

"I shall not forget," she softly whispered.

And, possibly by way of a reminder, Mr. George, under cover of the shaded and silent porch, took his first lover's kiss from her lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VISIT TO DOCTORS' COMMONS.

BUT where had Mr. Chattaway been all that time? And how came it that he was seen by George Ryle and Maude hovering about his own ground at night, when he was supposed to be miles away? The explanation can be given.

Mr. Chattaway found, as many of us do, that lets and hindrances intrude themselves into the most simple plans. When he took the sudden resolution that morning, now some days ago, to run up to London from Barmester after Flood the lawyer, and sent his horse home, and also a word of communication to Miss Diana Trevlyn, to the effect that he should be home on the morrow, he never supposed that his journey would be a prolonged one. Nothing more easy, as it appeared, than to catch Flood at his hotel, get a quarter-of-an-hour's conversation with him, hear his advice, and be home again. But a check intervened.

Upon arriving at the London terminus, Mr. Chattaway got into a cab, and drove to the hotel ordinarily used by Mr. Flood. After a dispute with the cab-driver—and Mr. Chattaway was one who generally did have disputes with cab-drivers—he entered the hotel, and asked to see Mr. Flood.

"Mr. Flood?—Mr. Flood?" repeated the waiter whom he had accosted. "There's no gentleman of that name staying here, sir."

"I mean Mr. Flood of Barmester," irritably rejoined the master of Trevlyn Hold. "Perhaps you don't know him personally. He came up this morning an hour or two ago."

The waiter was a fresh one, and did not know Mr. Flood personally. He went to another waiter, and the latter came forward to Mr. Chattaway. But the man's information was correct; Mr. Flood of Barmester had not arrived.

"He travelled by the eight-o'clock train," persisted Mr.

Chattaway, as if he found the denial difficult to reconcile with that fact. "He must be in London."

"All I can say, sir, is that he has not come here," returned the head-waiter.

Mr. Chattaway was considerably put out. In his impatience, the delay seemed most irritating. He quitted the hotel, and bent his steps towards Essex Street, where the agents of Mr. Flood lived. Chattaway went in eagerly, fully hoping, and consequently expecting, that the first object his eyes should rest on would be his confidential adviser.

His eyes did not receive that satisfaction. Some clerks were in the room, also one or two persons who appeared to be strangers; clients, probably; but there was no Mr. Flood, and the clerks could give no information of him. One of the firm, a Mr. Newby, appeared and shook hands with Mr. Chattaway, whom he had once or twice seen.

"Flood? Yes. We had a note from Flood yesterday morning, telling us to get some accounts prepared, as he should be in town in the course of a day or two. He has not come yet; be up to-morrow perhaps."

"But he has come," reiterated Chattaway. "I have followed him up to town. I want to see him upon a matter of importance."

"Oh, come, has he?" carelessly replied Mr. Newby, and the indifferent manner appeared almost like an insult to Chattaway in that gentleman's impatient frame of mind. "He'll be in later, then."

"He is sure to come here?" inquired Mr. Chattaway.

"Quite sure. We shall have a good bit of business to transact with him this time."

"Then, if you'll allow me, I'll wait here. I must see him, and I want to get back to Barbrook as soon as possible."

Mr. Chattaway was told that he was welcome to wait, if it pleased him to do so, and a chair was handed him in the entrance room, where the clerks were writing, and he took his seat in it. He sat there until he was well-nigh driven wild with impatience. The room was in a continual bustle; persons constantly coming in and going out. For the first hour or so, to watch the swaying door afforded Chattaway a sort of relief; for in every fresh visitor (until he came into view) he expected to see Mr. Flood. But this grew tedious at last, and the ever-recurring disappointment told upon his temper.

Evening came, the hour for closing the office, and the

country lawyer had not made his appearance. "It is most extraordinary," remarked Chattaway to Mr. Newby.

"He has been about some other business, and couldn't get to us to-day, I suppose," rejoined Mr. Newby, in the most provokingly matter-of-fact tone. "If he has come up for a week, as you say, he must have some important affair on hand; in which case it may be a day or two before he finds his way to us."

A most unsatisfactory conclusion for Mr. Chattaway; but that gentleman was obliged to put up with it, in the absence of any hope more tangible. He went back to the hotel, and there found that Mr. Flood was still among the non-arrivals.

It was bad enough, that day and night's disappointment and suspense for Chattaway; but when it came to be extended over more days and nights, you may judge how it was increased. Mr. Flood did not make his appearance. Chattaway, in a state of fume, divided his time between the hotel, the agents' office in Essex Street, and the Euston Square station, in the wild hope of coming upon the lawyer. All to no purpose. He telegraphed to Barmester, and received for reply that Mr. Flood was in London, and so he redoubled his hauntings at the different expected meeting-places, and worked himself into a fever.

It appeared to him absolutely necessary that he should consult Flood before venturing back to home quarters, where he should inevitably meet that dangerous enemy. But how could he see Flood?—where look for him? Barmester telegraphed up that Mr. Flood was in London; the agents persisted in their assertion that they expected him hourly, each day, at their office, and yet Chattaway could not come upon him. He tore into all the courts open in the long vacation; he prowled about the Temple, about Lincoln's Inn, and other places where lawyers congregated, in the delusive hope that he might by good luck meet with him. All, I say, in vain; and Chattaway had been very nearly a week from home, when his hopes were at length realized. There were other lawyers whom he might have consulted—Mr. Newby himself, for instance—but he shrank from laying bare his dread to a stranger.

He was walking slowly up Ludgate Hill, his hands in his pockets, his brow knit, altogether in a disconsolate manner, some vague intention in his mind of taking a peep inside Doctors' Commons, when, by the merest accident, he happened to turn his eyes on the string of vehicles passing up and down.

In that same moment a cab, extricating itself from the long line, whirled past him in the direction of Fleet Street; and its occupant was Flood the lawyer.

All his listlessness was gone. His eyes starting, Chattaway threw himself into the midst of the crowding carriages, and tore shouting after the cab. The sober foot-passengers thought he had gone mad: but they were bent on their own eager business, and had only time for a wondering glance. Chattaway bore on his way, and succeeded in keeping the cab in view. By the time it stopped at the hotel, to which it turned, and the lawyer had alighted, a portmanteau in hand, and was paying the driver, Chattaway was up with him, breathless, excited, grasping his arm as one demented.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Flood, in astonishment. "You here, Chattaway? Do you want me?"

"I followed you to town by the next train a week ago; I have been looking for you ever since," gasped Chattaway, unable to regain his breath between the race and the excitement. "Where have you been hiding yourself? Your agents have been expecting you all this time."

"I dare say they have. I wrote to say I should be with them in a day or two. I thought I should be, then."

"But where have you been?"

"Over to France. A client wrote to me from Paris——"

"To France!" interrupted Mr. Chattaway in his anger, feeling the announcement as a special and personal grievance. What right had his legal adviser to be dancing his heels in France, when he had been searching for him in London?

"I did not intend to stay," continued Mr. Flood. "I took the express route, *via* Folkestone, and meant to return without delay; but when I reached my client, I found the affair on which he wanted me was complicated, and I had to wait the dilatoriness of French lawyers."

"You have been lingering over the seductions of Paris; nothing else," growled Mr. Chattaway.

The lawyer laughed pleasantly. "No, on my honour. I did go about to see some of the sights while I was waiting for my business; but they did not detain me by one unnecessary minute. What is it that you want with me?"

They entered the hotel, and Mr. Chattaway took him into a private room, unwashed and unrefreshed as the traveller was, and laid the case before him: the sudden appearance of the mysterious stranger at Barbrook, his open avowal that he had

come to depose Chattaway from the Hold, and place in it Rupert Trevlyn.

"But who is he?" inquired Mr. Flood.

"A lawyer," was the reply—for you must remember that Mr. Chattaway could only speak in accordance with the supposed facts; the facts as they had been exaggerated to him. "I know nothing more about the man, except that he avows he has come to Barbrook to deprive me of my property, and take up the cause of Rupert Trevlyn. But he can't do it, you know, Flood. The Hold is mine, and must remain mine."

"Of course he can't," acquiesced the lawyer. "Why need you put yourself out about it?"

Mr. Chattaway was wiping the moisture from his face. The words, "But he can't do it, you know, Flood," had been spoken more as a question, suggested by his fears, than as an assertion of his belief. He sat looking at the lawyer.

"I can't deny that it has troubled me," he said: "that it is troubling me still. What would my family do—my children—if we were turned from the Hold?"

It was the lawyer's turn to look. He could not make out Chattaway. No power on earth, so far as his belief and knowledge went, could wrest Trevlyn Hold from its present master. Why, then, these fears? Were they born of nervousness? But Chattaway was not a nervous man.

"Trevlyn Hold is as much yours as this hat"—touching the one at his elbow—"is mine," he resumed. "It came to you by legal bequest; you have enjoyed it these twenty years, and to deprive you of it is beyond human power. Unless," he added, after a pause, "unless indeed—"

"Unless what?" eagerly interrupted Mr. Chattaway, his heart thumping against his side.

"Unless—it was only an idea that crossed me—there should prove to be a flaw in Squire Trevlyn's will. But that's not probable."

"It's impossible," gasped Chattaway, his fears, in defiance of the words, taking a new and startling turn. "It's impossible that there could have been anything defective in the will, Flood."

"It's next to impossible," acquiesced the lawyer; "though such mistakes have been known. Who drew it up?"

"The Squire's solicitors, Peterby and Jones."

"Then it's all right, you may be sure. Peterby and Jones are not men likely to insert errors in their deeds. I should not trouble myself about the matter."

Mr. Chattaway sat in silence, revolving many things. How he wished he *could* take the advice and not "trouble himself" about the matter! "What made you think there might be a flaw in the will?" he presently asked.

"Nay, I did not think there was: the train of thought led me to the idea that there might be; that was all. When a case is offered to me for consideration," continued Mr. Flood, "it is my habit to glance at it in all its bearings. You tell me that a stranger has made his appearance at Barbrook, avowing an intention of displacing you from Trevlyn Hold in favour of Rupert Trevlyn?"

"Well?"

"Well, then, I instantly, whilst you were speaking, began to grasp that case, to turn it about in my mind; and I see that there is no possible way by which you can be displaced, so far as I know and believe. You enjoy it in accordance with Squire Trevlyn's will, and so long as that will remains in force, you are safe—provided the will has no flaw in it."

"Why should you think it has a flaw in it?" reiterated Mr. Chattaway.

"I don't think it. I don't fear it. I only mentioned it as the remotest possible solution—the only ground of pretence for the manner in which you tell me this man is acting. I make no doubt that the will is what it has always been supposed to be—perfectly legal; and that the stranger's expressed intention will turn out to be all moonshine."

Mr. Chattaway sat biting his lips. His own opinion had always been (and, it may be said, was in contradistinction to that great dread ever hidden in his heart) that he was safe under the will and through the will. Never for a moment in the wildest flight of fear had he given a glance to the possibility that the will could be illegal. On that will he had relied, however dark and vague his fears had seemed: it had been his sheet-anchor. The idea, therefore, now suggested by Mr. Flood was perhaps the most alarming that could have been presented to him.

"If there were any flaw in the will," he began—and the very mention of the cruel words almost rent his heart in two—"could you detect it, by reading the will over?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Flood.

"Then let us go at once, and set this awful uncertainty at rest."

He had risen from his seat so eagerly and hastily that Mr. Flood scarcely understood. "Go where?" he asked.

"To Doctors' Commons. We can see it there by paying a shilling."

"Oh—ay. I'll go if you like. But I must have a wash first, and a mouthful of refreshment. I have had neither since leaving Boulogne, and the crossing—ugh! I don't want to think of it."

Mr. Chattaway controlled his impatience in the best manner he was able. He went out and called a cab to the door, and took his place in it before Mr. Flood was ready—which would, in all probability, entail one of Mr. Chattaway's favourite disputes with the driver when they should arrive at their destination. At length they were fairly on their way—to the very spot for which Mr. Chattaway had been making once before that morning.

Difficulties surmounted, including the cabman, Mr. Flood was soon deep in the perusal of Squire Trevlyn's will. He read it over slowly and thoughtfully, his eyes and head bent, his whole attention absorbed in the task. At its conclusion, he turned and looked full at Mr. Chattaway.

"You are perfectly safe," he said. "The will is right and legal in every point."

The relief brought a glow into Chattaway's dusky face. "I thought it strange if it could be wrong," he cried, drawing a deep breath.

"It is only the codicil, you see, which affects you," continued Mr. Flood, pointing to the deed before them. "The will appears to have been made years before the codicil, and leaves the estate to the eldest son Rupert, and failing him, to Joseph. Rupert died; Joe died; and then the codicil was drawn up, willing it to you. You come in, you see, *after* the two sons; contingent on their death; no mention whatever is made of the child Rupert."

Chattaway coughed. He did not deem it necessary to repeat that Squire Trevlyn had never known that the child Rupert was in existence: but Mr. Flood was, no doubt, aware of that fact.

"It's a good thing for you that Joe Trevlyn died before his father," carelessly remarked Mr. Flood, as he glanced again at the will.

"Why?" cried Chattaway.

"Because, had he not, this codicil would be valueless," explained the lawyer. "It is——"

"But he was dead, and it gives the estate to me," fiercely interrupted Chattaway, going into a white heat again.

"Yes, yes. But it was a good thing, I say, for you. Had Joe been alive, he would have come in, in spite of this codicil; and he could have bequeathed the property to his boy after him."

"Do you suppose I don't know all that?" retorted Chattaway. "It was only in consequence of Joe Trevlyn's death that the estate was willed to me. Had he lived, I never should have had it, or expected it."

The peevish tone of his voice betrayed how sore was the subject altogether, and Mr. Flood smiled. "You need not be cross over it, Chattaway," he said; "there's no cause for that. And now you may go home to the Hold in peace, without having your sleep disturbed by dreams of ejection. And if that unknown friend of yours should happen to mention in your hearing his kind intention of deposing you for Rupert Trevlyn, tell him, with my compliments, to come up here and read Squire Trevlyn's will."

Partially reassured, if not entirely satisfied, Mr. Chattaway lost little time in taking his departure from London. He quitted it that same afternoon, and arrived at Barbrook terminus just after dark, whence he started for the Hold.

But he did not proceed to it as most other travellers in his rank of life would have done. He did not call a fly and drive to it; he preferred to go on foot. He did not even walk openly along the broad highway, but turned into the by-paths, where he might be pretty sure of not meeting a soul, and stole cautiously along, peering on all sides, as if he were looking out for something he either longed or dreaded to see.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WELCOME HOME.

Was there a fate upon the master of Trevlyn Hold?—was he never to be at rest?—could not even one little respite be allowed him in this, the first hour of his return home? It seemed not. He was turning into the first of those fields you have so often heard of, next to the one which had been the scene of poor Mr. Ryle's unhappy end, when a tall man suddenly pounced upon him, came to a standstill, and spoke.