

## CHAPTER LVIII

Arthur took the same path by which he had come--all paths were alike to him now--but before he had gone ten yards he saw the figure of George Caresfoot, who appeared to have been watching him. In George's hand was a riding-whip, for he had ridden from the scene of the fire, and was all begrimed with smoke and dirt. But this Arthur did not notice.

"Hullo," he began; "what----" and then he hesitated; there was a look in Arthur's eyes which he did not like.

But, if George hesitated, Arthur did not. He sprang at him like a wild cat, and in a second had him by the throat and shoulder. For a moment he held him there, for in his state of compressed fury George was like a child in his hands. And as he held him a fierce and almost uncontrollable desire took possession of him to kill this man, to throw him down and stamp the life out of him. He conquered it, however, and loosed the grip on his throat.

"Let me go," shrieked George, as soon as he could get breath.

Arthur cut short his clamours by again compressing his wind-pipe.

"Listen," he said; "a second ago I was very near killing you, but I remember now that, after all, it is she, not you, who are chiefly to

blame. You only followed your brutal nature, and nothing else can be expected of a brute. Very likely you put pressure on her, like the cad that you are, but that does not excuse her, for, if she could not resist pressure, she is a fool in addition to being what she is. I look at you and think that soon \_she\_ will come down to \_your\_ level, the level of my successful rival. To be mated to a man like you would drag an angel down. That will be punishment enough. Now go, you cur!"

He swung him violently from him. His fall was broken by a bramble-bush. It was not exactly a bed of roses, but George thought it safer to lie there till his assailant's footsteps had grown faint--he did not wish to bring him back again. Then he crept out of the bush smarting all over. Indeed, his frame of mind was altogether not of the most amiable. To begin with, he had just seen his house--which, as luck would have it, was the only thing he had not sold to Philip, and which was also at the moment uninsured, owing to the confusion arising from the transfer of the property--entirely burnt down. All its valuable contents too, including a fine collection of pictures and private papers he by no means wished to lose, were irretrievably destroyed.

Nor was his mood improved by the recollection of the events of the previous night, or by the episode of the bramble-bush, illuminated as it was by Arthur's vigorous language; or by what he had just witnessed, for he had arrived in time to see, though from a distance, the last act of the interview between Arthur and Angela.

He had seen him lift her in his arms, kiss her, and place her on the stone seat, but he did not know that she had fainted. The sight had roused his evil passions until they raged like the fire he had left.

Then Arthur came out upon him and he made acquaintance with the bramble-bush as already described. But he was not going to be cheated out of his revenge; the woman was still left for him to wreak it on.

By the time he reached Angela, her faculties were reawakening; but, though insensibility had yielded, sense had not returned. She sat upon the stone seat, upright indeed, but rigid and grasping its angles with her hands. The dog had gone. In the undecided way common to dogs, when two people to whom they are equally attached separate, it had at that moment taken it into its head to run a little way after Arthur.

George marched straight up to her, livid with fury.

"So this is how you go on when your husband is away, is it? I saw you kissing that young blackguard, though I am not good enough for you. What, won't you answer? Then it is time that I taught you obedience."

"Swish!" went the heavy whip through the air, and fell across her fair cheek.

"Will that wake you, eh, or must I repeat the dose?"

The pain of the blow seemed to rouse her. She rose, her loosed hair falling round her like a golden fleece, and a broad blue stripe across her ghastly face. She stretched out her hands; she opened her great eyes, and in them blazed the awful light of madness.

He was standing, whip in hand, with his back to the lake; she faced him, a breathing, beautiful vengeance, and in a whisper so intense that the air was full of it, commenced a rambling prayer.

"Oh, God," she said, "bless my dear Arthur! Oh, Almighty Father, avenge our wrongs!"

She paused and fixed her eyes upon him, and they held him so that he could not stir. Then, in strange contrast to the hissing whisper, there broke from her lips a ringing and unearthly laugh that chilled him to the marrow. So they stood for some seconds.

The sound of angry voices had brought the bulldog back at full speed, and, at the sight of George's threatening attitude, it halted. It had always hated him, and now it straightway grew more like a devil than a dog. The innate fierceness of the great brute awoke; it bristled with fury till each separate hair stood out in knots against the skin, and saliva ran from its twitching jaws.

George did not know that it was near him, but Angela's wild eye fell upon it. Slowly raising her hand, she pointed at it.

"Look behind you," she cried.

The sound of her voice broke the spell that was upon him.

"Come, give me no more of your nonsense," he said, and then, as much from vague fear and rampant brutality as from any other reason, again struck her with the whip.

Next second he was aware of a tremendous shock. The dog had seen the blow, and had instantly launched itself, with all the blind courage of its race, straight at the striker's throat. It missed its aim, however, only carrying away a portion of George's under-lip. He yelled with pain, and struck at it with the whip, and then began a scene which, in its grotesque horror, beggars all description. Again and again the dog flew at him, its perfect silence contrasting strangely with George's shrieks of terror, and the shrill peals of horrible laughter that came hurrying from Angela's lips as she watched the struggle.

At last the dog gripped the man by the forearm, and, sinking its great teeth into the flesh, hung its weight upon it. In vain did George, maddened by the exquisite pain, dash himself and the dog against the ground: in vain did he stagger round and round the glen, tearing at its throat with his uninjured hand. The brute hung grimly on.

Presently there came an end. As he reeled along, howling for help and

dragging his fierce burden with him, George stumbled over a dead bough which lay upon the bank of the lake, and fell backwards into the water, exactly at the spot where the foundations of the old boat-house wall rose to within a few inches of the surface. His head struck heavily against the stonework, and he and the dog, who would not lose his grip, lay on it for a moment, then they rolled off together into the deep pool, the man dragging the dog with him. There were a few ripples, stained with little red filaments, a few air-bubbles that marked the exhalation of his last breath, and George's spirit had left its enclosing body, and gone--whither? Ay, reader, whither had it gone?

The outcry brought Philip and old Jakes running down to the lake. They found Angela standing alone on the brink and laughing her wildest.

"See," she cried, as they came panting up, "the bridegroom cometh from his chamber," and at that moment some unreleased air within the body brought it up for an instant to the surface, so that the torn and ghastly face and head emerged for a second as though to look at them. Then it sank again.

"The brave dog holds him well--ha, ha, ha! He cannot catch me now--ha, ha, ha! Nor you, Judas, who sold me. Judas! Judas! Judas!" and, turning, she fled with the speed of the wind.

Mr. Fraser had but just come down, and was walking in his garden, when he saw this dreadful figure come flying towards him with streaming hair.

"\_Betrayed\_," she cried, in a voice which rang like the wail of a lost soul, and fell on her face at his feet.

When she came back to life they found that she was mad.