

"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.

"I believe I am not mistaking in supposing that I address Mr. Chattaway?"

In his panic Mr. Chattaway nearly dropped a small parcel which he held. An utter fear had taken possession of him, even to the loss of his self-possession: for in the speaker he recognized that dreaded enemy; that man who had proclaimed that he was about to work evil against him. It seemed like a terrible omen, the meeting him in this, the first moment of his arrival.

"I have been wishing to see you for some days past," continued the stranger, "and have been to the Hold three or four times to ask if you had come home. I was a friend of the late Joe Trevlyn's. I am a friend now of his son."

"Yes," stammered Chattaway—for in his great fear he did not follow his first impulse, which had been to meet the words with a torrent of anger. "May I ask what it is you want with me?"

"I wish to converse with you upon the subject of Rupert Trevlyn. I would endeavour to impress upon your notice the grievous wrong inflicted upon him in keeping him out of the Hold—the property of his forefathers. I do not think you can ever have reflected properly upon the matter, Mr. Chattaway, or can have looked upon it in its true light—otherwise you would surely never deprive him of what is so indisputably his."

Mr. Chattaway, his fears taking deeper and deeper possession of him, had turned into the field, in the hope of walking away from the stranger. In any direction, no matter what, so that he could get rid of him—for what to answer he did not know. It must be conciliation or defiance; but he could not decide in that hurried moment which would be the better policy. The stranger also turned and kept up with him.

"My name is Daw, Mr. Chattaway. You may possibly remember it, for I had the honour of a little correspondence with you about the time of Mrs. Trevlyn's death. It was I who transmitted to you the account of the birth of the boy Rupert. I am now informed that that fact was not suffered to reach the ears of Squire Trevlyn."

"I wish to hear nothing about it, sir; I desire to hold no communication with you at all," cried Mr. Chattaway, bearing on his way.

"But it may be better for you that you should do so, and I ask it in courtesy," persisted Mr. Daw, striding beside him. "Appoint your own time and place, and I will wait upon you."

These things are always better settled amicably than the reverse: litigation generally brings a host of evil in its train; and Rupert Trevlyn has no money to risk in it. Not but that his costs could come out of the estate," equably concluded Mr. Daw.

The master of Trevlyn Hold turned passionately round, arresting his course for an instant. "Litigation! what do you mean? How dare you speak to me in this manner? Who but a footpad would accost a gentleman by night, as you are accosting me?"

The discourteous thrust did not seem to put out Mr. Daw. "I only wish you to appoint a time to see me—at your own home, or anywhere else you may please," he reiterated, not losing his good manners. "But I am not to be balked in this, Mr. Chattaway. I have taken up the cause of Rupert Trevlyn, and I shall try and carry it through."

A blaze of anger burst from Mr. Chattaway. His words, his tones, were alike fiercely passionate, and Mr. Daw turned away. "I will see you when you are in a reasonable mood," he said. "To-morrow I will call at the Hold, and I hope you will meet me more amicably than you have done to-night."

"I will never meet you; I will never see or listen to you," retorted Mr. Chattaway, his anger mastering him and causing him to forget prudence. "If you want to know by what right I retain the Hold over the boy, Rupert Trevlyn, go and consult Squire Trevlyn's will. There! That is the only answer you will get from me."

Panting with the anger he could not restrain, Mr. Chattaway stood and watched the calm, retreating steps of the stranger, and then turned his own in the direction of home; unconscious that he in his turn was also watched, and by two who were very close to him—George Ryle and Maude Trevlyn.

They—as you remember—proceeded immediately to Trevlyn Farm; and words were spoken between them which no time could efface. Impulsive words, telling of the love that had long lain in the heart of each, almost as suppressed, quite as deep, as the great dread which had made the skeleton in Mr. Chattaway's.

The hilarity of the evening had made much progress, as they found on entering. The company were seated round the table eating the good things, and evidently enjoying themselves heartily. The parlour-door was crowded with merry faces.

Mrs. Ryle and others were at one end of the large room: but George steered Maude direct to the parlour; and the group round its door made way for her, and welcomed her noisily.

But there came no smile to the face of Octave Chattaway. Pushing her way through the rest with a severe eye and stern tone, she confronted Maude. Her lips were drawn with anger.

"Maude Trevlyn, what do you do here? How dare you come?"

"Is there any harm in it, Octave?"

"Yes, there is," said Miss Chattaway, with flashing eyes. "There is harm because I desired that you would not come. A pretty thing for Mrs. Ryle to be invaded by half-a-dozen of us! Have you no sense of propriety?"

"Not a bit of it," gaily interrupted George. "No one understands that in connection with a harvest-home. I have been to the Hold for Miss Maude, Octave; and I should have brought Edith and Emily, but they were in bed."

"In bed!" exclaimed Caroline Ryle, in surprise.

"Having retired to it in mortification and tears at being excluded from the delights of a harvest-home," continued George, with mock gravity. "Miss Chattaway had preached propriety to them, and they could only bow to it. We must manage things better another time."

Octave's cheeks burnt. Was George Ryle speaking this in ridicule?—ridicule of her? To stand well with him, she would have risked much.

"They are better at home," she quietly said: "and I have no doubt Mrs. Ryle thinks so. Two of us are enough to come. Quite enough, in my opinion," she pointedly added, turning a reproving look on Maude. "I am surprised that you should have intruded——"

"Blame me, if you please, Miss Chattaway—if you deem that blame is due anywhere," interrupted George. "I have a will of my own, you know, and I took possession of Miss Maude and brought her, whether she would or no."

Octave pushed her hair back with an impatient movement. Her eyes fell before his; her voice, as she addressed him, turned to softness. George was not a vain man; but it was next to impossible to mistake these signs; though neither by word nor look would he give the faintest colouring of hope to them. If Octave could only have read the indifference at his heart! nay, more—his positive dislike!

"Did you see anything of Rupert, George?" she asked, recalling his attention to herself.

"I saw nothing of any one but Maude. I might have laid hands on all I found; but there was no one to meet, Maude excepted. What makes you so cross about it, Octave?"

She laughed pleasantly. "I am not cross. George," she added, in lower tones, "sometimes I think you do not understand me. You seem to——"

Octave's words died away. Coming in at the door was the tall, conspicuous form of the parsonage guest, Mr. Daw. Maude was just then standing apart, and he went deliberately up to her and kissed her forehead.

Startled and resentful, a half-cry escaped her lips, and she turned instinctively towards George. But Mr. Daw laid his hand gently on her arm.

"My dear young lady, I may almost claim that as a right. I believe I was the first person, except your mother, who ever pressed a kiss upon your little face. Do you know me?"

Maude faltered in her answer. His appearance and salutation had been altogether so sudden, that she was taken by surprise; but she did not fail to recognize him now. Yet she hesitated to acknowledge that she knew him, on account of the presence of Octave Chattaway. Rupert had told her all about the stranger; but it might be inconvenient to say so much to an inmate of Trevlyn Hold.

"It was I who christened you," he resumed. "It was I who promised your father to—sometimes watch over you. But I could not keep my promise; circumstances worked against it. And now that I am brought for a short time into the same neighbourhood that you inhabit, I may not call to see you."

"Why not?" exclaimed Maude, wondering much.

"Because those who are your guardians deny it to me. I went to the Hold and asked for you, and then became aware that in doing so I had committed something like a crime, or what was looked upon as one. Should Rupert, your brother, regain possession of his father's inheritance and his father's home, then, perhaps, I may be a more welcome visitor to it."

The room stood in consternation. To some of them, at any rate, these words were new; to the ears of Octave Chattaway they were tainted with the darkest treason. Octave had never heard aught of this bold stranger's business at Barbrook, and she gazed at him with defiant eyes and lips apart.

"Were you alluding to the Hold, sir?" she asked in a cold, hard voice, which might have been taken for Chattaway's own.

"I was. The Hold was the inheritance of Rupert Trevlyn's father: it ought to be that of Rupert."

"The Hold is the inheritance of my father," haughtily spoke Octave. "Is he mad?" she added in a half-whisper, turning to George.

"Hush, Octave. No."

It was not a pleasant or even an appropriate theme to be spoken of in the presence of Mr. Chattaway's daughters. George Ryle, at any rate, thought so, and he was glad that a burst of rustic merriment, so loud as to drown everything else for a time, came overpoweringly at that moment from the feasting in the other room.

Under cover of the noise, Octave approached Nora. Nora immediately drew an apple-pie before her, and began to cut unlimited helpings from it, pretending to be absorbed by her work. She had not the least inclination for a private interview with Miss Chattaway. Miss Chattaway was one, however, not easily repulsed.

"Nora, tell me—who is that man, and what brings him here?"

"What man, Miss Chattaway?" asked Nora, indifferently, unable quite to help herself. "Ann Canham, how many are there to serve with pie still?"

"*That* man. That bold, bad man who has been speaking so strangely."

"Does he speak strangely?" retorted Nora. "His voice is gruff certainly. And what a lot of plum-pudding he is eating! He is our young master's new waggoner, Miss Chattaway."

"Not *he*!" shrieked Octave, in her anger. "Do you suppose I concern myself with those stuffing clothoppers? I speak of that tall, strange man amongst the guests."

"Oh, he!" said Nora, carelessly glancing over her shoulder. "Nanny, here's plenty of pie if it's wanted. What about him, Miss Chattaway?"

"I asked you who he was, and what brought him here."

"Then you had better ask it of himself, Miss Chattaway. He goes about with a red umbrella; and that's about all I know of him for certain."

"Why does Mrs. Ryle invite suspicious characters to her house?"

"Suspicious characters! Is he one? Meg Sanders, if you

let Jim cram himself with pie in that style, you'll have something to do to get him home. He is stopping at the parsonage, Miss Chattaway; an acquaintance of Mr. Freeman's. I suppose they brought him here to-night out of politeness; it wouldn't have been good manners to leave him at home. He is an old friend of the Trevlyns, I hear; has always believed, until now, that Master Rupert enjoyed the Hold—can't be brought to believe that he doesn't. It is a state of things that does sound odd to a stranger, you know."

Octave might rest assured that she would not get the best of it with Nora. She turned away with a displeased gesture, and regained the sitting-room, where refreshments for Mrs. Ryle's friends were now being laid. But somehow the sunshine of the evening had gone out for her. What had run away with it? The ominous words of the stranger? No; the worst sentiment that Octave cast to *them* was contempt. It was George Ryle's unsatisfactory manner that vexed her: unsatisfactory, because so intensely calm and equable. And those calm, matter-of-fact manners, in one beloved, tell sorely upon the heart.

The evening passed, and it grew time to leave. Cris Chattaway and Rupert had come in, and they all set off in a body to Trevlyn Hold—those who had to go there. George went out with them.

"Are you coming?" asked Octave.

"Yes, part of the way."

So Octave stood, ready to take his arm, never supposing that he would not offer it; and her pulses began to beat. But he turned round as if waiting for something, and Octave could only walk on a few steps. Soon she heard him coming up with a brisk step, and she turned to him. And then her heart seemed to stand still and bound on again with fiery speed, and a flush of anger dyed her brow. He had taken Maude on his arm!

"Oh, George, do not let Maude trouble you," she exclaimed.

"Cris will take care of her. Cris, come and relieve George of Maude Trevlyn."

"Thank you, Octave; it's no trouble," replied George, his tone one of indifference. "As I brought Maude out, it is only fair that I should take her home—the task falls to me, you see."

Octave did not see it at all, and she pursued her way sullenly and resentfully; something very like hatred for Maude taking possession of her breast. It is not pleasant to write of

these things, especially when they may be looked upon as somewhat misplaced; but I know of few histories in which they can be quite avoided, if the whole truth is adhered to, for many and evil are the passions assailing the undisciplined human heart.

"Good-bye!" George whispered to Maude as he left her. "This night begins a new era in our lives."

The Hold was busy when they entered it. Mrs. Chattaway and her sister had just returned from Barmester, and were greeted by Mr. Chattaway. They had expected him for so many days past, and been disappointed, that his appearance now brought surprise with it. He answered the questions evasively put to him by Mrs. Chattaway and Diana, as to where he had been. Business had kept him, was all they could obtain.

"I cannot think what you have done for clothes, James," said Mrs. Chattaway.

"I have done very well," he retorted. "I bought what I wanted."

But it was not upon the score of his wardrobe, or what had kept him so long, that Miss Diana Trevlyn required speech of Chattaway. She had been waiting all that time, since the first morning of his absence, for information on a certain point, and she now demanded it in a peremptory manner.

"Chattaway," she began, when the rest had dispersed, and she waited with him, "I have had a strange communication made to me. In that past time—carry your thoughts back to it, if you please—when there came to this house the news of Rupert Trevlyn's birth and his mother's death—do you remember it?"

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Chattaway. "What should hinder me?"

"The tidings were conveyed by letter. Two letters came, the second a day after the first."

"Well?" returned Mr. Chattaway, believing the theme, in some shape or other, was to haunt him for ever. "What of the letters?"

"In that last letter, which must have been a heavy one, there was a communication enclosed for me."

"I don't remember it," said Mr. Chattaway.

"It was no doubt there. A document written at the request of Mrs. Trevlyn; constituting me guardian to the two children. What did you do with it?"

"I?" returned Chattaway, and he spoke with apparent surprise, and looked full at Miss Diana with an unmoved face. "I did nothing with it. I don't know anything about it."

"You must have taken it out and suppressed it," observed Miss Diana.

"I never saw it or heard of it," obstinately persisted Chattaway. "Why should I? You might have been their appointed guardian, and welcome, for me: you have chiefly acted as guardian. I tell you, Diana, I neither saw it nor heard of it: you need not look so suspiciously at me."

"Is he telling the truth?" thought Miss Diana, and her keen eyes were not lifted from Mr. Chattaway's face. But that gentleman was remarkably inscrutable, and never appeared more so than at this moment.

"If he did *not* do anything with it," continued Miss Diana in her train of thought, "what could have become of the thing? Where can it be?"

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. CHATTAWAY COME TO GRIEF.

A FEW days passed on, and strange rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood. Various rumours, vague at the best; but all tending to one point—that the true heir was coming to his own again. They penetrated even to the ears of Mr. Chattaway, throwing that gentleman into a state not to be described. Some said a later will of the Squire's had been found; some said a will of Joe Trevlyn's; some that it was now discovered the estate could only descend in the direct male line, and that consequently it had been Rupert's all along. Chattaway was in a raging fever; it preyed upon him, and turned his days to darkness. He seemed to look upon Rupert with the most intense suspicion, as if it were from him alone—from his plotting and working, you understand—that the evil would come. He feared to trust him out of his sight; to leave him alone for a single instant. When he went to Blackstone he took Rupert with him; he hovered about there all day, keeping Rupert in sight, and he brought him back in the evening. Miss Diana had not yet bought the pony she spoke of for Rupert's use, and Chattaway either mounted him