chattaway's groom, Sam Atkins, was standing with his young master's horse before the house, in waiting for that gentleman, when the messenger arrived. Not the new horse

of the previous day's notoriety, not the one lamed at Blackstone; but a despised and steady old animal sometimes used in the plough.

"What! there haven't been another accident sure-ly!" exclaimed Sam Atkins, in his astonishment at seeing Mr. Chattaway's steed brought home. "Where's the Squire?"

"He's all right; he have sent me up here with this," was the man's reply, producing the note. And at that moment Miss Diana Trevlyn appeared at the hall-door. [Miss Diana was looking out for Mr. Chattaway. After the communication made to her that morning by Mr. Daw—that he had forwarded to the Hold a document containing the last wishes of Mrs. Trevlyn, which appointed her (whether legally or not) the guardian of the two children—she could only come to the conclusion that the paper had been suppressed by Chattaway, and she was waiting in much wrath to demand his explanation of it.

"What brings the Squire's horse back?" she imperiously demanded.

Sam Atkins handed her the note, which she opened and read. Read it twice attentively, and then turned indoors. "Chattaway's a fool!" she angrily decided. "He is allowing this mare's-nest to take hold of his fears. He ought to know that while my father's will is in existence no power on earth can deprive him of Trevlyn Hold."

She went upstairs to Mrs. Chattaway's sitting-room. That lady, considerably recovered from the shock of the fall, was seated at the table, writing an affectionate letter to her daughter Amelia, telling her she might come home with Caroline Ryle. Miss Diana went straight up to the table, took a seat, and without the least apology or ceremony, closed Mrs. Chattaway's desk.

"I want your attention for a moment, Edith. You can write afterwards. Can you carry your memory back to the morning, so many years ago, when we received the news of Rupert's birth?"

"No effort is needed to do that, Diana. I think of it all too often."

"Very good. Then perhaps, without effort, you can recall the day following that, when the letter came announcing Mrs. Trevlyn's death?"

"Yes, I remember it also."

"The minute details? Could you, for instance, relate any

of the circumstances attending the arrival of that letter, if required to do so in a court of law? What time of the day it came, who opened it, where it was opened, and so forth?"

"Why do you ask me?" returned Mrs. Chattaway, surprised at the questions.

"I ask you to be answered. I have a reason for wishing to recall these past things. Think it over."

"Both the letters, so far as I can recollect, were given to Mr. Chattaway, and he opened them. He was in the habit then of opening papa's business letters. I have no doubt they were opened in the steward's room; James used to be there a great deal with the accounts and other matters connected with the estate. I cannot think why you ask me this."

"I have always known that James Chattaway did open those letters," said Miss Diana; "but I thought you might have been present at their opening. Were you?"

"No. I remember his coming into my chamber later, and telling me Mrs. Trevlyn was dead. I never shall forget the shock I felt."

"Attend to me, Edith. I have reason to believe that inside the last of those letters there was an inclosure for me. It never reached me. Do you know what became of it?"

The blank surprise on Mrs. Chattaway's countenance, her open questioning gaze at her sister, was a sufficient denial without words.

"I see you do not," said Miss Diana. "And now I am going to ask you something else. Did you ever hear that Emily Trevlyn, when she was dying, left a request that I should be guardian to her children?"

"Never," replied Mrs. Chattaway. "Have you been dreaming these things, Diana? Why should you ask about them now?"

"I leave dreams to you, Edith," was Miss Diana's reply. "My health is too sound to admit of sleeping dreams; my mind too practical to indulge in waking ones. Never mind why I asked: it was only as a personal matter of my own. By the way, I have had a line from your husband, written from Barmester. A little business has taken him out, and he may not be home until to-morrow. We are not to sit up for him."

"Has he gone to Nettleby hop fair?" hastily rejoined Mrs. Chattaway.

"Maybe," said Miss Diana, carelessly. "At any rate, say

nothing about his absence to any one. The children are unruly if they know he is away. I suppose he will be home to-morrow."

But Mr. Chattaway was not home on the morrow. Miss Diana was burning with impatience for his return; that explanation was being waited for, and she was one who brooked not delay: but she was obliged to submit to it now. Day after day passed on, Mr. Chattaway was still absent from Trevlyn Hold.

"What a time he is away!" quoth the servants in their familiar intercourse with each other. "He might be buying up all the hops in Nettleby."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WALK BY STARLIGHT.

A HARVEST-HOME used to be a great *fête* in farmhouses; chiefly so, as you are aware, for its servants and labourers. It is so in some houses still. A rustic, homely, social gathering; with plenty, in a plain way, to eat and drink, and where the masters and mistresses and their guests enjoy themselves as freely as their dependents.

Trevlyn Farm was lighted up to-night. The best kitchen, that large entrance room where you have seen Nora sitting sometimes, and which was never used for kitchen purposes, was set out with a long table as for dinner. Cold beef and ham, substantial and savoury meat pies, fruit pies, cakes, cheese, ale and cider, were being placed on it. Seats, chiefly benches, lined the walls, and the rustic labourers were coming sheepishly in. Some of them had the privilege of bringing their wives, who came in a great deal less sheepishly than the men.

Nanny was in full attire, a new green stuff gown and white apron; Molly from the parsonage was flaunting in a round cap, which the fashionable servants wore in Barmester, with red streamers hanging down; Ann Canham had a new Scotch plaid kerchief, white and purple, crossed on her shoulders; and Jim Sanders's mother, being rather poorly off for smart caps, wore a bonnet. These four were to do the waiting; and Nora was casting over them all the superintending eye of a

mistress. George Ryle liked to make his harvest-homes liberal and comfortable, and Mrs. Ryle seconded it. She was of the open-handed nature of the Trevlyns.

What Mrs. Ryle would have done, but for Nora Dickson, it was impossible to say. She really took little more management in the house than a visitor would take. Her will, it is true, was law: she gave orders, often in minute details; but she left the execution of them to others. Though she had married Thomas Ryle, the tenant of Trevlyn Farm, she never forgot that she was the daughter of Trevlyn Hold.

She sat in the small room opening from the supper-room—small in comparison with the drawing-room, but still commodious. On the harvest-home night, the visitors—Mrs. Ryle's visitors—were received in that ordinary room and sat there, forming, it may be said, part of the supper-room company, for the door was kept wide, and the great people went in and out, mixing with the small. George Ryle and the parson, Mr. Freeman, would be more in the supper-room than in the other; they were two who liked to see the hard-working people happy now and then.

Mrs. Ryle had taken up her place in the sitting-room; her gown of rich black silk and her real lace cap contrasting with the more showy attire of Mrs. Apperley, who sat next her. Mrs. Apperley was in a stiff brocade, yellow satin stripes flanking wavy lines of flowers. It had been her gala robe for years and years, and looked new yet. A wonderfully handsome silk, had it not been out of date. Mrs. Apperley's two daughters, in cherry-coloured ribbons and cherry-coloured hair-nets, were as gay as she was; they were whispering to Caroline Ryle, a graceful girl in dark-blue silk, with the blue eyes and the fair hair of her deceased father. Farmer Apperley, in top-boots, was holding an argument on the state of the country with a young gentleman who sat carelessly on the arm of the old-fashioned sofa, a young man of middle height and dark hair, stout for his years. It was Trevlyn Ryle. George had set his back against the wall, and was laughingly quizzing the Miss Apperleys, of which they were blushingly conscious. Were you to believe Nora, there was scarcely a young lady within the circuit of a couple of leagues but was privately setting her cap at handsome George.

A bustle in the outer room, and Nanny appeared with an announcement: "Parson and Mrs. Freeman." I am not responsible for the style of the introduction: you may hear it for