

HENRY WOOD

TREVLYN

HOLD

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Mrs. Henry Wood

Trevlyn Hold: A Novel

CHAPTER I

THOMAS RYLE

The fine summer had faded into autumn, and the autumn would soon be fading into winter. All signs of harvest had disappeared. The farmers had gathered the golden grain into their barns; the meads looked bare, and the partridges hid themselves in the stubble left by the reapers.

Perched on the top of a stile which separated one field from another, was a boy of some fifteen years. Several books, a strap passed round to keep them together, were flung over his shoulder, and he sat throwing stones into a pond close by, softly whistling as he did so. The stones came out of his pocket. Whether stored there for the purpose to which they were now being put, was best known to himself. He was a slender, well-made boy, with finely-shaped features, a clear complexion, and eyes dark and earnest. A refined face; a good face—and you have not to learn that the face is the index of the mind. An index that never fails for those gifted with the power to read the human countenance.

Before him at a short distance, as he sat on the stile, lay the village of Barbrook. A couple of miles beyond the village was the large town of Barmester. But you could reach the town without taking the village *en route*. As to the village itself, there were several ways of reaching it. There was the path through the fields, right in front of the stile where that schoolboy was sitting; there was the green and shady lane (knee-deep in mud sometimes); and there were two high-roads. From the signs of vegetation around—not that the vegetation was of the richest kind—you would never suspect that the barren and bleak coal-fields lay so near. Only four or five miles away in the opposite direction—that is, behind the boy and the stile—the coal-pits flourished. Farmhouses were scattered within view, had the boy on the stile chosen to look at them; a few gentlemen's houses, and many cottages and hovels. To the left, glancing over the field and across the upper road—the road which did not lead to Barbrook, but to Barmester—on a slight eminence, rose the fine old-fashioned mansion called Trevlyn Hold. Rather to the right, behind him, was the less pretentious but comfortable dwelling called Trevlyn Farm. Trevlyn Hold, formerly the property and residence of Squire Trevlyn, had passed, with that gentleman's death, into the hands of Mr. Chattaway, who now lived in it; his wife having been the Squire's second daughter. Trevlyn Farm was tenanted by Mr. Ryle; and the boy sitting on the stile was Mr. Ryle's eldest son.

There came, scuffling along the field-path from the village, as fast as her dilapidated shoes permitted her, a wan-looking, undersized girl. She had almost reached the pond, when a boy considerably taller and stronger than the boy on the stile came flying down the field on the left, and planted himself in her way.

"Now then, little toad! Do you want another buffeting?"

"Oh, please, sir, don't stop me!" she cried, beginning to sob loudly. "Father's dying, and mother said I was to run and tell them at the farm. Please let me go by."

"Did I not order you yesterday to keep out of these fields?" asked the tall boy. "The lane and roads are open to you; how dare you come this way? I promised you I'd shake the inside out of you if I caught you here again, and now I'll do it."

"I say," called out at this juncture the lad on the stile, "keep your hands off her."

The child's assailant turned sharply at the sound. He had not seen that any one was there. For one moment he relaxed his hold, but the next appeared to change his mind, and began to shake the girl. She turned her face, in its tears and dirt, towards the stile.

"Oh, Master George, make him let me go! I'm hasting to your house, Master George. Father's lying all white upon the bed; and mother said I was to come off and tell of it."

George leaped off the stile, and advanced. "Let her go, Cris Chattaway!"

Cris Chattaway turned his anger upon George. "Mind your own business, you beggar! It is no concern of yours."

"It is, if I choose to make it mine. Let her go, I say. Don't be a coward."

"What's that you call me?" asked Cris Chattaway. "A coward? Take that!"

He had picked up a clod of earth, and dashed it in George Ryle's face. The boy was not one to stand a gratuitous blow, and Mr. Christopher, before he knew what was coming, found himself on the ground. The girl, released, flew to the stile and scrambled over it. George stood his ground, waiting for Cris to get up; he was less tall and strong, but he would not run away.

Christopher Chattaway slowly gathered himself up. He *was* a coward; and fighting, when it came to close quarters, was not to his liking. Stone-throwing, water-squirting, pea-shooting—any annoyance that might safely be carried on at a distance—he was an adept in; but hand-to-hand fighting—Cris did not relish that.

"See if you don't suffer for this, George Ryle!"

George laughed good-humouredly, and sat down on the stile as before. Cris was dusting the earth off his clothes.

"You have called me a coward, and you have knocked me down. I'll enter it in my memorandum-book, George Ryle."

"Do," equably returned George. "I never knew any *but* cowards set upon girls."

"I'll set upon her again, if I catch her using this path. There's not a more impudent little wretch in the whole parish. Let her try it, that's all."

"She has a right to use this path as much as I have."

"Not if I choose to say she sha'n't use it. *You* won't have the right long."

"Oh, indeed!" said George. "What is to take it from me?"

"The Squire says he shall cause this way through the fields to be closed."

"*Who* says it?" asked George, with marked emphasis—and the sound grated on Cris Chattaway's ear.

"The Squire says so," he roared. "Are you deaf?"

"Ah," said George. "But Mr. Chattaway can't close it. My father says he has not the power to do so."

"*Your* father!" contemptuously rejoined Cris Chattaway. "He would like his leave asked, perhaps. When the Squire says he shall do a thing, he means it."

"At any rate, it is not done yet," was the significant answer. "Don't boast, Cris."

Cris had been making off, and was some distance up the field. He turned to address George.

"You know, you beggar, that if I don't go in and polish you off it's because I can't condescend to tarnish my hands. When I fight, I like to fight with gentlefolk." And with that he turned tail, and decamped quicker than before.

"Just so," shrieked George. "Especially if they wear petticoats."

A sly shower of earth came back in answer. But it happened, every bit of it, to steer clear of him, and George kept his seat and his equanimity.

"What has he been doing now, George?"

George turned his head; the question came from one behind him. There stood a lovely boy of some twelve years old, his beautiful features set off by dark blue eyes and bright auburn curls.

"Where did you spring from, Rupert?"

"I came down by the hedge. You were calling after Cris and did not hear me. Has he been threshing you, George?"

"Threshing me!" returned George, throwing back his handsome head with a laugh. "I don't think he would try that on, Rupert. He could not thresh me with impunity, as he does you."

Rupert Trevlyn laid his cheek on the stile, and fixed his eyes on the clear blue evening sky—for the sun was drawing towards its setting. He was a sensitive, romantic, strange sort of boy; gentle and loving by nature, but given to violent fits of passion. People said he inherited the latter from his grandfather, Squire Trevlyn. Other of the Squire's descendants had inherited the same. Under happier auspices, Rupert might have learnt to subdue these bursts of passion. Had he possessed a kind home and loving friends, how different might have been his destiny!

"George, I wish papa had lived!"

"The whole parish has need to wish that," returned George. "I wish you stood in his shoes! That's what I wish."

"Instead of Uncle Chattaway. Old Canham says I ought to stand in them. He says he thinks I shall, some time, because justice is sure to come uppermost in the end."

"Look here, Rupert!" gravely returned George Ryle. "Don't go listening to old Canham. He talks nonsense, and it will do neither of you any good. If Chattaway heard a tithe of what he sometimes says, he'd turn him from the lodge, neck and crop, in spite of Miss Diana. What *is*, can't be helped, you know, Rupert."

"But Cris has no right to inherit Trevlyn over me."

"He has legal right, I suppose," answered George; "at least, he will have it. Make the best of it, Ru. There are lots of things I have to make the best of. I had a caning yesterday for another boy, and I had to make the best of that."

Rupert still looked up at the sky. "If it were not for Aunt Edith," quoth he, "I'd run away."

"You little stupid! Where would you run to?"

"Anywhere. Mr. Chattaway gave me no dinner to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because Cris carried a tale to him. But it was false, George."

"Did you tell Chattaway it was false?"

"Yes. But where's the use? He always believes Cris before me."

"Have you had no dinner?"

Rupert shook his head. "I took some bread off the tray as they were carrying it through the hall. That's all I have had."

"Then I'd advise you to make double haste home to your tea," said George, jumping over the stile, "as I am going to do to mine."

George ran swiftly across the back fields towards his home. Looking round when he was well on his way, he saw Rupert still leaning on the stile with his face turned upward.

Meanwhile the little tatterdemalion had scuffled along to Trevlyn Farm—a very moderately-sized house with a rustic porch covered with jessamine, and a large garden, more useful than ornamental, intervening between it and the high-road. The garden path, leading to the porch, was straight and narrow; on either side rose alternately cabbage-rose trees and hollyhocks. Gooseberries, currants, strawberries, raspberries, and other plain fruit-trees grew amidst vegetables of various sorts. A productive if not an elegant garden. At the side of the house the fold-yard palings and a five-barred gate separated it from the public road, and behind the house were the barns and other outdoor buildings belonging to the farm.

From the porch the entrance led direct into a room, half sitting-room, half kitchen, called "Nora's room." Nora generally sat in it; George and his brother did their lessons there; the actual kitchen being at the back of it. A parlour opening from this room on the right, whose window looked into the fold-yard, was the general sitting-room. The best sitting-room, a really handsome apartment, was on the other side of the house. As the girl scuffled up to the porch, an active, black-eyed, talkative little woman, of five or six-and-thirty saw her approaching from the window of the best kitchen. That

was Nora. What with her ragged frock and tippet, broken straw bonnet, and slipshod shoes, the child looked wretched enough. Her father, Jim Sanders, was carter to Mr. Ryle. He had been at home ill the last day or two; or, as the phrase ran in the farm, was "off his work."

"If ever I saw such an object!" was Nora's exclamation. "How *can* her mother keep her in that state? Just look at Letty Sanders, Mrs. Ryle!"

Sorting large bunches of sweet herbs on a table at the back of the room was a tall, upright woman. Her dress was plain, but her manner and bearing betrayed the lady. Those familiar with the district would have recognised in her handsome but somewhat masculine face a likeness to the well-formed, powerful features of the late Squire Trevlyn. She was that gentleman's eldest daughter, and had given mortal umbrage to her family when she quitted Trevlyn Hold to become the second wife of Mr. Ryle. George Ryle was not her son. She had only two children; Trevlyn, a boy two years younger than George; and a little girl of eight, named Caroline.

Mrs. Ryle turned, and glanced at the path and Letty Sanders. "She is indeed an object! See what she wants, Nora."

Nora, who had no patience with idleness and its signs, flung open the door. The girl halted a few paces from the porch, and dropped a curtsy.

"Please, father be dreadful bad," began she. "He be lying on the bed and don't stir, and his face is white; and, please, mother said I was to come and tell the missus, and ask her for a little brandy."

"And how dare your mother send you up to the house in this trim?" demanded Nora. "How many crows did you frighten as you came along?"

"Please," whimpered the child, "she haven't had time to tidy me to-day, father's been so bad, and t'other frock was tored in the washin'."

"Of course," assented Nora. "Everything is 'tored' that she has to do with, and never gets mended. If ever there was a poor, moithering, thriftless thing, it's that mother of yours. She has no needles and no thread, I suppose, and neither soap nor water?"

Mrs. Ryle came forward to interrupt the colloquy. "What is the matter with your father, Letty? Is he worse?"

Letty dropped several curtseys in succession. "Please, 'm, his inside's bad again, but mother's afeared he's dying. He fell back upon the bed, and don't stir nor breathe. She says, will you please send him some brandy?"

"Have you brought anything to put it into?" inquired Mrs. Ryle.

"No, 'm."

"Not likely," chimed in Nora. "Madge Sanders wouldn't think to send so much as a cracked teacup. Shall I put a drop in a bottle, and give it to her?" continued Nora, turning to Mrs. Ryle.

"No," replied Mrs. Ryle. "I must know what's the matter with him before I send brandy. Go back to your mother, Letty. Tell her I shall be going past her cottage presently, and will call in."

The child turned and scuffled off. Mrs. Ryle resumed:

"Should it be another attack of internal inflammation, brandy would be the worst thing he could take. He drinks too much, does Jim Sanders."

"His inside's like a barrel—always waiting to be filled," remarked Nora. "He'd drink the sea dry, if it ran beer. What with his drinking, and her untidiness, small wonder the children are in rags. I am surprised the master keeps him on!"

"He only drinks by fits and starts, Nora. His health will not let him do more."

"No, it won't," acquiesced Nora. "And I fear this bout may be the ending of him. That hole was not dug for nothing."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Ryle. "How can you be so foolishly superstitious, Nora? Find Treve, will you, and get him ready."

"Treve," a young gentleman given to having his own way, and to be kept very much from school on account of "delicate health," a malady less real than imaginary, was found somewhere about the

farm, and put into visiting condition. He and his mother were invited to take tea at Barbrook. In point of fact, the invitation had been for Mrs. Ryle only; but she could not bear to stir anywhere without her darling boy Trevlyn.

They had barely departed when George entered. Nora had then laid the tea-table, and was standing cutting bread-and-butter.

"Where are they all?" asked George, depositing his books upon a sideboard.

"Your mother and Treve are off to tea at Mrs. Apperley's," replied Nora. "And the master rode over to Barmester this afternoon, and is not back yet. Sit down, George. Would you like some pumpkin pie?"

"Try me," responded George. "Is there any?"

"I saved it from dinner,"—bringing forth a plate from a closet. "It is not much. Treve's stomach craves for pies as much as Jim Sanders's for beer; and Mrs. Ryle would give him all he wanted, if it cleared the larder—Is some one calling?" she broke off, going to the window. "George, it's Mr. Chattaway! See what he wants."

A gentleman on horseback had reined in close to the gate: a spare man, rather above the middle height, with a pale, leaden sort of complexion, small, cold light eyes and mean-looking features. George ran down the path.

"Is your father at home?"

"No. He is gone to Barmester."

A scowl passed over Mr. Chattaway's brow. "That's the third time I have been here this week, and cannot get to see him. Tell your father that I have had another letter from Butt, and will trouble him to attend to it. And further tell your father I will not be pestered with this business any longer. If he does not pay the money right off, I'll make him pay it."

Something not unlike an ice-bolt shot through George Ryle's heart. He knew there was trouble between his house and Mr. Chattaway; that his father was, in pecuniary matters, at Mr. Chattaway's mercy. Was this message the result of his recent encounter with Cris Chattaway? A hot flush dyed his face, and he wished—for his father's sake—that he had let Mr. Cris alone. For his father's sake he was now ready to eat humble-pie, though there never lived a boy less inclined to humble-pie in a general way than George Ryle. He went close up to the horse and raised his honest eyes fearlessly.

"Has Christopher been complaining to you, Mr. Chattaway?"

"No. What has he to complain of?"

"Not much," answered George, his fears subsiding. "Only I know he does carry tales."

"Were there no tales to carry he could not carry them," coldly remarked Mr. Chattaway. "I have not seen Christopher since dinner-time. It seems to me that you are always suspecting him of something. Take care you deliver my message correctly, sir."

Mr. Chattaway rode away, and George returned to his pumpkin pie. He had scarcely finished it—with remarkable relish, for the cold dinner he took with him to school daily was little more than a luncheon—when Mr. Ryle entered by the back-door, having been round to the stables with his horse. He was a tall, fine man, with light curling hair, mild blue eyes, and a fair countenance pleasant to look at in its honest simplicity. George delivered the message left by Mr. Chattaway.

"He left me that message, did he?" cried Mr. Ryle, who, if he could be angered by anything, it was on this very subject of Chattaway's claims against him. "He might have kept it until he saw me himself."

"He bade me tell you, papa."

"Yes; it is no matter to Chattaway how he browbeats me and exposes my affairs. He has been at it for years. Has he gone home?"

"I think so," replied George. "He rode that way."

"I'll stand it no longer, and I'll tell him so to his face," continued Mr. Ryle. "Let him do his best and his worst."

Taking up his hat, Mr. Ryle strode out of the house, disdainingly Nora's invitation to tea, and leaving on the table a scarf of soft scarlet merino, which he had worn into Barmester. Recently suffering from sore throat, Mrs. Ryle had induced him to put it on when he rode out that afternoon.

"Look there!" cried Nora. "He has left his cravat on the table."

Snatching it up, she ran after Mr. Ryle, catching him half-way down the path. He took the scarf from her with a hasty movement, and went along swinging it in his hand. But he did not attempt to put it on.

"It is just like the master," grumbled Nora to George. "He has worn that warm woollen thing for hours, and now goes off without it! His throat will be bad again."

"I am afraid papa's gone to have it out with Mr. Chattaway," said George.

"And serve Chattaway right if he has," returned Nora. "It is what the master has threatened this many a day."

CHAPTER II

SUPERSTITION

Later, when George was working diligently at his lessons, and Nora was sewing—both by the help of the same candle: for an array of candles was not more indulged in than other luxuries in Mr. Ryle's house—footsteps were heard approaching the porch, and a modest knock came to the door.

"Come in," called out Nora.

A very thin woman, in a washed-out cotton gown, with a thin face and inflamed eyes, came in, curtsying. It was an honest face, a meek face; although it looked as if its owner had a meal about once a week.

"Evening, Miss Dickson; evening, Master George. I have stepped round to ask the missis whether I shall be wanted on Tuesday."

"The missis is out," said Nora. "She has been talking of putting off the wash till the week after, but I don't know that she will do so. If you sit down a bit, Ann Canham, she'll come in, perhaps."

Ann Canham seated herself respectfully on the edge of a remote chair. And Nora, who liked gossiping above every earthly thing, began to talk of Jim Sanders's illness.

"He has dreadful bouts, poor fellow!" observed Ann Canham.

"But six times out of seven he brings them on through his own fault," tartly returned Nora. "Many and many a time I have told him he'd do for himself, and now I think he has done it. This bout, it strikes me, is his last."

"Is he so ill as that?" exclaimed Ann Canham. And George looked up from his exercise-book in surprise.

"I don't know that he is," said Nora; "but—"

Nora broke suddenly off, dropped her work, and bent her head towards Ann Canham.

"We have had a strange thing happen here," she continued, her voice falling to a whisper; "and if it's not a warning of death, never believe me again. This morning—George, did you hear the dog in the night?"

"No," answered George.

"Boys sleep soundly," she remarked to Ann Canham. "You might drive a coach-and-six through their room, and not wake them. His room's at the back, too. Last night the dog got round to the front of the house, and there he was, all night long, sighing and moaning like a human creature. You couldn't call it a howl; there was too much pain in it. He was at it all night long; I couldn't sleep for it. The missis says she couldn't sleep for it. Well, this morning I was up first, the master next, Molly next; but the master went out by the back-way and saw nothing. By-and-by I spied something out of this window on the garden path, as if some one had been digging there; so out I went. It was for all the world like a grave!—a great hole, with the earth thrown up on either side of it. That dog had done it in the night!"

Ann Canham, possibly feeling uncomfortably aloof from the company when graves became the topic, drew her chair nearer the table. George sat, his pen arrested; his large wide-open eyes turned on Nora—not with fear, but merriment.

"A great hole, twice the length of our rolling-pin, and wide in proportion, all hollowed and scratched out," went on Nora. "I called the cow-boy, and asked him what it looked like. 'A grave,' said he, without a moment's hesitation. Molly came out, and they two filled it in again, and trod the path down. The marks have been plain enough all day. The master has been talking a long while of having that path gravelled, but it has not been done."

"And the hole was scratched by the dog?" proceeded Ann Canham, unable to get over the wonder.

"It was scratched by the dog," answered Nora. "And every one knows it's a sign that death's coming to the house, or to some one belonging to the house. Whether it's your own dog scratches it, or somebody else's dog, no matter; it's a sure sign that a real grave is about to be dug. It may not happen once in fifty years—no, not in a hundred; but when it does come, it's a warning not to be neglected."

"It's odd how the dogs can know!" remarked Ann Canham, meekly.

"Those dumb animals possess an instinct we can't understand," said Nora. "We have had that dog ever so many years, and he never did such a thing before. Rely upon it, it's Jim Sanders's warning. How you stare, George!"

"I may well stare, to hear you," was George's answer. "How can you put faith in such rubbish, Nora?"

"Just hark at him!" exclaimed Nora. "Boys are half heathens. I wouldn't laugh in that irreverent way, if I were you, George, because Jim Sanders's time has come."

"I am not laughing at that," said George; "I am laughing at you. Nora, your argument won't hold water. If the dog had meant to give notice that he was digging a hole for Jim Sanders, he would have dug it before his own door, not before ours."

"Go on!" cried Nora, sarcastically. "There's no profit arguing with unbelieving boys. They'd stand it to your face the sun never shone."

Ann Canham rose, and put her chair back in its place with much humility. Indeed, humility was her chief characteristic. "I'll come round in the morning, and know about the wash, if you please, ma'am," she said to Nora. "Father will be wanting his supper, and will wonder where I'm staying."

She departed. Nora gave George a lecture upon unbelief and irreverence in general, but George was too busy with his books to take much notice of it.

The evening went on. Mrs. Ryle and Trevlyn returned, the latter a diminutive boy, with dark curls and a handsome face.

"Jim Sanders is much better," remarked Mrs. Ryle. "He is all right again now, and will be at work in a day or two. It must have been a sort of fainting-fit he had this afternoon, and his wife got frightened. I told him to rest to-morrow, and come up the next day if he felt strong enough."

George turned to Nora, his eyes dancing. "What of the hole now?" he asked.

"Wait and see," snapped Nora. "And if you are impertinent, I'll never save you pie or pudding again."

Mrs. Ryle went into the sitting-room, but came back speedily when she found it dark and untenanted. "Where's the master?" she exclaimed. "Surely he has returned from Barmester!"

"Papa came home ages ago," said George. "He has gone up to the Hold."

"The Hold?" repeated Mrs. Ryle in surprise, for there was something like deadly feud between Trevlyn Hold and Trevlyn Farm.

George explained; telling of Mr. Chattaway's message, and the subsequent proceedings. Nora added that "as sure as fate, he was having it out with Chattaway." Nothing else would keep him at Trevlyn Hold.

But Mrs. Ryle knew that her easy-natured husband was not one to "have it out" with any one, even his enemy Chattaway. He might say a few words, but it was all he would say, and the interview would end almost as soon as begun. She took off her things, and Molly carried the supper-tray into the parlour.

But still there was no Mr. Ryle. Ten o'clock struck, and Mrs. Ryle grew, not exactly uneasy, but curious as to what could have become of him. What *could* be detaining him at the Hold?

"It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he has been taken too bad to come back," said Nora. "He unwound his scarlet cravat from his throat, and went away swinging it in his hand. John Pinder's waiting all this time in the kitchen."

"Have you finished your lessons, George?" asked Mrs. Ryle, perceiving that he was putting his books away.

"Every one," answered George.

"Then you shall go up to the Hold, and walk home with your father. I cannot think what is delaying his return."

"Perhaps he has gone somewhere else," said George.

"He would neither go anywhere else nor remain at Chattaway's," said Mrs. Ryle. "This is Tuesday evening."

A conclusive argument. Tuesday evening was invariably devoted by Mr. Ryle to his farm accounts, and he never suffered anything to interfere with that evening's work. George put on his cap and started on his errand.

It was a starlight night, cold and clear, and George went along whistling. A quarter of an hour's walk up the turnpike road brought him to Trevlyn Hold. The road rose gently the whole way, for the land was higher at Trevlyn Hold than at Trevlyn Farm. A white gate, by the side of a lodge, opened to the shrubbery or avenue—a dark walk wide enough for two carriages to pass, with the elm trees nearly meeting overhead. The shrubbery wound up to a lawn stretched before the windows of the house: a large, old-fashioned stone-built house, with gabled roofs, and a flight of steps leading to the entrance-hall. George ascended the steps and rang the bell.

"Is my father ready to come home?" he asked, not very ceremoniously, of the servant who answered it.

The man paused, as though he scarcely understood. "Mr. Ryle is not here, sir," was the answer.

"How long has he been gone?"

"He has not been here at all, sir, that I know of. I don't think he has."

"Just ask, will you?" said George. "He came here to see Mr. Chattaway. It was about five o'clock."

The man went away and returned. "Mr. Ryle has not been here at all, sir. I thought he had not."

George wondered. Could he be out somewhere with Chattaway? "Is Mr. Chattaway at home?" he inquired.

"Master is in bed," said the servant. "He came home to-day about five, or thereabouts, not feeling well, and he went to bed as soon as tea was over."

George turned away. Where could his father have gone to? Where to look for him? As he passed the lodge, Ann Canham was locking the gate, of which she and her father were the keepers. It was a whim of Mr. Chattaway's that the larger gate should be locked at night; but not until after ten. Foot-passengers could enter by the side-gate.

"Have you seen my father anywhere, since you left our house this evening?" he asked.

"No, I have not, Master George."

"I can't imagine where he can be. I thought he was at Chattaway's, but they say he has not been there."

"At Chattaway's! He wouldn't go there, would he, Master George?"

"He started to do so this afternoon. It's very odd! Good night, Ann."

"Master George," she interrupted, "do you happen to have heard how it's going with Jim Sanders?"

"He is much better," said George.

"Better!" slowly repeated Ann Canham. "Well, I hope he is," she added, in doubting tones. "But, Master George, I didn't like what Nora told us. I can't bear tokens from dumb animals, and I never knew them fail."

"Jim Sanders is all right, I tell you," said heathen George. "Mamma has been there, and he is coming to his work the day after to-morrow. Good night."

"Good night, sir," answered Ann Canham, as she retreated within the lodge. And George went through the gate, and stood in hesitation, looking up and down the road. But it was apparently of no use to search elsewhere in the uncertainty; and he turned towards home, wondering much.

What had become of Mr. Ryle?

CHAPTER III IN THE UPPER MEADOW

The stars shone bright and clear as George Ryle walked down the slight descent of the turnpike-road, wondering what had become of his father. Any other night but this, he might not have wondered about it; but George could not remember the time when Tuesday evening had been devoted to anything but the farm accounts. John Pinder, who acted as a sort of bailiff, had been in the kitchen some hours with his weekly memoranda, to go through them as usual with his master; and George knew his father would not willingly keep the man waiting.

George went along whistling a tune; he was given to whistling. About half-way between Trevlyn Hold and his own house, the sound of another whistle struck upon his ear. A turn in the road brought a lad into view, wearing a smock-frock. It was the waggoner's boy at Trevlyn Hold. He ceased when he came up to George, and touched his hat in rustic fashion.

"Have you seen anything of my father, Bill?"

"Not since this afternoon, Master George," was the answer. "I see him, then, turning into that field of ours, next to where the bull be. Going up to the Hold, mayhap; else what should he do there?"

"What time was that?" asked George.

The boy considered a moment. "'Twas afore the sun set," he said at length, "I am sure o' that. He had some'at red in his hand, and the sun shone on it fit to dazzle one's eyes."

The boy went his way; George stood and thought. If his father had turned into the field indicated, there could be no doubt that he was hastening to Chattaway's. Crossing this field and the one next to it, both large, would bring one close to Trevlyn Hold, cutting off, perhaps, two minutes of the high-road, which wound round the fields. But the fields were scarcely ever favoured, on account of the bull. This bull had been a subject of much contention in the neighbourhood, and was popularly called "Chattaway's bull." It was a savage animal, and had once got out of the field and frightened several people almost to death. The neighbours said Mr. Chattaway ought to keep it under lock and key. Mr. Chattaway said he should keep it where he pleased: and he generally pleased to keep it in the field. This barred it to pedestrians; and Mr. Ryle must undoubtedly have been in hot haste to reach Trevlyn Hold to choose the route.

A hundred fears darted through George Ryle's mind. He was more thoughtful, it may be said more imaginative, than boys of his age generally are. George and Cris Chattaway had once had a run from the bull, and only saved themselves by desperate speed. Venturing into the field one day when the animal was apparently grazing quietly in a remote corner, they had not anticipated his running at them. George remembered this; he remembered the terror excited when the bull had broken loose. Had his father been attacked by the bull?—perhaps killed by it?

His heart beating, George retraced his steps, and turned into the first field. He hastened across it, glancing on all sides as keenly as the night allowed him. Not in this field would the danger be; and George reached the gate of the other, and stood looking into it.

Apparently it was quite empty. The bull was probably safe in its shed then, in Chattaway's farmyard. George could see nothing—nothing except the grass stretched out in the starlight. He threw his eyes in every direction, but could not perceive his father, or any trace of him. "What a simpleton I am," thought George, "to fear that such an out-of-the-way thing could have happened! He must—"

What was that? George held his breath. A sound, not unlike a groan, had smote upon his ear. And there it came again! "Holloa!" shouted George, and cleared the gate with a bound. "What's that? Who is it?"

A moan answered him; and George Ryle, guided by the sound, hastened to the spot. It was only a little way off, down by the hedge separating the fields. All the undefined fear George, not a

minute ago, had felt inclined to treat as groundless, was indeed but a prevision of the terrible reality. Mr. Ryle lay in a narrow, dry ditch: and, but for that friendly ditch, he had probably been gored to death on the spot.

"Who is it?" he asked feebly, as his son bent over him, trying to distinguish what he could in the darkness. "George?"

"Oh, papa! what has happened?"

"Just my death, lad."

It was a sad tale. One that is often talked of in the place, in connection with Chattaway's bull. In crossing the second field—indeed, as soon as he entered it—Mr. Ryle was attacked by the furious beast, and tossed into the ditch, where he lay helpless. The people said then, and say still, that the red cravat he carried excited the anger of the bull.

George raised his voice in a shout for help, hoping it might reach the ears of the boy whom he had recently encountered. "Perhaps I can get you out, papa," he said, "though I may not be able myself to get you home."

"No, George; it will take stronger help than yours to get me out of this."

"I had better go up to the Hold, then. It is nearer than our house."

"You will not go to the Hold," said Mr. Ryle, authoritatively. "I will not be beholden to Chattaway. He has been the ruin of my peace, and now his bull has done for me."

George bent down closer. There was no room for him to get into the ditch, which was very narrow. "Papa, are you shivering with cold?"

"With cold and pain. The frost strikes keenly upon me, and my pain is great."

George instantly took off his jacket and waistcoat, and laid them gently on his father, his tears dropping silently in the dark night. "I'll run home for help," he said, speaking as bravely as he could. "John Pinder is there, and we can call up one or two of the men."

"Ay, do," said Mr. Ryle. "They must bring a shutter, and carry me home on it. Take care you don't frighten your mother, George. Tell her at first that I am a little hurt, and can't walk; break it to her so that she may not be alarmed."

George flew away. At the end of the second field, staring over the gate near the high-road, stood the boy Bill, whose ears George's shouts had reached. He was not a sharp-witted lad, and his eyes and mouth opened with astonishment to see George Ryle come flying along in his shirt-sleeves.

"What's a-gate?" asked he. "Be that bull loose again?"

"Run for your life to the second field," panted George, seizing him in his desperation. "In the ditch, a few yards along the hedge to the right, my father is lying. Go and stay by him, until I come back with help."

"Lying in the ditch!" repeated Bill, unable to collect his startled senses. "What's done it, Master George?"

"Chattaway's bull has done it. Hasten down to him, Bill. You might hear his groans all this way off, if you listened."

"Is the bull there?" asked Bill.

"I have seen no bull. The bull must have been in its shed hours ago. Stand by him, Bill, and I'll give you sixpence to-morrow."

They separated. George tore down the road, wondering how he should fulfil his father's injunction not to frighten Mrs. Ryle in telling the news. Molly, very probably looking after her sweetheart, was standing at the fold-yard gate as he passed. George sent her into the house the front way, and bade her whisper to Nora to come out; to tell her "somebody" wanted to speak to her. Molly obeyed; but executed her commission so bunglingly, that not only Nora, but Mrs. Ryle and Trevlyn came flocking to the porch. George could only go in then.

"Don't be frightened, mamma," he said, in answer to their questions. "My father has had a fall, and—and says he cannot walk home. Perhaps he has sprained his ankle."

"What has become of your jacket and waistcoat?" cried Nora, amazed to see George standing in his shirt-sleeves.

"They are safe enough. Is John Pinder still in the kitchen?" continued George, escaping from the room.

Trevlyn ran after him. "George, have you been fighting?" he asked. "Is your jacket torn to ribbons?"

George drew the boy into a dark angle of the passage. "Treve," he whispered, "if I tell you something about papa, you won't cry out?"

"No, I won't cry out," answered Treve.

"We must get a stretcher of some sort up to him, to bring him home. I am going to consult John Pinder."

"Where is papa?" interrupted Treve.

"Lying in a ditch in the large meadow. Chattaway's bull has attacked him. I am not sure but he will die."

The first thing Treve did *was* to cry out. George put his hand over his mouth. But Mrs. Ryle and Nora, who were full of curiosity, both as to George's jacketless state and George's news, had followed into the passage. Treve began to cry.

"He has dreadful news about papa, he says," sobbed Treve. "Thinks he's dead."

It was all over. George must tell now, and he could not help himself. "No, no, Treve, you should not exaggerate," he said, turning to Mrs. Ryle in his pain and earnestness. "There is an accident, mamma; but it is not so bad as that."

Mrs. Ryle retained perfect composure; very few people had seen *her* ruffled. It was not in her nature to be so, and her husband had little need to caution George as he had done. She laid her hand upon George's shoulder and looked calmly into his face. "Tell me the truth," she said in tones of quiet command. "What is the injury?"

"I do not know yet—"

"The truth, boy, I said," she sternly interposed.

"Indeed I do not yet know what it is. He has been attacked by Chattaway's bull."

It was Nora's turn now. "By Chattaway's bull?" she shrieked.

"Yes," said George. "It must have happened immediately after he left here at tea-time, and he has been lying ever since in the ditch in the upper meadow. I put my jacket and waistcoat over him; he was shivering with cold and pain."

While George was talking, Mrs. Ryle was acting. She sought John Pinder and issued her orders clearly and concisely. Men were got together; a mattress with holders was made ready; and the procession started under the convoy of George, who had been made to put on another jacket. Bill, the waggoner's boy, had been faithful, and was found by the side of Mr. Ryle.

"I'm glad you be come," was the boy's salutation. "He's been groaning and shivering awful. It set me shivering too."

As if to escape from the evil, Bill ran off, there and then, across the field, and never drew in until he reached Trevlyn Hold. In spite of his somewhat stolid propensities, he felt a sort of pride in being the first to impart the story there. Entering the house by the back, or farmyard door—for farming was carried on at Trevlyn Hold as well as at Trevlyn Farm—he passed through sundry passages to the well-lighted hall. There he seemed to hesitate at his temerity, but at length gave an awkward knock at the door of the general sitting-room.

A large, handsome room. Reclining in an easy-chair was a pretty and pleasing woman, looking considerably younger than she really was. Small features, a profusion of curling auburn hair, light blue eyes, a soft, yielding expression, and a gentle voice, were the adjuncts of a young woman, rather than of one approaching middle-age. A stranger, entering, might have taken her for a young unmarried woman; and yet she was mistress of Trevlyn Hold, the mother of that great girl of sixteen at the

table, now playing backgammon and quarrelling with her brother Christopher. Mistress in name only. Although the wife of its master, Mr. Chattaway, and daughter of its late master, Squire Trevlyn; although universally called *Madam* Chattaway—as from time immemorial it had been customary to designate the mistress of Trevlyn Hold—she was in fact no better than a nonentity in it, possessing little authority, and assuming less. She has been telling her children several times that their hour for bed has passed; she has begged them not to quarrel; she has suggested that if they will not go to bed, Maude should do so; but she may as well talk to the winds.

Miss Chattaway possesses a will of her own. She has the same insignificant features, pale leaden complexion, small, sly, keen light eyes that characterise her father. She would like to hold undisputed sway as the house's mistress; but the inclination has to be concealed; for the real mistress of Trevlyn Hold may not be displaced. She is sitting in the background, at a table apart, bending over her desk. A tall, majestic lady, in a stiff green silk dress and an imposing cap, in person very like Mrs. Ryle. It is Miss Trevlyn, usually called Miss Diana, the youngest daughter of the late Squire. You would take her to be at least ten years older than her sister, Mrs. Chattaway, but in point of fact she is that lady's junior by a year. Miss Trevlyn is, to all intents and purposes, mistress of Trevlyn Hold, and she rules its internal economy with a firm sway.

"Maude, you should go to bed," Mrs. Chattaway had said for the fourth or fifth time.

A graceful girl of thirteen turned her dark, violet-blue eyes and pretty light curls upon Mrs. Chattaway. She had been leaning on the table watching the backgammon. Something of the soft, sweet expression visible in Mrs. Chattaway's face might be traced in this child's; but in Maude it was blended with greater intellect.

"It is not my fault, Aunt Edith," she gently said. "I should like to go. I am tired."

"Be quiet, Maude!" broke from Miss Chattaway. "Mamma, I wish you wouldn't worry about bed! I don't choose Maude to go up until I go. She helps me to undress."

Poor Maude looked sleepy. "I can be going on, Octave," she said to Miss Chattaway.

"You can hold your tongue and wait, and not be ungrateful," was the response of Octavia Chattaway. "But for papa's kindness, you would not have a bed to go to. Cris, you are cheating! that was not sixes!"

It was at this juncture that the awkward knock came to the door. "Come in!" cried Mrs. Chattaway.

Either her gentle voice was not heard, for Cris and his sister were disputing just then, or the boy's modesty would not allow him to respond. He knocked again.

"See who it is, Cris," came forth the ringing voice of Miss Trevlyn.

Cris did not choose to obey. "Open the door, Maude," said he.

Maude did as she was bid: she had little chance allowed her in that house of doing otherwise. Opening the door, she saw the boy standing there. "What is it, Bill?" she asked in surprise.

"Please, is the Squire there, Miss Maude?"

"No," answered Maude. "He is not well, and has gone to bed."

This appeared to be a poser for Bill, and he stood considering. "Is Madam in there?" he presently asked.

"Who is it, Maude?" came again in Miss Trevlyn's commanding tones.

Maude turned her head. "It is Bill Webb, Aunt Diana."

"What does he want?"

Bill stepped in. "Please, Miss Diana, I came to tell the Squire the news. I thought he might be angry with me if I did not, seeing as I knowed of it."

"The news?" repeated Miss Diana, looking imperiously at Bill.

"The mischief the bull have done. He's gone and gored Farmer Ryle."

The words arrested the attention of all. They came forward, as with one impulse. Cris and his sister, in their haste, upset the backgammon-board.

"*What* do you say, Bill?" gasped Mrs. Chattaway, with white face and faltering voice.

"It's true, ma'am," said Bill. "The bull set on him this afternoon, and tossed him into the ditch. Master George found him there a short while ago, groaning awful."

There was a startled pause. "I—I—hope he is not much injured?" said Mrs. Chattaway at last, in her consternation.

"He says it's his death, ma'am. John Pinder and others have brought a bed, and be carrying of him home on it."

"What brought Mr. Ryle in that field?" asked Miss Diana.

"He telled me, ma'am, he was a-coming up here to see the Squire, and took that way to save time."

Mrs. Chattaway fell back a little. "Cris," said she to her son, "go down to the farm and see what the injury is. I cannot sleep in the uncertainty. It may be fatal."

Cris tossed his head. "You know, mother, I'd do almost anything to oblige you," he said, in his smooth accents, which had ever a false sound in them, "but I can't go to the farm. Mrs. Ryle might insult me: there's no love lost between us."

"If the accident happened this afternoon, why was it not discovered when the bull was brought to his shed to-night?" cried Miss Trevlyn.

Bill shook his head. "I dun know, ma'am. For one thing, Mr. Ryle was in the ditch, and couldn't be seen. And the bull, maybe, had gone to the top o' the field again, where the groaning wouldn't be heard."

"If I had only been listened to!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, in wailing accents. "How many a time have I asked that the bull should be parted with, before he did some fatal injury. And now it has come!"

CHAPTER IV

LIFE OR DEATH?

Mr. Ryle was carried home on the mattress, and laid on the large table in the sitting-room, by the surgeon's directions. Mrs. Ryle, clear-headed and of calm judgment, had sent for medical advice even before sending for her husband. The only doctor available for immediate purposes was Mr. King, who lived about half-way between the farm and the village. He attended at once, and was at the house before his patient. Mrs. Ryle had sent also to Barmester for another surgeon, but he could not arrive just yet. It was by Mr. King's direction that the mattress was placed on the large table in the parlour.

"Better there; better there," acquiesced the sufferer, when he heard the order given. "I don't know how they'd get me up the stairs."

Mr. King, a man getting in years, was left alone with his patient. The examination over, he came forth from the room and sought Mrs. Ryle, who was waiting for the report.

"The internal injuries are extensive, I fear," he said. "They lie chiefly here"—touching his chest and right side.

"Will he *live*, Mr. King?" she interrupted. "Do not temporise, but let me know the truth. Will he live?"

"You have asked me a question I cannot yet answer," returned the surgeon. "My examination has been hasty and superficial: I was alone, and knew you were anxiously waiting. With the help of Mr. Benage, we may be able to arrive at some decisive opinion. I fear the injuries are serious."

Yes, they were serious; and nothing could be done, as it seemed, to remedy them or alleviate the pain. Mr. Ryle lay helpless on the bed, giving vent to his regret and anguish in somewhat homely phraseology. It was the phraseology of this simple farmhouse; that to which he had been accustomed; and he was not likely to change it now. Gentlemen by birth and pedigree, he and his father had been content to live as plain farmers only, in language as well as work.

He lay groaning, lamenting his imprudence, now that it was too late, in venturing within the reach of that dangerous animal. The rest waited anxiously and restlessly the appearance of the surgeon. For Mr. Benage of Barmester had a world-wide reputation, and such men seem to bring consolation with them. If any one could apply healing remedies and save his life, it was Mr. Benage.

George Ryle had taken up his station at the garden gate. His hands clasped, his head lying lightly upon them, he was listening for the sound of the gig which had been despatched to Barmester. Nora at length came out to him.

"You'll catch cold, George, out here in the keen night air."

"The air won't hurt me to-night. Listen, Nora! I thought I heard something. They might be back again by this."

He was right. The gig was bowling swiftly along, containing the well-known surgeon and messenger despatched for him. The surgeon, a little man, quick and active, was out of the gig before it had well stopped, passed George and Nora with a nod, and entered the house.

A short time, and the worst was known. There would be but a few more hours of life for Mr. Ryle.

Mr. King would remain, doing what he could to comfort, to soothe pain. Mr. Benage must return to Barmester, for he was wanted there. Refreshment was offered him, but he declined it. Nora waylaid him in the garden as he was going down.

"Will the master see to-morrow's sun, sir?"

"It's rising now; he may do so. He will not see its setting."

Can you picture to yourselves what that night was for the house and its inmates? In the parlour, gathered round the table on which lay the dying man supported by pillows and covered with blankets,

were Mrs. Ryle, George and Trevlyn, the surgeon, and sometimes Nora. In the outer room was collected a larger group: John Pinder, the men who had borne him home, and Molly; with a few others whom the news of the accident had brought together.

Mrs. Ryle stood near her husband. George and Trevlyn seemed scarcely to know what to do with themselves; and Mr. King sat in a chair in the recess of the bay window. Mr. Ryle looked grievously wan, and the surgeon administered medicine from time to time.

"Come here, my boys," he suddenly said. "Come close to me."

They approached as he spoke, and leaned over him. He took a hand of each. George swallowed down his tears in the best way that he could. Trevlyn looked frightened.

"Children, I am going. It has pleased God to cut me off in the midst of my career, just when I had least thought of death. I don't know how it will be with you, my dear ones, or how it will be with the old home. Chattaway can sell up everything if he chooses; and I fear there's little hope but he will do it. If he would let your mother stay on, she might keep things together, and get clear of him in time. George will be growing into more of a man every day, and may soon learn to be useful in the farm, if his mother thinks well to trust him. Maude, you'll do your best for them? For him, as for the younger ones?"

"I will," said Mrs. Ryle.

"Ay, I know you will. I leave them all to you, and you will act for the best. I think it's well George should be upon the farm, as I am taken from it; but you and he will see to that. Treve, you must do the best you can in whatever station you may be called to. I don't know what it will be. My boys, there's nothing before you but work. Do you understand that?"

"Fully," was George's answer. Treve seemed too bewildered to give one.

"To work with all your might; your shoulders to the wheel. Do your best in all ways. Be honest and single-hearted in the sight of God; work for Him whilst you are working for yourselves, and then He will prosper you. I wish I had worked for Him more than I have done!"

A pause, broken only by George, who could no longer control his sobs.

"My days seem to have been made up of nothing but struggling, and quarrelling, and care. Struggling to keep my head above water, and quarrelling with Chattaway. The end seemed far-off, ages away, something as heaven seems. And now the end's come, and heaven's come—that is, I must set out upon the journey that leads to it. I fear the end comes to many as suddenly; cutting them off in their carelessness and their sins. Do not spend your days in quarrelling, my boys; be working on a bit for the end whilst time is given you. I don't know how it will be in the world I am about to enter. Some fancy that when once we have entered it, we shall see what is going on here, in our families and homes. For that thought, if for no other, I would ask you to try and keep right. If you were to go wrong, think how it would grieve me! I should always be thinking that I might have trained you better, and had not done so. Children! it is only when we come to lie here that we see all our shortcomings. You would not like to grieve me, George?"

"Oh, no! no!" said George, his sobs deepening. "Indeed I will try to do my best. I shall be always thinking that perhaps you are watching me."

"One greater than I is always watching you, George. And that is God. Act well in His sight; not in mine. Doctor, I must have some more of that stuff. I feel a strange sinking."

Mr. King rose, poured some drops into a wine-glass of water, and administered them. The patient lay a few moments, and then took his sons' hands, as before.

"And now, children, for my last charge to you. Reverence and love your mother. Obey her in all things. George, she is not your own mother, but you have never known another, and she has been as one to you. Listen to her always, and she will lead you aright. If I had listened to her, I shouldn't be lying where I am now. A week or two ago I wanted the character of that outdoor man from Chattaway. 'Don't go through that field,' she said before I started. 'Better keep where the bull can't touch you.' Do you remember, Maude?"

Mrs. Ryle simply bowed her head in reply. She was feeling the scene deeply, but emotion she would not show.

"I heeded what your mother said, and went up to Chattaway's, avoiding the fields," resumed Mr. Ryle. "This last afternoon, when I was going up again and had got to the field gate, I turned into it, for it cut off a few steps, and my temper was up. I thought of what your mother would say, as I swung in, but it didn't stop me. It must have been that red neckerchief that put him up, for I was no sooner over the gate than he bellowed savagely and butted at me. It was all over in a minute; I was in the ditch, and he went on, bellowing and tossing and tearing at the cloth. If you go there to-morrow, you'll see it in shreds about the field. Children, obey your mother; there'll be still greater necessity for it when I am gone."

The boys had been obedient hitherto. At least, George had been: Trevlyn was too indulged to be perfectly so. George promised that he would be so still.

"I wish I could have seen the little wench," resumed the dying man, the tears gathering on his eyelashes. "But it may be for the best that she's away, for I should hardly have borne parting with her. Maude! George! Treve! I leave her to you all. Do the best you can by her. I don't know that she'll be spared to grow up, for she's a delicate little mite: but that is as God pleases. I wish I could have stayed with you all a bit longer—if it's not sinful to wish contrary to God's will. Is Mr. King there?"

Mr. King had resumed his seat in the bay window, and was partially hidden by the curtain. He came forward. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Ryle?"

"You would oblige me by writing out a few directions. I should like to write them myself, but it is impossible; you'll enter the sentences just as I speak them. I have not made my will. I put it off, and put it off, thinking I could do it at any time; but now the end's come, and it is not done. Death surprises a great many, I fear, as he has surprised me. It seems that if I could only have one day more of health, I would do many things I have left undone. You shall write down my wishes, doctor. It will do as well; for there's only themselves, and they won't dispute one with the other. Let a little table be brought, and pen, ink, and paper."

He lay quiet whilst these directions were obeyed, and then began again.

"I am in very little pain, considering that I am going; not half as much as when I lay in that ditch. Thank God for it! It might have been that I could not have left a written line, or said a word of farewell to you. There's sure to be a bit of blue sky in the darkest trouble; and the more implicitly we trust, the more blue sky we shall find. I have not been what I ought to be, especially in the matter of disputing with Chattaway—not but that Chattaway's hardness has been in fault. But God is taking me from a world of care, and I trust He will forgive all my shortcomings for our Saviour's sake. Is everything ready?"

"All is ready," said Mr. King.

"Then leave me alone with the doctor a short time, dear ones," he resumed. "We shall not keep you out long."

Nora, who had brought in the things required, held the door open for them to pass through. The pinched look that the face, lying there, was assuming, struck upon her ominously.

"After all, the boy was right," she murmured. "The scratched hole was not meant for Jim Sanders."

CHAPTER V

MAUDE TREVLYN

The sun rose gloriously, dispersing the early October frost, and brightening the world. But the sunbeams fall upon dark scenes sometimes; perhaps more often than upon happy ones.

George Ryle was leaning on the fold-yard gate. He had strolled out without his hat, and his head was bent in grief. Not that he was shedding tears now. He had shed plenty during the night; but tears cannot flow for ever, even from an aching heart.

Hasty steps were heard approaching down the road, and George raised his head. They were Mr. Chattaway's. He stopped suddenly at sight of George.

"What is this about your father? What has happened? Is he dead?"

"He is dying," replied George. "The doctors are with him. Mr. King has been here all night, and Mr. Benage has just come again from Barmester. They have sent us out of the room; me and Treve. They let my mother remain with him."

"But how on earth did it happen?" asked Chattaway. "I cannot make it out. The first thing I heard when I woke this morning was that Mr. Ryle had been gored to death by the bull. What brought him near the bull?"

"He was passing through the field up to your house, and the bull attacked him—"

"But when? when?" hastily interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

"Yesterday afternoon. My father came in directly after you rode away, and I gave him your message. He said he would go up to the Hold at once, and speak to you; and took the field way instead of the road."

"Now, how could he take it? He knew it was hardly safe for strangers. Not but that the bull ought to have known him."

"He had a red cravat in his hand, and he thinks that excited the bull. It tossed him into the ditch, and he lay there, undiscovered, until past ten at night."

"And he is badly hurt?"

"He is dying," replied George, "dying now. I think that is why they sent us from the room."

Mr. Chattaway paused in dismay. Though a hard, selfish man, who had taken delight in quarrelling with Mr. Ryle and putting upon him, he did possess some feelings of humanity as well as his neighbours; and the terrible nature of the case naturally called them forth. George strove manfully to keep down his tears; relating the circumstances was almost too much for him, but he did not care to give way before the world, especially before that unit in it represented by Mr. Chattaway. Mr. Chattaway rested his elbow on the gate, and looked down at George.

"This is very shocking, lad. I am sorry to hear it. What will the farm do without him? How shall you all get on?"

"Thinking of that has been troubling him all night," said George. "He said we might get a living at the farm, if you would let us do it. If you would not be hard," he added, determined to speak out.

"Hard, he called me, did he?" said Mr. Chattaway. "It's not my hardness that has been in fault, but his pride. He has been as saucy and independent as if he did not owe me a shilling; always making himself out my equal."

"He is your equal," said George, speaking gently in his sadness.

"My equal! Working Tom Ryle the equal of the Chattaways! A man who rents two or three hundred acres and does half the work himself, the equal of the landlord who owns them and ever so many more to them!—equal to the Squire of Trevlyn Hold! Where did you pick up those notions, boy?"

George had a great mind to say that in strict justice Mr. Chattaway had no more right to be Squire of Trevlyn Hold, or to own those acres, than his father had; not quite so much right, if it came to that. He had a great mind to say that the Ryles were gentlemen, and once owners of what his father now rented. But George remembered they were in Chattaway's power; he could sell them up, and turn them from the farm, if he pleased; and he held his tongue.

"Not that I blame you for the notions," Mr. Chattaway resumed, in the same thin, unpleasant tones—never was there a voice more thin and wiry than his. "It's natural you should have got them from Ryle, for they were his. He was always—But there! I won't say any more, with him lying there, poor fellow. We'll let it drop, George."

"I do not know how things are between you and my father," said George, "except that there's money owing to you. But if you will not press us, if you will let my mother remain on the farm, I—"

"That's enough," interrupted Mr. Chattaway. "Never trouble your head about business that's above you. Anything between me and your father, or your mother either, is no concern of yours; you are not old enough to interfere yet. I should like to see him. Do you think I may go in?"

"We can ask," answered George; some vague and indistinct idea floating to his mind that a death-bed reconciliation might help to smooth future difficulties.

He led the way through the fold-yard. Nora was coming out at the back-door as they advanced.

"Nora, do you think Mr. Chattaway may go in to see my father?" asked George.

"If it will do Mr. Chattaway any good," responded Nora, who ever regarded that gentleman in the light of a common enemy, and could with difficulty bring herself to be commonly civil to him. "It's all over; but Mr. Chattaway can see what's left of him."

"Is he dead?" whispered Mr. Chattaway; whilst George lifted his white and startled face.

"He is dead!" broke forth Nora; "and perhaps there may be some that will wish now they had been less hard with him in life. The doctors and Mrs. Ryle have just come out, and the women have gone in to put him straight and comfortable. Mr. Chattaway can go in also, if he would like it."

Mr. Chattaway, it appeared, did not like it. He turned from the door, drawing George with him.

"George, tell your mother I am grieved at her trouble, and wish that beast of a bull had been stuck before he had done this. Tell her if there's any little thing she could fancy from the Hold, to let Edith know, and she'll gladly send it to her. Good-bye, lad. You and Treve must keep up, you know."

He passed out by the fold-yard gate, as he had entered, and George leaned upon it again, with his aching heart; an orphan now. Treve and Caroline had their mother left, but he had no one. It is true he had never known a mother, and Mrs. Ryle, his father's second wife, had supplied the place of one. She had done her duty by him; but it had not been in love; nor very much in gentleness. Of her own children she was inordinately fond; she had not been so of George—which perhaps was in accordance with human nature. It had never troubled George much; but the fact now struck upon him with a sense of intense loneliness. His father had loved him deeply and sincerely: but—he was gone.

In spite of his heavy sorrow, George was awake to sounds in the distance, the everyday labour of life. The cow-boy was calling to his cows; one of the men, acting for Jim Sanders, was going out with the team. And now there came a butcher, riding up from Barmester, and George knew he had come about some beasts, all unconscious that the master was no longer here to command, or deal with. Work, especially farm work, must go on, although death may have accomplished its mission.

The butcher, riding fast, had nearly reached the gate, and George was turning away to retire indoors, when the unhappy thought came upon him—Who is to see this man? His father no longer there, who must represent him?—must answer comers—must stand in his place? It brought the fact of what had happened more practically before George Ryle's mind than anything else had done. He stood where he was, instead of turning away. That day he must rise superior to grief, and be useful; must rise above his years in the future, for his step-mother's sake.

"Good morning, Mr. George," cried the butcher, as he rode up. "Is the master about?"

"No," answered George, speaking as steadily as he could. "He will never be about again. He is dead."

The butcher thought it a boy's joke. "None of that, young gentleman!" said he, with a laugh. "Where shall I find him?"

"Mr. Cope," said George, raising his grave face—and its expression struck a chill to the man's heart—"I should not joke upon the subject of death. My father was attacked by Chattaway's bull yesterday evening, and has died of the injuries."

"Lawk-a-mercy!" uttered the startled man. "Attacked by Chattaway's bull! and—and—died of the injuries! Surely it can't be so!"

George had turned his face away; the strain was getting too much for him.

"Has Chattaway killed the bull?" was the man's next question.

"I suppose not."

"Then he is no man and no gentleman if he don't do it. If a beast of mine injured a neighbour, I'd stay him from injuring another, no matter what its value. Dear me! Mr. George, I'd rather have heard any news than this."

George's head was quite turned away now. The butcher roused himself to think of business. His time was short, for he had to be in the town again before his shop opened for the day.

"I came up about the beasts," he said. "The master as good as sold 'em to me yesterday; it was only a matter of a few shillings split us. But I'll give in sooner than not have 'em. Who is going to carry on the dealings in Mr. Ryle's place? Who can I speak to?"

"You can see John Pinder," answered George. "He knows most about things."

The man guided his horse through the fold-yard, scattering the cocks and hens, and reached the barn. John Pinder came out to him; and George escaped indoors.

It was a sad day. The excitement over, the doctors departed, the gossipers and neighbours dispersed, the village carpenter having come and taken certain measures, the house was left to its monotonous quiet; that distressing quiet which tells upon the spirits. Nora's voice was subdued, Molly went about on tiptoe. The boys wished it was over; that, and many more days to come. Treve fairly broke bounds about twelve, said he could not bear it, and went out amongst the men. In the afternoon George was summoned upstairs to the chamber of Mrs. Ryle, where she had remained since the morning.

"George, you must go to Barmester," she said. "I wish to know how Caroline bears the news, poor child! Mr. Benage said he would call and break it to her; but I cannot get her grief out of my head. You can go over in the gig; but don't stay. Be home by tea-time."

It is more than probable that George felt the commission as a relief, and he started as soon as the gig was ready. As he went out of the yard, Nora called after him to be careful how he drove. Not that he had never driven before; but Mr. Ryle, or some one else, had always been in the gig with him. Now he was alone; and it brought his loss again more forcibly before him.

He reached Barmester, and saw his sister Caroline, who was staying there on a visit. She was not overwhelmed with grief, but, on the contrary, appeared to have taken the matter coolly and lightly. The fact was, the little girl had no definite ideas on the subject of death. She had never been brought into contact with it, and could not at all realise the fact told her, that she would never see papa again. Better for the little heart perhaps that it was so; sorrow enough comes with later years; and Mrs. Ryle judged wisely in deciding to keep the child where she was until after the funeral.

When George reached home, he found Nora at tea alone. Master Treve had chosen to take his with his mother in her chamber. George sat down with Nora. The shutters were closed, and the room was bright with fire and candle; but to George all things were dreary.

"Why don't you eat?" asked Nora, presently, perceiving the bread-and-butter remained untouched.

"I'm not hungry," replied George.

"Did you have tea in Barmester?"

"I did not have anything," he said.

"Now, look you here, George. If you are going to give way to—Mercy on us! What's that?"

Some one had entered hastily. A lovely girl in a flowing white evening dress and blue ribbons in her hair. A heavy shawl fell from her shoulders to the ground, and she stood panting, as one who has run quickly, her fair curls falling, her cheeks crimson, her dark blue eyes glowing. On the pretty arms were coral bracelets, and a thin gold chain was on her neck. It was Maude Trevlyn, whom you saw at Trevlyn Hold last night. So out of place did she look in that scene, that Nora for once was silent, and could only stare.

"I ran away, Nora," said Maude, coming forward. "Octave has a party, but they won't miss me if I stay only a little time. I have wanted to come all day, but they would not let me."

"Who would not?" asked Nora.

"Not any of them. Even Aunt Edith. Nora, is it *true*? Is it true that he is dead?" she reiterated, her pretty hands clasped with emotion, her great blue eyes cast upwards at Nora, waiting for the answer.

"Oh, Miss Maude! you might have heard it was true enough up at the Hold. And so they have a party! Some folk in Madam Chattaway's place might have had the grace to put it off, when their sister's husband was lying dead!"

"It is not Aunt Edith's fault. You know it is not, Nora. George, you know it also. She has cried very much to-day; and she asked long and long ago for the bull to be sent off. But he was not sent. Oh, George, I am so sorry! I wish I could have seen him before he died. There was no one I liked so well as Mr. Ryle."

"Will you have some tea?" asked Nora.

"No, I must not stay. Should Octave miss me she will tell of me, and then I should be punished. What do you think? Rupert displeased Cris in some way, and Miss Diana sent him to bed away from all the pleasure. It is a shame!"

"It is all a shame together, up at Trevlyn Hold—all that concerns Rupert," said Nora, not, perhaps, very judiciously.

"Nora, where did he die?" asked Maude, in a whisper. "Did they take him up to his bedroom when they brought him home?"

"They carried him in there," said Nora, pointing to the sitting room door. "He is lying there now."

"I want to see him," she continued.

Nora received the intimation dubiously.

"I don't know whether you had better," said she, after a pause.

"Yes, I must, Nora. What was that about the dog scratching a grave before the porch?"

"Who told you anything about that?" asked Nora, sharply.

"Ann Canham came up to the Hold and spoke about it. Was it so, Nora?"

Nora nodded. "A hole, Miss Maude, nearly big enough to lay the master in. Not that I thought it a token for *him*! I thought only of Jim Sanders. And some folk laugh at these warnings!" she added. "There sits one," pointing to George.

"Well, never mind it now," said George, hastily. Never was a boy less given to superstition; but, with his father lying where he was, he somehow did not care to hear much about the mysterious hole.

Maude moved towards the door. "Take me in to see him," she pleaded.

"Will you promise not to be frightened?" asked Nora. "Some young people can't bear the sight of death."

"What should I fear?" returned Maude. "He cannot hurt me."

Nora rose in acquiescence, and took up the candle. But George laid his hand on the girl.

"Don't go, Maude. Nora, you must not let her go in. She might regret it. It would not be right."

Now, of all things, Nora disliked being dictated to, especially by those she called children. She saw no reason why Maude should not look upon the dead if she wished to do so, and gave a sharp word of reprimand to George, in an undertone. How could they speak aloud, entering that presence?

"Maude, Maude!" he whispered. "I would advise you not to go in."

"Let me go!" she pleaded. "I should like to see him once again. I did not see him for a whole week before he died. The last time I ever saw him was one day in the copse, and he got down some hazel-nuts for me. I never thanked him," she added, tears in her eyes. "In a hurry to get home, I never stayed to thank him. I shall always be sorry for it. George, I must see him."

Nora was already in the room with the candle. Maude advanced on tiptoe, her heart beating with awe. She halted at the foot of the table and looked eagerly upwards.

Maude Trevlyn had never seen the dead, and her heart gave a bound of terror, and she fell back with a cry. Before Nora knew well what had occurred, George had her in the other room, his arms wound about her with a sense of protection. Nora came out and closed the door, vexed with herself for having allowed her to enter.

"You should have told me you had never seen any one dead before, Miss Maude," cried she, testily. "How was I to know? And you ought to have come right up to the top before looking."

Maude was clinging tremblingly to George, sobbing hysterically. "Don't be angry with me," she whispered. "I did not think he would look like that."

"Oh, Maude, I am not angry; I am only sorry," he said soothingly. "There's nothing really to be frightened at. Papa loved you very much; almost as much as he loved me."

"Shall I take you back, Maude?" said George, when she was ready to go.

"Yes, please," she eagerly answered. "I should not dare to go alone now. I should be fancying I saw—it—looking out at me from the hedges."

Nora folded her shawl well over her again, and George drew her closer to him that she might feel his presence as well as see it. Nora watched them down the path, right over the hole the restless dog had favoured the house with a night or two ago.

They went up the road. An involuntary shudder shook George's frame as he passed the turning which led to the fatal field. He seemed to see his father in the unequal conflict. Maude felt the movement.

"It is never going to be out again," she whispered.

"What?" he asked, his thoughts buried deeply just then.

"The bull. I heard Aunt Diana talking to Mr. Chattaway. She said it must not be set at liberty again, or we might have the law down upon Trevlyn Hold."

"Yes; that's all Miss Trevlyn and he care for—the law," returned George, in tones of pain. "What do they care for the death of my father?"

"George, he is better off," said she, in a dreamy manner, her face turned towards the stars. "I am very sorry; I have cried a great deal over it; and I wish it had never happened; I wish he was back with us; but still he is better off; Aunt Edith says so. You don't know how she has felt it."

"Yes," answered George, his heart very full.

"Mamma and papa are better off," continued Maude. "Your own mother is better off. The next world is a happier one than this."

George made no rejoinder. Favourite though Maude was with George Ryle, those were heavy moments for him. They proceeded in silence until they turned in at the great gate by the lodge: a round building, containing two rooms upstairs and two down. Its walls were not very substantial, and the sound of voices could be heard within. Maude stopped in consternation.

"George, that is Rupert talking!"

"Rupert! You told me he was in bed."

"He was sent to bed. He must have got out of the window again. I am sure it is his voice. Oh, what will be done if it is found out?"

George Ryle swung himself on to the very narrow ledge under the window, contriving to hold on by his hands and toes, and thus obtained a view of the room.

"Yes, it is Rupert," said he, as he jumped down. "He is sitting talking to old Canham."

But the slightness of structure which allowed voices to be heard within the lodge also allowed them to be heard without. Ann Canham came hastening to the door, opened it a few inches, and stood peeping. Maude took the opportunity to slip past her into the room.

But no trace of her brother was there. Mark Canham was sitting in his usual invalid seat by the fire, smoking a pipe, his back towards the door.

"Where has he gone?" cried Maude.

"Where's who gone?" roughly spoke old Canham, without turning his head. "There ain't nobody here."

"Father, it's Miss Maude," interposed Ann Canham, closing the outer door, after allowing George to enter. "Who be you taking the young lady for?"

The old man, partly disabled by rheumatism, put down his pipe, and contrived to turn in his chair. "Eh, Miss Maude! Why, who'd ever have thought of seeing you to-night?"

"Where is Rupert?" asked Maude.

"Rupert?" composedly returned old Canham. "Is it Master Rupert you're asking after? How should we know where he is, Miss Maude?"

"We saw him here," interposed George Ryle. "He was sitting on that bench, talking to you. We both heard his voice, and I saw him."

"Very odd!" said the old man. "Fancy goes a great way. Folks is oftentimes deluded by it."

"Mark Canham, I tell you—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Maude. She opened the door leading into the inner room, and stood looking into its darkness. "Rupert!" she called; "it is only George and I. You need not hide."

It brought forth Rupert; that lovely boy, with his large blue eyes and auburn curls. There was a great likeness between him and Maude; but Maude's hair was lighter.

"I thought it was Cris," he said. "He is learning to be as sly as a fox: though I don't know that he was ever anything else. When I am ordered to bed before my time, he has taken to dodging into the room every ten minutes to see that I am safe in it. Have they missed me, Maude?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I also came away without their knowing it. I have been down to Aunt Ryle's, and George has brought me home again."

"Will you be pleased, to sit down, Miss, Maude?" asked Ann Canham, dusting a chair.

"Eh, but that's a pretty picture!" cried old Canham, gazing at Maude, who had slipped off her heavy shawl, and stood warming her hands at the fire.

Mark Canham was right. A very pretty picture. He extended the hand that was not helpless towards her.

"Miss Maude, I mind me seeing your mother looking just as you look now. The Squire was out, and the young ladies at the Hold thought they'd give a dance, and Parson Dean and Miss Emily were invited to it. I don't know that they'd have been asked if the Squire had been at home, matters not being smooth between him and parson. She was older than you be; but she was dressed just as you be now; and I could fancy, as I look at you, that it was her over again. I was in the rooms, helping to wait. It doesn't seem so long ago! Miss Emily was the sweetest-looking of 'em all present; and the young heir seemed to think so. He opened the ball with Miss Emily in spite of his sisters; they wanted him to choose somebody grander. Ah, me! and both of 'em lying low so soon after, leaving you two behind 'em!"

"Mark!" cried Rupert, throwing his eyes on the old man—eyes sparkling with excitement—"if they had lived, papa and mamma, I should not have been sent to bed to-night because there's another party at Trevlyn Hold."

Mark's only answer was to put up his hands with an indignant gesture. Ann Canham was still offering the chair to Maude. Maude declined it.

"I cannot stay, Ann. They will miss me if I don't return. Rupert, you will come?"

"To be boxed up in my bedroom, whilst the rest of you are enjoying yourselves," cried Rupert. "They would like to take the spirit out of me; have been trying at it a long time."

Maude wound her arm within his. "Do come, Rupert!" she whispered coaxingly. "Think of the disturbance if Cris should find you here and tell!"

"And tell!" repeated Rupert, mockingly. "Not to tell would be impossible to Cris Chattaway. It's what he'd delight in more than in gold. I wouldn't be the sneak Cris Chattaway is for the world."

But Rupert appeared to think it well to depart with his sister. As they were going out, old Canham spoke to George.

"And Mrs. Ryle, sir—how does she bear it?"

"She bears it very well, Mark," answered George, as the tears rushed to his eyes unbidden. The old man marked them.

"There's one comfort for ye, Master George," he said, in low tones: "that he has took all his neighbours' sorrow with him. And as much couldn't be said if every gentleman round about here was cut off by death."

The significant tone was not needed to tell George that he alluded to Mr. Chattaway. The master of Trevlyn Hold was, in fact, no greater favourite with old Canham than he was with George Ryle.

"Mind how you get in, Master Rupert, so they don't fall upon you," whispered Ann Canham, as she held open the lodge door.

"I'll mind," was the boy's answer. "Not that I should care much if they did," he added. "I am getting tired of it."

She stood and watched them up the dark walk until a turn in the road hid them from view, and then closed the door. "If they don't take to treat him kinder, I misdoubt me but he'll do something desperate, as the dead-and-gone heir, Rupert, did," she remarked, sitting down near her father.

"Like enough," was the old man's reply, taking up his pipe again. "He has the true Trevlyn temper, have young Rupert."

"Maude," began Rupert, as they wound their way up the dark avenue, "don't they know you came out?"

"They would not have let me come if they had known it," replied Maude. "I have been wanting to go down all day, but Aunt Diana and Octave kept me in. I begged to go down last night when Bill Webb brought the news; and they were angry with me."

"Do you know what I should have done in Chattaway's place, George?" cried the boy, impulsively. "I should have loaded my gun the minute I heard of it, and shot the beast between the eyes. Chattaway would, if he were half a man."

"It is of no use talking of it, Rupert," answered George, in sadly subdued tones. "That would not mend the evil."

"Only fancy their having this rout to-night, while Mr. Ryle is lying dead!" indignantly resumed Rupert. "Aunt Edith ought to have interfered for once, and stopped it."

"Aunt Edith did interfere," spoke up Maude. "She said it must be put off. But Octave would not hear of it, and Miss Diana said Mr. Ryle was no real rela—"

Maude dropped her voice. They were now in view of the house and its lighted windows; and some one, probably hearing their footsteps, came bearing down upon them with a fleet step. It was Cris Chattaway. Rupert stole into the trees, and disappeared: Maude, holding George's arm, bore bravely on, and met him.

"Where have you been, Maude? The house has been searched for you. What brings *you* here?" he roughly added to George.

"I came because I chose to come," was George's answer.

"None of your insolence," returned Cris. "We don't want you here to-night. Just be off from this."

Was Cris Chattaway's motive a good one, under his rudeness? Did he feel ashamed of the gaiety going on, whilst Mr. Ryle, his uncle by marriage, was lying dead, under circumstances so unhappy? Was he anxious to conceal the unseemly proceeding from George? Perhaps so.

"I shall go back when I have taken Maude to the hall-door," said George. "Not before."

Anything that might have been said further by Cris, was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Trevlyn. She was standing on the steps.

"Where have you been, Maude?"

"To Trevlyn Farm," was Maude's truthful answer. "You would not let me go during the day, so I have been now. It seemed to me that I must see him before he was put underground."

"See *him!*" cried Miss Trevlyn.

"Yes. It was all I went for. I did not see my aunt. George, thank you for bringing me home," she continued, stepping in. "Good-night. I would have given all I possess for it never to have happened."

She burst into a flood of tears as she spoke—the result, no doubt, of her previous fright and excitement, as well as her sorrow for Mr. Ryle's unhappy fate. George wrung her hand, and lifted his hat to Miss Trevlyn as he turned away.

But ere he had well plunged into the dark avenue, there came swift and stealthy steps behind him. A soft hand was laid upon him, and a soft voice spoke, broken by tears:

"Oh, George, I am so sorry! I have felt all day as if it would almost be my death. I think I could have given my own life to save his."

"I know, I know! I know how *you* will feel it," replied George, utterly unmanned by the true and unexpected sympathy.

It was Mrs. Chattaway.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROMANCE OF TREVLYN HOLD

It is impossible to go on without a word of retrospect. The Ryles, gentlemen by a long line of ancestry, had once been rich men, but they were open-handed and heedless, and in the time of George's grandfather, the farm (not called the farm then) passed into the possession of the Trevlyns of the Hold, who had a mortgage on it. They named it Trevlyn Farm, and Mr. Ryle and his son remained on as tenants where they had once been owners.

After old Mr. Ryle's death, his son married the daughter of the curate of Barbrook, the Reverend George Berkeley, familiarly known as Parson Berkeley. In point of fact, the parish knew no other pastor, for its Rector was an absentee. Mary Berkeley was an only child. She had been petted, and physicked, and nursed, after the manner of only children, and grew up sickly as a matter of course. A delicate, beautiful girl in appearance, but not strong. People (who are always fond, you know, of settling everybody else's business for them) deemed that she made a poor match in marrying Thomas Ryle. It was whispered, however, that he himself might have made a greater match, had he chosen—no other than Squire Trevlyn's eldest daughter. There was not so handsome, so attractive a man in all the country round as Thomas Ryle.

Soon after the marriage, Parson Berkeley died—to the intense grief of his daughter, Mrs. Ryle. He was succeeded in the curacy and parsonage by a young clergyman just in priest's orders, the Reverend Shafto Dean. A well-meaning man, but opinionated and self-sufficient in the highest degree, and before he had been one month at the parsonage, he and Squire Trevlyn were at issue. Mr. Dean wished to introduce certain new fashions and customs into the church and parish; Squire Trevlyn held to the old. Proud, haughty, overbearing, but honourable and generous, Squire Trevlyn had known no master, no opposer; *he* was lord of the neighbourhood, and was bowed down to accordingly. Mr. Dean would not give way, the Squire would not give way; and the little seed of dissension grew and spread. Obstinacy begets obstinacy. That which a slight yielding on either side, a little mutual good-feeling, might have removed at first, became at length a terrible breach, the talk of a county.

Meanwhile Thomas Ryle's fair young wife died, leaving an infant boy—George. In spite of her husband's loving care, in spite of having been shielded from all work and management, so necessary on a farm, she died. Nora Dickson, a humble relative of the Ryle family, who had been partially brought up on the farm, was housekeeper and manager. She saved all trouble to young Mrs. Ryle: but she could not save her life.

The past history of Trevlyn Hold was a romance in itself. Squire Trevlyn had five children: Rupert, Maude, Joseph, Edith and Diana. Rupert, Maude and Diana were imperious as their father; Joseph and Edith were mild, yielding, and gentle, as had been their mother. Rupert was of course regarded as the heir: but the property was not entailed. An ancestor of Squire Trevlyn's coming from some distant part—it was said Cornwall—bought it and settled down upon it. There was not a great deal of grass land on the estate, but the coal-mines in the distance made it very valuable. Of all his children, Rupert, the eldest, was the Squire's favourite: but poor Rupert did not live to come into the estate. He had inherited the fits of passion characteristic of the Trevlyns; was of a thoughtless, impetuous nature; and he fell into trouble and ran away from his country. He embarked for a distant port, which he did not live to reach. And Joseph became the heir.

Very different, he, from his brother Rupert. Gentle and yielding, like his sister Edith, the Squire half despised him. The Squire would have preferred him passionate, haughty, and overbearing—a true Trevlyn. But the Squire had no intention of superseding him in the succession of Trevlyn Hold. Provided Joseph lived, none other would be its inheritor. *Provided*. Joseph—always called Joe—appeared to have inherited his mother's constitution; and she had died early, of decline.

Yielding, however, as Joe Trevlyn was naturally, on one point he did not prove himself so—that of his marriage. He chose Emily Dean; the pretty and lovable sister of Squire Trevlyn's *bête noire*, the obstinate parson. "I would rather you took a wife out of the parish workhouse, Joe," the Squire said, in his anger. Joe said little in reply, but he held to his choice; and one fine morning the marriage was celebrated by the obstinate parson himself in the church at Barbrook.

The Squire and Thomas Ryle were close friends, and the former was fond of passing his evenings at the farm. The farm was not a productive one. The land, never of the richest, had become poorer and poorer: it wanted draining and nursing; it wanted, in short, money laid out upon it; and that money Mr. Ryle did not possess. "I shall have to leave it, and try and take a farm in better condition," he said at length to the Squire.

The Squire, with all his faults and his overbearing temper, was generous and considerate. He knew what the land wanted; money spent on it; he knew Mr. Ryle had not the money to spend, and he offered to lend it him. Mr. Ryle accepted it, to the amount of two thousand pounds. He gave a bond for the sum, and the Squire on his part promised to renew the lease upon the present terms, when the time of renewal came, and not raise the rent. This promise was not given in writing: but none ever doubted the word of Squire Trevlyn.

The first of Squire Trevlyn's children to marry had been Edith: some years before she had married Mr. Chattaway. The two next to marry had been Maude and Joseph. Joseph, as you have heard, married Emily Dean; Maude, the eldest daughter, became the second wife of Mr. Ryle. A twelvemonth after the death of his fair young wife Mary, Miss Trevlyn of the Hold stepped into her shoes, and became the step-mother of the little child, George. The youngest daughter Diana, never married.

Miss Trevlyn, in marrying Thomas Ryle, gave mortal offence to some of her kindred. The Squire himself would have forgiven it; nay, perhaps have grown to like it—for he never could do otherwise than like Thomas Ryle—but he was constantly incited against it by his family. Mr. Chattaway, who had no great means of living of his own, was at the Hold on a long, long visit, with his wife and two little children, Christopher and Octavia. They were always saying they must leave; but they did *not* leave; they stayed on. Mr. Chattaway made himself useful to the Squire on business matters, and whether they ever would leave was a question. She, Mrs. Chattaway, was too gentle-spirited and loving to speak against her sister and Mr. Ryle; but Chattaway and Miss Diana Trevlyn kept up the ball. In point of fact, they had a motive—at least, Chattaway had—for making permanent the estrangement between the Squire and Mr. Ryle, for it was thought that Squire Trevlyn would have to look out for another heir.

News had come home of poor Joe Trevlyn's failing health. He had taken up his abode in the south of France on his marriage: for even then the doctors had begun to say that a more genial climate than this could alone save the life of the heir to Trevlyn. Bitterly as the Squire had felt the marriage, angry as he had been with Joe, he had never had the remotest thought of disinheriting him. He was the only son left: and Squire Trevlyn would never, if he could help it, bequeath Trevlyn Hold to a woman. A little girl, Maude, was born in due time to Joe Trevlyn and his wife; and not long after this, there arrived the tidings that Joe's health was rapidly failing. Mr. Chattaway, selfish, mean, sly, covetous, began to entertain hopes that *he* should be named the heir; he began to work on it in stealthy determination. He did not forget that, were it bequeathed to the husband of one of the daughters, Mr. Ryle, as the husband of the eldest, might be considered to possess most claim to it. No wonder then that he did all he could, secretly and openly, to incite the Squire against Mr. Ryle and his wife. And in this he was joined by Miss Diana Trevlyn. She, haughty and imperious, resented the marriage of her sister with one of inferior position, and willingly espoused the cause of Mr. Chattaway as against Thomas Ryle. It was whispered about, none knew with what truth, that Miss Diana made a compact with Chattaway, to the effect that she should reign jointly at Trevlyn Hold with him and enjoy part of its revenues, if he came into the inheritance.

Before the news came of Joe Trevlyn's death—and it was some months in coming—Squire Trevlyn had taken to his bed. Never did man seem to fade so rapidly as the Squire. Not only his health, but his mind failed him; all its vigour seemed gone. He mourned poor Joe excessively. In rude health and strength, he would not have mourned him; at least, would not have shown that he did so; never a man less inclined than the Squire to allow his private emotions to be seen: but in his weakened state he gave way to lamentation for his heir (his *heir*, note you, more than his son) every hour in the day. Over and over again he regretted that the little child, Maude, left by Joe, was not a boy. Nay, had it not been for his prejudice against her mother, he would have willed the estate to her, girl though she was. Now was Mr. Chattaway's time: he put forth in glowing colours his own claims, as Edith's husband; he made golden promises; he persuaded the poor Squire, in his wrecked mind, that black was white—and his plans succeeded.

To the will which had bequeathed the estate to the eldest son, dead Rupert, the Squire added a codicil, to the effect that, failing his two sons, James Chattaway was the inheritor. But all this was kept a profound secret.

During the time the Squire lay ill, Mr. Ryle went to Trevlyn Hold, and succeeded in obtaining an interview. Mr. Chattaway was out that day, or he had never accomplished it. Miss Diana Trevlyn was out. All the Squire's animosity departed the moment he saw Thomas Ryle's long-familiar face. He lay clasping his hand, and lamenting their estrangement; he told him he should cancel the two-thousand-pound bond, giving the money as his daughter's dowry; he said his promise of renewing the lease of the farm to him on the same terms would be held sacred, for he had left a memorandum to that effect amongst his papers. He sent for a certain box, in which the bond for the two thousand pounds had been placed, and searched for it, intending to give it to him then; but the bond was not there, and he said that Mr. Chattaway, who managed all his affairs now, must have placed it elsewhere. But he would ask him for it when he came in, and it should be destroyed before he slept. Altogether, it was a most pleasant and satisfactory interview.

But strange news arrived from abroad ere the Squire died. Not strange, certainly, in itself; only strange because it was so very unexpected. Joseph Trevlyn's widow had given birth to a boy! On the very day that little Maude was twelve months old, exactly three months after Joe's death, this little fellow was born. Mr. Chattaway opened the letter, and I will leave you to judge of his state of mind. A male heir, after he had made everything so safe and sure!

But Mr. Chattaway was not a man to be thwarted. *He* would not be deprived of the inheritance if he could by any possible scheming retain it, no matter what wrong he dealt out to others. James Chattaway had as little conscience as most people. The whole of that day he never spoke of the news; he kept it to himself; and the next morning there arrived a second letter, which rendered the affair a little more complicated. Young Mrs. Trevlyn was dead. She had died, leaving the two little ones, Maude and the infant.

Squire Trevlyn was always saying, "Oh, that Joe had left a boy; that Joe had left a boy!" And now, as it was found, Joe *had* left one. But Mr. Chattaway determined that the fact should never reach the Squire's ears to gladden them. Something had to be done, however, or the little children would be coming to Trevlyn. Mr. Chattaway arranged his plans, and wrote off hastily to stop their departure. He told the Squire that Joe's widow had died, leaving Maude; but he never said a word about the baby boy. Had the Squire lived, perhaps it could not have been kept from him; but he did not live; he went to his grave all too soon, never knowing that a male heir was born to Trevlyn.

The danger was over then. Mr. Chattaway was legal inheritor. Had Joe left ten boys, they could not have displaced him. Trevlyn Hold was his by the Squire's will, and could not be wrested from him. The two children, friendless and penniless, were brought home to the Hold. Mrs. Trevlyn had lived long enough to name the infant "Rupert," after the old Squire and the heir who had run away and died. Poor Joe had always said that if ever he had a boy, it should be named after his brother.

There they had been ever since, these two orphans, aliens in the home that ought to have been theirs; lovely children, both of them; but Rupert had the passionate Trevlyn temper. It was not made a systematically unkind home to them; Miss Diana would not have allowed that; but it was a very different home from that they ought to have enjoyed. Mr. Chattaway was at times almost cruel to Rupert; Christopher exercised upon him all sorts of galling and petty tyranny, as Octave Chattaway did upon Maude; and the neighbourhood, you may be quite sure, did not fail to talk. But it was known only to one or two that Mr. Chattaway had kept the fact of Rupert's birth from the Squire.

He stood tolerably well with his fellow-men, did Chattaway. In himself he was not liked; nay, he was very much disliked; but he was owner of Trevlyn Hold, and possessed sway in the neighbourhood. One thing, he could not get the title of Squire accorded to him. In vain he strove for it; he exacted it from his tenants; he wrote notes in the third person, "Squire Chattaway presents his compliments," etc.; or, "the Squire of Trevlyn Hold desires," etc., etc., all in vain. People readily accorded his wife the title of Madam—as it was the custom to call the mistress of Trevlyn Hold—she was the old Squire's daughter, and they recognised her claim to it, but they did not give that of Squire to her husband.

These things had happened years ago, for Maude and Rupert were now aged respectively thirteen and twelve, and all that time James Chattaway had enjoyed his sway. Never, never; no, not even in the still night when the voice of conscience in most men is so suggestive; never giving a thought to the wrong dealt out to Rupert.

And it must be mentioned that the first thing Mr. Chattaway did, after the death of Squire Trevlyn, was to sue Mr. Ryle upon the bond; which he had *not* destroyed, although ordered to do so by the Squire. The next thing he did was to raise the farm to a ruinous rent. Mr. Ryle, naturally indignant, remonstrated, and there had been ill-feeling between them from that hour to this; but Chattaway had the law on his own side. Some of the bond was paid off; but altogether, what with the increased rent, the bond and its interest, and a succession of ill-luck on the farm, Mr. Ryle had scarcely been able to keep his head above water. As he said to his wife and children, when the bull had done its work—he was taken from a world of care.

CHAPTER VII

MR. RYLE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Etiquette, touching the important ceremonies of buryings and christenings, is much more observed in the country than in towns. To rural districts this remark especially applies. In a large town people don't know their next-door neighbours, don't care for their neighbours' opinions. In a smaller place the inhabitants are almost as one family, and their actions are chiefly governed by that pertinent remark, "What will people say?" In these narrow communities, numbers of which are scattered about England, it is considered necessary on the occasion of a funeral to invite all kith and kin. Omit to do so, and it would be set down as a slight; affording the parish a theme of gossip for weeks afterwards. Hence Mr. Chattaway, being a connection—brother-in-law, in fact, of the deceased gentleman's wife—was invited to follow the remains of Thomas Ryle to the grave. In spite of the bad terms they had been on; in spite of Mrs. Ryle's own bitter feelings against Chattaway and Trevlyn Hold generally; in spite of Mr. Ryle's death having been caused by Chattaway's bull—Mr. Chattaway received a formal invitation to attend as mourner the remains to the grave. And it would never have entered into Mr. Chattaway's ideas of manners to decline it.

An inquest had been held at the nearest inn. The verdict returned was "Accidental Death," with a deodand of five pounds upon the bull. Which Mr. Chattaway had to pay.

The bull was already condemned. Not to annihilation; but to be taken to a distant fair, and there sold; whence he would be conveyed to other pastures, where he might possibly gore somebody else. It was not consideration for the feelings of the Ryle family which induced Mr. Chattaway to adopt this step, and so rid the neighbourhood of the animal; but consideration for his own pocket. Feeling ran high in the vicinity; fear also; the stoutest hearts could feel no security that the bull might not have a tilt at them: and Chattaway, on his part, was as little certain that an effectual silencer would not be dealt out to the bull some quiet night. Therefore he resolved to part with him. Apart from his misdoings, he was a valuable animal, worth a great deal more than Mr. Chattaway cared to lose; and the bull was dismissed.

The day of the funeral arrived, and those bidden to it began to assemble about one o'clock: that is, the undertaker's men, the clerk, and the bearers. Of the latter, Jim Sanders made one. "Better he had gone than his master," said Nora, in a matter-of-fact, worldly spirit of reasoning, as her thoughts went back to the mysterious hole she had gratuitously, and the reader will say absurdly, coupled with Jim's fate. A table was laid out in the entrance-room groaning under an immense cold round of beef, bread-and-cheese, and large supplies of ale. To help to convey a coffin to church without being first regaled with a good meal, was a thing Barbrook had never heard of, and never wished to hear of. The select members of the company were shown to the drawing-room, where the refreshment consisted of port and sherry, and "pound" cake. These were the established rules of hospitality at all well-to-do funerals: wine and cake for the gentry; cold beef and ale for the men. They had been observed at Squire Trevlyn's; at Mr. Ryle's father's; at every substantial funeral within the memory of Barbrook. Mr. Chattaway, Mr. Berkeley (a distant relative of Mr. Ryle's first wife), Mr. King the surgeon, and Farmer Apperley comprised the assemblage in the drawing-room.

At two o'clock, after some little difficulty in getting it into order, the sad procession started. It had then been joined by George and Trevlyn Ryle. A great many spectators had collected to view and attend it. The infrequency of a funeral in the respectable class, combined with the circumstances attending the death, drew them together: and before the church was reached, where it was met by the clergyman, it had a train half-a-mile long after it; chiefly women and children. Many dropped a tear for the premature death of one who had lived amongst them as a good master and kind neighbour.

They left him in his grave, by the side of his long-dead wife, Mary Berkeley. As George stood at the head of his father's coffin, during the ceremony in the churchyard, the gravestone with its name was in front of him; his mother's name: "Mary, the wife of Thomas Ryle, and only daughter of the Rev. George Berkeley." None knew with what feeling of loneliness the orphan boy turned from the spot, as the last words of the minister died away.

Mrs. Ryle, in her widow's weeds, was seated in the drawing-room on their return, as the gentlemen filed into it. In Barbrook custom, the relatives of the deceased, near or distant, were expected to assemble together for the remainder of the day; or for a portion of it. The gentlemen would sometimes smoke, and the ladies in their deep mourning sat with their hands folded in their laps, resting on their snow-white handkerchiefs. The conversation was only allowed to run on family matters, future prospects, and the like; and the voices were amicable and subdued.

As the mourners entered, they shook hands severally with Mrs. Ryle. Chattaway put out his hand last, and with perceptible hesitation. It was many a year since his hand had been given in fellowship to Mrs. Ryle, or had taken hers. They had been friendly once, and in the old days he had called her "Maude": but that was over now.

Mrs. Ryle turned from the offered hand. "No," she said, speaking in quiet but decisive tones. "I cannot forget the past sufficiently for that, James Chattaway. On this day it is forcibly present to me."

They sat down. Trevlyn next his mother, called there by her. The gentlemen disposed themselves on the side of the table facing the fire, and George found a chair a little behind them; no one seemed to notice him. And so much the better; the boy's heart was too full to bear much notice then.

On the table was placed the paper which had been written by the surgeon, at the dictation of Mr. Ryle, the night when he lay in extremity. It had not been unfolded since. Mr. King took it up; he knew that he was expected to read it. They were waiting for him to do so.

"I must premise that the dictation of this is Mr. Ryle's," he said. "He expressly requested me to write down his *own words*, just as they came from his lips. He—"

"Is it a will?" interrupted Farmer Apperley, a little man, with a red face and a large nose. He had come to the funeral in top boots, which constituted his idea of full dress.

"You can call it a will, if you please," replied Mr. King. "I am not sure that the law would do so. It was in consequence of his not having made a will that he requested me to write down these few directions."

The farmer nodded; and Mr. King began to read.

"In the name of God: Amen. I, Thomas Ryle.

"First of all, I bequeath my soul to God: trusting that He will pardon my sins, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

"It's a dreadful blow, this meeting my death by Chattaway's bull. The more so, that I am unable to leave things straightforward for my wife and children. They know—at least, my wife knows, and all the parish knows—the pressure that has been upon me, through Chattaway coming down upon me as he has done. I have been as a bird with its wings clipped. As soon as I tried to get up, I was pulled down again.

"Ill luck has been upon me besides. Beasts have died off, crops have failed. The farm's not good for much, for all the money that has been laid out upon it, and I alone know the labour it has cost. When you think of these things, my dear wife and boys, you'll know why I do not leave you better provided for. Many and many a night have I lain awake upon my bed, fretting, and planning, and hoping, all for your sakes. Perhaps if that bull had spared me to old age, I might have left you better off.

"I should like to bequeath the furniture and all that is in the house, the stock, the beasts, and all that I die possessed of, to my dear wife, Maude—but it's not of any use, for Chattaway will sell up—except the silver tankard, and that should go to Trevlyn. But for having 'T.R.' upon it, it should go to George, for he is the eldest. T.R. stood for my father, and T.R. has stood for me, and T.R. will

stand for Trevlyn. George, though he is the eldest, won't grudge it him, if I know anything of his nature. And I give to George my watch, and I hope he'll keep it for his dead father's sake. It is only a silver one; but it's a very good one, and George can have his initials engraved on the shield. The three seals, and the gold key, I give to him with it. The red cornelian has our arms on it. For we had arms once, and my father and I have generally sealed our letters with them: not that they have done him or me any good. And let Treve keep the tankard faithfully, and never part with it. And remember, my dear boys, that your poor father would have left you better keepsakes had it been in his power. You must prize these for the dead giver's sake. But there! it's of no use talking, for Chattaway will sell up, watch and tankard, and all.

"And I should like to leave that bay foal to my dear little Caroline. It will be a pretty creature when it's bigger. You must let it have the run of the three cornered paddock, and I should like to see her on it, sweet little soul!—but Chattaway's bull has stopped it. And don't grudge the cost of a little saddle for her; and Roger can break it in; and mind you are all true and tender with my dear little girl. You are good lads—though Treve is hasty when his temper's put out—and I know you'll be to her what brothers ought to be. I always meant that foal for Carry, since I saw how pretty it was likely to grow, though I didn't say so; and now I give it to her. But where's the use? Chattaway will sell up.

"If he does sell up, to the last stick and stone, he won't get his debt in full. Perhaps not much above half of it; for things at a forced sale don't bring their value. You have put down 'his debt,' I suppose; but it is not his debt. I am on my death-bed, and I say that the two thousand pounds was made a present of to me by the Squire on *his* death-bed. He told me it was made all right with Chattaway; that Chattaway understood the promise given to me, not to raise the rent; and that he'd be the same just landlord to me that the Squire had been. The Squire could not lay his hand on the bond, or he would have given it me then; but he said Chattaway should burn it as soon as he entered, which would be in an hour or two. Chattaway knows whether he has acted up to this; and now his bull has done for me.

"And I wish to tell Chattaway that if he'll act a fair part as a man ought, and let my wife and the boys stop on the farm, he'll stand a much better chance of getting the money, than he would if he turns them out of it. I don't say this for their sakes more than for his; but because from my heart I believe it to be the truth. George has his head on his shoulders the right way, and I would advise his mother to keep him on the farm; he will be getting older every day. Not but that I wish her to use her own judgment in all things, for her judgment is good. In time, they may be able to pay off Chattaway; in time they may be able even to buy back the farm, for I cannot forget that it belonged to my forefathers, and not to the Squire. That is, if Chattaway will be reasonable, and let them stop on it, and not be hard and pressing. But perhaps I am talking nonsense, for he may turn them off and do for them, as his bull has done for me.

"And now, my dear George and Treve, I repeat it to you, be good boys to your mother. Obey her in all things. Maude, I have left all to you in preference to dividing it between you and them, for which there is no time; but I know you'll do the right thing by them: and when it comes to your turn to leave—if Chattaway don't sell up—I wish you to bequeath to them in equal shares what you die possessed of. George is not your son, but he is mine, and—But perhaps I'd better not say what I was going to say. And, my boys, work while it's day. In that Book which I have not read so much as I ought to have read, it says, 'The night cometh when no man can work.' When we hear that read in church, or when we get the Book out on a Sunday evening and read it to ourselves, that night seems a long, long way off. It seems so far off that it can hardly ever be any concern of ours; and it is only when we are cut off suddenly that we find how very near it is. That night has come for me; and that night will come for you before you are aware of it. So, *work*—and score that, doctor. God has placed us in this world to work, and not to be ashamed of it; and to work for Him as well as for ourselves. It was often in my mind that I ought to work more for God—that I ought to think more of Him; and I used to say, 'I will do so when a bit of this bother's off my mind.' But the bother was always there,

and I never did it. And now the end's come; and I can see things would have been made easier to me if I *had* done it—score it again, doctor—and I say it as a lesson to you, my children.

"And I think that's about all; and I am much obliged to you, doctor, for writing this. I hope they'll be able to manage things on the farm, and I would ask my neighbour Apperley to give them his advice now and then, for old friendship's sake, until George shall be older, and to put him in a way of buying and selling stock. If Chattaway don't sell up, that is. If he does, I hardly know how it will be. Perhaps God will put them in some other way, and take care of them. And I would leave my best thanks to Nora, for she has been a true friend to us all, and I don't know how the house would have got on without her. And now I'm growing faint, doctor, and I think the end is coming. God bless you all, my dear ones. Amen."

A deep silence fell on the room as Mr. King ceased. He folded the paper, and laid it on the table near Mrs. Ryle. The first to speak was Farmer Apperley.

"Any help that I can be of to you and George, Mrs. Ryle, and to all of you, is heartily at your service. It will be yours with right goodwill at all times and seasons. The more so, that you know if I had been cut off in this way, my poor friend Ryle would have been the first to offer to do as much for my wife and boys, and have thought no trouble of it. George, you can come over and ask me about things, just as you would ask your father; or send for me up here to the farm; and whatever work I may be at at home, though it was putting out a barn on fire, I'd come."

"And now it is my turn to speak," said Mr. Chattaway. "And, Mrs. Ryle, I give you my promise, in the presence of these gentlemen, that if you choose to remain on the farm, I will put no hindrance upon it. Your husband thought me hard—unjust; he said it before my face and behind my back. My opinion always has been that he entirely mistook Squire Trevlyn in that last interview he had with him. I do not think it was ever the Squire's intention to cancel the bond; Ryle must have misunderstood him altogether: at any rate, I heard nothing of it. As successor to the estate, the bond came into my possession; and in my wife and children's interest I could not consent to destroy it. No one but a soft-hearted man—and that's what Ryle was, poor fellow—would have thought of asking such a thing. But I was willing to give him every facility for paying it, and I did do so. No! It was not my hardness that was in fault, but his pride and nonsense, and his thinking I ought not to ask for my own money—"

"If you bring up these things, James Chattaway, I must answer them," interrupted Mrs. Ryle. "I would prefer not to be forced to do it to-day."

"I do not want to bring them up in any unpleasant spirit," answered Mr. Chattaway; "or to say it was his fault or my fault. We'll let bygones be bygones. He is gone, poor man; and I wish that savage beast of a bull had been in four quarters before he had done the mischief! All I would now say, is, that I'll put no impediment to your remaining on the farm. We will not go into business details this afternoon, but I will come in any day you like to appoint, and talk it over. If you choose to keep on the farm at its present rent—it is well worth it—to pay me interest for the money owing, and a yearly sum towards diminishing the debt, you are welcome to do it."

Just what Nora had predicted! Mr. Chattaway loved money far too much to run the risk of losing part of the debt—as he probably would do if he turned them from the farm. Mrs. Ryle bowed her head in cold acquiescence. She saw no way open to her but that of accepting the offer. Mr. Chattaway probably knew there was no other.

"The sooner things are settled, the better," she remarked. "I will name eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good; I'll be here," he answered. "And I am glad it is decided amicably."

The rest of those present also appeared glad. Perhaps they had feared some unpleasant recrimination might take place between Mrs. Ryle and James Chattaway. Thus relieved, they unbent a little, and crossed their legs as if inclined to become more sociable.

"What shall you do with the boys, Mrs. Ryle?" suddenly asked Farmer Apperley.

"Treve, of course, will go to school as usual," she replied. "George—I have not decided about George."

"Shall I have to leave school?" cried George, looking up with a start.

"Of course you will," said Mrs. Ryle.

"But what will become of my Latin; my studies altogether?" returned George, in tones of dismay. "You know, mamma—"

"It cannot be helped, George," she interrupted, speaking in the uncompromising, decisive manner, so characteristic of her; as it was of her sister, Diana Trevlyn. "You must turn your attention to something more profitable than schooling, now."

"If a boy of fifteen has not had schooling enough, I'd like to know when he has had it?" interposed Farmer Apperley, who neither understood nor approved of the strides education and intellect had made since he was a boy. Substantial people in his day had been content to learn to read and write and cipher, and deem that amount of learning sufficient to grow rich upon. As did the Dutch professor, to whom George Primrose wished to teach Greek, but who declined the offer. He had never learned Greek; he had lived, and ate, and slept without Greek; and therefore he did not see any good in Greek. Thus was it with Farmer Apperley.

"What do you learn at school, George?" questioned Mr. Berkeley.

"Latin and Greek, and mathematics, and—"

"But, George, where will be the good of such things to you?" cried Farmer Apperley, not allowing him to end the catalogue. "Latin and Greek and mathematics! What next, I wonder!"

"I don't see much good in giving a boy that sort of education myself," put in Mr. Chattaway, before any one else had time to speak. "Unless he is to take up a profession, the classics only lie fallow in the mind. I hated them, I know that; I and my brother, too. Many and many a caning we have had over our Latin, until we wished the books at the bottom of the sea. Twelve months after we left school we could not have construed a page, had it been put before us. That's all the good Latin did for us."

"I shall keep up my Latin and Greek," observed George, very independently, "although I may have to leave school."

"Why need you keep it up?" asked Mr. Chattaway, turning full upon George.

"Why?" echoed George. "I like it, for one thing. And a knowledge of the classics is necessary to a gentleman."

"Necessary to what?" cried Mr. Chattaway.

"To a gentleman," repeated George.

"Oh," said Mr. Chattaway. "Do you think of being one?"

"Yes, I do," repeated George, in tones as decisive as any ever used by his step-mother.

This bold assertion nearly took away the breath of Farmer Apperley. Had George Ryle announced his intention of becoming a convict, Mr. Apperley's consternation had been scarcely less. The same word bears different constructions to different minds. That of "gentleman" in the mouth of George, could only bear one to the simple farmer.

"Hey, lad! What wild notions have ye been getting into your head?" he asked.

"George," said Mrs. Ryle almost at the same moment, "are you going to give me trouble at the very outset? There is nothing for you to look forward to but work. Your father said it."

"Of course I look forward to work," returned George, as cheerfully as he could speak that sad afternoon. "But that will not prevent my being a gentleman."

"George, I fancy you may be somewhat misusing terms," remarked the surgeon, who was an old inhabitant of that rustic district, and a little more advanced than the rest. "What you meant to say was, that you would be a good man, honourable and upright; nothing mean about you. Was it not?"

"Yes," said George, after an imperceptible hesitation. "Something of that sort."

"The boy did not express himself clearly, you see," said Mr. King, looking round on the rest. "He means well."

"Don't you ever talk about being a gentleman again, my lad," cried Farmer Apperley, with a sagacious nod. "It would make the neighbours think you were going in for bad ways. A gentleman is one who follows the hounds in white smalls and scarlet coat, goes to dinners and drinks wine, and never puts his hands to anything, but leads an idle life."

"That is not the sort of gentleman I meant," said George.

"It is to be hoped not," replied the farmer. "A man may do this if he has a good fat balance at his banker's, but not else."

George made no remark. To have explained how very different his ideas of a gentleman were from those of Farmer Apperley might have involved him in a long conversation. His silence was looked suspiciously upon by Mr. Chattaway.

"Where idle and roving notions are taken up, there's only one cure for them!" he remarked, in short, uncompromising tones. "And that is hard work."

But that George's spirit was subdued, he might have hotly answered that he had taken up neither idle nor roving notions. As it was, he sat in silence.

"I doubt whether it will be prudent to keep George at home," said Mrs. Ryle, speaking generally, but not to Mr. Chattaway. "He is too young to do much on the farm. And there's John Pinder."

"John Pinder would do his best, no doubt," said Mr. Chattaway.

"The question is—if I do resolve to put George out, what can I put him to?" resumed Mrs. Ryle.

"My father thought it best I should remain on the farm," interposed George, his heart beating a shade faster.

"He thought it best that I should exercise my own judgment in the matter," corrected Mrs. Ryle. "The worst is, it takes money to place a lad out," she added, looking at Farmer Apperley.

"It does that," replied the farmer.

"There's nothing like a trade for boys," said Mr. Chattaway, impressively. "They earn a living, and are kept out of mischief. It appears to me that Mrs. Ryle will have expense enough upon her hands, without the cost and keep of George added to it. What good can so young a boy do the farm?"

"True," mused Mrs. Ryle, agreeing for once with Mr. Chattaway. "He could not be of much use at present. But the cost of placing him out?"

"Of course he could not," repeated Mr. Chattaway, with an eagerness which might have betrayed his motive, but that he coughed it down. "Perhaps I may be able to put him out for you without cost. I know of an eligible place where there's a vacancy. The trade is a good one, too."

"I am not going to any trade," said George, looking Mr. Chattaway full in the face.

"You are going where Mrs. Ryle thinks fit to send you," returned Mr. Chattaway, in his hard, cold tones. "If I can get you into the establishment of Wall and Barnes without premium, it will be a first-rate thing for you."

All the blood in George Ryle's body seemed to rush to his face. Poor though they had become, trade had been unknown in their family, and its sound in George's ears, as applied to himself, was something terrible. "That is a retail shop!" he cried, rising from his seat.

"Well?" said Mr. Chattaway.

They remained gazing at each other. George with his changing face flushing to crimson, fading to paleness; Mr. Chattaway with his composed leaden features. His light eyes were sternly directed to George, but he did not glance at Mrs. Ryle. George was the first to speak.

"You shall never force me there, Mr. Chattaway."

Mr. Chattaway rose from his seat, took George by the shoulder, and turned him towards the window. The view did not take in much of the road to Barbrook; but a glimpse of it might be caught sight of here and there, winding along in the distance.

"Boy! Do you remember what was carried down that road this afternoon—what you followed next to, with your younger brother? *He* said that you were not to oppose your mother, but obey her in all things. These are early moments to begin to turn against your father's dying charge."

George sat down, heart and brain throbbing. He did not see his duty very distinctly before him then. His father certainly had charged him to obey his mother's requests; he had left him entirely subject to her control; but George felt perfectly sure that his father would never have placed him in a shop; would not have allowed him to enter one.

Mr. Chattaway continued talking, but the boy heard him not. He was bending towards Mrs. Ryle, enlarging persuasively upon the advantages of the plan. He knew that Wall and Barnes had taken a boy into their house without premium, he said, and he believed he could induce them to waive it in George's case. He and Wall had been at school together; had passed many an impatient hour over the Latin previously spoken of; had often called in to have a chat with him in passing. Wall was a ten-thousand-pound man now; and George might become the same in time.

"How would you like to place Christopher at it, Mr. Chattaway?" asked George, his heart beating rebelliously.

"Christopher!" indignantly responded Mr. Chattaway. "Christopher's heir to Trev—Christopher isn't you," he concluded, cutting his first retort short. In the presence of Mrs. Ryle it might not be altogether prudent to allude to the heirship of Cris to Trevlyn Hold.

The sum named conciliated the ear of Mr. Apperley, otherwise he had not listened with any favour to the plan. "Ten thousand pounds! And Wall hardly a middle-aged man! That's worth thinking of, George."

"I could never live in a shop; the close air, the confinement, the pettiness of it, would stifle me," said George, with a groan, putting aside for the moment his more forcible objections.

"You'd rather live in a thunder-storm, with the rain coming down on your head in bucketfuls," said Mr. Chattaway, sarcastically.

"A great deal," said George.

Farmer Apperley did not detect the irony of Mr. Chattaway's remark, or the bitterness of the answer. "You'll say next, boy, that you'd rather turn sailor, exposed to the weather night and day, perched midway between sky and water!"

"A thousand times," was George's truthful answer. "Mother, let me stay at the farm!" he cried, the nervous motion of his hands, the strained countenance, proving how momentous was the question to his grieved heart. "You do not know how useful I should soon become! And my father wished it."

Mrs. Ryle shook her head. "You are too young, George, to be of use. No."

George seemed to turn white. He was approaching Mrs. Ryle with an imploring gesture; but Mr. Chattaway caught his arm and pushed him towards his seat again. "George, if I were you, I would not, on this day, cross my mother."

George glanced at her. Not a shade of love, of relenting, was there on her countenance. Cold, haughty, self-willed, it always was; but more cold, more haughty, more self-willed than usual now. He turned and left the room, crossed the kitchen, and passed into the room whence his father had been carried only two hours before.

"Oh, father! father!" he sobbed; "if you were only back again!"

CHAPTER VIII

REBELLION

Borne down by the powers above him, George Ryle could only succumb to their will. Persuaded by the eloquence of Mr. Chattaway, Mrs. Ryle became convinced that placing George in the establishment of Wall and Barnes was the most promising thing that could be found for him. The wonder was, that she should have brought herself to listen to Chattaway at all, or have entertained for a moment any proposal emanating from him. There could have been but one solution to the riddle: that of her own anxiety to get George settled in something away from home. Deep down in the heart of Mrs. Ryle, there was seated a keen sense of injury—of injustice—of wrong. It had been seated there ever since the death of Squire Trevlyn, influencing her actions, warping her temper—the question of the heirship of Trevlyn. Her father had bequeathed Trevlyn Hold to Chattaway; and Chattaway's son was now the heir; whereas, in her opinion, it was her son, Trevlyn Ryle, who should be occupying that desirable distinction. How Mrs. Ryle reconciled it to her conscience to ignore the claims of young Rupert Trevlyn, she best knew.

Ignore them she did. She gave no more thought to Rupert in connection with the succession to Trevlyn, than if he had not existed. He had been barred from it by the Squire's will, and there it ended. But, failing heirs to her two dead brothers, it was *her* son who should have come in. Was she not the eldest daughter? What right had that worm, Chattaway, to have insinuated himself into the Squire's home? into—it may be said—his heart? and so willed over to himself the inheritance?

A bitter fact to Mrs. Ryle; a fact which rankled in her heart night and day; a turning from the path of justice which she firmly intended to see turned back again. She saw not how it was to be accomplished; she knew not by what means it could be brought about; she divined not yet how she should help in it; but she was fully determined that it should be Trevlyn Ryle eventually to possess Trevlyn Hold. Never Cris Chattaway.

A determination immutable as the rock: a purpose in the furtherance of which she never swerved or faltered; there it lay in the archives of her most secret thoughts, a part and parcel of herself, not the less indulged because never alluded to. It may be that in the death of her husband she saw her way to the end somewhat more clearly; his removal was one impediment taken from the path. She had never but once given utterance to her ambitious hopes for Trevlyn: and that had been to her husband. His reception of them was a warning never to speak of them again to him. No son of his, he said, should inherit Trevlyn Hold whilst the children of Joseph Trevlyn lived. If Chattaway chose to wrest their rights from them, make his son Cris usurper after him, he, Thomas Ryle, could not hinder it; but his own boy Treve should never take act or part in so crying a wrong. So long as Rupert and Maud Trevlyn lived, he could never recognise other rights than theirs. From that time forward Mrs. Ryle kept silence with her husband, as she did with others; but the roots of the project grew deeper and deeper in her heart, overspreading all its healthy fibres.

With this destiny in view for Treve, it will readily be understood why she did not purpose bringing him up to any profession, or sending him out in the world. Her intention was, that Treve should live at home, as soon as his school-days were over; should be master of Trevlyn Farm, until he became master of Trevlyn Hold. And for this reason, and this alone, she did not care to keep George with her. Trevlyn Farm might be a living for one son; it would not be for two; neither would two masters on it answer, although they were brothers. It is true, a thought at times crossed her whether it might not be well, in the interests of the farm, to retain George. He would soon become useful; would be trustworthy; her interests would be his; and she felt dubious about confiding all management to John Pinder. But these suggestions were overruled by the thought that it would not be desirable for George to acquire a footing on the farm as its master, and be turned from it when the time came for

Treve. As much for George's sake as for Treve's, she felt this; and she determined to place George at something away, where his interests and Treve's would not clash with each other.

Wall and Barnes were flourishing and respectable silk-mercens and linen-drapers; their establishment a large one, the oldest and best-conducted in Barmester. Had it been suggested to Mrs. Ryle to place Treve there, she would have retorted in haughty indignation. And yet there she was sending George.

What Mr. Chattaway's precise object could be in wishing to get George away from home, he alone knew. That he had such an object, there could be no shadow of doubt about; and Mrs. Ryle's usual clear-sightedness must have been just then obscured not to perceive it. Had his own interests or pleasure not been in some way involved, Chattaway would have taken no more heed as to what became of George than he did of a clod of earth in that miserable field just rendered famous by the ill-conditioned bull. It was Chattaway who did it all. He negotiated with Wall and Barnes; he brought news of his success to Mrs. Ryle; he won over Farmer Apperley. Wall and Barnes had occasionally taken a youth without premium—the youth being expected to perform an unusual variety of work for the favour, to be at once an apprentice and a general factotum, at the beck and call of the establishment. Under those concessions, Wall and Barnes had been known to forego the usual premium; and this great boon was, through Mr. Chattaway, offered to George Ryle. Chattaway boasted of it; enlarged upon his luck to George; and Mrs. Ryle—accepted it.

And George? Every pulse in his body coursed on in fiery indignation against the measure, every feeling of his heart rebelled. But of opposition he could make none: none that served him. Chattaway quietly put him down; Mrs. Ryle met all remonstrances with the answer that she had *decided*; and Farmer Apperley laboured to convince him that it was a slice of good fortune, which any one (under the degree of a gentleman who rode to cover in a scarlet coat and white smalls) might jump at. Was not Wall, who had not yet reached his five-and-fortieth year, a ten-thousand pound man? Turn where George would, there appeared to be no escape for him. He must give up all the dreams of his life—not that the dreams had been as yet particularly defined—and become what his mind revolted at, what he knew he should ever dislike bitterly. Had he been a less right-minded boy, he would have defied Chattaway, and declined to obey Mrs. Ryle. But that sort of rebellion George did not enter upon. The injunction of his dead father lay on him all too forcibly—"Obey and reverence your mother." And so the agreement was made, and George Ryle was to go to Wall and Barnes, to be bound to them for seven years.

He stood leaning out of the casement window the night before he was to enter; his aching brow bared to the cold air, cloudy as the autumn sky. Treve was fast asleep, in his own little bed in the far corner, shaded and sheltered by its curtains; but there was no such peaceful sleep for George. The thoughts he was indulging were not altogether profitable; and certain questions which arose in his mind had been better left out of it.

"What *right* have they so to dispose of me?" he soliloquised, alluding, it must be confessed, to the trio, Chattaway, Mrs. Ryle, and Apperley. "They *know* that if my father had lived, they would not have dared to urge my being put to it. I wonder what it will end in? I wonder whether I shall have to be at it always? It is *not* right to put a poor fellow to what he hates most of all in life, and will hate for ever and for ever."

He gazed out at the low stretch of land lying under the night sky, looking as desolate as he. "I'd rather go for a sailor!" broke from him in his despair; "rather—"

A hand on his shoulder caused him to start and turn. There stood Nora.

"If I didn't say one of you boys was out of bed! What's this, George? What are you doing?—trying to catch your death at the open window."

"As good catch my death, for all I see, as live in the world, now," was George's answer.

"As good be a young simpleton and confess it," retorted Nora, angrily. "What's the matter?"

"Why should they force me to that horrible place at Barmester?" cried George, following up his thoughts, rather than answering Nora. "I wish Chattaway had been a thousand miles away first! What business has he to interfere about me?"

"I wish I was queen at odd moments, when work seems coming in seven ways at once, and only one pair of hands to do it," quoth Nora.

George turned from the window. "Nora, look here! You know I am a gentleman born and bred: *is* it right to put me to it?"

Nora evaded an answer. She felt nearly as much as the boy did; but she saw no way of escape for him, and therefore would not oppose it.

There was no way of escape. Chattaway had decided it, Mrs. Ryle had acquiesced, and George was conducted to the new house, and took up his abode in it, rebellious feelings choking his heart, rebellious words rising to his lips.

But he did his utmost to beat down rebellion. The charge of his dead father was ever before him, and George was mindful of it. He felt as one crushed under a weight of despair; as one who had been rudely thrust from his proper place on earth: but he constantly battled with himself and his wrongs, and strove to make the best of it. How bitter the struggle, none save himself knew: its remembrance would never die out from memory.

The new work seemed terrible; not for its amount, though that was great; but from its nature. To help make up this parcel, to undo that; to take down these goods, to put up others. He ran to the post with letters—and that was a delightful phase of his life, compared with the rest—he carried out brown paper parcels. He had to stand behind the counter, and roll and unroll goods, and measure tapes and ribbons. You will readily conceive what all this was to a proud boy. George might have run away from it altogether, but that the image of that table in the sitting-room, and of him who lay upon it, was ever before him, whispering to him not to shrink from his duty.

Not a moment's idleness was George allowed; however the shopmen might enjoy leisure intervals when customers were few, there was no such interval for him. He was the new scapegoat of the establishment; often doing the work that of right did not belong to him. It was perfectly well known to the young men that he had entered as a working apprentice; one who was not to be particular in work he did, or its quantity; and therefore he was not spared. He had taken his books with him, classics and others; he soon found he might as well have left them at home. Not one minute in the twenty-four hours could he devote to them. His hands were full of work until bed-time; and no reading was permitted in the chambers. "Where is the use of my having gone to school at all?" he would sometimes ask himself. He would soon become as oblivious of Latin and Greek as Mr. Chattaway could wish; and his prospects of adding to his stock of learning were such as would have gladdened Farmer Apperley's heart.

One Saturday, when George had been there about three weeks, and the day was drawing near for the indentures to be signed, binding him to the business for years, Mr. Chattaway rode up in the very costume that was the subject of Farmer Apperley's ire, when worn by those who ought not to afford to wear it. The hounds had met that day near Barmester, had found their fox, and been led a round-about chase, the fox bringing them back to their starting-point to resign his brush; and the master of Trevlyn Hold, on his splashed hunter, in his scarlet coat, white smalls and boots, splashed also, rode through Barmester on his return, and pulled up at the door of Wall and Barnes. Giving his horse to a street boy to hold, he entered the shop, whip in hand.

The scarlet coat, looming in unexpectedly, caused a flutter in the establishment. Saturday was market-day, and the shop was unusually full. The customers looked round in admiration, the shopmen with envy. Little chance thought those hard-worked, unambitious young men, that they should ever wear a scarlet coat, and ride to cover on a blood hunter. Mr. Chattaway, of Trevlyn Hold, was an object of consideration just then. He shook hands with Mr. Wall, who came forward from some remote region; then turned and shook hands condescendingly with George.

"And how does he suit?" blandly inquired Mr. Chattaway. "Can you make anything of him?"

"He does his best," was the reply. "Awkward at present; but we have had others who have been as awkward at first, I think, and who have turned out valuable assistants in the long run. I am willing to take him."

"That's all right then," said Mr. Chattaway. "I'll call in and tell Mrs. Ryle. Wednesday is the day he is to be bound, I think?"

"Wednesday," assented Mr. Wall.

"I shall be here. I am glad to take this trouble off Mrs. Ryle's hands. I hope you like your employment, George."

"I do not like it at all," replied George. And he spoke out fearlessly, although his master stood by.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Chattaway, with a false-sounding laugh. "Well, I did not suppose you would like it too well at first."

Mr. Wall laughed also, a hearty, kindly laugh. "Never yet did an apprentice like his work too well," said he. "It's their first taste of the labour of life. George Ryle will like it better when he is used to it."

"I never shall," thought George. But he supposed it would not quite do to say so; neither would it answer any end. Mr. Chattaway shook hands with Mr. Wall, nodded to George, and he and his scarlet coat loomed out again.

"Will it last for ever?—will this dreadful slavery last throughout my life?" broke from George Ryle's rebellious heart.

CHAPTER IX

EMANCIPATION

On the following day, Sunday, George walked home: Mrs. Ryle had told him to come and spend the day at the Farm. All were at church except Molly, and George went to meet them. Several groups were coming along; and presently he met Cris Chattaway, Rupert Trevlyn, and his brother Treve, walking together.

"Where's my mother?" asked George.

"She stepped indoors with Mrs. Apperley," answered Treve. "Said she'd follow me on directly."

"How do you relish linen-draping?" asked Cris Chattaway, in a chaffing sort of manner, as George turned with them. "Horrid, isn't it?"

"There's only about one thing in this world more horrid," answered George.

"My father said you expressed fears before you went that you'd find the air stifling," went on Cris, not asking what the one exception might be. "Is it hopelessly so?"

"The black hole in Calcutta must have been cool and pleasant in comparison with it," returned George.

"I wonder you are alive," continued Cris.

"I wonder I am," said George, equably. "I was quite off in a faint one day, when the shop was at the fullest. They thought they must have sent for you, Cris; that the sight of you might bring me to again."

"There you go!" exclaimed Treve Ryle. "I wonder if you *could* let each other alone if you were bribed to do it?"

"Cris began it," said George.

"I didn't," said Cris. "I *should* like to see you at your work, though, George! I'll come some day. The Squire paid you a visit yesterday afternoon, he told us. He says you are getting to be quite the counter cut; one can't serve out yards of calico without it, you know."

George Ryle's face burnt. He knew Mr. Chattaway had ridiculed him at Trevlyn Hold, in connection with his new occupation. "It would be a more fitting situation for you than for me, Cris," said he. "And now you hear it."

Cris laughed scornfully. "Perhaps it might, if I wanted one. The master of Trevlyn won't need to go into a linen-drapeer's shop."

"Look here, Cris. That shop is horrid, and I don't mind telling you that I find it so; not an hour in the day goes over my head but I wish myself out of it; but I would rather bind myself to it for twenty years than be master of Trevlyn Hold, if I came to it as you will come to it—by wrong."

Cris broke into a shrill, derisive whistle. It was being prolonged to an apparently interminable length, when he found himself rudely seized from behind.

"Is that the way you walk home from church, Christopher Chattaway? Whistling!"

Cris looked round and saw Miss Trevlyn. "Goodness, Aunt Diana! are you going to shake me?"

"Walk along as a gentleman should, then," returned Miss Trevlyn.

She went on. Miss Chattaway walked by her side, not deigning to cast a word or a look to the boys as she swept past. Gliding up behind them, holding the hand of Maude, was gentle Mrs. Chattaway. They all wore black silk dresses and white silk bonnets: the apology for mourning assumed for Mr. Ryle. But the gowns were not new; and the bonnets were the bonnets of the past summer, with the coloured flowers removed.

Mrs. Chattaway slackened her pace, and George found himself at her side. She seemed to linger, as if she would speak with him unheard by the rest.

"Are you pretty well, my dear?" were her first words. "You look taller and thinner, and your face is pale."

"I shall look paler before I have been much longer in the shop, Mrs. Chattaway."

Mrs. Chattaway glanced her head timidly round with the air of one who fears she may be heard. But they were alone now.

"Are you grieving, George?"

"How can I help it?" he passionately answered, feeling that he could open his heart to Mrs. Chattaway as he could to no one else in the wide world. "Is it a proper thing to put me to, dear Mrs. Chattaway?"

"I said it was not," she murmured. "I remarked to Diana that I wondered Maude should place you there."

"It was not my mother so much as Mr. Chattaway," he answered, forgetting possibly that it was Mr. Chattaway's wife to whom he spoke. "At times, do you know, I feel as though I would almost rather be—be—"

"Be what, dear?"

"Be dead, than remain there."

"Hush, George!" she cried, almost with a shudder. "Random figures of speech never do any good! I have learnt it. In the old days, when—"

She suddenly broke off and glided forward without further notice. As she passed she caught up the hand of Maude, who was then walking by the side of the boys. George looked round for the cause of desertion, and found it in Mr. Chattaway. That gentleman was coming along with a quick step, one of his younger children in his hand.

The Chattaways turned off towards Trevlyn Hold, and George walked on with Treve.

"Do you know how things are going on at home, Treve, between my mother and Chattaway?" asked George.

"Chattaway's a miserable screw," was Treve's answer. "He'd like to grind down the world, and doesn't let a chance escape him. Mamma says it's a dreadful sum he has put upon her to pay yearly, and she does not see how the farm will do it, besides keeping us. I wish we were clear of him! I wish I was as big as you, George! I'd work my arms off, but I'd get together the money to pay him!"

"I'm not allowed to work," said George. "They have thrust me away from the farm."

"I wish you were back at it; I know that! Nothing goes on as it used to, when you were there and papa was alive. Nora's cross, and mamma's cross; and I have not a soul to speak to. What do you think Chattaway did this week?"

"Something mean, I suppose!"

"Mean! We killed a pig, and while it was being cut up, Chattaway marched in. 'That's fine meat, John Pinder,' said he, when he had looked at it a bit; 'as fine as ever I saw. I should like a bit of this meat; I think I'll take a sparerib; and it can go against Mrs. Ryle's account with me.' With that, he laid hold of a sparerib, the finest of the two, called a boy who was standing by, and sent him up with it at once to Trevlyn Hold. What do you think of that?"

"Think! That it's just the thing Chattaway would do every day of his life, if he could. Mamma should have sent for the meat back again."

"And enrage Chattaway! It might be all the worse for us if she did."

"Is it not early to begin pig-killing?"

"Yes. John Pinder killed this one on his own authority; never so much as asking mamma. She was so angry. She told him, if ever he acted for himself again, without knowing what her pleasure might be, she should discharge him. But it strikes me John Pinder is fond of doing things on his own head," concluded Treve, sagaciously; "and will do them, in spite of everyone, now there's no master over him."

The day soon passed. George told his mother how terribly he disliked being where he was placed; worse than that, how completely unsuited he was to the business. Mrs. Ryle coldly said we all had to put up with what we disliked, and he would grow reconciled to it in time. There was evidently no hope for him; and he returned to Barmester at night, feeling there was not any.

On the following afternoon, Monday, some one in deep mourning entered the shop of Wall and Barnes, and asked if she could speak to Mr. Ryle. George was at the upper end of the shop. A box of lace had been accidentally upset on the floor, and he had been called to set it straight. Behind him hung two shawls, and, hidden by those shawls, was a desk, belonging to Mr. Wall. The visitor approached George and saluted him.

"Well, you *are* busy!"

George lifted his head at the well-known voice—Nora's. Her attention appeared chiefly attracted by the lace.

"What a mess it is in! And you don't go a bit handy to work, towards putting it tidy."

"I shall never be handy at this sort of work. Oh, Nora! I cannot tell you how I dislike it!" he exclaimed, with a burst of feeling that betrayed its own pain. "I would rather be with my father in his coffin!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Nora.

"It is not nonsense. I shall never care for anything again in life, now they have put me here. It was Chattaway's doing; you know it was, Nora. My mother never would have thought of it. When I remember that my father would have objected to this for me just as strongly as I object to it myself, I can hardly *bear* my thoughts. I think how he will grieve, if he can see what goes on in this world. You know he said something about that when he was dying—the dead retaining their consciousness of what is passing here."

"Have you objected to be bound?"

"I have not objected. I don't mean to object. My father charged me to obey Mrs. Ryle, and not cross her—and I won't forget that; therefore I shall remain, and do my duty to the very best of my power. But it was a cruel thing to put me to it. Chattaway has some motive for getting me off the farm; there's no doubt about it. I shall stay if—if—"

"Why do you hesitate?" asked Nora.

"Well, there are moments," he answered, "when a fear comes over me whether I *can* bear and stay on. You see, Nora, it is Chattaway and my mother's will balancing against all the hopes and prospects of my life. I know that my father charged me to obey my mother; but, on the other hand, I know that if he were alive he would be pained to see me here; would be the first to take me away. When these thoughts come forcibly upon me, I doubt whether I can remain."

"You must not encourage them," said Nora.

"I don't encourage them; they come in spite of me. The fear comes; it is always coming. Don't say anything at home, Nora. I have made up my mind to stop, and I'll try hard to do it. As soon as I am out of my time I'll go off to India, or somewhere, and forget the old life in the new one."

"My goodness!" uttered Nora. But having no good arguments at hand, she thought it as well to leave him, and took her departure.

The day arrived on which George was to be bound. It was a gloomy November day, and the tall chimneys of Barmester rose dark and dismal against the outlines of the grey sky. The previous night had been hopelessly wet, and the mud in the streets was ankle-deep. People who had no urgent occasion to be abroad, drew closer to their comfortable fire-sides, and wished the dreary month of November was over.

George stood at the door of the shop, having snatched a moment to come to it. A slender, handsome boy, with his earnest eyes and dark chestnut hair, looking far too gentlemanly to belong to that place. Belong to it! Ere the stroke of another hour should have been told on the dial of the church clock of Barmester, he would be irrevocably bound to it—have become as much a part and

parcel of it as the silks displayed in its windows, the shawls exhibited in their gay and gaudy colours. As he stood there, he was feeling that no fate on earth was ever so hopelessly dark as his: feeling that he had no friend either in earth or heaven.

One, two; three, four! chimed out over the town through the leaden atmosphere. Half-past eleven! It was the hour fixed for signing the indentures which would bind him to servitude for years; and he, George Ryle, looked to the extremity of the street, expecting the appearance of Mr. Chattaway.

Considering the way in which Mr. Chattaway had urged on the matter, George had thought he would be half-an-hour before the time, rather than five minutes behind it. He looked eagerly to the extremity of the street, at the same time dreading the sight he sought for.

"George Ryle!" The call came ringing in sharp, imperative tones, and he turned in obedience to it. He was told to "measure those trimmings, and card them."

An apparently interminable task. About fifty pieces of ribbon-trimmings, some scores of yards in each piece, all off their cards. George sighed as he singled out one and began upon it—he was terribly awkward at the work.

It advanced slowly. In addition to the inaptitude of his fingers for the task, to his intense natural distaste for it—and so intense was that distaste, that the ribbons felt as if they burnt his fingers—in addition to this, there were frequent interruptions. Any of the shopmen who wanted help called to George Ryle; and once he was told to open the door for a lady who was departing.

As she walked away, George leaned out, and took another gaze. Mr. Chattaway was not in sight. The clocks were then striking a quarter to twelve. A feeling of something like hope, but vague and faint and terribly unreal, dawned over his heart. Could the delay augur good for him?—was it possible that there could be any change?

How unreal it was, the next moment proved. There came round that far corner a horseman at a hand-gallop, his horse's hoofs scattering the mud in all directions. It was Mr. Chattaway. He reined up at the private door of Wall and Barnes, dismounted, and consigned his horse to his groom, who had followed at the same pace. The false, faint hope was over; and George walked back to his cards and his trimmings, as one from whom all spirit has gone out.

A message was brought to him almost immediately by one of the house servants: Squire Chattaway waited in the drawing-room. Squire Chattaway had sent the message himself, not to George, to Mr. Wall; but Mr. Wall was engaged at the moment with a gentleman, and sent the message on to George. George went upstairs.

Mr. Chattaway, in his top boots and spurs, stood warming his hands over the fire. He had not removed his hat. When the door opened, he raised his hand to do so; but seeing it was only George who entered, he left it on. He was much given to the old-fashioned use of boots and spurs when out riding.

"Well, George, how are you?"

George went up to the fireplace. On the centre table, as he passed it, lay an official-looking parchment rolled up, an inkstand by its side. George had not the least doubt that the parchment was no other than that formidable document, his Indentures.

Mr. Chattaway had taken up the same opinion. He extended his riding whip towards the parchment, and spoke in a significant tone, turning his eye on George.

"Ready?"

"It is no use attempting to say I am not," replied George. "I would rather you had forced me to become one of the lowest boys in your coal-mines, Mr. Chattaway."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

He was pointing now to the upper part of the sleeve of George's jacket. Some ravellings of cotton had collected there unnoticed. George took them off, and put them in the fire.

"It is only a badge of my trade, Mr. Chattaway."

Whether Mr. Chattaway detected the bitterness of the words—not the bitterness of sarcasm, but of despair—cannot be told. He laughed pleasantly, and before the laugh was over, Mr. Wall came in. Mr. Chattaway removed his hat now, and laid it with his riding-whip beside the indentures.

"I am later than I ought to be," observed Mr. Chattaway, as they shook hands. "The fact is, I was on the point of starting, when my colliery manager came up. His business was important, and it kept me the best part of an hour."

"Plenty of time; plenty of time," said Mr. Wall. "Take a seat."

They sat down near the table. George, apparently unnoticed, remained standing on the hearth-rug. A few minutes were spent conversing on different subjects, and then Mr. Chattaway turned to the parchment.

"These are the indentures, I presume?"

"Yes."

"I called on Mrs. Ryle last evening. She requested me to say that should her signature be required, as the boy's nearest relative and guardian—as his only parent, it may be said, in fact—she should be ready to affix it at any given time."

"It will not be required," replied Mr. Wall, in a clear voice. "I shall not take George Ryle as an apprentice."

A stolid look of surprise struggled to Mr. Chattaway's leaden face. At first, he scarcely seemed to take in the full meaning of the words. "Not take him?" he rejoined, staring helplessly.

"No. It is a pity these were made out," continued Mr. Wall, taking up the indentures. "It has been so much time and parchment wasted. However, that is not of great consequence. I will be at the loss, as the refusal comes from my side."

Mr. Chattaway found his tongue—found it volubly. "Won't he do? Is he not suitable? I—I don't understand this."

"Not at all suitable, in my opinion," answered Mr. Wall.

Mr. Chattaway turned sharply upon George, a strangely evil look in his dull grey eye, an ominous curl in his thin, dry lip. Mr. Wall likewise turned; but on his face there was a reassuring smile.

And George? George stood there as one in a dream; his face changing to perplexity, his eyes strained, his fingers intertwined with the nervous grasp of emotion.

"What have you been guilty of, sir, to cause this change of intentions?" shouted Mr. Chattaway.

"He has not been guilty of anything," interposed Mr. Wall, who appeared to be enjoying a smile at George's astonishment and Mr. Chattaway's discomfiture. "Don't blame the boy. So far as I know and believe, he has striven to do his best ever since he has been here."

"Then why won't you take him? You *will* take him," added Mr. Chattaway, in a more agreeable voice, as the idea dawned upon him that Mr. Wall had been joking.

"Indeed, I will not. If Mrs. Ryle offered me a thousand pounds premium with him, I should not take him."

Mr. Chattaway's small eyes opened to their utmost width. "And why not?"

"Because, knowing what I know now, I believe that I should be committing an injustice upon the boy; an injustice which nothing could repair. To condemn a youth to pass the best years of his life at an uncongenial pursuit, to make the pursuit his calling, is a cruel injustice wherever it is knowingly inflicted. I myself was a victim to it. My boy," added Mr. Wall, laying his hand on George's shoulder, "you have a marked distaste to the mercery business. Is it not so? Speak out fearlessly. Don't regard me as your master—I shall never be that, you hear—but as your friend."

"Yes, I have," replied George.

"You think it a cruel piece of injustice to have put you to it: you will never more feel an interest in life; you'd as soon be with poor Mr. Ryle in his coffin! And when you are out of your time, you mean to start for India or some out-of-the-world place, and begin life afresh!"

George was too much confused to answer. His face turned scarlet. Undoubtedly Mr. Wall had overheard his conversation with Nora.

Mr. Chattaway was looking red and angry. When his face did turn red, it presented a charming brick-dust hue. "It is only scamps who take a dislike to what they are put to," he exclaimed. "And their dislike is all pretence."

"I differ from you in both propositions," replied Mr. Wall. "At any rate, I do not think it the case with your nephew."

Mr. Chattaway's brick-dust grew deeper. "He is no nephew of mine. What next will you say, Wall?"

"Your step-nephew, then, to be correct," equably rejoined Mr. Wall. "You remember when we left school together, you and I, and began to turn our thoughts to the business of life? Your father wished you to go into the bank as clerk, you know; and mine—"

"But he did not get his wish, more's the luck," again interposed Mr. Chattaway, not pleased at the allusion. "A poor start in life that would have been for the future Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

"Pooh!" rejoined Mr. Wall, in a good-tempered, matter-of-fact tone. "You did not expect then to be exalted to Trevlyn Hold. Nonsense, Chattaway! We are old friends, you know. But, let me continue. I overheard a certain conversation of this boy's with Nora Dickson, and it seemed to bring my own early life back to me. With every word he spoke, I had a fellow-feeling. My father insisted that I should follow the business he was in; this one. He carried on a successful trade for years, in this very house, and nothing would do but I must succeed to it. In vain I urged my repugnance to it, my dislike; in vain I said I had formed other views for myself; I was not listened to. In those days it was not the fashion for sons to run counter to their fathers' will; at least, such was my experience; and into the business I came. I have reconciled myself to it by dint of time and habit; liked it, I never have; and I have always felt that it was—as I heard this boy express it—a cruel wrong to force me into it. You cannot, therefore, be surprised that I decline so to force another. I will never do it knowingly."

"You decline absolutely to take him?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"Absolutely and positively. He can remain in the house a few days longer if it will suit his convenience, or he can leave to-day. I am not displeased with you," added Mr. Wall, turning to George, and holding out his hand. "We shall part good friends."

George seized it and grasped it, his countenance glowing, a whole world of gratitude shining from his eyes as he lifted them to Mr. Wall. "I shall always think you have been the best friend I ever had, sir, next to my father."

"I hope it will prove so. I trust you will find some pursuit in life more congenial to you than this."

Mr. Chattaway took up his hat and whip. "This will be fine news for your mother, sir!" cried he, severely.

"It may turn out well for her," replied George, boldly. "My belief is the farm never would have got along with John Pinder as manager."

"You think you would make a better?" said Mr. Chattaway, his thin lip curling.

"I can be true to her, at any rate," said George. "And I can have my eyes about me."

"Good morning," resumed Mr. Chattaway to Mr. Wall, putting out unwillingly the tips of two fingers.

Mr. Wall laughed. "I do not see why you should be vexed, Mr. Chattaway. The boy is no son of yours. For myself, all I can say is, that I have been actuated by motives of regard for his interest."

"It remains to be proved whether it will be for his interest," coldly rejoined Mr. Chattaway. "Were I his mother, and this check were dealt out to me, I should send him off to break stones on the road. Good morning, Wall. And I beg you will not bring me here again upon a fool's errand."

George went into the shop, to get from it some personal trifles he had left there. He deemed it well to depart at once, and carry the news home to Mrs. Ryle himself. The cards and trimmings

lay in the unfinished state he had left them. What a change, that moment and this! One or two of the employés noticed his radiant countenance.

"Has anything happened?" they asked.

"Yes," answered George. "I have been suddenly lifted into paradise."

He started on his way, leaving his things to be sent after him. His footsteps scarcely touched the ground. Not a rough ridge of the road felt he; not a sharp stone; not a hill. Only when he turned in at the gate did he remember there was his mother's displeasure to be met and grappled with.

Nora gave a shriek when he entered the house. "*George!* What brings you here?"

"Where's my mother?" was George's only answer.

"In the best parlour," said Nora. "And I can tell you she's not in the best of humours just now, so I'd advise you not to go in."

"What about?" asked George, taking it for granted she had heard the news about himself, and that was the grievance. But he was agreeably undeceived.

"It's about John Pinder. He has been having two of the meads ploughed up, and he never asked the missis first. She *is* angry."

"Has Chattaway been here to see my mother, Nora?"

"He came up on horseback in a desperate hurry half-an-hour ago; but she was out on the farm, so he said he'd call again. It was through going out this morning that she discovered what they were about with the fields. She says she thinks John Pinder must be going out of his mind, to take things upon himself in the way he is doing."

George bent his steps to the drawing-room. Mrs. Ryle was seated before her desk, writing a note. The expression of her face as she looked up at George between the white lappets of her widow's cap was resolutely severe. It changed to astonishment.

Strange to say, she was writing to Mr. Wall to stop the signing of the indentures, or to desire that they might be cancelled if signed. She could not do without George at home, she said; and she told him why she could not.

"Mamma," said George, "will you be angry if I tell you something that has struck me in all this?"

"Tell it," said Mrs. Ryle.

"I feel quite certain Chattaway has been acting with a motive; he has some private reason for wishing to get me away from home. That's what he has been working for; otherwise he would never have troubled himself about me. It is not in his nature."

Mrs. Ryle gazed at George steadfastly, as if weighing his words, and presently knit her brow. George could read her countenance tolerably well. He felt sure she had arrived at a similar conclusion, and that it irritated her. He resumed.

"It looks bad for you, mother; but you must not think I say this selfishly. Twenty minutes I have asked myself the question, Why does he wish me away? And I can only think that he would like the farm to go to rack and ruin, so that you may be driven from it."

"Nonsense, George."

"Well, what else can it be?"

"If so, he is defeated," said Mrs. Ryle. "You will take your place as master of the farm from to-day, George, under me. Deferring to me in all things, you understand; giving no orders on your own responsibility, taking my pleasure upon the merest trifle."

"I should not think of doing otherwise," replied George. "I will do my best for you in all ways, mother. You will soon see how useful I can be."

"Very well. But I may as well mention one thing to you. When Treve shall be old enough, it is he who will be master here, and you must resign the place to him. It is not that I wish to set the younger of your father's sons unjustly above the head of the elder. This farm will be a living but for one of you; barely that; and I prefer that Treve should have it; he is my own son. We will endeavour to find a better farm for you before that time shall come."

"Just as you please," said George, cheerfully. "Now that I am emancipated from that dreadful nightmare, my prospects look very bright to me. I'll do the best I can on the farm, remembering that I do it for Treve's future benefit; not for mine. Something else will turn up for me, no doubt, before I'm ready for it."

"Which will not be for some years to come," said Mrs. Ryle, feeling pleased with the boy's acquiescent spirit. "Treve will not be old enough for—"

Mrs. Ryle was interrupted. The door had opened, and there appeared Mr. Chattaway, showing himself in. Nora never affected to be too courteous to that gentleman; and on his coming to the house to ask for Mrs. Ryle a second time, she had curtly answered that Mrs. Ryle was in the best parlour (the more familiar name for the drawing-room in the farmhouse), and allowed him to find his own way to it.

Mr. Chattaway looked surprised at seeing George; he had not bargained for his arriving home so soon. Extending his hand towards him, he turned to Mrs. Ryle.

"There's a dutiful son for you! You hear what he has done?—returned on your hands as a bale of worthless goods."

"Yes, I hear that Mr. Wall has declined to take him," was her composed answer. "It has happened for the best. When he arrived just now, I was writing to Mr. Wall requesting that he might *not* be bound."

"And why?" asked Mr. Chattaway in considerable amazement.

"I find I am unable to do without him," said Mrs. Ryle, her tone harder and firmer than ever; her eyes, stern and steady, thrown full on Chattaway. "I have tried the experiment, and it has failed. I cannot do without one by my side devoted to my interests; and John Pinder cannot get on without a master."

"And do you think you'll find what you want in him!—in that inexperienced schoolboy?" burst forth Mr. Chattaway.

"I do," replied Mrs. Ryle, her tone so significantly decided, as to be almost offensive. "He takes his standing from this day as master of Trevlyn Farm; subject only to me."

"I wish you joy of him!" angrily returned Chattaway. "But you must understand, Mrs. Ryle, that your having a boy at the head of affairs will oblige me to look more keenly after my interests."

"My arrangements with you are settled," she said. "So long as I fulfil my part, that is all that concerns you, James Chattaway."

"You'll not fulfil it, if you put him at the head of things."

"When I fail you can come here and tell me of it. Until then, I prefer that you should not intrude on Trevlyn Farm."

She rang the bell sharply as she spoke, and Molly, who was passing along the passage, immediately appeared. Mrs. Ryle extended her hand imperiously, the forefinger pointed.

"The door for Mr. Chattaway."

CHAPTER X

MADAM'S ROOM

Leading out of Mrs. Chattaway's dressing-room was a comfortable apartment, fitted up as a sitting-room, with chintz hangings and maple-wood furniture. It was called in the household "Madam's Room," and here Mrs. Chattaway frequently sat. Yes; the house and the neighbourhood accorded her readily the title which usage had long given to the mistress of Trevlyn Hold: but they would not give that of "Squire" to her husband. I wish particularly to repeat this. Strive for it as he would, force his personal servants to observe the title as he did, he could not get it recognised or adopted. When a written invitation came to the Hold—a rare event, for the old-fashioned custom of inviting verbally was chiefly followed there—it would be worded, "Mr. and Madam Chattaway," and Chattaway's face would turn green as he read it. No, never! He enjoyed the substantial good of being proprietor of Trevlyn Hold, he received its revenues, he held sway as its lord and master; but its honours were not given to him. It was so much gall and wormwood to Chattaway.

Mrs. Chattaway stood at this window on that dull morning in November mentioned in the last chapter, her eyes strained on the distance. What was she gazing at? Those lodge chimneys?—The dark, almost bare trees that waved to and fro in the wintry wind?—The extensive landscape stretching out in the distance, not fine to-day, but dull and cheerless?—Or on the shifting clouds in the grey skies? Not on any of these; her eyes, though apparently bent on all, in reality saw nothing. They were fixed on vacancy; buried, like her thoughts.

She wore a muslin gown, with dark purple spots upon it; her collar was fastened with a bow of black ribbon, her sleeves were confined with black ribbons at the wrist. She was passing a finger under one of these wrist-ribbons, round and round, as if the ribbon were tight; in point of fact, it was only a proof of her abstraction. Her smooth hair fell in curls on her fair face, and her blue eyes were bright as with a slight touch of inward fever.

Some one opened the door, and peeped in. It was Maude Trevlyn. Her frock was of the same material as Mrs. Chattaway's gown, and a sash of black ribbon encircled her waist. Mrs. Chattaway did not turn, and Maude came forward.

"Are you well to-day, Aunt Edith?"

"Not very, dear." Mrs. Chattaway took the pretty young head within her arm as she answered, and fondly stroked the bright curls. "You have been crying, Maude!"

Maude shook back her curls with a smile, as if she meant to be brave; make light of the accusation. "Cris and Octave went on so shamefully, Aunt Edith, ridiculing George Ryle; and when I took his part, Cris hit me a sharp blow. It was stupid of me to cry, though."

"Cris did?" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway.

"I know I provoked him," candidly acknowledged Maude. "I'm afraid I flew into a passion; and you know, Aunt Edith, I don't mind what I say when I do that. I told Cris that he would be placed at something not half as good as a linen-draper's some time, for he'd want a living when Rupert came into Trevlyn Hold."

"Maude! Maude! hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway in tones of terror. "You must not say that."

"I know I must not, Aunt Edith; I know it is wrong; wrong to think it, and foolish to say it. It was my temper. I am very sorry."

She nestled close to Mrs. Chattaway, caressing and penitent. Mrs. Chattaway stooped and kissed her, a strangely marked expression of tribulation, shrinking and hopeless, upon her countenance.

"Oh, Maude! I am so ill!"

Maude felt awed; and somewhat puzzled. "Ill, Aunt Edith?"

"There is an illness of the mind worse than that of the body, Maude. I feel as though I should sink under my weight of care. Sometimes I wonder why I am kept on earth."

"Oh, Aunt Edith!"

A knock at the room door, followed by the entrance of a female servant. She did not observe Mrs. Chattaway; only Maude.

"Is Miss Diana here, Miss Maude?"

"No. Only Madam."

"What is it, Phœbe?" asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"Master Cris wants to know if he can take the gig out, ma'am?"

"I cannot tell anything about it. You must ask Miss Diana. Maude, see; that is your Aunt Diana's step on the stairs now."

Miss Trevlyn came in. "The gig?" she repeated. "No; Cris cannot take it. Go and tell him so, Maude. Phœbe, return to your work."

Maude ran away, and Phœbe went off grumbling, not aloud, but to herself; no one dared grumble in the hearing of Miss Trevlyn. She had spoken in sharp tones to Phœbe, and the girl did not like sharp tones. As Miss Trevlyn sat down opposite Mrs. Chattaway, the feverish state of that lady's countenance arrested her attention.

"What is the matter, Edith?"

Mrs. Chattaway buried her elbow on the sofa-cushion, and pressed her hand to her face, half covering it, before she spoke. "I cannot get over this business," she answered in low tones. "To-day—perhaps naturally—I am feeling it more than is good for me. It makes me ill, Diana."

"What business?" asked Miss Trevlyn.

"This apprenticing of George Ryle."

"Nonsense," said Miss Diana.

"It is not the proper thing for him, Diana; you admitted so yesterday. The boy says it is the blighting of his whole future life; and I feel that it is nothing less. I could not sleep last night for thinking about it. Once I dozed off, and fell into an ugly dream," she shivered. "I thought Mr. Ryle came to me, and asked whether it was not enough that we had heaped care upon him in life, and then sent him to his death, but must also pursue his son."

"You always were weak, you know, Edith," was the composed rejoinder of Miss Trevlyn. "Why Chattaway should be interfering with George Ryle, I cannot understand; but it surely need not give concern to you. The proper person to put a veto on his being placed at Barmester, as he is being placed, was Mrs. Ryle. If she did not think fit to do it, it is no business of ours."

"It seems to me as if he had no one to stand up for him. It seems," added Mrs. Chattaway, with more passion in her tone, "as if his father must be looking down at us, and condemning us."

"If you will worry yourself over it, you must," was the rejoinder of Miss Trevlyn. "It is very foolish, Edith, and it can do no earthly good. He is bound by this time, and the thing is irrevocable."

"Perhaps that is the reason—because it is irrevocable—that it presses upon me to-day with greater weight. It has made me think of the past, Diana," she added in a whisper. "Of that other wrong, which I cheat myself sometimes into forgetting; a wrong—"

"Be silent!" imperatively interrupted Miss Trevlyn, and the next moment Cris Chattaway bounded into the room.

"What's the reason I can't have the gig?" he began. "Who says I can't have it?"

"I do," said Miss Trevlyn.

Cris insolently turned from her, and walked up to Mrs. Chattaway. "May I not take the gig, mother?"

If there was one thing irritated the sweet temper of Mrs. Chattaway, it was being appealed to against any decision of Diana's. She knew that she possessed no power; was a nonentity in the house;

and though she bowed to her dependency, and had no resource but to bow to it, she did not like it brought palpably before her.

"Don't apply to me, Cris. I know nothing about things downstairs; I cannot say one way or the other. The horses and vehicles are specially the things that your father will not have meddled with. Do you remember taking out the dog-cart without leave, and the result?"

Cris looked angry; perhaps the reminiscence was not agreeable. Miss Diana interfered.

"You will *not* take out the gig, Cris. I have said it."

"Then see if I don't walk! And if I am not home to dinner, Aunt Diana, you can just tell the Squire the thanks are due to you."

"Where do you wish to go?" asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"I am going to Barmester. I want to wish that fellow joy of his indentures," added Cris, a glow of triumph lighting up his face. "He is bound by this time. I wonder the Squire is not back again!"

The Squire was back again. As Cris spoke, his tread was heard on the stairs, and he came into the room. Cris was too full of his own concerns to note the expression of his face.

"Father, may I take out the gig? I want to go to Barmester, to pay a visit of congratulation to George Ryle."

"No, you will not take out the gig," said Mr. Chattaway, the allusion exciting his anger almost beyond bearing.

Cris thought he might have been misunderstood. Cris deemed that his proclaimed intention would find favour with Mr. Chattaway.

"I suppose you have been binding that fellow, father. I want to go and ask him how he likes it."

"No, sir, I have not been binding him," thundered Mr. Chattaway. "What's more, he is not going to be bound. He has left it, and is at home again."

Cris gave a blank stare of amazement, and Mrs. Chattaway let her hands fall silently upon her lap and heaved a gentle sigh, as though some great good had come to her.

CHAPTER XI

RUPERT

None of us can stand still in life. Everything rolls on its course towards the end of all things. In noting down a family's or a life's history, its periods will be differently marked. Years will glide quietly on, giving forth few events worthy of record; again, it will happen that occurrences, varied and momentous, will be crowded into an incredibly short space of time. Events, sufficient to fill up the allotted life of man, will follow one another in rapid succession in the course of as many months; nay, of as many days.

Thus it was with the Trevlyns, and those connected with them. After the lamentable death of Mr. Ryle, the new agreement touching money-matters between Mr. Chattaway and Mrs. Ryle, and the settling of George Ryle into his own home, it may be said in his father's place, little occurred for some years worthy of note. Time seemed to pass uneventfully. Girls and boys grew into men and women; children into girls and boys. Cris Chattaway lorded it in his own offensive manner as the Squire's son—as the future Squire; his sister Octavia was not more amiable than of yore, and Maude Trevlyn was governess to Mr. and Mrs. Chattaway's younger children. Miss Diana Trevlyn had taken care that Maude should be well educated, and she paid the cost of it out of her own pocket, in spite of Mr. Chattaway's sneers. When Maude was eighteen years of age, the question arose, What shall be done with her? "She shall go out and be a governess," said Mr. Chattaway. "Of what profit her fine education, if it's not to be made use of?" "No," dissented Miss Diana; "a Trevlyn cannot be sent out into the world to earn her own living: our family have not come to that." "I won't keep her in idleness," growled Chattaway. "Very well," said Miss Diana; "make her governess to your girls, Edith and Emily: it will save the cost of schooling." The advice was taken; and Maude for the past three years had been governess at Trevlyn Hold.

But Rupert? Rupert was found not to be so easily disposed of. There's no knowing what Chattaway, in his ill-feeling, might have put Rupert to, had he been at liberty to place him as he pleased. If he had not shown any superfluous consideration in placing out George Ryle—or rather in essaying to place him out—it was not likely he would show it to one whom he hated as he hated Rupert. But here Miss Diana again stepped in. Rupert was a Trevlyn, she said, and consequently could not be converted into a chimney-sweep or a shoe-black: he must get his living at something befitting his degree. Chattaway demurred, but he knew better than run counter to any mandate issued by Diana Trevlyn.

Several things were tried for Rupert. He was placed with a clergyman to study for the Church; he went to an LL.D. to read for the Bar; he was consigned to a wealthy grazier to be made into a farmer; he was posted off to Sir John Rennet, to be initiated into the science of civil engineering. And he came back from all. As one venture after the other was made, so it failed, and a very short time would see Rupert return as ineligible to Trevlyn Hold. Ineligible! Was he deficient in capacity? No. He was only deficient in that one great blessing, without which life can bring no enjoyment—health. In his weakness of chest—his liability to take cold—his suspiciously delicate frame, Rupert Trevlyn was ominously like his dead father. The clergyman, the doctor, the hearty grazier, and the far-famed engineer, thought after a month's trial they would rather not take charge of him. He had a fit of illness—it may be better to say of weakness—in the house of each; and they, no doubt, one and all, deemed that a pupil predisposed to disease—it may be almost said to death—as Rupert Trevlyn appeared to be, would bring with him too much responsibility.

So, times and again, Rupert was returned on the hands of Mr. Chattaway. To describe that gentleman's wrath would take a pen dipped in gall. Was Rupert *never* to be got rid of? It was like the Eastern slippers which persisted in turning up. And, in like manner, up came Rupert Trevlyn. The

boy could not help his ill-health; but you may be sure Mr. Chattaway's favour was not increased by it. "I shall put him in the office at Blackstone," said he. And Miss Diana acquiesced.

Blackstone was the locality where Mr. Chattaway's mines were situated. An appropriate name, for the place was black enough, and stony enough, and dreary enough for anything. A low, barren, level country, its flatness alone broken by signs of the pits, its uncompromising gloom enlivened only by ascending fires which blazed up at night, and illumined the country for miles round. The pits were not all coal: iron mines and other mines were scattered with them. On Chattaway's property, however, there was coal alone. Long rows of houses, as dreary as the barren country, were built near: occupied by the workers in the mines. The overseer or manager for Mr. Chattaway was named Pinder, a brother to John Pinder, who was on Mrs. Ryle's farm: but Chattaway chose to interfere very much with the executive himself, and may almost have been called his own overseer. He had an office near the pits, in which accounts were kept, the men paid, and other business items transacted: a low building, of one storey only, consisting of three or four rooms. In this office he kept one regular clerk, a young man named Ford, and into this same office he put Rupert Trevlyn.

But many and many and many a day was Rupert ailing; weak, sick, feverish, coughing, and unable to go to it. But for Diana Trevlyn, Chattaway might have driven him there ill or well. Not that Miss Diana possessed any extraordinary affection for Rupert: she did not keep him at home out of love, or from motives of indulgence. But hard, cold, and imperious though she was, Miss Diana owned somewhat of the large open-handedness of the Trevlyns: she could not be guilty of trivial spite, or petty meanness. She ruled the servants with an iron hand; but in case of their falling into sickness or trouble, she had them generously cared for. So with respect to Rupert. It may be that she regarded him as an interloper; that she would have been better pleased were he removed elsewhere. She had helped to deprive him of his birthright, but she did not treat him with personal unkindness; and she would have been the last to say he must go out to his daily occupation, if he felt ill or incapable of it. She deplored his ill-health; but, ill health upon him, Miss Diana was not one to ignore it, to reproach him with it, or put hindrances in the way of his being nursed.

It was a tolerably long walk for Rupert in a morning to Blackstone. Cris Chattaway, when he chose to go over, rode on horseback; and Mr. Cris did not infrequently choose to go over, for he had the same propensity as his father—that of throwing himself into every petty detail, and interfering unwarrantably. In disposition, father and son were alike—mean, stingy, grasping. To save a sixpence, Chattaway would almost have sacrificed a miner's life. Improvements which other mine owners had introduced into their pits, into the working of them, Chattaway held aloof from. In his own person, however, Cris was not disposed to be saving. He had his horse, and he had his servant, and he favoured an extensive wardrobe, and was given altogether to various little odds and ends of self-indulgence.

Yes, Cris Chattaway rode to Blackstone; with his groom behind him sometimes, when he chose to make a dash; and Rupert Trevlyn walked. Better that the order of travelling had been reversed, for that walk, morning and evening, was not too good for Rupert in his weakly state. He would feel it particularly in an evening. It was a gradual ascent nearly all the way from Blackstone to Trevlyn Hold, almost imperceptible to a strong man, but sufficiently apparent to Rupert Trevlyn, who would be fatigued with the day's work.

Not that he had hard work to do. But even sitting on the office stool tired him. Another thing that tired him—and which, no doubt, was excessively bad for him—was the loss of his regular meals. Excepting on Sundays, or on days when he was not well enough to leave Trevlyn Hold, he had no dinner: what he had at Blackstone was only an apology for one. The clerk, Ford, who lived at nearly as great a distance from the place as Rupert, used to cook himself a chop or steak at the office grate. But that the coals were lying about in heaps and cost nothing, Chattaway might have objected to the fire being used for such a purpose. Rupert occasionally cooked himself some meat; but he more frequently dined upon bread and cheese, or scraps brought from Trevlyn Hold. It was not often that Rupert had the money to buy meat or anything else, his supply of that indispensable commodity,

the current coin of the realm, being very limited. Deprived of his dinner, deprived of his tea—tea being generally over when he got back to the Hold—that, of itself, was almost sufficient to bring on the disease feared for Rupert Trevlyn. One sound in constitution, revelling in health and strength, might not have been much the worse in the long-run; but Rupert did not come under the head of that favoured class of humanity.

It was a bright day in that mellow season when summer is merging into autumn. A few fields of the later grain were lying out yet, but most of the golden store had been gathered into barns. The sunlight glistened on the leaves of the trees, lighting up their rich tints of brown and red—tints which never come until the season of passing away.

Halting at a stile which led to a field white with stubble, were two children and a young lady. Not very young children, either, for the younger of the two must have been thirteen. Pale girls both, with light hair, and just now a disagreeable expression of countenance. They were insisting upon crossing that stile to pass through the field: one of them, in fact, had already mounted, and they did not like to be thwarted in their wish.

"You cross old thing!" cried she on the stile. "You always object to our going where we want to go. What dislike have you to the field, pray, that we may not cross it?"

"I have no dislike to it, Emily. I am only obeying your father's injunctions. You know he has forbidden you to go on Mrs. Ryle's lands."

She spoke in calm tones; a sweet, persuasive voice. She had a sweet and gentle face, too, with delicate features, and large blue eyes. It is Maude Trevlyn. Eight years have passed since you last saw her, and she is twenty-one. In spite of her girlish, graceful figure, which scarcely reaches middle height, she bears a look of the Trevlyns. Her head is well set upon her shoulders, thrown somewhat back, as you may see in Miss Diana Trevlyn. She wears a grey flowing cloak, and pretty blue bonnet.

"The lands are not Mrs. Ryle's," retorted the girl on the stile. "They are papa's."

"They are Mrs. Ryle's as long as she rents them. It is all the same. Mr. Chattaway has forbidden you to cross them. Come down from the stile, Emily."

"No. I shall jump over it."

It was ever thus. Except in the presence of Miss Diana Trevlyn, the girls were openly rude and disobedient to Maude. Expected to teach them, she was denied the ordinary authority vested in a governess. And Maude could not emancipate herself: she must suffer and submit.

Emily Chattaway put her foot over the top bar of the stile, preparatory to jumping over it, when the sound of a horse was heard, and she turned her head. Riding along the lane at a quick pace was a gentleman of some three or four-and-twenty years: a tall man, as far as could be seen, who sat his horse well. He reined in when he saw them, and bent down a pleasant face, with a pleasant smile upon it. The sun shone into his fine dark eyes, as he stooped to shake hands with Maude.

Maude's cheeks had turned crimson. "Quite well," she stammered, in answer to his greeting, somewhat losing her self-possession. "When did you return home?"

"Last night. I was away two days only, instead of the four anticipated. Emily, you'll fall backwards if you don't mind."

"No, I sha'n't," said Emily. "Why did you not stay longer?"

"I found Treve away when I reached Oxford, so I came back again, and got home last night—to Nora's discomfiture."

Maude looked into his face with a questioning glance. She had quite recovered her self-possession. "Why?" she asked.

George Ryle laughed. "Nora had turned my bedroom inside out, and accused me, in her vexation, of coming back on purpose."

"Where did you sleep?" asked Emily.

"In Treve's room. Take care, Edith!"

Maude hastily drew back Edith Chattaway, who had gone too near the horse. "How is Mrs. Ryle?" asked Maude. "We heard yesterday she was not well."

"She is suffering from a cold. I have scarcely seen her. Maude," leaning down and whispering, "are things any brighter than they were?"

Again the soft colour came into her face, and she threw him a glance from her dark blue eyes. If ever glance spoke of indignation, hers did. "What change can there be?" she breathed. "Rupert is ill again," she added in louder tones.

"Rupert!"

"At least, he is not well, and is at home to-day. But he is better than he was yesterday—"

"Here comes Octave," interrupted Emily.

George Ryle gathered up his reins. Shaking hands with Maude, he said a hasty good-bye to the other two, and cantered down the lane, lifting his hat to Miss Chattaway, who was coming up from a distance.

She was advancing quickly across the common, behind the fence on the other side of the lane. A tall, thin young woman, looking her full age of four or five-and-twenty, with the same leaden complexion as of yore, and the disagreeably sly grey eyes. She wore a puce silk paletot, and a brown hat trimmed with black lace; an unbecoming costume for one so tall.

"That was George Ryle!" she exclaimed, as she came up. "What brings him back already?"

"He found his brother away when he reached Oxford," was Maude's reply.

"I think he was very rude not to stop and speak to you, Octave," observed Emily Chattaway. "He saw you coming."

Octave made no reply. She mounted the stile and gazed after the horseman, apparently to see what direction he would take on reaching the end of the lane. Patiently watching, she saw him turn into another lane, which branched off to the left. Octave Chattaway jumped over the stile, and went swiftly across the field.

"She's gone to meet him," was Emily's comment.

It was precisely what Miss Chattaway *had* gone to do. Passing through a copse after quitting the field, she emerged from it just as George was riding quietly past. He halted and stopped to shake hands, as he had done with Maude.

"You are out of breath, Octave. Have you been hastening to catch me?"

"I need not have done so but for your gallantry in riding off the moment you saw me," she answered, resentfully.

"I beg your pardon. I did not know you wanted me. And I am in a hurry."

"It seems so—stopping to speak so long to the children and Maude," she returned, with irony. And George Ryle's laugh was a conscious one.

Latent antagonism was seated in the minds of both, and a latent consciousness of it running through their hearts. When George Ryle saw Octave hastening across the common, he knew she was speeding to reach him ere he should be gone; when Octave saw him ride away, a voice whispered that he did so to avoid meeting her; and each felt that their secret thoughts and motives were known to the other. Yes, there was constant antagonism between them; if the word may be applied to Octave Chattaway, who had learnt to value the society of George Ryle more highly than was good for her. Did he so value hers? Octave wore out her heart, hoping for it. But in the midst of her unwise love for him, her never-ceasing efforts to be in his presence, near to him, there constantly arose the bitter conviction that he did not care for her.

"I wished to ask you about the book you promised to get me," she said. "Have you procured it?"

"No; and I am sorry to say that I cannot meet with it," replied George. "I thought of it at Oxford, and went into nearly every bookseller's shop in the place, unsuccessfully. I told you it was difficult to find. I must get them to write to London for it from Barmester."

"Will you come to the Hold this evening?" she asked, as he was riding away.

"Thank you. I am not sure that I can. My day or two's absence has made me busy."

Octave Chattaway drew back under cover of the trees and halted: never retreating until every trace of that fine young horseman had passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XII UNANSWERED

It is singular to observe how lightly the marks of Time occasionally pass over the human form and face. An instance of this might be seen in Mrs. Chattaway. It was strange that it should be so in her case. Her health was not good, and she certainly was not a happy woman. Illness was frequently her portion; care ever seemed to follow her; and it is upon these sufferers in mind and body that Time is fond of leaving his traces. He had not left them on Mrs. Chattaway; her face was fair and fresh as it had been eight years ago; her hair fell in its mass of curls; her eyes were still blue, and clear, and bright.

And yet anxiety was her constant companion. It may be said that remorse never left her. She would sit at the window of her room upstairs—Madam's room—for hours, apparently contemplating the outer world; in reality seeing nothing.

As she was sitting now. The glories of the bright day had faded into twilight; the sun no longer lit up the many hues of the autumn foliage; all the familiar points in the landscape had faded to indistinctness; old Canham's lodge chimneys were becoming obscure, and the red light from the mines and works was beginning to show out on the right in the extreme distance. Mrs. Chattaway leaned her elbow on the old-fashioned armchair, and rested her cheek upon her hand. Had you looked at her eyes, gazing out so upon the fading landscape, you might have seen that they were deep in the world of thought.

That constitutional timidity of hers had been nothing but a blight to her throughout life. Reticence in a woman is good; but not that timid, shrinking reticence which is the result of fear; which dare not speak up for itself, even to oppose a wrong. Every wrong inflicted upon Rupert Trevlyn—every unkindness shown him—every pang, whether of mind or body, which happier circumstances might have spared him, was avenged over and over again in the person of Mrs. Chattaway. It may be said that she lived only in pain; her life was one never-ending sorrow—sorrow for Rupert.

In the old days, when her husband had chosen to deceive Squire Trevlyn as to the existence of Rupert, she had not dared to avow the truth, and say to her father, "There is an heir born." She dared not fly in the face of her husband, and say it; and, it may be, that she was too willingly silent for her husband's sake. It would seem strange, but that we know what fantastic tricks our passions play us, that pretty, gentle Edith Trevlyn should have *loved* that essentially disagreeable man, James Chattaway. But so it was. And, while deploring the fact of the wrong dealt out to Rupert—it may almost be said *expiating* it—Mrs. Chattaway never visited that wrong upon her husband, even in thought, as it ought to have been visited. None could realise more intensely its consequences than she realised them in her secret heart. Expiate it? Ay, she expiated it again and again, if her sufferings could only have been reckoned as atonement.

But they could not. *They* were enjoying Trevlyn Hold and its advantages, and Rupert was little better than an outcast on the face of the earth. Every dinner put upon their table, every article of attire bought for their children, every honour or comfort their position brought them, seemed to rise up reproachfully before the face of Mrs. Chattaway, and say, "The money to procure all this is not yours and your husband's; it is stolen from Rupert." And she could do nothing to remedy it; could only wage ever-constant battle with the knowledge, and the sting it brought. No remedy existed. They had not come into the inheritance by legal fraud; had succeeded to it fairly and openly, according to the will of Squire Trevlyn. If the whole world ranged itself on Rupert's side, pressing that the property should be resigned to him, Mr. Chattaway had only to point to the will, and say, "You cannot act against that."

It may be that this very fact brought remorse home with greater force to Mrs. Chattaway. It may be that incessantly dwelling upon it caused a morbid state of feeling, which increased the malady. Certain it is, that night and day the wrongs of Rupert pressed on her mind. She loved him with that

strange intensity which brings an aching to the heart. When the baby orphan was brought home to her from its foreign birthplace, with its rosy cheeks and its golden curls—when it put out its little arms to her, and gazed at her with its large blue eyes, her heart went out to it there and then, and she caught it to her with a love more passionate than any ever given to her own children. The irredeemable wrong inflicted on the unconscious child, fixed itself on her conscience in that hour, never to be lifted from it.

If ever a woman lived a dual life, that woman was Mrs. Chattaway. Her true aspect—that in which she saw herself as she really was—was as different from the one presented to the world as light from darkness. Do not blame her. It was difficult to help it. The world and her own family saw in Mrs. Chattaway a weak, gentle, apathetic woman, who did not take upon herself even the ordinary authority of the head of a household. They little imagined that that weak woman, remarkable for nothing but indifference, passed her days in sadness, in care, in thought. The hopeless timidity (inherited from her mother) which had been her bane in former days, was her bane still. She had not dared to rise up against her husband when the wrong was inflicted upon Rupert Trevlyn; she did not dare openly rise up now against the petty tyrannies daily dealt out to him. There may have been a latent consciousness in her mind that if she did interfere it would not change things for the better, and might make them worse for Rupert. Probably it would have done so.

There were many things she could have wished for Rupert, and went so far as to hint some of them to Mr. Chattaway. She wished he could be altogether relieved from Blackstone; she wished greater indulgences for him at home; she wished he might be transported to a warmer climate. A bare suggestion she dropped, once in a way, to Mr. Chattaway, but they fell unheeded on his ear. He replied to the hint of the warmer climate with a prolonged stare and a demand as to what romantic absurdity she could be thinking of. Mrs. Chattaway had never mentioned it again. In these cases of constitutional timidity, a rebuff, be it ever so slight, is sufficient to close the lips for ever. Poor lady! she would have sacrificed her own comfort to give peace and comfort to the unhappy Rupert. He was miserably put upon; treated with less consideration than the servants; made to feel his dependent state daily and hourly by petty annoyances; and yet she could not openly interfere!

Even now, as she sat watching the deepening shades, she was dwelling on this; resenting it in her heart, for his sake. It was the evening of the day when the girls had met George Ryle in the lane. She could hear sounds of merriment downstairs from her children and their visitors, and felt sure Rupert did not make one of them. It had long been the pleasure of Cris and Octave to exclude Rupert from the evening gatherings of the family, as far as they could do so; and if, through the presence of herself or Miss Diana, they could not absolutely deny his entrance, they treated him with studied indifference. She sat on, revolving these bitter thoughts in the gloom, until roused by the entrance of an intruder.

It was Rupert himself. He approached Mrs. Chattaway, and she fondly threw her arm round him, and drew him down to a chair by her side. Only when they were alone could she show him these marks of affection, or prove to him that he did not stand in the world entirely isolated from all love.

"Do you feel better to-night, Rupert?"

"Oh, I am a great deal better. I feel quite well. Why are you sitting in the dark, Aunt Edith?"

"It is not quite dark yet. What are they doing below, Rupert? I hear plenty of laughter."

"They are playing at some game, I think."

"At what?"

"I don't know. I was joining them, when Octave, as usual, said they were enough without me; so I came away."

Mrs. Chattaway made no reply. She never spoke a reproachful word of her children to Rupert, whatever she might feel; she never, by so much as a breathing, cast a reproach on her husband to living mortal. Rupert leaned his head on her shoulder, as though weary. Sufficient light was left to show how delicate his features, how attractive his face. The lovely countenance of his boyhood characterised him still—the suspiciously bright cheeks and silken hair. Of middle height, slender and fragile, he

scarcely looked his twenty years. There was a resemblance in his face to Mrs. Chattaway: and it was not surprising, for Joe Trevlyn and his sister Edith had been remarkably alike when they were young.

"Is Cris come in?" asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"Not yet."

Rupert rose as he spoke, and stretched himself. The verb *s'ennuyer* was one he often felt obliged to conjugate, in his evenings at the Hold.

"I think I shall go down for an hour to the farm."

Mrs. Chattaway started: shrank from the words, as it seemed. "Not to-night, Rupert!"

"It is so dull at home, Aunt Edith."

"They are merry enough downstairs."

"Yes. But Octave takes care that I shall not be merry with them."

What could she answer?

"Then, Rupert, you will *be sure* to be home," she said, after a while. And the pained emphasis with which she spoke no pen could express. The words evidently conveyed some meaning, understood by Rupert.

"Yes," was all he answered, the tones of his voice betraying his resentment.

Mrs. Chattaway caught him to her, and hid her face upon his shoulder. "For my sake, Rupert, darling, for my sake!"

"Yes, yes, dear Aunt Edith: I'll be sure to be in time," he reiterated. "I won't forget it, as I did the other night."

She stood at the window, and watched him away from the house and down the avenue, praying that he might *not* forget. It had pleased Mr. Chattaway lately to forbid Rupert the house, unless he returned to it by half-past ten. That this motive was entirely that of ill-naturedly crossing Rupert, there could be little doubt about. Driven by unkindness from the Hold, Rupert had taken to spending his evenings with George Ryle; sometimes at the houses of other friends; now and then he would invade old Canham's. Rupert's hour for coming in from these visits was about eleven; he had generally managed to be in by the time the clock struck; but the master of Trevlyn Hold suddenly issued a mandate that he must be in by half-past ten; failing strict obedience as to time, he was not to be let in at all. Rupert resented it, and one or two unpleasant scenes had ensued. A similar rule was not applied to Cris, who might come in at any hour he pleased.

Mrs. Chattaway went down to the drawing-room. Two girls, the daughters of neighbours, were spending the evening there, and they were playing at proverbs with great animation: Maude Trevlyn, the guests, and the Miss Chattaways. Octave alone joined in it listlessly, as if her thoughts were far away. Her restless glances towards the door seemed to say she was watching for the entrance of one who did not come.

By-and-by Mr. Chattaway came home, and they sat down to supper. Afterwards, the guests departed, and the younger children went to bed. Ten o'clock struck, and the time went on again.

"Where's Rupert?" Mr. Chattaway suddenly asked his wife.

"He went down to Trevlyn Farm," she said, unable, had it been to save her life, to speak without deprecation.

He made no reply, but rang the bell, and ordered the household to bed. Miss Diana Trevlyn was out upon a visit.

"Cris and Rupert are not in," observed Octave, as she lighted her mother's candle and her own.

Mr. Chattaway took out his watch. "Twenty-five minutes past ten," he said, in his hard, impassive manner—a manner which imparted the idea that he was utterly destitute of sympathy for the whole human race. "Mr. Rupert must be quick if he intends to be admitted to-night; Give your mother her bed-candle."

It may appear almost incredible that Mrs. Chattaway should meekly take her candle and follow her daughter upstairs without remonstrance, when she would have given the world to sit up longer.

She was becoming quite feverish on Rupert's account, and would have wished to wait in that room until his ring was heard. But to oppose her own will to her husband's was a thing she had never yet done; in small things, as in great, she had bowed to his wishes without making the faintest shadow of resistance.

Octave wished her mother good-night, went into her room, and closed the door. Mrs. Chattaway was turning into hers when she saw Maude creeping down the upper stairs. She came noiselessly along the corridor, her face pale with agitation, and her heart beating.

"Oh, Aunt Edith, what will be done?" she murmured. "It is half-past ten, and he is not home."

"Maude, my poor child, you can do nothing," was the whispered answer, the tone as full of pain as Maude's. "Go back to your room, dear; your uncle may come up."

The great clock in the hall struck the half-hour, its sound falling as a knell. Hot tears were falling from the eyes of Maude.

"What will become of him, Aunt Edith? Where will he sleep?"

"Hush, Maude! Run back."

It was time to run; and Mrs. Chattaway spoke the words in startled tones. The master's heavy footstep was heard crossing the hall. Maude stole back, and Mrs. Chattaway passed into her dressing-room.

She sat down on a chair, and pressed her hands upon her bosom to still its beating. Her suspense and agitation were terrible. A sensitive nature, such as Mrs. Chattaway's, feels emotion in a most painful degree. Every sense was strung to its utmost tension. She listened for Rupert's footfall outside; waited with a sort of horror for the ringing of the house-bell announcing his arrival, her whole frame sick and faint.

At last one came running up the avenue at a fleet pace, and the echoes of the bell were heard resounding through the house.

Not daring to defy her husband by going down to let him in she knocked at his door and entered.

"Shall I go down and open the door, James?"

"No."

"It is only five minutes past the half-hour."

"Five minutes are the same in effect as five hours," answered Mr. Chattaway. "Unless he can be in before the half-hour, *he does not come in at all.*"

"It may be Cris," she resumed.

"Nonsense! You know it is not Cris. Cris has his latch-key."

Another alarming peal.

"He can see the light in my dressing-room," she urged, with parched lips. "Oh, James, let me go down."

"I tell you—No."

There was no appeal against it. She knew there might be none. But she clasped her hands in agony, and gave utterance to the distress at her heart.

"Where will he sleep? Where can he go, if we deny him entrance?"

"Where he chooses. He does not enter here."

And Mrs. Chattaway went back to her dressing-room, and listened in despair to further appeals from the bell. Appeals which she might not answer.

CHAPTER XIII

OPINIONS DIFFER

The nights were chilly in the early autumn, and a blazing fire lighted up the drawing-room at Trevlyn Farm. On a comfortable sofa, drawn close to it, sat Mrs. Ryle, a warm shawl thrown over her black silk gown—soft cushions heaped around her. A violent cold had made an invalid of her for some days past, but she was recovering. Her face was softened by a white cap of delicate lace; but its lines had grown haughtier and firmer with her years. She wore well, and was handsome still.

Trevlyn Farm had prospered. It was a lucky day for Mrs. Ryle when she decided upon her step-son's remaining on it. He had brought energy and goodwill to bear on his work; a clear head and calm intelligence; and time had contributed judgment and experience. Mrs. Ryle knew that she could not have been more faithfully served, and gradually grew to feel his value. Had they been really mother and son, they could not have been better friends. In the beginning she was inclined to discountenance sundry ways and habits George favoured. He did not turn himself into a *working* farmer, as his father had done, and as Mrs. Ryle thought he ought to do. George objected. A man who worked on his own farm must give it a less general supervision, he urged: and after all, it was only the cost of an additional day-labourer. His argument carried reason with it; and keen and active Farmer Apperley, who deemed idleness the greatest sin (next, perhaps, to hunting) a young farmer could commit, nodded approval. George did not put aside his books; his classics, and his studies in general literature; quite the contrary. In short, George Ryle appeared to be going in for a gentleman—as Cris Chattaway chose to term it—a great deal more than Mrs. Ryle considered would be profitable for him or for her. But George had held on his course, in a quiet, undemonstrative way; and Mrs. Ryle had at length fallen in with it. Perhaps she now saw its wisdom. That he was essentially a gentleman, in person and manners, in mind and conduct, she could only acknowledge, and she felt a pride in him she had never dreamed she should feel for any one but Treve.

Could she feel pride in Treve? Not much, with all her partiality. Trevlyn Ryle was not turning out quite satisfactorily. There was nothing very objectionable to be urged against him; but Mrs. Ryle was accustomed to measure by a high standard of excellence; and of that Treve fell exceedingly short. She had not deemed it well that George Ryle should be too much of a gentleman, but she had determined Trevlyn should be one. Upon the completion of his school life, he was sent to Oxford. The cost might have been imprudently heavy for Mrs. Ryle, had she borne it unassisted; but Trevlyn had gained a scholarship at Barmester Grammar School, and the additional cost was light. Treve, once at Oxford, did not get on quite so fast as he might have done. Treve spent; Treve seemed to have plenty of wild-oats to sow; Treve thought he should like a life of idleness better than farming. His mother had foolishly whispered the fond hope that he might some time be owner of Trevlyn Hold, and Treve reckoned upon its fulfilment more confidently than was good for him. Meanwhile, until the lucky chance arrived which should give him the inheritance (though by what miracle the chance was to fall was at present hidden in the womb of mystery), Treve, upon leaving college, was to assume the mastership of Trevlyn Farm, in accordance with the plan originally decided upon by Mrs. Ryle. He would not be altogether unqualified for this: having been about the farm since he was a child, and seen how it should be worked. Whether he would give sufficient personal attention to it was another matter.

Mrs. Ryle expressed herself as not being too confident of him—whether of his industry or qualifications she did not state. George had given one or two hints that when Treve came home for good, he must look out for something else; but Mrs. Ryle had waived away the hints as if they were unpleasant to her. Treve must prove what metal he was made of, before assuming the management, she briefly said. And George suffered the subject to drop.

Treve had now but one more term to keep at the university. At the conclusion of the previous term he had not returned home: remaining on a visit to a friend, who had an appointment in one of the colleges. But Treve's demand for money had become somewhat inconvenient to Mrs. Ryle, and she had begged George to pay Oxford a few days' visit, that he might see how Treve was really going on. George complied, and proceeded to Oxford, where he found Treve absent—as in the last chapter you heard him say to Maude Trevlyn.

Mrs. Trevlyn sat by the drawing-room fire, enveloped in her shawl, and supported by her pillows. The thought of these things was bringing a severe look to her proud face. She had scarcely seen George since his return; had not exchanged more than ten words with him. But those ten words had not been of a cheering nature; and she feared things were not going on satisfactorily with Treve. With that hard look on her features, how wonderfully her face resembled that of her dead father!

Presently George came in. Mrs. Ryle looked up eagerly at his entrance.

"Are you better?" he asked, advancing, and bending with a kindly smile. "It is long since you had such a cold as this."

"I shall be all right in a day or two," she answered. "Yesterday I thought I was going to have a long illness, my chest was so painful. Sit down, George. What about Treve?"

"Treve was not at Oxford. He had gone to London."

"You told me so. What had he gone there for?"

"A little change, Ferrars said. He had been gone a week."

"A little change? In plain English, a little pleasure, I suppose. Call it what you will, it costs money."

George had seated himself opposite to her, his arm resting on the centre table, and the red blaze lighting up his frank, pleasant face. In figure he was tall and slight; his father, at his age, had been so before him.

"Why did you not follow him to London?" resumed Mrs. Ryle. "It would have been less than a two hours' journey from Oxford."

George turned his large dark eyes upon her, some surprise in them. "How was I to know where to look for him, if I had gone?"

"Could Mr. Ferrars not give you his address?"

"No. I asked him. Treve had not told him where he should put up. In fact, Ferrars did not think Treve knew himself. Under these circumstances, my going to town would have been only waste of time and money."

"It is of no use your keeping things from me," resumed Mrs. Ryle, after a pause. "Has Treve contracted fresh debts at Oxford?"

"I fancy he has. A few."

"A 'few'—and you 'fancy!' George, tell me the truth. That you know he has, and that they are not a few."

"That he has, I believe to be true: I gathered as much from Ferrars. But I do not think they are serious; I do not indeed."

"Why did you not inquire? I would have gone to every shop in the town, in order to ascertain. If he is contracting more debts, who is to pay them?"

George was silent.

"When shall we be clear of Chattaway?" she abruptly resumed. "When will the last payment be due?"

"In a month or two's time. Principal and interest will all be paid off then."

"It will take all your efforts to make up the sum."

"It will be ready, mother. It shall be."

"I don't doubt it. But it will not be ready, George, if a portion is to be taken from it for Treve."

George knit his brow. He was falling into thought.

"I *must* get rid of Chattaway," she resumed. "He has been weighing us down all these years like an incubus; and now that emancipation has nearly come, were anything to delay it, I should—I think I should go mad."

"I hope and trust nothing will delay it," answered George. "I am more anxious to get rid of Chattaway than, I think, even you can be. As to Treve, his debts must wait."

"But it would be more desirable that he should not contract them."

"Of course. But how are we to prevent his contracting them?"

"He ought to prevent it himself. *You* did not contract debts."

"I!" he rejoined, in surprise. "I had no opportunity of doing so. Work and responsibility were thrown upon me before I was old enough to think of pleasure: and they kept me steady."

"You were not naturally inclined to spend, George."

"There's no knowing what I might have acquired, had I been sent out into the world, as Treve has," he rejoined.

"It was necessary that Treve should go to college," said Mrs. Ryle, quite sharply.

"I am not saying anything to the contrary," George quietly answered. "It was right that he should go—as you wished it."

"I shall live—I hope I shall live—I pray that I may live—to see Trevlyn lawful possessor of the Hold. A gentleman's education was essential to him: hence I sent him to Oxford."

George made no reply. Mrs. Ryle felt vexed. She knew George disapproved her policy in regard to Trevlyn, and charged him with it now. George would not deny it.

"What I think unwise is your having led Treve to build hopes upon succeeding to Trevlyn Hold," he said.

"Why?" she haughtily asked. "He will come into it."

"I do not see how."

"He has far more right to it than he who is looked upon as its successor—Cris Chattaway," she said, with flashing eyes. "You know that."

George could have answered that neither of them had a just right to it, whilst Rupert Trevlyn lived; but Rupert and his claims had been so completely ignored by Mrs. Ryle, as by others, that his advancing them would have been waived away as idle talk. Mrs. Ryle resumed, her voice unsteady. It was most rare that she suffered herself to speak of these past grievances; but when she did, her vehemence mounted to agitation.

"When my boy was born, the news that Joe Trevlyn's health was failing had come home to us. I knew the Squire would never leave the property to Maude, and I expected that my son would inherit. Was it not natural that I should do so?—was it not his right?—I was the Squire's eldest daughter. I had him named Trevlyn; I wrote a note to my father, saying he would not now be at fault for a male heir, in the event of poor Joe's not leaving one—"

"He did leave one," interrupted George, speaking impulsively.

"Rupert was not born then, and his succession was afterwards barred by my father's will. Through deceit, I grant you: but I had no hand in that deceit. I named my boy Trevlyn; I regarded him as the heir; and when the Squire died and his will was opened, it was found he had bequeathed all to Chattaway. If you think I have ever once faltered in my hope—my resolve—to see Trevlyn some time displace the Chattaways, you do not know much of human nature."

"I grant what you say," replied George; "that, of the two, Trevlyn has more right to it than Cris Chattaway. But has it ever occurred to you to ask, *how* Cris is to be displaced?"

Mrs. Ryle did not answer. She sat beating her foot upon the ottoman, as one whose mind is not at ease. George continued:

"It appears to me the wildest possible fallacy, the bare idea of Trevlyn's being able to displace Cris Chattaway in the succession. If we lived in the barbarous ages, when inheritances were wrested by force of arms, when the turn of a battle decided the ownership of a castle, then there might be a

chance that Cris might lose Trevlyn Hold. As it is, there is none. There is not the faintest shadow of a chance that it can go to any one beside Cris. Failing his death—and he is strong and healthy—he *must* succeed. Why, even were Rupert—forgive my alluding to him again—to urge *his* claims, there would be no hope for him. Mr. Chattaway legally holds the estate; he has willed it to his son; and that son cannot be displaced by others."

Her foot beat more impatiently; a heavier line settled on her brow. Often and often had the arguments now stated by her step-son occurred to her aching brain. George spoke again.

"And therefore, the improbability—I may say the impossibility—of Treve's ever succeeding renders it unwise that he should have been taught to build upon it. Far better, mother, the thought had never been so much as whispered to him."

"Why do you look at it in this unfavourable light?" she cried angrily.

"Because it is the correct light. The property is Mr. Chattaway's—legally his, and it cannot be taken from him. It will be Cris's after him. It is simply madness to think otherwise."

"Cris may die," said Mrs. Ryle sharply.

"If Cris died to-morrow, Treve would be no nearer succession. Chattaway has daughters, and would will it to each in turn rather than to Treve. He can will it away as he pleases. It was left to him absolutely."

"My father was mad when he made such a will in favour of Chattaway! He could have been nothing less. I have thought so many times."

"But it was made, and cannot now be altered. Will you pardon me for saying that it would have been better had you accepted the state of affairs, and endeavoured to reconcile yourself to them?"

"Better?"

"Yes; much better. To rebel against what cannot be remedied can only do harm. I would a great deal rather Treve succeeded to Trevlyn Hold than Cris Chattaway: but I know Treve never will succeed: and, therefore, it is a pity it was ever suggested to him. He might have settled down more steadily had he never become possessed of the idea that he might some time supersede Cris Chattaway."

"He *shall* supersede him—"

The door opened to admit a visitor, and he who entered was no other than Rupert Trevlyn. Ignore his claims as she would, Mrs. Ryle felt it would not be seemly to discuss before him Treve's chance of succession. She had in truth completely put from her all thought of the claims of Rupert. He had been deprived of his right by Squire Trevlyn's will, and there was an end to it. Mrs. Ryle rather liked Rupert; or, it may be better to say, she did not *dislike* him; really to like any one except Treve, was not in her nature. She liked Rupert in a negative sort of way; but would not have helped him to his inheritance by lifting a finger. In the event of her possessing no son to be jealous for, she might have taken up the wrongs of Rupert—just to thwart Chattaway.

"Why, Rupert," said George, rising, and cordially shaking hands, "I heard you were ill again. Maude told me so to-day."

"I am better to-night. Aunt Ryle, they said you were in bed."

"I am better, too, Rupert. What has been the matter with you?"

"Oh, my chest again," said Rupert, pushing the waving hair from his bright and delicate face. "I could hardly breathe this morning."

"Ought you to have come out to-night?"

"I don't think it matters," carelessly answered Rupert. "For all I see, I am as well when I go out as when I don't. There's not much to stay in for, there."

Painfully susceptible to cold, he edged himself closer to the hearth with a slight shiver. George took the poker and stirred the fire, and the blaze went flashing up, playing on the familiar objects of the room, lighting up the slender figure, the well-formed features, the large blue eyes of Rupert, and

bringing out all the signs of constitutional delicacy. The transparent fairness of complexion and the bloom of the cheeks, might have whispered a warning.

"Octave thought you were going up there to-night, George."

"Did she?"

"The two Beecroft girls are there, and they turned me out of the drawing-room. Octave said 'I wasn't wanted.' Will you play chess to-night, George?"

"If you like; after supper."

"I must be home by half-past ten, you know. I was a minute over the half-hour the other night, and one of the servants opened the door for me. Chattaway pretty nearly rose the roof off, he was so angry; but he could not decently turn me out again."

"Chattaway is master of Trevlyn Hold for the time being," remarked Mrs. Ryle. "Not Squire; never Squire"—she broke off, straying abruptly from her subject, and as abruptly resuming it. "You will do well to obey him, Rupert. When I make a rule in this house, I *never permit it to be broken*."

A valuable hint, if Rupert had only taken it for guidance. He meant well: he never meant, for all his light and careless speaking, to disobey Mr. Chattaway's mandate. And yet it happened that very night!

The chess-board was attractive, and the time slipped on to half-past ten. Rupert said a hasty good night, snatched up his hat, tore through the entrance-room and made the best speed his lungs allowed him to Trevlyn Hold. His heart was beating as he gained it, and he rang that peal at the bell which had sent its echoes through the house; through the trembling frame and weak heart of Mrs. Chattaway.

He rang—and rang. There came back no sign that the ring was heard. A light shone in Mrs. Chattaway's dressing-room; and Rupert took up some gravel, and gently threw it against the window. No response was accorded in answer to it; not so much as the form of a hand on the blind; the house, in its utter stillness, might have been the house of the dead. Rupert threw up some more gravel as silently as he could.

He had not to wait very long this time. Cautiously, slowly, as though the very movement feared being heard, the blind was drawn aside, and the face of Mrs. Chattaway appeared looking down at him. He could see that she had not begun to undress. She shook her head; raised her hands and clasped them with a gesture of despair; and her lips formed themselves into the words, "I may not let you in."

He could not hear the words, but read the expression of the whole all too clearly—Chattaway would not suffer him to be admitted. Mrs. Chattaway, dreading possibly that her husband might cast his eyes within her dressing-room, quietly let the blind fall again, and removed her shadow from the window.

What was Rupert to do? Lie on the grass that skirted the avenue, and take his night's rest under the trees in the freezing air and night dews? A strong frame, revelling in superfluous health, might possibly risk that; but not Rupert Trevlyn.

A momentary thought come over him that he would go back to Trevlyn Farm, and ask for a night's shelter there. He would have done so, but for the recollection of Mrs. Ryle's stern voice and sterner face when she remarked that, as he knew the rule made for his going in, he must not break it. Rupert had never got on too cordially with Mrs. Ryle. He remembered shrinking from her haughty face when he was a child; and somehow he shrank from it still. No; he would not knock them up at Trevlyn Farm.

What must he do? Should he walk about until morning? Suddenly a thought came to him—were the Canhams in bed? If not, he could go there, and lie on their settle. The Canhams never went to bed very early. Ann Canham sat up to lock the great gate—it was Chattaway's pleasure that it should not be done until after ten o'clock; and old Canham liked to sit up, smoking his pipe.

With a brisk step, now that he had decided on his course, Rupert walked down the avenue. At the first turning he ran against Cris Chattaway, who was coming leisurely up it.

"Oh, Cris! I am so glad! You'll let me in. They have shut me out to-night."

"Let you in!" repeated Cris. "I can't."

Rupert's blue eyes opened in the starlight. "Have you not your latch-key?"

"What should hinder me?" responded Cris. "*I'm* going in; but I can't let you in."

"Why not?" hotly asked Rupert.

"I don't choose to fly in the Squire's face. He has ordered you to be in before half-past ten, or not to come in at all. It has gone half-past ten long ago: is hard upon eleven."

"If you can go in after half-past ten, why can't I?" cried Rupert.

"It's not my affair," said Cris, with a yawn. "Don't bother. Now look here. It's of no use following me, for I shall not let you in."

"Yes you will, Cris."

"*I will not*," responded Cris, emphatically. Rupert's temper was getting up.

"Cris, I wouldn't show myself such a hangdog sneak as you to be made king of England. If every one had their rights, Trevlyn Hold would be mine, to shut you out of it if I pleased. But I wouldn't please. If only a dog were turned out of his kennel at night, I would let him into the Hold for shelter."

Cris put his latch-key into the lock. "*I* don't turn you out. You must settle that question with the Squire. Keep off. If he says you may be let in at eleven, well and good; but I'm not going to encourage you in disobeying orders."

He opened the door a few inches, wound himself in, and shut it in Rupert's face. He made a great noise in putting up the bar, which was not in the least necessary. Rupert had given him his true appellation—that of sneak. He was one: a false-hearted, plausible, cowardly sneak. As he stood at a table in the hall, and struck a match to light his candle, his puny face and dull light eyes betrayed the most complaisant enjoyment.

He went upstairs smiling. He had to pass the angle of the corridor where his mother's rooms were situated. She glided silently out as he was going by. Her dress was off, and she had apparently thrown a shawl over her shoulders to come out to Cris: an old-fashioned spun-silk shawl, with a grey border and white centre: not so white, however, as the face of Mrs. Chattaway.

"Cris!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking in the most timid whisper, "why did you not let him in?"

"I thought we had been ordered not to let him in," returned he of the deceitful nature. "*I* have been ordered, I know that."

"You might have done it just for once, Cris," his mother answered. "I know not what will become of him, out of doors this sharp night."

Cris disengaged his arm, and continued his way up to his room. He slept on the upper floor. Maude was standing at the door of her chamber when he passed—as Mrs. Chattaway had been.

"Cris—wait a minute," she said, for he was hastening by. "I want to speak a word to you. Have you seen Rupert?"

"Seen him and heard him too," boldly avowed Cris. "He wanted me to let him in."

"Which, of course, you would not do?" answered Maude, bitterly. "I wonder if you ever performed a good-natured action in your life?"

"Can't remember," mockingly retorted Cris.

"Where is Rupert? What is he going to do?"

"You know where he is as well as I do: I suppose you could hear him. As to what he is going to do, I didn't ask him. Roost in a tree with the birds, perhaps."

Maude retreated into her room and closed the door. She flung herself into a chair, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Her heart ached for her brother with pain that amounted to agony: she could have forced down her proud spirit and knelt to Mr. Chattaway for him: almost have sacrificed her own life to bring comfort to Rupert, whom she loved so well.

He—Rupert—stamped off when the door was closed against him, feeling he would like to stamp upon Cris himself. Arrived in front of the lodge, he stood and whistled, and presently Ann Canham looked from the upper casement in her nightcap.

"Why, it's never you, Master Rupert!" she exclaimed, in intense surprise.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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