

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



across the yard near to her. She glided towards him, and he turned in answer to her call.

"You see! They have taken Rupert!"

"Do not distress yourself, dear Mrs. Chattaway," he answered. "I wish you could have been persuaded not to remain in this scene: it is altogether unfit for you."

"George," she gasped, "do *you* believe he did it?"

George Ryle did believe it. He had heard about the horse-whipping; and, knowing of that mad and evil passion called the Trevlyn temper, he could not do otherwise than believe it.

"Ah, don't speak!" she interrupted, perceiving his hesitation. "I see you condemn him, as some of those around us are condemning. But," she added, with feverish eagerness, "there is only the word of Jim Sanders against him. They are saying so."

"Very true," replied George, in hearty tones, desiring to give her any comfort that he could. "Mr. Jim must make good his words before we can condemn Rupert."

"Mamma, Jim Sanders has always been looked upon as truthful," interposed Octave Chattaway, who had drawn near. Surely, it was ill-natured to say so at that moment, however indisputable the fact might be!

"It has to be proved yet that Jim did make the accusation," said George, in reply to Octave. "It is not obliged to be the fact, although Bridget asserts it. And even if Jim did say it, he may have been mistaken. He must show that he was not mistaken before the magistrates to-morrow, or the charge will fall to the ground."

"And Rupert be released?" added Mrs. Chattaway, in suspicious eagerness.

"Certainly. At least, I should suppose so."

He passed on his way; Octave went back to where she had been standing, and Mrs. Chattaway remained alone, buried in thought.

A few minutes, and she stole out of the yard. With stealthy steps, and eyes that glanced fearfully around her lest her movements should be watched, she escaped by degrees beyond the crowd, and emerged in the open field. Then, turning an angle at a fleet pace—as if, now that she was out of the reach of prying eyes, she would lose no time on the errand she was bound—she ran against some one who was coming swiftly up. Mrs. Chattaway's heart-blood coursed on with violence, and a low cry escaped her. It seemed, in her self-consciousness, that

the mere fact of being encountered like this, was sufficient to betray the wild project she had conceived and was now bent on. Conscience is very suggestive.

But it was only Nora Dickson: and Nora in a state of overflowing wrath. When the alarm that there was a fire at the Hold reached Trevlyn Farm, its inmates had hastened out to the scene with one accord, leaving none in the house but Nora and Mrs. Ryle. Mrs. Ryle, suffering from some temporary indisposition, was in bed, and Nora, in consequence, had to stay and take care of the house, doing grievous violence to her curiosity. She stood leaning over the gate, watching the people hasten by to the delightful scene of excitement from which she was per force excluded; and when the Barbrook engine thundered past, Nora danced with impotent anger. She felt half inclined to lock up the house, and Mrs. Ryle, and start in the wake of the engine; the fierce if innocent anathemas she hurled at the head of the unconscious and truant Nanny, were something formidable; and when that damsel at length found her way back, Nora would have experienced the greatest satisfaction in shaking her. But the bent of her indignation changed; for Nanny, before Nora had had time to visit it upon her by so much as a word, burst forth with the news she had gathered at the Hold. It was Rupert Trevlyn who fired the hayrick, because Mr. Chattaway had horsewhipped him.

Nora's breath was taken away: wrath for her own grievance was merged in the greater wrath she felt for the sake of Rupert. Horsewhipped him? That brute of a Chattaway had horsewhipped Rupert Trevlyn! A burning glow rushed over her as she listened; a resentful denial broke from her lips: but Nanny persisted that her statement was correct. Chattaway had locked out Rupert the previous night, and Madam, unknown to her husband, admitted him: Chattaway had demanded of Rupert who let him in, but Rupert, fearing to compromise Madam, refused to tell, and then Chattaway used the horse-whip.

Nora waited to hear no more. She started off to the Hold in her strong indignation; not so much now to take part in the bustling scene going on there, or to indulge her curiosity, as to ascertain the truth of this shameful story. Rupert could scarcely have felt more indignant pain at the chastisement, than Nora felt at hearing it. Close to the outer gate of the fold-yard, she encountered Mrs. Chattaway.



A short explanation ensued. Nora, forgetting possibly in her heart that it was Mrs. Chattaway to whom she spoke, broke into a burst of indignation at Mr. Chattaway, a flood of sympathy for Rupert. It told Mrs. Chattaway that she might trust her, trust her fully, and her delicate fingers entwined themselves nervously around Nora's stronger ones in her hysterical emotion.

"It must have been done in a fit of the Trevlyn temper, Nora," she whispered imploringly, as if beseeching Nora's clemency for him. "The temper was born with him, you know, Nora, and he could not help that—and to be horse-whipped is a terrible thing."

If Nora felt inclined to doubt the report before, these words dispelled the doubt, and brought to her a momentary shock. Nora was not one to excuse or extenuate a crime so great as that of wilfully setting fire to a rick-yard: to all who have to do with farms, with rick-yards, it is especially abhorrent, and Nora was no exception to the rule. But in this case she did, by some ingenious sophistry of her own, shift the blame from Rupert's shoulders, and lay it on Mr. Chattaway's; and she again expressed her opinion of that gentleman's conduct in pretty plain terms.

"He is in custody, Nora!" said Mrs. Chattaway with a shiver. "He is to be examined to-morrow before the magistrates, and they will either commit him for trial, or release him, according to the evidence. Should he be tried and condemned for it, the punishment might be penal servitude for life."

"Heaven help him!" ejaculated Nora in her dismay at this new feature presented to her view. "That would be a climax to his unhappy life!"

"But if they can prove nothing against him to-morrow, the magistrates will not commit him," resumed Mrs. Chattaway, who had scarcely paused to give time for Nora's observation. "There's nothing against him; nothing to prove it but Jim Sanders's word: and—Nora,"—she feverishly added—"perhaps we can keep Jim back?"

"Jim Sanders's word!" repeated Nora, who as yet had not heard of Jim's word in connection with the affair. "What has Jim to do with it?"

Mrs. Chattaway explained. She mentioned all that was said to have passed, Bridget's declaration, and her own miserable conviction that it was but too true. She just spoke of the suspicion cast on Jim himself by several doubters, but in a

slighting way, which proved that the suspicion found no weight with her; and she told of his disappearance from the scene. "I was on my way to search for him," she continued; "but I don't know where to search. Oh, Nora, won't you go with me and help me? I would kneel to Jim, and implore him not to come forward against Rupert; I will be ever kind to Jim, and take care of his welfare, if he will only hear me! I will try to bring him on in life."

Nora, impulsive as was Mrs. Chattaway, but with far greater calmness of mind, strength of judgment, turned without a word. From that moment she entered into the plot heart and soul. If Jim Sanders could be kept back by mortal means, Nora would keep him. She revolved matters rapidly in her mind as she went along, but had not proceeded many steps when she halted, and laid her hand on the arm of her companion.

"I had better go alone about this business, Madam Chattaway. If you'll trust to me, it shall be done—if it can be done. You'll catch your death, coming out with nothing on, this cold night: and I'm not sure that it would answer for you to be seen in it."

"I must go on, Nora," was the earnest answer. "I cannot rest until I see what chance there is of finding Jim. As to catching cold, I have been standing in the open air since the fire broke out, and have not felt whether it was cold or hot. I am too feverish to-night for any cold to affect me."

Nevertheless, she untied her black silk apron as she spoke, and folded it over her head, concealing all her fair falling curls. Nora made no further remonstrance.

The most obvious place to look for Jim was evidently his own home; at least, it was the one that occurred to Nora. Jim had the honour of residing with his mother in a lonely three-cornered cottage, which could boast of two rooms and a loft in the roof. It was a good step to it, and they walked swiftly along, exchanging a sentence now and then, in hushed tones. As they came within view of it, Nora's quick sight detected the head (generally a very untidy one) of Mrs. Sanders, airing itself at the open door.

"You halt here, Madam Chattaway," she whispered, pointing to a friendly hedge, and let me go on and feel my way with *her*. She'll be a great deal more difficult to deal with than Jim; and the more I reflect, the more I am convinced that it will not do for you to be seen in it."

So far, Mrs. Chattaway acquiesced. She stopped under



cover of the hedge, and Nora went on alone. But when she had really gained the door, it was shut; no one was at it. She lifted the cumbrous, old-fashioned wooden latch, and entered. The door had no other fastening; strange as that fact may sound to the dwellers in towns. The woman had backed against the further wall, and was staring at the intruder with a face of dread. Keen Nora noted the signs, drew a very natural deduction from them, and shaped her tactics accordingly.

"Where's Jim?" began she, in a decisive but not unkind tone.

"It's not true what they are saying of him, Miss Dickson," gasped the woman. "I could be upon my Bible oath that he never did it. Jim ain't of that wicked natur; he'd not harm a fly."

"But there are such things as accidents, you know, Meg Sanders," promptly answered Nora, who had no doubt as to her cue now. "It's a certain thing that he was in the rick-yard with a lighted torch; and boys, as everybody knows, are the most careless animals on earth. Is Jim here? I suppose you have him in hiding?"

"I haven't set eyes on Jim since night fell," the woman answered.

"Look here, Meg Sanders, you had better avow the truth to me. I have come down as a friend, to see what can be done for Jim; and I can tell you this, that I would rather keep him in hiding—or put him in hiding, for the matter of that—than show him up to the police, and say, 'You'll find Jim Sanders so-and-so.' Tell me the whole truth, and I'll stand Jim's friend. Has he not been about our place from a little chap in petticoats, when he was put to hurrish the crows away from the land? It's not likely we should want to harm Jim."

Her words reassured the woman, but she persisted in her denial. "I declare to goodness, ma'am, that I know nothing of where he is," she said, pushing back her untidy hair, caps being articles of luxury that Mrs. Sanders's pocket did not allow her to indulge in. "He come in here after he left work, and tidied hisself a bit, and went off with one of them puppies of his; and he has never been back since."

"Yes," said Nora. "He took the puppy to the Hold, and was showing it to Bridget when the fire burst out—that's the tale that's told to me. But Jim had a torch, they say; and torches are dangerous things in rick-yards——"

"Jim's a fool!" was the complimentary interruption of Jim's

mother. "His head's running wild over that fine flighty gawky thing, Bridget—as ain't worth her salt. I asked him what he was bringing on that puppy for, and he said for Bridget—and I told him he was a simpleton for his pains. And now this has come of it!"

"How did you hear of Jim's being connected with the fire?"

"I have had a dozen past here, opening their mouths to tell me of it," resentfully spoke the woman. "Some of 'em said Mr. Rupert was mixed up in it, and that the police were after him as well as after Jim."

"It is true that Mr. Rupert is said to be mixed up in it," said Nora, speaking with a purpose. "And he is taken into custody."

"Into custody?" echoed Mrs. Sanders, in a scared whisper.

"Yes, he is; and Jim must be hidden away for the next four-and-twenty hours, or they'll take him. Where's he to be found?"

"I couldn't tell you if you killed me for't," protested Meg Sanders, in her fear; and her tones were an earnest of the truth. "Maybe he *is* in hiding—have gone and put hisself into 't in his fear of Chattaway and the p'lice. Though I'll take my oath he never did it wilful. If he *had* a torch, why, a spark of it might have blowed on to a loose bit of hay and fired it: but he never did it wilful. It ain't a windy night, either," she added reflectively. "Eh! the fool that that there Jim has been ever since he was born!"

Nora paused. In the uncertainty as to where to look for Jim, she did not see her way particularly clear to accomplish the object in view. She took a few moments' rapid counsel with herself.

"Listen, Meg Sanders, and pay attention to what I say to you," she cried impressively. "I can't do for Jim what I wanted to do, because he is not to be found. But now, mind: should he come in after I am gone, send him off instantly to me at the farm. Tell him to dodge in and out under the trees and hedges on his way, and to take care that nobody catches sight of him. When he gets to the farm, he must come to the front-door, and knock gently with his knuckles: I shall be in the room."

"And then?" questioned Mrs. Sanders, looking puzzled.

"I'll take care what then; I'll take care of *him*. Now, do you understand?"



"Yes, yes," said the woman. "I'll be sure to do it, Miss Dickson."

"Mind you do," said Nora. "And now, good night to you."

Mrs. Sanders was coming to the door with the candle, officiously to light her visitor over its threshold; but Nora peremptorily sent her back, giving her at the same time a piece of advice in rather a sharp tone—to keep her cottage dark and silent that night, lest the attention of passers-by might be drawn to it.

It was not cheering news to carry back to poor Mrs. Chattaway. That timid, trembling, unhappy lady had left the shelter of the hedge—where she probably found her crouching position not a very easy one—and was standing behind the huge trunk of a tree at a little distance, her arms clasping it for support, as she threw her whole weight upon it. To stand long, unaided, was almost a physical impossibility to her, for her spine was weak. She saw Nora, and came forward.

"Where is he?"

"He is not at home. His mother does not know where he is. She had heard that— Hush! Who's this?"

Nora's voice dropped, and they retreated behind the tree. To be seen in the vicinity of Jim Sanders's cottage would not have been politic considering the object they had in view—that of burying the gentleman for a time. The steps advanced closer, and Nora, stealing a peep round the trunk, recognized Farmer Apperley.

He was coming from the direction of the Hold; and they rightly judged, seeing him walking pretty leisurely, that the danger must be over. At the same moment they became conscious of footsteps approaching from another direction. They were coming across the road, bearing rather towards the Hold, and in another moment would meet Mr. Apperley. Footsore, weary, but yet excited, and making what haste he could, their owner came in view, disclosing the face and person of Mr. Jim Sanders. Mrs. Chattaway uttered a suppressed exclamation, and would have started forward; but Nora, with more caution, held her back.

The farmer heard the cry, and looked round, but he could see nothing, and probably thought his ears had deceived him. As he turned his head again, there, right in front of him, was Jim Sanders. Quick as lightning his powerful grasp was laid upon the boy's shoulder.

"Now then! Where have you been skulking?"

"Lawk a mercy! I han't been skulking, sir," returned Jim, apparently surprised at the salutation. "I be a'most ready to drop with the speed I've made."

Poor, ill-judged Jim! In point of fact he had done more, indirectly, towards putting out the fire, than had Farmer Apperley and ten of the best men at his back. Jim's horror and consternation when he saw the flames burst forth had taken from him all thought—all power, as may be said—except instinct. Instinct led him to Barbrook, to apprise the fire-engine there: he saw it off, and then hastened all the way to Barmester, and actually gave notice to the engines and urged their departure before the arrival of Cris Chattaway on his fleet horse. From Barmester Jim started off to Layton's Heath—a place standing at an acute angle between Barmester and Barbrook, but further from both places than those two towns were apart from each other—and posted off the engines from there also. And now Jim was toiling back again, footsore and weary, but somewhat excited still, and was bending his course to Trevlyn Hold, to render his poor assistance towards putting out the flames. Rupert Trevlyn had always been a favourite of Jim's. Rupert in his good-natured way had petted Jim, and the boy in his unconscious gratitude was striving to amend the damage which he saw Rupert cause. In after-days, this night's walk—or rather *run* of Jim's, for he must have flown over the ground—was told of as a marvel verging on the impossible. Men are apt to forget the bodily marvels that may be done under the influence of any of the great emotions.

Something of this—of where he had been and for what purpose—Jim explained to the farmer, and Mr. Apperley released his hold upon him.

"They are saying up there, lad"—indicating the Hold—"that you had a torch in the rick-yard."

"So I had," replied Jim. "But I didn't do no damage with it."

"You told me that it was Rupert Trevlyn who had fired the rick."

"And so it was," replied Jim. "He was holding that there torch of mine, when Mr. Chattaway came up; a looking at the puppy, we was. And Chattaway he had a word or two with him, and then he horsewhipped him; and Mr. Rupert caught up the torch, which he had let fall, and pushed it into the rick. I see him," added Jim, conclusively.

Mr. Apperley stroked his chin. He also liked Rupert, and



he very much condemned the extreme chastisement inflicted by Mr. Chattaway. He did not go so far as to deem it an excuse, as Nora did—scarcely, perhaps, a palliation—for the mad act of Rupert; but it is certain he did not condemn it as he would have condemned it in another, or if committed under different circumstances. He felt grieved and uncomfortable; he was conscious of a sore feeling in his mind; and he heartily wished the whole night's work could be blotted out from the record of deeds done, and that Rupert was free again and guiltless.

"Well, lad, it's a bad job altogether," he observed; "but you don't seem to have been to blame except for taking a lighted torch into a rick-yard. Never you do such a thing again. You see what has come of it."

"We warn't anigh the ricks when I lighted the torch," pleaded Jim. "We was yards off 'em."

"That don't matter. There's always danger. I'd turn off the best man I have on my farm, if I saw him venture into the rick-yard with a torch. Don't you be such a fool again. Where are you off to now?" he added; for Jim, with a touch of his hat, was passing on.

"Up to the Hold, sir. I'm a-going help put out the fire."

"The fire's out—or nigh upon it; and you'd best stop where you are. If you show your face there, you'll get taken up by the police—they are looking out for you. And I don't see that you've done anything to merit a night's lodging in the lock-up," added the farmer, in his sense of justice. "Better pass it in your bed. You'll be wanted before the Bench tomorrow; but it's as good to go before them a free lad, as a prisoner. The prisoner they have already taken, Rupert Trevlyn, is enough. Never you take a torch anigh ricks again."

With this reiterated piece of advice, Mr. Apperley departed. Jim stood in indecision, revolving in a dazed kind of way the various pieces of information gratuitously bestowed upon him. He himself suspected; in danger of being took up by them perlice!—and Mr. Rupert a prisoner! and the fire out, or a'most out! It might be better, perhaps, that he went in to his cottage hard by, and got to sleep as Mr. Apperley advised, if he was not too over-tired to sleep.

But before Jim saw his way clearly out of the maze, or had come to any decision, he found himself seized from behind with a grasp fast and firm as had been Mr. Apperley's. A vision of

a file of policemen brought a rush of fear to Jim's mind, of hot blood to his face. But the arms proved to be only Nora Dickson's, and a soft, gentle voice of entreaty was whispering a prayer into his ear, almost as the prayer of an angel. Jim started in amazement, and looked round.

"Lawk a mercy!" ejaculated he. "Why, it's Madam Chattaway!"

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ANOTHER VISITOR FOR MRS. SANDERS.

A FEW minutes after his encounter with Jim Sanders, to which interview Mrs. Chattaway and Nora had been unseen witnesses, Farmer Apperley met Policeman Dumps, to whom, if you remember, the superintendent had referred as having been despatched in search of Jim. He came up from the direction of Barbrook.

"I can't find him nowhere," was his salutation to Mr. Apperley. "I have been a'most all over the lands of Mr. Ryle, and in every hole and corner of Barbrook, and he ain't nowhere. I'm a-going on now to his own home, just for form's sake; but that's about the last place he'd hide in."

"Are you speaking of Rupert Trevlyn?" asked Mr. Apperley, who knew nothing of the man's having been sent in search of the other.

"No, sir, not him. That there Jim Sanders."

"Oh, you need not look after him," relied the farmer. "I have just met him. Jim's all right. It was not he who did the mischief. He has been after all the fire-engines on foot, and is just come back, dead-beat. He was going on to the Hold to help put out the fire, but I told him it was all but out, and that he could go home. There's not the least necessity to look after Jim."

Mr. Dumps—whose clear-sightedness was certainly not enough to set the Thames on fire, policeman though he was—received the news without any qualm of doubt. "I thought it a odd thing for Jim Sanders to do. He haven't got daring enough," he remarked. "That there kitchenmaid was right, I'll be bound, as to its being Mr. Rupert in his passion. Gone in home, did you say, sir?"