

had dimmed, and neither lamp nor candles had been lighted. Mrs. Chattaway and Miss Diana sat there conversing together.

"Who is this?" cried the former, looking round. "Oh, is it you, James? I did not know you were home again. What a fine day you have had for Whitterbey!"

Mr. Chattaway growled something about the day not having been particularly fine.

"Did you buy the stock you thought of buying?" asked Miss Diana.

"I bought some," he said, rather sulkily. "Prices ran high to-day."

"You are home late," she resumed.

"I came round by Blackstone."

It was evident by his tone and manner that he was in one of his least genial humours. Both the ladies knew from experience that the wisest plan at those times was to leave him to himself, and they resumed their own converse. Mr. Chattaway stood with his back to them, his hands in his pockets, his eyes peering out into the dusky night. Not in reality looking at anything, or attempting to look: he was far too deeply busied with his thoughts to pay attention to outward things.

He was beginning very slightly to repent of the horsewhipping, to doubt whether it might not have been more prudent had he abstained from inflicting it. As do many more of us, when we awake to reflection after some act committed in passion. If Rupert *was* to be dreaded; if he, in connection with others, was hatching treason, this outrage would only make of him a more bitter enemy. Better, perhaps, not to have gone to the extremity.

But it was done; it could not be undone; and to regret it were worse than useless. Mr. Chattaway began thinking of the point which had led to it—the refusal of Rupert to say who had admitted him. This at least Mr. Chattaway determined to ascertain.

"Did either of you let in Rupert last night?" he suddenly inquired, looking round.

"No, we did not," promptly replied Miss Diana, answering for Mrs. Chattaway as well as for herself, which she believed she was perfectly safe in doing. "He was not in until eleven, I hear; we went up to bed long before that."

"Then who did let him in?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway.

"One of the servants, of course," rejoined Miss Diana.

"But they say they did not," he answered.

"Have you asked them all?"

No. Mr. Chattaway remembered that he had not asked them all, and he came to the conclusion that one of them must have been the culprit. He turned to the window again, standing sulkily as before, and vowing in his own mind that the offender, whether man or woman, should be turned summarily out of the Hold.

"If you have been to Blackstone, you have heard that the inquest is over, James," observed Mrs. Chattaway, anxious to turn the conversation from the subject of last night. "Did you hear the verdict?"

"I heard it," he growled.

"It is not an agreeable verdict, Chattaway," remarked Miss Diana. "Better that you had made these improvements in the mine—as I urged upon you long ago—than wait to be forced to do them."

"I am not forced yet," retorted Chattaway. "They must—Holloa! What's that?"

His sudden exclamation called them both to the window. A bright light, a blaze, was shooting up into the sky. At the same moment a shrill scream of terror—the scream from Bridget—arose with it.

"The rick-yard! the rick-yard!" exclaimed Miss Diana. "It is on fire!"

Mr. Chattaway stood for an instant as one paralyzed. The next he was leaping down the stairs, something like a yell bursting from him.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE BLAZE.

THERE is a terror, which, from its very suddenness, shakes man's equanimity to its foundation—and that terror fell upon Trevlyn Hold. At the twilight hour of the evening—for it was not yet quite dark—its inmates were sitting mostly in idleness; the servants gossiping quietly in the kitchen, the young ladies lingering over the fire in the drawing-room; when those awful sounds of fear interrupted them—the cry of their father in the room above; the cry, shrill and prolonged, from outside the house. With a simultaneous movement, all flew to the



hall, only to see Mr. Chattaway leap down the stairs, followed by his wife and Miss Diana Trevlyn.

"Oh, papa! what is it? What is the matter?"

"The rick-yard is on fire!"

None of them knew who answered. It was not Mr. Chattaway's voice; it was not their mother's; it did not sound like Miss Diana's. A startled pause, and they ran out to the rick-yard, a terrified company. Little Edith Chattaway, a most excitable girl, fell into hysterics, and only added to the confusion of the scene.

The blaze was shooting upwards, and men were coming up from the out-buildings, as they gave vent to their dismay in various exclamations. One voice was heard distinctly above all the rest—that of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

"Who has done this? It must have been purposely set on fire."

She turned sharply on the group of servants as she spoke, as if suspecting one of them. The blaze fell on their alarmed faces, and they visibly recoiled; not from any consciousness of guilt, but from the general sense of fear which lay upon all. One of the grooms spoke impulsively.

"I heard voices not a minute ago in the rick-yard," he cried. "I'll swear I heard 'em. I was a-going across the top there to fetch a bucket of water from the pump for the stables, and I heard 'em talking. One was a woman's. I saw a light, too."

The women-servants were grouped together, staring helplessly at the blaze. Miss Diana directed her attention particularly to them: she had a ready perception, a keen sight, and she detected signs of terror so unmistakable in the face of one of them, that she could not help drawing a rapid conclusion. It was not the expression of general alarm, of surprise, of doubt depicted on the countenance of the rest; but an apprehensive, lively, conscious terror. The girl began endeavouring to draw behind, out of the sight of Miss Diana.

Miss Diana laid her hand upon her. It was Bridget, the kitchenmaid. "You know something of this!"

Bridget burst into tears. A more complete picture of helpless fear than she presented at that moment could not well be drawn. In her apron, held up as it seemed unconsciously, was something hidden.

"What have you got there?" sharply continued Miss Diana, whose thoughts may have flown to tow and matches, and other incendiary adjuncts.

Bridget, unable to speak, turned down the apron and disclosed a little black puppy: which, as if not liking to be displayed to general gaze, began to whine. There was nothing very guilty about him; but Bridget's sobs were redoubled.

"Were you in the rick-yard?" questioned Miss Diana; "was it your voice that Sam heard?" And Bridget was too terribly frightened to deny it.

"Then, pray, what were you doing? What brought you in the rick-yard at all?"

But Mrs. Chattaway, timid Mrs. Chattaway, who was trembling almost as much as Bridget, but who had compassion for every one in distress, came to the rescue. "Don't, Diana," she said. "I am sure Bridget is too good and honest a girl to have taken part in so dreadful a thing as this. The rick may have got heated and taken fire spontaneously."

"No, Madam, I'd die before I'd do such a thing," sobbed Bridget, in answer to the kindness. "If I was in the rick-yard, I wasn't doing no harm—and I'm sure I'd rather have went a hundred mile the other way if I'd thought what was going to happen. I turned sick with fright when I saw the flame burst out."

"Was it you who screamed?" inquired Miss Diana.

"I did scream, ma'am. I couldn't help it."

"Diana," whispered Mrs. Chattaway, "you may see she's innocent."

"Yes, most likely; but there's something behind for all that," replied Miss Diana, in her decisive tone. "Bridget, I mean to come to the bottom of this business, and the sooner you explain it, the less trouble you'll be at. I ask what took you to the rick-yard?"

"It wasn't no harm, ma'am, as Madam says," sobbed Bridget, evidently very unwilling to enter on the explanation. "Oh, ma'am! I never did no harm in going there, nor thought none."

"Then it is the more easily told," responded Miss Diana. "Do you hear me, girl? What business took you to the rick-yard, and who were you talking with?"

There appeared to be no help for it; Bridget had felt there would not be from the first; she should have to confess to her rustic admirer's stolen visit. And Bridget, while liking him in her heart, was intensely ashamed of him, from his being so much younger than herself.

"Ma'am, I only came into it for a minute to speak to a



young boy; my cousin, Jim Sanders. Hatch, he came into the kitchen and said young Jim wanted to see me, and I came out. That's all—if it was the last word I had to speak," she added, with a burst of grief.

"And Jim Sanders? What did he want with you?" pursued Miss Diana, with uncompromising sternness.

"It was to show me this puppy," returned Bridget, not choosing to confess that the small animal was brought as a present. "Jim seemed proud of it, he did, ma'am, and he brought it up for me to see."

A very innocent confession; plausible also; and Miss Diana saw no reason for disbelieving it. But she was one who liked to be on the sure side, and when corroborative testimony was to be had to a fact, she did not allow it to escape her. "One of you find Hatch," she said, addressing the maids.

Hatch was found with the men-servants and labourers, who were knocking over each other in their eager endeavours to carry water to the rick, under the frantic and confused directions of their master. Hatch's smock-frock was already wringing wet through the upsetting of a bucket over him. He came up to Miss Diana.

"Did you go into the kitchen, and tell Bridget that Jim Sanders wanted her in the rick-yard?" she questioned.

I think it has been mentioned once before that this man, Hatch, was too honest or too simple to answer anything but the straightforward truth. He replied that he did so; that he had been called to by Jim Sanders as he was passing along at the top of the rick-yard near the stables, who asked him to go to the house and send out Bridget.

"Did he say what he wanted with her?" continued Miss Diana.

"Not to me," replied Hatch. "It ain't nothing new for that there boy to come up and ask for Bridget, ma'am," he continued. "He's always coming up for her, Jim is. They be cousins."

A well-meant, good-natured speech, no doubt, on Hatch's part; but Bridget would have liked to box his ears for it there and then. Miss Diana, liberal-minded, sufficiently large-hearted, saw no reason to object to Mr. Jim's visits, provided they were paid at proper times and seasons, when the girl was not at her work. "Was any one with Jim Sanders?" she asked.

"Not as I saw, ma'am. As I was coming back after telling Bridget, I see Jim a-waiting there, all by hisself. He——"

"How could you see him? Was it not too dark?" interrupted Miss Diana.

"Not then. Bridget, she kep' him waiting ever so long afore she came out. Jim must 'a' been a good half-hour altogether in the yard; 'twere that, I know, from the time he called me till the blaze burst out. But Jim might have went away afore that," added Hatch, reflectively.

"That's all, Hatch; make haste back again," said Miss Diana. "Now, Bridget," she resumed, "was Jim Sanders in the yard when the flames burst out, or was he not?"

"Yes, ma'am, he was there."

"Then if any suspicious characters got into the rick-yard and did the mischief, he would no doubt have een them," thought Miss Diana, to herself. "Do you know who did set it on fire?" she impatiently asked.

Bridget's face, which had regained some of its colour, grew white again—white as the apron she wore. Should she dare to tell what she had heard about Rupert? "I did not see it done," she gasped.

"Come, Bridget, this will not do," cried Miss Diana, noting the signs. "There's more behind, I see. Where's Jim Sanders?"

She looked around as she spoke—looked into the obscurity, into the light and shade cast by the flames. Jim was certainly not in sight. "Do you know where he is?" she sharply resumed to Bridget.

But instead of answering, Bridget was taken with a fresh fit of shivering. It amazed Miss Diana considerably.

"Did Jim do it?" she sharply asked.

"No, no," answered Bridget, bursting into fresh tears. "When I got to Jim he had somehow lost the puppy"—glancing down at her apron—"and we had to look about for it. It was only just in the minute he found it that the flames broke forth. Jim, he was showing of it to me, ma'am, and he started like anything when I shrieked out."

"Could he not see them as well as you?" cried Miss Diana.

"He had his back to 'em and I had my face," answered Bridget.

"And where is Jim Sanders? What has become of him?"

"I don't know," sobbed Bridget. "Jim, he seemed like one dazed when he turned and saw the blaze. He stood a minute looking at it, and I could see his face turn all of a fright; the blaze made it light enough to see anything; and then he flung



the puppy into my arms and scrambled off over the palings, never speaking a word."

Miss Diana paused. There was something suspicious in Jim's making off in the clandestine manner described; it struck her so at once. On the other hand she had known Jim from his infancy—known him to be of a harmless, inoffensive nature.

"An honest lad would have remained to see what assistance he could render towards putting it out, not have run off in that cowardly way," spoke Miss Diana. "Bridget, girl, I don't like the look of this."

Bridget made no reply, except by her tears. She was beginning to wish the ground would open and swallow her up for a convenient half-hour; she wished Jim Sanders had been actually buried in it before he had brought this trouble upon her. Miss Diana, Madam, and the young ladies were surrounding her; the maid-servants began to edge away from her suspiciously; even Miss Edith had ceased her sobs and her hysterics to stare at Bridget.

Cris Chattaway came leaping past them. Cris, who had been leisurely making his way to the Hold—very near it, in fact, when the flames broke out—had just come up, and after a short conference with his father, was now running to the stables. "You are a fleet horseman, Cris," Mr. Chattaway had said to him: "get the engines here from Barmester." And Cris was hastening to mount a horse, and ride away on the errand.

Mrs. Chattaway caught his arm as he passed. "Oh, Cris, this is dreadful! What can have caused it?"

"What!" returned Cris, in a savage tone—not, however, meant for his mother, but induced by the subject. "Don't you know what has caused it? He ought to swing for it, the felon!"

Mrs. Chattaway was surprised. She connected his words with what she had just been listening to. "Cris!—do you mean—— It never could have been Jim Sanders!"

"Jim Sanders!" slightly spoke Cris. "What should have put Jim Sanders in your head, mother? No; it was your favoured nephew, Rupert Trevlyn?"

Mrs. Chattaway broke into a cry as the words came from his lips. Maude started a step forward, her face full of indignant protestation; and Miss Diana imperiously demanded what he meant.

"Don't stop me," said Cris. "Rupert Trevlyn was in the yard with a torch just before it broke out, and he must have fired it."

"It can't be, Cris!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, her accent one of intense pain, and she laid hold of her son as he was speeding away. "Who says this?"

Cris twisted himself from her. "I can't stop, mother, I say, I am going for the engines. You had better ask my father; it was he told me. It's true enough: who *would* do it, except Rupert?"

The shaft lanced at Rupert struck to the heart of Mrs. Chattaway; it struck unpleasantly on the ear of Miss Diana Trevlyn; it did not sound agreeably to some of the women-servants. Rupert was liked in the household, Cris hated. One of the latter spoke up in her zeal.

"It's well, it is, to try to throw it off the shoulders of that Jim Sanders on to Mr. Rupert! Jim Sanders——"

"And what have you got to say agin' Jim Sanders?" interrupted Bridget, aroused by the innuendo—fearful, it may be, of a danger that the crime should be fastened on him. "Perhaps if I had spoke my mind, I could have told as it was Mr. Rupert as well as others could; perhaps Jim Sanders could have told it, too. At any rate, it wasn't——"

"What is that, Bridget?"

The quiet but most imperative interruption came from Miss Diana. Bridget fell on her knees; excitement was overpowering her. "It was Mr. Rupert, ma'am; it was; Jim saw him fire it."

"Diana! Diana! I feel ill," gasped Mrs. Chattaway, in a faint tone. "Let me go to him; I cannot breathe under this suspense."

She meant to her husband. Pressing across the confused and crowded rick-yard—for people, aroused by the sight of the flames, were coming up now in numbers—she succeeded in gaining Mr. Chattaway. Maude, scared nearly to death, followed her closely. She caught him just as he had taken a bucket of water to hand on to some one standing next him in the line, thereby causing him to spill it. Mr. Chattaway turned with a passionate word.

"What do you want here?" he roughly asked, although he saw it was his wife.

"James, tell me," she pleadingly whispered. "I felt sick with suspense; I could not wait. What did Cris mean by saying it was Rupert?"

"It was," answered Mr. Chattaway. "There's not a shadow of doubt that it was Rupert. He has done it in revenge."



"Revenge for what?" she asked.

"For the horsewhipping I gave him. When I joined you upstairs just now, I came straight from it. I horsewhipped him here, on this very spot," continued Mr. Chattaway, as if it afforded him satisfaction to repeat his avowal of the fact. "He had a torch with him, and I—like a fool—left it with him, never thinking of consequences, or that he might use it to become a felon. He must have fired the rick in revenge."

Mrs. Chattaway had been gradually drawing away from the proximity of the blaze; from the line formed to pass buckets for water on to the flames, which crackled and roared on high; from the crowd and confusion that prevailed around the spot. Mr. Chattaway had drawn with her, leaving his place in the line to be filled up by another. She fell against a distant rick, feeling sick unto death.

"Oh, James! Why did you horsewhip him? What had he done?"

"I horsewhipped him for insolence; for bearding me to my face. I bade him tell me who let him in last night when he returned home, and he set me at defiance by refusing to tell. One of my servants must be a traitor, and Rupert is screening him."

A great cry escaped her. "Oh, what have you done? It was I who let him in."

"*You!*" foamed Mr. Chattaway. "It is not true," he added, the next moment. "You are striving also to deceive me—to defend him."

"It is true," she answered. "I saw him come to the house from my dressing-room window, and I went down the backstairs and opened the door for him. If he refused to betray me, it was done in good-feeling, in love towards me, lest you should reproach me. And you have horsewhipped him for it!—you have goaded him on to this crime! Oh, Rupert! my darling Rupert!"

Mr. Chattaway turned impatiently away; he had no time to waste on sentiment when his ricks were burning. His wife detained him.

"It has been a wretched mistake altogether, James," she whispered. "Say you will forgive him—forgive him for my sake!"

"Forgive him!" repeated Mr. Chattaway, his voice assuming quite a hissing sound in his anger. "Forgive this? Never. I'll prosecute him to the extremity of the law; I'll try hard

to get him condemned to penal servitude for life. Forgive *this!* You are out of your mind, Madam Chattaway."

Her breath was coming shortly, her voice rose amidst sobs, and she entwined her arms about him caressingly, imploringly, in her agony of distress and terror.

"For my sake, my husband! It would kill me to see it brought home to him. He must have been overcome by a fit of the Trevlyn temper. Oh, James! forgive him for my sake."

"I never will," deliberately replied Mr. Chattaway. "I tell you that I will prosecute him to the utmost limit of the law; I swear it. In an hour's time from this he will be in custody."

He broke from her, and she staggered against the rick. But for Maude she might have fallen. Poor Maude, who had stood and listened, her face turning to stone, her heart to despair.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A NIGHT SCENE.

ALAS for the Trevlyn temper! How many times has the regret to be repeated! Were the world filled with lamentations for this most unhappy state of mind to which some of its mortals give way, they could not atone for the ill inflicted. It is not a pleasant topic to enlarge upon, and I seem to have lingered unnecessarily in dislike to approach it.

When Rupert leaped the palings and flew away over the field, he was totally incapable of self-government for the time being. I do not say this in extenuation. I say that such a state of things is most lamentable, and ought not to be. I only state that it was so. The most passionate temper ever born with man *may* be kept under, where the right means are used—prayer, ever-watchful self-control, stern determination; but how few there are who find the means! Rupert Trevlyn did not. He had no clear perception of what he had done; he probably knew that he had thrust the blazing torch into the rick; but he gave no thought whatever to consequences, whether the hay was undamaged or whether it should burst forth into a flame.

He flew over the field as one possessed; he flew over a succession of fields; the high-road intervened, and he was