

"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

passing over it in his reckless career, when he was encountered by Farmer Apperley. Not, for a moment, did the farmer recognize Rupert.

"Hey, lad! What in the name of fortune has taken you?" cried he, laying his hand upon him.

His face distorted with passion, his eyes starting with fury, Rupert tore on. He shook the farmer's hand off him, and pressed on, leaping the low dwarf hedge opposite, and never speaking.

Mr. Apperley began to doubt whether he had not been deceived by some strange apparition—such, for instance, as the popular Flying Dutchman. He ran to a stile, and stood there gazing after the mad figure, which seemed to be flying about heedlessly, without purpose. It had not gone out of the field: now in one part of it, now in another: and Mr. Apperley rubbed his eyes and tried to penetrate more clearly the obscurity of the night.

"It *was* Rupert Trevlyn—if I ever saw him," decided he, at length. "What can have put him into this state? Perhaps he's gone mad!"

The farmer, in his consternation, stood there he knew not how long: ten minutes it may have been. It was not a busy night with him, and he would as soon linger at that gate as go on at once to Bluck the farrier—where he was bound to. Any time would do to give his orders to Bluck.

"Well, I can't make it out a bit," soliloquized he, when he at length turned away. "I'm sure it was Rupert; but what could have put him into that state? Halloa? what's that?"

A bright light in the direction of Trevlyn Hold had caught his eye. He stood and gazed at it in a second state of consternation equal to that in which he had just gazed after Rupert Trevlyn. "If I don't believe it's a fire!" ejaculated he.

Was every one running about madly? The words were escaping Mr. Apperley's lips when a second figure, white, breathless as the other, came flying over the road in the self-same spot. This one wore a smock-frock, and the farmer recognized Jim Sanders.

"Why, Jim, is it you? What's up?"

"Don't stop me, sir," panted Jim. "Don't you see the blaze there? It's Chattaway's rick-yard."

"Mercy on me! Chattaway's rick-yard! What has done it? Have we got the incendiaries in the county again?"

"It was Mr. Rupert," answered Jim, dropping his voice

to a whisper. "I see him fire it. Let me get on, please, sir."

In very astonishment, Mr. Apperley loosed his hold of the boy, who went speeding off in the direction of Barbrook. The farmer propped his back against the stile, that he might gather together his scared senses.

Rupert Trevlyn had fired the rick-yard! Had he really gone mad?—or was Jim Sanders mad when he said it? The farmer, a slow man to arrive at conclusions, was sorely puzzled. "The one looked as mad as t'other, for what I saw," deliberated he. "Any way, however, there's the fire, and I'd better make my way to it: they'll want hands if they are to put that out. Thank God, it's a calm night!"

He took the nearest way to the Hold; another helper amidst the many now crowding the busy scene. What a Babel of confusion it was!—what a scene for a painting, could it have been transferred to canvas!—what a life's remembrance! The noise of the excited men as they passed the buckets; the deep interjections of Mr. Chattaway; and the faces of the lookers-on, turned up to the lurid flame. Farmer Apperley, a man more given to deeds than words, rendered what help he could, speaking to none.

He had been at work some time, when a shout broke simultaneously from the spectators. The next rick had caught fire. Mr. Chattaway uttered a despairing word, and the workers ceased for a few moments their efforts—as if paralyzed with the additional evil.

"If the fire-engines would only come!" impatiently exclaimed Mr. Chattaway.

Even as he spoke a faint rumbling was heard in the distance. It came nearer and nearer; its reckless pace proclaiming it to be a fire-engine. And Mr. Chattaway, in spite of his remark of impatience, gazed at its approach with astonishment; for he knew there had not been time for the Barmester engines to arrive.

It proved to be the little engine from Barbrook, one kept in the village. A very despised engine indeed; from its small size, one rarely called for; and which Mr. Chattaway had not so much as thought of, when sending for the superior engines from Barmester. On it came, glibly, as if it meant to do good service, and the crowd in the rick-yard welcomed it with a shout, and parted to give it space.

Churlish as was Mr. Chattaway's general manner, he could

not avoid showing somewhat of his satisfaction at its arrival. "I am so glad you have come!" he exclaimed. "I never thought to send to you. I suppose you saw the flames, and came of your own accord?"

"No, sir, we never saw nothing," was the reply of the man he addressed. "Mr. Ryle's lad, Jim Sanders, came for us. I never see a chap in such a commotion; he a'most got the engine ready hisself."

The mention of the name, Jim Sanders, caused a buzz around. The acknowledgment of the kitchen-maid Bridget, that the offender was Rupert Trevlyn, had been whispered and commented upon; and if some were found to believe the whisper, others scornfully rejected it. There was Mr. Chattaway's assertion, also, that it was Rupert; but Mr. Chattaway's ill-will to Rupert was remembered that night, and the assertion was received doubtfully. A meddlesome voice interrupted the fireman.

"Jim Sanders! why that was the one what fired it. There ain't no doubt he did. Little wonder he seemed frightened."

"Did he fire it?" interrupted Farmer Apperley, eagerly. "What, Jim? Why, what possessed him to do such a thing? I met him just now, like one frightened out of his life, and he laid the guilt on Rupert Trevlyn."

"Hush, Mr. Apperley!" whispered a cautioning voice at his elbow, and the farmer turned to see George Ryle. The latter, with an almost imperceptible movement, directed his attention to the right, to the livid face of Mrs. Chattaway. As one paralyzed stood she, her hands clasped, listening to the words.

"Yes, it was Mr. Rupert," protested Bridget, with a sob. "Jim Sanders told me that he watched Mr. Rupert thrust the lighted torch into the rick. He seemed not to know what he was about, Jim said; he seemed to do it in a passion."

"Hold your tongue, Bridget," interposed a sharp commanding voice. "Have I not desired you already to do so? It is not upon the hearsay evidence of Jim Sanders that you can accuse Mr. Rupert."

The speaker was Miss Diana Trevlyn. In good truth, Miss Diana did not believe that Rupert could have been guilty of the act. It had been disclosed that the torch in the rick-yard belonged to Jim Sanders, had been brought there by him, and she deemed that fact suspicious against Jim. Miss Diana had arrived unwillingly at the conclusion that Jim Sanders had set the rick on fire by accident; and in his fright had accused

Rupert, to screen himself. She imparted her view of the affair to Mr. Apperley.

"Like enough," was the response of Mr. Apperley when he had listened. "Some of these boys have no more caution in 'em than if they were children of two years old. But what could have put Rupert into such a state?" he added; the thought occurring to him, "If anybody ever looked mad, he did this night."

"When?" asked Miss Diana, eagerly, and Mrs. Chattaway pressed up closer with her white countenance.

"I saw him just before I came up here. I was on my way to Bluck's, and somebody with a white face, breathless and panting, came bursting through the hedge right across my path. I did not know him at first; he didn't look a bit like Rupert; but when I saw who it was, I tried to stop him, and I asked what was the matter. He shook me off, and went over the opposite hedge like a wild animal, and there he tore about the field. If he had been a lunatic escaped from the county asylum, he couldn't have run at greater speed."

"Did he say nothing?" some voice interrupted.

"Not a word," replied the farmer. "He did not look as if he could speak. Well, before I had digested that shock, or come to any manner of reflection as to what it could mean, there came another, flying up in the same mad state, and that was Jim Sanders. I stopped *him*. Nearly at the same time, or just before it, I had seen a light shoot up towards the sky. Jim said as well as he could talk for fright, that the rick-yard at the Hold was on fire, and that Mr. Rupert had set it alight."

"At all events, the mischief seems to lie between them," remarked some voices around.

There would have been no time for this desultory conversation—at least, for the gentlemen's share in it—but that the fire-engine had put a stop to their efforts. It had planted itself on the very spot where the line had been formed, scattering those who had taken part in it, and was rapidly getting itself into working order. The flames were shooting up terribly now, and Mr. Chattaway was rushing here, there, and everywhere, in his frantic but impotent efforts to subdue them. He was not insured.

George Ryle approached Mrs. Chattaway, and bent over her, a strange tone of kindness in his every word: it seemed to suggest how conscious he was of the great sorrow that was

coming upon her. "I wish you would let me take you indoors," he whispered. "Indeed it is not well for you to be here."

"Where is he?" she gasped, in answer. "Could you find him, and remove him from danger?"

A conviction, sure and not to be shaken, had been upon her from the very moment that her husband had avowed his chastisement of Rupert—the conviction that it was he, Rupert, and no other, who had done the mischief. Her own brothers—chiefly, however, her brother Rupert—*had* been guilty of one or two acts almost as mad in their passion. He could not help his temper, she reasoned—some, perhaps, may say wrongly; and if Mr. Chattaway had provoked him by that sharp and insulting punishment, it was he who was in fault more than Rupert.

"I would die to save him, George," she whispered. "I would give all I am worth to save him from the consequences. Mr. Chattaway says he will prosecute him to the last."

"I am quite sure you will be ill if you stay here," remonstrated George, for she was shivering from head to foot; not, however, with cold, but with emotion. "I will go with you to the house, and talk to you there."

"To the house!" she repeated. "Do you suppose I could stay in the house to-night? Look at them; they are all out here."

She pointed to her children; to the women-servants. It was even so: all were out there. Mr. Chattaway, in passing, had once or twice sharply demanded what they, a pack of women, did in a scene such as that, and the women had drawn away at the rebuke, but only to come forward again. Perhaps it was not in human nature to keep wholly away from that scene of excitement.

A half-exclamation of fear escaped Mrs. Chattaway's lips, and she pressed a few steps onwards.

Holding a close and apparently private conference with Mr. Apperley, was Bowen, the superintendent of the very slight staff of police stationed in the place.

As a general rule, these rustic districts are too peaceable to require much supervision from the men in blue.

"Mr. Apperley, you will not turn against him!" she implored, from between her fevered and trembling lips; and in good truth, Mrs. Chattaway gave indications of being almost as much beside herself that night as was the unhappy Rupert.

"Is Bowen asking you where you saw Rupert, that he may go and find him? Do not *you* turn against him!"

"My dear, good lady, I haven't a thing to tell," returned Mr. Apperley, looking at her in surprise, for her manner was very strange. "Bowen heard me say, as everybody else within some feet around us heard me, that Mr. Rupert was in the Brook field when I came from it. But I have nothing else to tell of him; and he may not be there now. It's hardly likely that he should be."

Mrs. Chattaway lifted her white face to Bowen. "You will not take him?" she imploringly whispered.

The man shook his head—he was an intelligent officer, much respected in the neighbourhood—and answered her in the same low tone, "I can't help myself, ma'am. When charges are given to us, we are obliged to take cognizance of them, and to arrest, if need be, those implicated."

"Has this charge been given you?" she asked.

"Yes, this half-hour ago. I was up here almost with the breaking out of the flames, for I happened to be close by, and Mr. Chattaway made his formal complaint to me, and put it in my charge."

Her heart sank within her. "And you are looking for him?"

"Chigwell is," replied the superintendent, alluding to a policeman. "And Dumps is gone to see after Jim Sanders."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed a voice at her elbow. It was that of George Ryle; and Mrs. Chattaway turned to him in amazement. But George's words had not borne reference to her, or to anything she was saying.

"It is beginning to rain," he exclaimed. "A fine, steady rain would do us more good than the engines. What does that noise mean?"

A murmur of excitement had arisen on the opposite side of the rick-yard, and was spreading as fast as did the flame. George looked in vain for its cause: he was very tall, and raised himself on tiptoe to see the better: as yet without result.

But not for long. The cause soon showed itself. Pushing his way through the rick-yard, pale, subdued, quiet now, came Rupert Trevlyn. Not in custody; not fettered; not passionate; only very worn and weary, as if he had undergone some painful amount of fatigue. It was only that the fit of passion had left him; he was worn-out, weary, powerless. In the days gone by it had so left his uncle Rupert.

Mr. Bowen walked up, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "I am sorry to do it, sir," he said, "but you are my prisoner."
 "I can't help it," wearily responded Rupert.

But what brought Rupert Trevlyn back into the very camp of the Philistines? Rupert, in his terrible passion, had partly fallen to the ground, partly flung himself down in the field where Mr. Apperley saw him, and there he lay until the passion abated. Then he gathered himself up so far as to sit, and bent his head upon his knees, and revolved what had passed. How long he might have stopped there, it is impossible to say, but that shouts and cries in the road aroused him, and he lifted his head to see that red light, and men running in its direction. He went and questioned them. "The rick-yard at the Hold was on fire!"

An awful consciousness came across him that it was *his* work. It is a fact, that he did not positively remember what he had done: that is to say, had no very clear recollection of it. Giving no thought to consequences, to himself—any more than he had an hour before given thought to the consequences of his work—he began to hasten to the Hold as fast as his depressed physical state would permit. If he had caused that flame, it was only fair that he should do what he could towards putting it out.

The clouds cleared away, and the rain did not fulfil its promise as George Ryle had fondly hoped. But the little engine from Barbrook did good service, and the flames were not spreading over the whole rick-yard. Later, the two great Barmester engines thundered up, and gave their aid towards the extinguishing of the fire.

And Rupert Trevlyn was in custody for having caused it!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NORA'S DIPLOMACY.

AMIDST all the human beings collected in and about the burning rick-yard of Trevlyn Hold, perhaps no one was so intensely miserable, not even excepting the unhappy Rupert, as its mistress, Mrs. Chattaway. *He* stood there in custody for a dark crime; a crime for which the punishment only a few short years before would have been the extreme penalty of the

law; he whom she had so loved. In her chequered life of pain she had experienced moments of unhappiness than which she had thought no future could exceed them in intensity; but had all those moments been concentrated into one dark and dreadful hour, it could not have equalled the trouble of this. The confusion of the scene, its noise, its bustle, its moving mass of humanity, its red light, now dim and apparently subdued, now shooting up with renewed glare, moved before her actual sight as scenes in a phantasmagoria, even as the dread consequences moved before the sight of her mind. Her vivid imagination leaped over the present, and held up to her view but one appalling picture of the future—Rupert working in chains. Poor, unhappy, wronged Rupert! whom they had kept out of his rights; whom her husband had now by his personal ill-treatment goaded to the ungovernable passion which was the curse of her family: and this was the result.

Every pulse of her heart beating with its sense of the terrible wrong; every chord of love for Rupert strung to its utmost tension; every fear that an excitable imagination can depict raised up within her, Mrs. Chattaway leaned against the palings at the upper part of the yard in utter faintness of spirit. Her ears took in with unnatural quickness the free comments around. Under shelter of an obscure light, making part of a busy crowd, people will speak out opinions that they might shrink from proclaiming in broad noonday. She heard some hotly avow their belief that Rupert was not guilty, except in the malicious fancy of Mr. Chattaway; she heard them say that Chattaway was "all scared like," that past day when he found that Rupert was alive, instead of dead, down in the mine: even the more moderate ones observed that after all it was only Jim Sanders's word for it; and that if Jim did not appear to confirm it, Mr. Rupert must be held innocent.

The wonder appeared to be, where was Jim? He had not reappeared on the scene, and his absence certainly wore a suspicious look. In moments of intense fear, the mind receives the slightest word, the barest hint, vividly and comprehensively, and Mrs. Chattaway's heart bounded within her at that whispered suggestion. *If Jim Sanders did not appear to confirm his word Rupert must be held innocent.* Was there no possibility of keeping Jim back? By persuasion—by stratagem—by force, even, if necessary? The blood came mounting to her pale cheek at the thought, red as the lurid flame which lighted up the air. At that moment she saw George Ryle hastening