

"My dear, but for this unhappy fiat which appears to have gone forth for your brother Rupert, perhaps I might have let the Upland Farm to George. As it is, I cannot part with both of you. If poor Rupert is to be taken from me, you must remain."

She looked at him, her lips apart, utterly unable to understand him.

"And as you appear not to be inclined to part with Mr. George, all that can be done in the matter, so far as I see, is that we must have him at the Hold."

"Oh, Uncle Rupert!" And Maude's head and her joyous tears were hidden in the loving arms that were held out to shelter her.

"Child, child! Did you think I had come home to make my dead brother's children unhappy? You will know me better soon, Maude."

CHAPTER LX

A BETTER HEIRSHIP.

A SHORT time, and people had settled down into their places. Squire Trevlyn was alone at the Hold with Maude and Rupert, the Chattaways were at the Upland Farm, and Miss Diana Trevlyn had taken up her abode in a pretty house that belonged to herself. Circumstances had favoured the removal of Mr. Chattaway from the Hold almost immediately after the arrival of Squire Trevlyn; otherwise it is hard to say how he would have made up his mind to leave it; and the Squire would scarcely have liked to turn him out summarily, out of consideration to his sister Edith. The occupant of the Upland Farm, who only remained in it because his time was not up until spring, was glad to find it would be an accommodation if he quitted it earlier; he did so, and by Christmas the Chattaways were installed in it.

Mr. Chattaway had set to work in earnest. Things were changed with him. At the Hold, whether he was up and doing, or whether he lay in bed in idleness, his revenues came in to him. At the Upland Farm he must be up early and in bed late, for the eye of a master was always necessary, if the land was to yield its increase; and by that increase he and his

family had now to live. There was a serious battle with Cris. It was deemed advisable for the interest of both parties—that is, for Mr. Cris and his father—that the younger gentleman should enter upon some occupation of his own; but Cris resolutely refused. He could find plenty to do on the Upland Farm, he urged, and he wouldn't be turned out of his home. In fact, Mr. Cris had lived so long without work, that it was difficult, now he was leaving his youth behind him, to begin it. Better, as Squire Trevlyn said, that this change had been made years ago. It *was* hard for Cris; let us acknowledge it. He had been reared to the expectation of Trevlyn Hold and its revenues; he had lorded it as the future master. When he rose in the morning, early or late, as his inclination prompted him, he had nothing more formidable before him than to take a ride on his handsome horse, his groom in attendance behind him. He had indulged in outdoor sports, hunting, shooting, fishing, at will; no care upon him, except how he could most agreeably get through the day, or be home for dinner. He had been addicted to riding or driving into Barmester, and showing himself off in the streets, lounging up and down on foot for the benefit of all admiring spectators, or taking a turn in the billiard-rooms. All that was over now; Mr. Cris's leisure and his greatness had come to an end; his groom would take service elsewhere, his fine horse must be used for other purposes than pleasure. In short, poor Cris Chattaway had fallen from his high estate, as many another has fallen before him, and must henceforth earn his bread before he ate it. "There's room for us both on the Upland Farm, and a good living for both," Cris urged upon his father; and though Mr. Chattaway demurred, he gave way, and allowed Cris to stop there. With all his severity to others, he had lost his authority over his children, especially over Cris and Octave, and perhaps he scarcely dared to maintain his own will against that of Cris, or tell him he should go if he chose to remain. Cris had no more relish for work than any one else has who is reared to idleness; and Cris knew quite well that the easiest life he could now enter upon would be that of staying at home and pretending to be busy upon the farm. When the dispute was at its height between himself and his father, as to what the future arrangements should be, Cris so far bestirred himself as to ask Squire Trevlyn to give him the post of manager at Blackstone. But the Squire had heard quite enough of the past doings there, and told Cris, with the plainness that was

natural to him, that he would not have either him or his father in power at Blackstone, if they paid him for it in gold. And so Cris was at home.

There were other changes also in Mr. Chattaway's family. Maude's tuition, that Octave had been ever ready to find fault with, was over for ever, and Octave had taken her place. Amelia was at home, for expenses had to be curtailed. An outlay that had been quite suitable for the master of Trevlyn Hold, would be unjustifiable and imprudent in the tenant of the Upland Farm. They found Maude's worth now that they had lost her; they could appreciate now the sweetness of her temper, the enduring, gentle patience to which she had constrained herself. Octave, who liked idleness as much as Cris did, had undertaken the tuition of her sisters with a very bad grace: she did not positively refuse, but she hated the trouble and the labour. She might have refused but for Miss Diana Trevlyn. Miss Diana had not lost her good sense or her love of rule in vacating Trevlyn Hold, and she openly told Octave that she must bend to circumstances as well as her parents, and that if she would not teach her sisters, and so save the money, she had better go out as governess and help to earn it. Octave could have beaten Miss Diana for the unwelcome suggestion—*she* go out and earn her living!—but she offered no further opposition to the proposition that she should replace Maude with her sisters.

Ay, and it was hard for Octave, as for Cris; let us not deny it. Alluding not to that one great disappointment which had fallen upon her, and which may as well be passed over in silence, life was hard, very hard just then, for Octave Chattaway. She had inherited the envious, selfish disposition of her father, and the very fact that Maude and herself, as may be said, had changed positions, was sufficient to vex her almost beyond endurance. She had become the drudge whose days must be passed beating grammar and spelling into the obtuse minds of her rebellious sisters; Maude, the young lady of Trevlyn Hold. Whether things would go on as they had begun, it was difficult to say; for the scenes that frequently took place between Octave and her pupils disturbed to a grave degree the peace of the Upland Farm. Octave was impatient, fretful, and exacting; they were self-willed, tantalizing, and disobedient. Noise and quarrels were incessant; and it came now and then to blows. Octave's temper urged her to personal correction, and the girls, unused to it, retorted in kind.

It *was* hard for Octave; it *was* different; she may be no favourite with us, but let us be just. It is in human nature to exaggerate sorrow, and Octave not only exaggerated hers, but did what she could wilfully to increase it. Instead of patiently sitting down to her new duties, and striving to perform them so that they might in time become pleasant, that her change of position might be soothed to her, she steeled herself against them, and augmented her chagrin by every possible means. A terrible jealousy of Maude had taken possession of her; it had long been smouldering; and she did her utmost to enhance it. Jealousy in more senses than one. There was a gate in their grounds which overlooked the highway leading to Trevlyn Hold, and it seemed to be Octave's delight to go and stand there on the watch, at the hour when she might expect Maude to pass. Not a day went by but Maude drove out with her uncle. Sometimes in the open carriage—a new one which the Squire had purchased—sometimes in a close carriage, according to the weather, but always with the marks of wealth and position, the fine horses, the attendant servants—Miss Maude Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold. And Octave would watch stealthily until they were out of sight, and gather in fresh food for her unhappy state of envy until the next day. It would seem most strange that she should thus like to torment herself, but that the human heart is full of such contradictions.

One day that she was standing there, Mrs. Ryle passed. And, speaking of Mrs. Ryle, it may be as well remarked that, Mr. Chattaway excepted, she seemed to be the most aggrieved—not at her brother's return, but at some of the results of that return. In the certainty of Rupert's not living to succeed—and it was all too great a certainty now—Mrs. Ryle had again cherished hopes for her son Trevlyn. She had been exceedingly vexed when she heard of the Upland Farm being leased to Mr. Chattaway; when she watched him and his family move into it; and she thought George must have played his cards badly. She allowed her resentment to smoulder for a time, but one day it burst forth, and she so far forgot herself, forgot past obligations, as to demand of George whether he thought that two masters would answer upon Trevlyn Farm; and she hinted that it was time he was away from it, and made room for Treve.

George, though his cheek burnt—for her, not for himself—answered, with the calmest equanimity, that he expected shortly to leave it—to relieve her of his presence, Treve of his personal advice and help.

"But you did not get the Upland?" she reiterated. "And I have been told this morning that the other farm you thought of is let over your head."

"Stay, mother," was George's answer. "You are ready, I see, to blame Squire Trevlyn for letting these farms, and not to me; but my views are altered. I do not now wish for the Upland, or any other farm. Squire Trevlyn has proposed something else to me—that I should manage his own land for him."

"Manage his own land for him!" she repeated. "Do you mean the land attached to Trevlyn?"

"Yes."

"And where shall you live?"

"With him. At Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle could scarcely speak from amazement. "I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed, staring excessively at the smile hovering on his lips, and which he vainly endeavoured to suppress. "What can be the meaning of it?"

"It is an assured fact, unhappily, that Rupert cannot live. Had he regained his health and strength, he would have filled this place. But he will not regain it, and Squire Trevlyn spoke to me, and I am to be with him at the Hold."

George did not add that he at first fought with Squire Trevlyn against going to the Hold, *its heir*—for indeed it was as nothing else. He would rather make his own fortune, than have it made for him, he said. Very well, the Squire answered with equanimity, he could give up the Hold if he liked, but he must give up Maude with it. And you may guess whether George would do that.

But Mrs. Ryle did not overcome her surprise; she could not see things clearly. "Of course, I can understand that Rupert Trevlyn would have held sway on the estate, would have looked after it, just as a son would do; but what my brother can mean by wanting a 'manager'—by taking you—I cannot understand. You say you are to *live* at Trevlyn Hold?"

The suspicious smile grew very conspicuous on George's lips. "It is so arranged," he answered. "And therefore I no longer wish to rent the Upland."

Mrs. Ryle stared at him as if she did not believe it. She fell into deep thought—thought, from which she suddenly started, put on a bonnet, and went direct to Trevlyn Hold.

A pretty little mare's nest she was indulging as she went along. If Rupert was in this state, was to be called away from

this world, the only fit and proper person to succeed him as the Squire's heir was her son Treve. In which case, George would not be required as manager, and their anticipated positions might be reversed; Treve take up his abode at the Hold, George remain at his old home, the Farm.

She found Squire Trevlyn alone. She gave herself no time to consider the propriety of speaking at all, or the words in which she should speak; but without any circumlocution whatever, she told him that, failing Rupert, Trevlyn must be his heir.

"Oh dear, no," said the Squire. "You forget Maude."

"Maude!"

"If poor Rupert is to be taken, Maude remains to me. And she will inherit Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle bit her compressed lips. "Is it well to leave Trevlyn Hold to a woman? Your father would not do it, Rupert."

"I am not bound to adopt the prejudices of my father. I imagine the reason of his disinheriting Maude—whose birth and existence it appears he did know of—was the ill-feeling he felt towards Joe and her mother, from their having married in opposition to him. But that ill-feeling does not extend to me. Why, Maude, were I capable of leaving the estate away from Joe's children, while one of them is in existence to take it, I should deem myself as bad as Chattaway."

"Maude is a girl; it ought not to be held by a girl," was Mrs. Ryle's reiterated answer.

"Well, that objection need not trouble you; for in point of fact, it will be held by Maude's husband. Indeed, I am not sure but I shall bequeath it direct to him. I believe I shall do so."

"She may never marry."

"She will marry immediately. Why, you don't mean to say he has not let you into the secret?" broke off Squire Trevlyn, as he gazed on her puzzled face. "Has George told you nothing?"

"He has just told me that he was coming here as your manager," she replied, not in the least comprehending Squire Trevlyn's drift.

"And as Maude's husband. My manager, eh? He put it upon that score, did he? He will come here as my son-in-law—I may say it, for I regard Maude as my daughter; as my recognized successor. George Ryle comes here as the future Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle was five minutes before she recovered herself. Utterly unable to digest the news, she could do nothing but stare. George Ryle the future successor! the inheritor of Trevlyn Hold! Was she awake or dreaming?

"It ought to be Trevlyn's," she said at length. "He is your relative by blood, George Ryle is none."

"I know he is not. I do not leave it to him on the score of relationship, but as Maude's husband. He will take the name of Trevlyn. You should have got Maude to fall in love with the other one, if you wished him to succeed."

Perhaps it was the most unhappy moment in all Mrs. Ryle's life. Never had she given up the hope of her son's succession until now. That George should supplant him!—George, whom she had so despised by the side of Treve—so put upon! She sat beating her foot on the carpet, her pale face bent.

"It is not right; it is not right," she said, at length. "George Ryle is not worthy to be the successor to Trevlyn Hold: it is reversing the order of things."

"Not worthy!" echoed Squire Trevlyn. "Your judgment must be strangely prejudiced, Maude, to say it. Of all those who have flocked here to welcome me home from the different parts of the country, far and near, I have looked in vain for a second George Ryle. He has not his equal. If I hesitated at the first moment to give him Maude, I don't hesitate now that I know him. I can tell you that had Miss Maude chosen unworthily, as your sister Edith did, her husband would never have come in for Trevlyn Hold."

"Is your decision irrevocable?"

"Entirely so. I wish them to be married immediately; for I should like George to be installed here as soon as may be, and, of course, he cannot come until Maude is his. Rupert wishes it."

"It appears to me that this arrangement is very premature," resumed Mrs. Ryle. "You may marry yet, and have children of your own."

A change came over Squire Trevlyn's face. "I shall never marry," he said, with emphasis; and to Mrs. Ryle's ears there was a strange solemnity in his tone. "You need not ask me why, for I shall not enter into my reasons; let the assurance of the fact suffice—I *shall never marry*. Trevlyn Hold will be as securely theirs as though I bequeathed it to them by deed of gift."

"Rupert, this is a blow for my son."

"If you persist in considering it so, I cannot help that," was the reply of Squire Trevlyn. "It must have been very foolish of you, Maude, ever to cast a thought to your son's succeeding, while Joe's children were alive."

"Foolish! when one of my sons—my step-son at any rate—is to succeed, as it seems!"

The Squire laughed. "You must talk to Maude about that. They had settled plans together before I came home. If Treve turns out all he should be, I may remember him before I die, Maude. Trevlyn Farm was originally the birthright of the Ryles; perhaps I may make it so again in the person of Treve. There! don't let us go on discussing: it will bring no good. Will you see Rupert?"

She had the sense to see that if the discussion were prolonged until night, it would indeed be productive of no good, and rose to follow him into the next room. Rupert, with the hectic still upon his cheeks, but not looking very ill, sat in a chair near the fire. Maude was reading to him.

"Is it you, Aunt Ryle!" he called out. "You never come to see me."

"I am sorry to hear you are so poorly, Rupert."

"I am not half as ill as I feared I should be," he said. "I thought by this time it—it would have been all over. But I seem better. Where's George?"

"George is at home. I have been talking to your uncle about him. Until to-day I did not know what was in contemplation."

"He'll make a better Squire for the Hold than I should have made," cried Rupert, lifting his eyes—bluer and brighter than ever, the effect of disease—to her face, whilst Maude made her escape from the room, and Squire Trevlyn had not entered it, so that they were alone. "But, Aunt Ryle, I want it to be soon; I want it to be before I die. I should like George to be here to see the last of me."

"I think I might have been informed of this before," observed Mrs. Ryle.

"It has not been told to any one. Uncle Rupert, and I, and George, and Maude have kept the secret between us. Maude was shy, and did not wish it talked of. Only think, Aunt Ryle! that after all the hopes, the contentions, the heart-burnings, it should be George Ryle to succeed to Trevlyn Hold."

She could not bear this repeated harping on the string; she could not bear it. George's conduct to his step-mother had

been exemplary, and she did not remain insensible to the fact ; but she was one of those second wives (there are such in the world) who feel an instinctive dislike—a jealousy—of their step-children. Very bitter, for Treve's sake, was the jealousy that burnt in her heart now.

"I will come in and see you another day, Rupert," she said, starting up. "I am too vexed to remain longer this morning."

"What are you vexed about, Aunt Ryle?"

"I was in hopes that Treve—failing you—would have been made the heir of Trevlyn Hold."

Rupert opened his eyes in wonder. "Treve?—while Maude lives! Not he. I can tell you what I think, Aunt Ryle; that Treve, had there been no Maude, would never have come in for the Hold. I don't fancy Uncle Rupert would have left it to him."

"To whom then would he have left it, do you fancy?"

"Well—I suppose," slowly answered Rupert, turning the matter over in his mind—"I suppose, in that case, it would have been my aunt Diana. But there *is* Maude, Aunt Ryle, and we need not talk about it. George and Maude will have it, and their children after them."

"Poor boy!" she said, with a touch of compassionate feeling; "it is a sad fate for you! Not to live to be the heir!"

A gentle smile rose to his face, and he pointed upwards. "There's a better heirship for me, Aunt Ryle."

It was upon returning from this memorable interview with Squire Trevlyn, that Mrs. Ryle encountered Octave Chattaway. She stopped to speak.

"Are you getting pretty well settled, Octave?"

"Tolerably so. Mamma says she shall not be straight in six months to come. Have you been to the Hold?" continued Octave.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ryle, turning her determined face full on Octave. "Have you heard the news? That the Squire has chosen his heir?"

"No," breathlessly rejoined Octave. "We have heard that Rupert is entirely beyond hope; but we have heard nothing else. It will be Maude, I conclude."

"It is to be George Ryle."

"George Ryle!" repeated Octave, in amazement.

"Yes. I suppose it will be left to him, not to Maude. But it will be all the same. He is to marry her, and to assume the name of Trevlyn. George never told me of this. He just said

to me to-day that he was going to live at the Hold; but he never said it was as Maude's husband and the Squire's heir. How prospects have changed!"

Changed! Ay, Octave felt it to her inmost soul, as she leaned against the gate, and gazed in thought after Mrs. Ryle. Gazed without seeing or hearing, deep in her heart's tribulation, her hand pressed upon her bosom, her pale face shivering as it was turned to the winter sky.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN THE CHURCH AT BARBROOK.

BENDING in tenderness over the couch of Rupert Trevlyn was Mrs. Chattaway. Madam Chattaway no longer; she had quitted that distinctive title when she quitted Trevlyn Hold. It was a warm day in early May, and Rupert had lingered on; the progress of his disease being so gradual, so imperceptible, that even the medical men were deceived; and now that the end (as was soon to be seen) had come, they were still saying that he might last until the autumn.

Rupert had been singularly favoured: some, stricken by this dire malady, are so. Scarcely any of its painful features were apparent; and Mr. Daw wrote them word that they had not been in his father. There was scarcely any cough, scarcely any pain, and though the weakness was certainly great, Rupert had not for one single day taken to his bed. Until within two days of this very time, when you see Mrs. Chattaway leaning over him, he had gone out in the carriage whenever the weather permitted. He could not sit up much; he chiefly lay on the sofa as he was lying now, facing the window, which he liked to have open to the warm noon-day sun. The room was the one you have seen frequently before, the former sitting-room of Mrs. Chattaway. When the Chattaways left the Hold, Rupert had changed to their rooms; he seemed to have a fancy for them, and would sit there and watch the visitors who came up the avenue.

Mrs. Chattaway has been stopping at the Hold since the previous Tuesday, for Maude is away from it. Maude left it with George Ryle on that day, but they are coming home this even-