

THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

THE
CHILD OF MYSTERY,
A NOVEL,
IN THREE VOLUMES,
FOUNDED ON RECENT EVENTS.

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VOL. I.

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THE CHILD

OF

MYSTERY.

“PAST *three*, and not yet returned!” said the lovely, amiable, Berthalina, as she dejectedly cast her tearful eyes on the splendid dial which adorned the chimney-piece of her boudoir, and listened to the hoarse tones of the watchmen, proclaiming the hour, with the unwelcome addition of a tempestuous morning.

Berthalina put aside the window-curtain, and stood in melancholy contemplation.

The lightning’s glare was terrific, the thunder rolled heavily, the rain poured, and violent gusts of wind added to the horrors of the scene.

The fair-one retreated to the sofa with a heavy sigh, and another hour elapsed in painful expectation, when the door opened, and the venerable form of Mrs. Aubrey presented itself to view.

“My dear, kind nurse,” said Berthalina, extending her hand, “why do you thus risk the endangering your precarious health, by leaving your bed at such an hour, and in such a night?”

“My revered mistress, my beloved *child!* for such I take the freedom to call you, *can I* repose, and leave you sitting here, a prey to anguish!”

“Ah! what a fate is mine!” sighed Berthalina. “I never knew a mother’s tenderness, nor, till lately, a father’s love—you, my dear Aubrey, have been the only caresser of my infancy, to you I am indebted for all the indulgence shown to my childhood, and you are now the only being in whom I can place confidence, or to whom I can look for commiseration!”

A violent knocking at the street door prevented Mrs. Aubrey’s reply; and the voice of Lord Elwood, giving orders to his servants, was soon heard by Berthalina, who rose from her seat to meet him; but, to her surprise, he passed the boudoir, and repaired to his own chamber.

The tempest had now ceased, and Berthalina prevailed on Mrs. Aubrey to retire once more to bed; but the faithful creature would not yield to her arguments, till she promised not to sit indulging meditations baneful to her peace.

Berthalina expected that Lord Elwood would certainly send some messages by his valet, to apologize for his breach of promise, but in this she was disappointed, and she felt at a loss how to act, in respect of the half-formed arrangements for the ensuing day.

She did not rise till ten the next morning, when she descended to the breakfast-parlour, in tremulous expectation of meeting Lord Elwood, whose nocturnal engagements seldom prevented him from taking his *déjeûné* at that hour.

He was there; but, to her chagrin, accompanied by Mr. Melmoth, and another of his gay companions, whom he introduced by the name of Hildon; a bold-looking, fashionable man, whose ardent gaze disconcerted the gentle fair-one.

She was on the point of retiring, when lord Elwood, with a gentle kind of violence, placed her on a seat, and inquired, in a ludicrous manner, why she was going to desert them.

“I thought,” said Berthalina hesitatingly, “that I had better breakfast in my boudoir; as my presence might be a restraint on your converse.”

“Let me intreat you, Miss Elwood,” said Melmoth, “not to consign us poor bachelors to ennui, by a deprivation of your company.”

Mr. Hildon seconded the request, and, lord Elwood entreating her to lay aside her antique prudery, and do the honors of the table, she felt herself forced, though reluctantly, to comply.

The subjects they discussed were by no means to the taste of Miss Elwood, and she found her situation extremely unpleasant, impatiently waiting for the moment that should free her from this restraint.

Melmoth, taking out his watch, remarked that it wanted but a few minutes to twelve; and reminded his companions that they must be alert, or they would not be in time to meet lord Bateby at the Smyrna, according to appointment.

The two then arose, and lord Elwood was leaving the room, with the utmost *nonchalance*, when Berthalina requested a few minutes audience before he left the house.

Elwood desired the two gentlemen to walk on, and he would join them before they could reach Oxford Street.

They complied with his request, and turning to Berthalina, he asked what commands she had to honor him with.

“How can you ask me such a question, my dear brother?—Is it possible that you have so soon forgotten our yesterday’s conversation, and the promise you made me of

returning at an early hour from lord Bateby's, that we might arrange the plans then talked of, and”

“Ha! now I perfectly remember it; but I shall keep Melmoth and Hildon waiting—so you must excuse me for the present; do not go to Woodford to-day, at all events: order dinner at five, and I will be punctual.” All this was uttered with a rapidity that allowed Miss Elwood no time to reply. He then hurried away, and she repaired to the chamber of nurse Aubrey, whom, according to her fears, she found much indisposed, and not able to leave her bed.

After the first greetings and inquiries were over, nurse Aubrey lamented her inability to attend Miss Elwood, that day, to Essex.

“I can soon, my good Aubrey, relieve you from that source of woe, though not in a manner, I am convinced, that will meet either your wishes or mine: my brother, by an affected absence of mind, and volatility of disposition, delaying to make with me the requisite arrangements for that purpose.”

Nurse Aubrey remarked that each revolving day added to her regrets of Miss Elwood, continuing under her brother's roof; and entreated her to be firm in her purpose of leaving Seymour Street as soon as possible, for an eligible retirement.

The servant announcing Miss Radnor, Berthalina hastened to the drawing-room, to receive her fair friend, and congratulate her on her return from Pembroke.

“You look indisposed, dear Berthalina; town does not agree with you.”

Berthalina's response was a deep sigh.

“I fear, my loved friend, the death of Lord Elwood has, beside the filial sorrow proceeding from that event, (for the loss of a parent must be a severe affliction to a daughter possessing your sensibility and tenderness of nature) afflicted you with solitudes till now unknown. Your brother is too much engaged in pleasurable pursuits, to contribute to the happiness of my Berthalina, at least, which is the suggestion of my parents, who were this morning conversing, as we sat at breakfast, on the many amiable qualities possessed by Miss Elwood, whose visits used to make such an addition to our domestic felicity and Laurel Grove.”

“The partiality, my dear Caroline, of your parents,” replied Miss Elwood, “was always manifest, in the many endearing attentions they showed me while I resided in their vicinity; and their return from Wales gives me a sensible pleasure, by restoring me to their society.”

The entrance of lady Morland and her two daughters, prevented any further discourse of a familiar nature, and Berthalina had scarce time to dress, in the interval

between the departure of her visitors, and dinner being on table, at which, contrary to her expectation, for she placed little reliance on his promises, her brother was her companion; and orders were given that lord Elwood was not at home to any of the gentlemen who might call in; for his lordship being single, and his lovely sister not yet introduced to company, they did not stand much on points of etiquette in their hours of visiting at his house.

During their dinner the conversation was desultory: but lord Elwood's manner was mysterious to Berthalina. Sometimes he was extravagantly gay, at others evidently depressed and abstracted; and fixing his eyes on his sister, with an expression that, to her, was indefinable, would fetch a deep-drawn sigh, and mutter some unintelligible sentences; then, observing that Berthalina's attention was fixed on him, would in a moment resume his levity.

When the cloth was removed, Miss Elwood entreated to know, without any further procrastination, how she was to dispose of herself; and added her hopes that he would coincide in her wishes of returning immediately to Woodford.

“Pho! nonsense! I mean to instruct Phillips, the auctioneer, to sell off your late residence; it can be of no use to us—I shall never permit you to bury charms of the first magnitude in retirement. I have far different views for the lovely Berthalina.”

“You surely, Charles, can never have the cruelty, I may say, injustice, to prevent me returning to my loved seclusion; your manners and mine do not assimilate, and I cannot foresee any inconvenience that can result to you from our separation.”

Lord Elwood drew his chair close to Berthalina. “Be not offended,” said he, “my beloved sister, the truth must be stated; you *can* return to Woodford no more.”

“How! speak! *can* return no more! What mean you?”

“’Tis already disposed of; my word is given; Hildon is the purchaser.”

Berthalina burst into tears.

Lord Elwood seemed affected; he rose from his seat, and paced the room with hasty strides: then, resuming his seat, he put one arm round the waist of Berthalina, and with the other, pressed her left arm to his bosom, and passionately kissing her, exclaimed, “You have no love for me, or you would not thus continually tease me with importunities to leave my house; can there be any impropriety in your remaining with a brother that adores you?”

“My immature years, and the company you keep, render it, my dear Charles, an impropriety. It appears to have been my father's wish, that I should not be introduced at court till I was twenty-one; consequently I cannot make, nor receive public visits among

what I believe, for I am not versed in your fashionable terms, you call the *beau monde*; in the country, all this is very well; but in the vicinity of Portman Square, in the house of a gay young gentleman, unaccompanied by any female, it subjects me to numerous misrepresentations which are very displeasing.”

“Can you, Berthalina, advance one incident to prove the truth of your assertion?”

“I see your smile of incredulity; yet it is no longer since than yesterday, that Aubrey was shocked by a gentleman’s asking her if the young lady residing with lord Elwood, was in reality his sister, or his—odious suggestion—kept mistress.”

“And what reply did old antiquity make?”

“One that convinced him of my honor, and the absurdity of your conduct.”

“Excellent, upon my honor! Pray who is this inquisitive gentleman? Is his name and person known to you; or is he an admirer, incognito, of my lovely, immaculate sister?”

“I perceive with pain,” said the distressed fair-one, “that it is vain to converse with you on any serious subject; we will therefore entirely drop all further discussion, and you must excuse me if I adopt measures that I think consistent with prudence and my happiness.”

“And *you must* excuse me,” replied lord Elwood, “if I adopt measures consistent with the authority delegated to me by my deceased father.”

Berthalina was too much depressed to reply; and lord Elwood left the room, in a rage that he strove not to conceal.

Hearing him, as he passed through the hall, order his carriage immediately, Miss Elwood retired to Mrs. Aubrey’s apartment, and took her coffee with the faithful attendant of her infancy, to whom she related her dissension with lord Elwood, and requested her counsel, in respect of her revealing to the Radnor family those events of her life with which they were unacquainted, and explaining the present peculiarities that rendered her situation always unpleasant, but at times disgusting.

Mrs. Aubrey advised her by no means to delay this communication, as she thought the present situation of her beloved mistress teeming with danger, and lamented, as she had often done before, the infatuation of the late lord Elwood, to leave so much power to the present possessor of his title and fortune.

To wile away the evening, Miss Elwood had recourse to her piano, and sought, in harmonious tones, to lull all discordant thoughts to oblivion.

Lord Elwood did not return home till a late, or rather, an early hour; long after Berthalina had retired to repose. He did not appear at the déjeûné, and Miss Elwood understood from his valet that he was gone to breakfast with Mr. Hildon.

The name of Hildon made the thoughts of the Woodford cottage recur forcibly to her mind, and tears of regret chased each other down her lovely cheeks.

She ordered the carriage at eleven, and repaired to Grosvenor Place, where she was received with every possible token of respect and friendship, by Caroline Radnor and her worthy parents.

So earnest were the entreaties of this amiable family, that Miss Elwood found herself pleasingly forced to remain the day with them; and she sent home the carriage, with a note to her brother, explaining her engagement, and pleading an excuse for this unannounced absence.

Mr. Radnor was forced to attend that honorable house of which he was an honorable member, an affair of consequence to the nation being then on the eve of discussion; and Miss Elwood being left with Mrs. Radnor and Caroline, took that opportunity of entering into the particular motives of her visit; her native sense of female delicacy preventing her doing so in the presence of Mr. Radnor, though she requested his lady to take on herself the task of acquainting him with such passages as she might think proper to meet his ear.

“The first years of my childhood were passed in a small village,” narrated our heroine, “near Alnwick in Northumberland; at the earliest period of my remembrance I found myself carefully attended, and my every want supplied with a solicitude that no maternal tenderness could exceed, by the good Mrs. Aubrey; and it is but a justice I owe to his memory, when I observe that I experienced a father’s fondness from her son, the worthy farmer under whose roof we resided.”

“He died just as I entered my seventh year, and his widowed mother was forced to remove to a small house in the neighbourhood, the farm being too great a concern for her to undertake; besides, the affairs of her son were much embarrassed, and little remained when his funeral and debts were justly paid. To his excessive philanthropy this was attributed, in making every one’s troubles his own, becoming bondsman, advancing sums of money, in fine, any thing by which he could relieve the distresses of a fellow creature. Too often, alas, he met with ingratitude, and the non-payment of several large sums thus advanced, proved detrimental to his affairs: he grew comparatively poor, and his richer neighbours laughed at his weakness.

“But his weakness was a *virtue*, and no doubt registered as such in that blest abode in which charity will meet its reward.

Mrs. Aubrey, myself, and a female servant, were the only residents of the neat habitation chosen by the former, on our removal from the Grange Farm.

“A school, kept by the amiable widow of the late rector, for a select number of young ladies, was the place where I received the first rudiments of education, and formed the first friendship among the juvenile part of my own sex.

“They were frequently inviting me to their several habitations, and the picture of domestic happiness that there presented itself to view, in the endearing ties of parent and child, brother, and sister, made me, as my ideas expanded, wonder how I came to be such an isolated being, without any of these relatives to bless me by their society.

“The questions I put to Mrs. Aubrey relating to this interesting subject, obtained replies that were far from satisfying my ardent curiosity.

“I had just attained my twelfth year when Mrs. Aubrey was attacked by an indisposition, so violent that her life was despaired of.

“It was then she thought proper to make me the following communication, which, from its singularity, impressed itself forcibly on my youthful mind.”

Miss Elwood made a slight pause, as if to retrace the various circumstances she was going to recite; and then proceeded to gratify the curiosity that her preceding words had raised in her fair attentive auditors.

CHAPTER. II.

“MY dear young lady,’ said Mrs. Aubrey, as I sat weeping by her couch, ‘I am now going to inform you, what you have so frequently in vain requested from me, how you came to be confided to my care.

“Believe me, my non-compliance with your wishes arose from a reluctance of acquainting you with what could not add to your happiness, but plant sensations in your breast, that I wished you to remain a stranger to as long as possible.

“In the case of my death, it may eventually be proper for you to know the mysterious manner in which you were placed at Grange Farm, under the safe though humble protection of my family.

“My daughter-in-law was sitting with her infant, a lovely boy, about six weeks old, in the ivy porch which my dear husband, God rest his soul, formed at the front of our dwelling, about three years previous to his death; ah! that, Miss Berthalina was a weighty affliction to me.’—

“Pardon me, dear ladies,” said Berthalina, “these little digressions from the thread of my story: I repeat it in the words of the good dame, not doubting but the simplicity of her narrative will please you better than if I suppressed any part of it, or changed her words into borrowed phrases.”

Mrs. and Miss Radnor expressed their wishes for Berthalina to give her narrative in Mrs. Aubrey’s words, as far as they formed a part of her recital.

Miss Elwood proceeded with—

“But why should I impiously murmur against the decrees of him, who, in his almighty wisdom, giveth and taketh again.

“Well, as I was saying, Miss Berthalina, my son’s wife was caressing her little George, when one of her neighbours came up to her, in seeming haste, with a lovely babe in her arms.

“Will you, Mrs. Aubrey,’ said the woman, ‘do me a favour?’

“Most willingly, if it is in my power,’ was the reply, for our Mary delighted in doing good.

“Will you take charge of this child for a couple of hours? that shall be the utmost time of my absence.’

“‘Certainly; but whose little cherub of a girl is this?’

“‘It belongs to my daughter Sarah, who, if you recollect, went about three years since, to live forty miles distant, at ’squire Lockwood’s, as waiting-woman to his lady; she married the butler, who still remains in the family, and Mary went to reside in a small house on their master’s estate. Six weeks ago she lay in with this child, whom she meant to have nursed herself, but such an advantageous offer has been made to her, by a lady of quality, who is related to Mrs. Lockwood, to go and live with her as wet-nurse, that she has accepted it, and sets off directly to her situation, which is but a few miles from here, a lucky circumstance for her, as I can nurse her child, and she can frequently see it.’”

“‘My daughter,’” continued Mrs. Aubrey, “observed, that ‘it was indeed *lucky* for Mary to meet with so much good fortune. But thought it a pity to wean so young an infant.’

“‘Tis, indeed, very young,’ said Mrs. Burton, “but I’ve been always reckon’d an excellent nurse, and you may be sure I shall do all that lays in my power to comfort my little grand-child. But I stand talking here, and Sarah will be uneasy at my detaining her so long, as I have promised to accompany her a great part of the way, for she is but poorly, or she would have come with me here.’”

“Mrs. Burton hastily quitted the farm, and my daughter’s little George being asleep, she put him in the cradle, and paid great attention to her pretty charge.

“A considerable time elapsed, and Mrs. Burton did not return, and the babe began to want its accustomed nourishment. Mrs. Aubrey had taken a great fancy to it; she could not bear to hear its plaintive cries, and put it to her own breast, with the charitable design of offering to suckle it, if Mrs. Burton would bring it to the farm at stated times every day, and she knew her husband was too humane in his disposition, to deny her the gratification she promised herself in administering to the wants of the dear little babe.

“The return of Mrs. Burton was so far procrastinated as to occasion some uneasiness at Grange Farm; they thought something unfortunate must have happened to her on the road, or she would have come back ere that time.

“A boy was sent to her cottage, but she was not there; at length my son suggested that it was very probable that her daughter had been so poorly on the road as to require her mother’s company all the way, when it would not be in her power to return that night. ‘She is well aware,’ said he, ‘that the babe is left in good hands, and we shall see her the first thing in the morning, without doubt, so lend the pretty-one some of George’s night-things, and put it to bed!’ (for it was asleep on my arm). So my daughter took the child from me, and began to undress it. She pulled off its white robe, and, to her great surprise, found a note pinned underneath, directed to farmer Aubrey and his wife.

“They looked at each other for some moments, with a mixture of astonishment and anticipation; my son then broke the wafer, and read the contents to us.

“This child has received the private baptism of our church, her name is Berthalina; to you she is now entrusted. The enclosed twenty-pound note is all you are to expect with her; you may possibly have more, but that entirely depends on chance; nor is it likely that she will ever be claimed by her parents. Behave well to this *innocent*; and may God reward your charity.”

“My daughter’s tears bedewed the sleeping babe; my son declared his intentions of adopting it as his own, yet felt extremely indignant at the behaviour of Mrs. Burton, in thus imposing on him: he resolved to spare no pains in seeking her out, as well as the unnatural mother who could thus abandon her infant to the protection of strangers.

“He set off, the next morning, to ’squire Lockwood’s, where, to his surprise, he found Mrs. Burton’s daughter bustling about the house as brisk as a bee; and learnt, on inquiry, that she was not married, and had no prospect of changing her condition, and that the butler, who had lived in the family for many years, had a wife and four children; she had not heard from her mother for some weeks past, and was much shocked when Mr. Aubrey explained the reason of his coming to her master’s.

“He returned home the next night, perfectly convinced that Sarah was entirely innocent of every part of this mysterious transaction, and in the mean time we had gleaned the following particulars from the people who resided in sight of the cottage Mrs. Burton had occupied.

“They said that within the last few days a handsome travelling-carriage had been observed to stop at her door frequently, and a lady with a long thick veil go in attended by an elderly woman.

“For a short time my son kept searching for Mrs. Burton, in the nearest villages, but with no success, and he abandoned the pursuit. On investigating her dwelling, it was discovered that there was nothing left but a few ponderous articles of furniture, and that her clothes, with every thing that was portable, had been secretly conveyed away.

“Mr. Aubrey desired his wife to provide proper clothes for the infant, and to put those it had then on carefully by, with a curious chain and locket that was round its neck. This she exactly performed, and thus you, my dear Miss Berthalina, became one of our family, and was most tenderly beloved and attended by every individual.

“Ah,” exclaimed I, interrupting her, “how great are my obligations to you, my dear Mrs. Aubrey, and to your son and daughter, whose memory I shall ever revere.

“She affectionately embraced me, and then continued—

“From the circumstance of your being abandoned by your parents my daughter-in-law seemed to think that she could never show you kindness enough, to make up for your loss, and she continued to nourish you at her own breast, equally with your foster-brother, and you both throve so fast, that she considered her cares amply repaid. You were both of an age, according to Mrs. Burton’s account, when she brought you to the farm; and just as you had attained the twelfth month, you were attacked by the small-pox; your’s was favourable, and you soon recovered, without your face being the least impaired; but poor George languished a few days in the utmost misery, and then expired. His mother’s grief was extreme; but she expressed her thanks to Heaven that you was left to console her by your infantile fondness. But you was soon doomed to lose this sincere friend. She died in child-birth, with her infant also, just as you entered your third year, earnestly recommending her adopted child to me and her husband. We promised all she asked, and my dear son punctually kept his word.

“Year after year elapsing without any inquiry being made for our dear charge, and no Mrs. Burton appearing, we entirely abandoned every thought of that kind, resolving to give you as good an education as our means would allow, and then apprentice you to some genteel business.

“The death of my dear son left me very much depressed in circumstances to what I had reason to expect. Ah, Miss Bertha, I sadly fear, more for their sakes than my own, that the persons appointed to settle his affairs did not do me justice. But I hope God will pardon them, and not visit the sin of wronging the widow on their heads.

“Thus circumstanced, believe me, my dearest child, I felt more for you than for myself, as I knew not how to provide for your future years—my intentions were frustrated, in respect of having a sufficient sum to apprentice you in a genteel manner, and I was quite disconsolate, when, to my utter astonishment, I received a letter, dated from London, enclosing bank notes to the amount of a hundred pounds, desiring me to take no notice of this circumstance to any of my neighbours, but to settle as near Grange Farm as possible, on account of Berthalina, for whose use an annual sum would be sent more than sufficient for our necessary expenses.

“Oh! how my heart was delighted, what reason I had to rejoice; our present necessities were relieved, and my fears on account of my dear charge were lessened if not quite chased away, as this letter was a convincing proof that she had friends, who in spite of their apparent desertion, had kept an eye on her, and were anxious for her welfare.

I did as I was directed, and hired the abode we now live in, settling my plan of domestic expenses in its present manner. I accounted to my neighbours for this comfortable settlement, by saying that my own relations befriended me.

“This, my dear Miss, said my kind protectress, is all I have to relate: should this violent illness with which the Lord has been pleased to afflict me, prove my death, you will find the baby-clothes, and the two letters wrote on your account, in the small black box that you have so frequently seen and questioned me about in the bottom drawer.

These will serve as proofs of your being the babe committed to our care. To leave you thus unconscious of who will be your protector when I am no more, is a hard struggle; yet I trust, from the circumstances that I have related, your secret friends will take care of you, and be a little more explicit in their behaviour. But I would not have you, my sweet child, to depend too much on this casual circumstance; you may be benefited by it, and you may not. Therefore I would wish you to learn something that may prove of service to you, should you be wholly deserted by those who undoubtedly ought to take care of you.”

“Here my kind nurse was so exhausted with talking, that she embraced me, and desired I would withdraw, and send the woman who had been hired to attend on her during her present illness.

CHAPTER. III.

“THOUGH at an age when most children care little for the future, and fancy the world a garden filled with fragrant flowers, I felt the most poignant anguish at the recital I had just heard from Mrs. Aubrey, and kneeling down in one corner of the parlour fervently prayed that it might please Heaven to restore this kind friend to health, and consequently to me.

“It might appear, my dear ladies, that in this petition I was actuated by selfish motives, and thought less of Mrs. Aubrey than myself. But this I assure you, that though I trembled at the bare idea of being left unprotected, yet I loved her with a filial affection, free from every interested thought but that of a dutiful child to an aged parent, for in that light I considered her.

“For more than a week after this important disclosure, Mrs. Aubrey continued in an alarming state, when her disorder took a favourable turn, and she slowly recovered; yet from that time she never regained her former health and activity, but seemed to sink rapidly into the vale of years.

“We continued at our peaceful seclusion three years after this event; the promise that was made of sending an annual sum was faithfully adhered to by my unknown guardian, accompanied by a judicious selection of books fitted to my years, some working-materials with patterns for embroidery &c. and a few articles of clothing superior to those I usually wore; with injunctions to Mrs. Aubrey to procure me every branch of instruction that her confined and remote situation would allow.

“Every letter renewed the enjoined secrecy, and it was strictly preserved.

“In a village, every incident, however trivial, is more noticed than in a town or city where all is bustle and more variety is presented to the eye and ear. The way in which Mrs. Burton left me was generally known, and as I grew up, I excited much more curiosity on the subject, than when an infant. Many wondered what Mrs. Aubrey intended me for, and did not hesitate to blame her for *encumbering* herself, as they termed it, with me; she was often teased with indelicate questions on the subject which she invariably answered with ambiguous reservedness.

Mrs. Aubrey had both her hopes and fears on my account, yet the former preponderated, for she thought it unlikely that my friends would entirely abandon me after what they had done.

One evening as we were sitting in our arbour, which commanded a view of the high road, a sudden exclamation from Mrs. Aubrey aroused my attention from a book that I had been reading, while she knit her stockings, and I perceived a very handsome equipage, drawn by four greys, advancing at a quick pace; we mutually expressed our

suppositions that it was going to the castle; but, to our utter amaze, it stopt at our door, and announced their arrival by a violent peal at the bell.

Peggy, our only domestic, had scarce time to open the door, when a gentleman rushed past her, and in hurried accents inquired for Mrs. Aubrey, who instantly appeared, and conducted him into the parlour. They remained together upwards of an hour, when Mrs. Aubrey came to me, her eyes swollen with weeping, and with a faltering voice, she told me that I must pack up a couple of changes, and go immediately with the stranger to London.

“Is he my father?”

“Your question,” said Mrs. Aubrey, “is what I expected, it is natural, and I am sorry to say, that the gentleman denies his being in any way related to you. I repeat that I am sorry, because he seems so good and so humane, that I should have been pleased if you had been claimed by him as a daughter. But since it is not so, we can only hope—”

“The stranger calling to us to make haste, interrupted what she would have said, and we repaired to my chamber.

“We shall soon meet again, my dear young lady,” said Aubrey, “we shall soon meet again.”

“Meet again! do you not go with your Berthalina?”

“Ah, no; but the gentleman assures me that you will return almost immediately. O how shall I pray for the hour that restores to me my dear child!

“We mingled our tears together, and I was at length torn from her fond embrace, before I would consent to part from the fosterer of my tender years.

“The stranger, who announced himself as Mr. Elwin, was polite and attentive; and we reached London in safety. Though I was sadly fatigued and indisposed, being unused to travelling.

“We stopt at the Adelphi Hotel, the first night of our arrival in the busy metropolis.

“The next evening, as soon as we had finished our coffee, Mr. Elwin was informed that a gentlewoman desired to speak with him.

“Mr. Elwin desired she might be conducted up stairs.

“In a few moments she entered our apartment, and presented Mr. Elwin a sealed note.

“While he was reading the contents, which appeared to agitate him in the most excessive manner, Mrs. Charlton, for by that appellation he addressed her, never took her eyes off me, till I was relieved from her gaze by Mr. Elwin’s desiring her to follow him into the next room.

“They conversed for some length of time, and I could audibly distinguish her sobs.

“When they returned to me Mr. Elwin ordered a hackney coach to be called, and requested me to prepare for a ride. I rang for my bonnet and pelisse, and silently wished myself with Mrs. Aubrey, in our little parlour; every thing appeared wrapped in mystery. I was among strangers, but as there could be no alternative, I made no scruple to comply with Mr. Elwin’s orders, and desisted from interrogatories, lest I should be considered impertinent.

“Mrs. Charlton accompanied us, and Mr. Elwin spoke to the coachman in so low a key, that I did not hear where he was ordered to convey us, nor do I know to this day, any more than that we went to a considerable distance beyond Hyde-park Corner.

“We were set down at the end of a lane, and the coach was dismissed. It was now quite dark, and fears of the most terrible nature agitated my bosom. I trembled violently, and Mrs. Charlton, who held one of my hands, discovered my emotion, which she tried by the kindest assurances to dispel.

“We proceeded up the lane, till we came to a small door, which Mrs. Charlton opened with a key, and conducted us through the garden, to a summer-house.

“‘You must wait here with Miss,’ said she, addressing Mr. Elwin, ‘till I have seen my lady. You must excuse having a light, for obvious reasons, which I need not explain, sir, to you.’

“Mr. Elwin cast himself on a settee, and soon fell into a slumber; while I, pensively gazing on the moon, thought only on the singularity of my present situation.

“The most trivial noise, even the rustling of the leaves, occasioned by the wind, made me start, and I dreaded I knew not what: ah! how torturing is suspense!

“We remained in the summer-house above two hours, when Mrs. Charlton returned, and awakened Mr. Elwin.

“She preceded us to the house, and we ascended a back stair-case, to a most elegant boudoir, on which every expensive ornament was lavished with an unsparing hand. I was left here for a few moments, while Charlton and Mr. Elwin went into the next room. When the former returned, and told me that my *mother* wished to fold me in her embrace.

“‘My mother!’ exclaimed I, ‘blessed sound, O! let me fly to her, and’—

“Mrs. Charlton stayed me from rushing into the adjoining chamber, and told me I must moderate my transports, or they might be fatal to her lady, who was very weak, and not expected to survive one hour after another.

“Ah! have I only found her, then, in the moment when she is to be torn from me for ever.

“‘I hope,’ said Charlton, ‘you will enjoy a blessed eternity together, where all is pious joy, and no sorrow can intrude.’

“I forcibly felt this reproof, but had no time to reply, ere I found myself in the chamber of my parent.

“Mr. Elwin took my hand, and led me to the bed-side. I raised my eyes, and beheld a lady supported by pillows. Her countenance was pale, yet interesting, and evidently displayed the remains of extraordinary beauty.

“She spoke not for a considerable time, but surveyed me with the most scrutinizing attention; then said to Mr. Elwin, with a deep sigh, ‘The child I abandoned, is now approaching womanhood, and possesses, I see, that beauty which is too often the wreck of our sex. Ah! my dear sir, what a charge I repose in your hands, what a promise you have made!’

“‘And that promise I will sacredly fulfil, I will be to her as father, mother, friend; but I thought you had dismissed all fears on her account.’

“‘I *had*, but her presence made them forcibly return. O, my foreboding heart!’

“I wept aloud, no longer able to restrain my feelings.

“The lady bent forward to embrace me, and we mingled tears with our caresses.

“My mother was so exhausted by the exertions she had made, that she sunk back, fainting on her pillow.

“By the attentions of myself and Charlton she recovered, and sunk into a gentle slumber, which lasted above half an hour, which interval I passed in prayers for her recovery, and thanksgivings to God that I had been folded in a mother’s embrace.

“She awoke in seeming pain, and a very visible alteration took place in her countenance.

“Mr. Elwin’s distress appeared to equal mine.

“The lady observed it, and said ‘Adieu my dearest child;’ and then, ‘O! Charles, even in death my heart clings to thee. Alas! I have not many moments of existence left; would I could have passed them with thee, and expired in the arms of my Berthalina! But it must not be, even at the painful separation of soul from body, the opinions of the world must be regarded. Oh! that pang—in mercy leave me. O my Charles! O my Berthalina! dreadful conflict!’

“I heard no more, but fell senseless into the arms of Mr. Elwin, who conveyed me to the summer-house, where I found myself on recovering from my swoon.

“Mr. Elwin could scarce compose himself sufficiently to tell me we must quit that place, where I would yet have gladly lingered; but the melancholy indulgence of being near my expiring parent was denied me.

“I put my arm in Mr. Elwin’s, and we proceeded along the garden and lanes without speaking to each other, but entirely engrossed by our own thoughts.

“It was an early hour of the morning, and at any other time I should have been excessively terrified, at so lonely a peregrination, in a place with which I was wholly unacquainted. But now all personal fear was banished, and all my anxieties were, if I was motherless, or my loved parent still in existence; though, from her agonies, I could scarce expect, or indeed wish, the latter, but consider her death as a merciful release.

“We had nearly walked back to Hyde-park Corner, when a coach passed us, which Mr. Elwin engaged, and we were conveyed to the Adelphi, and I retired immediately to my chamber, but sleep was a stranger to my eye-lids.

“Mr. Elwin ordered me my breakfast in bed, and sent a note, importing that he was going to inquire after my dear mother.

“It was three in the afternoon when he returned, and imparted the sad tidings that my unfortunate parent (for so he styled her) had ceased to breathe.

“Her anguish had increased to a melancholy degree, after our departure, yet she perfectly retained her senses, and taking leave of her family, resigned herself to prayer, and finished her mortal for an immortal existence, at a little past seven in the morning.

“The parting scene with my mother made such a forcible impression on my mind, that a fever ensued, which threatened fatal consequences, and nearly three weeks elapsed before I was pronounced out of danger. All this time I remained at the hotel; but as soon as I was able to bear the fatigue, I was removed to a beautiful cottage, in the vicinity of Woodford, in Essex. On stepping from the chaise that conveyed me thither, I was surprised, and, need I add, pleased at finding Mrs. Aubrey ready to receive me, she bedewed me with tears, and readily promised Mr. Elwin, who now announced himself as my father, to remain with her dear Berthalina.

“Mr. Elwin observed that he should return to the cottage in a few days, when he would explain to me a few of the leading particulars of my history.

“We quitted Woodford as soon as we had dined, and as no tie of secrecy had been imposed on me, I related to Mrs. Aubrey the particulars of the interview with my mother.

“The good woman shed tears as I recounted what my dear, dear, parent had said, and her evident fears on my account.

“She agreed with me that the behaviour of Mr. Elwin was very mysterious, and calculated to give me pain, particularly that part of it—his denying himself to be my father when he fetched me so abruptly from Alnwick, and his now acknowledging himself as such.

“What passed in the interview with my mother did not serve as the least elucidation; she had never addressed Mr. Elwin as my father, and at first seemed more to speak to him as a faithful friend; but, when the agonies of death approached, her manner was more tender, and seemed to imply that some fatal event had separated them from each other, and even at this awful crisis, her dread of their being detected in this painful farewell rose superior to every other consideration.

“In the midst of all our conjectures we could not but acknowledge the attention he had shown to our mutual comfort, and my extreme happiness, in sending for Mrs. Aubrey to live with me at Woodford. This delicate attention spoke volumes in his favour, and made my heart bound with gratitude towards him. For I confess with sorrow, that I never, in all my interviews with Mr. Elwin, not even when residing under his roof, felt such emotions of filial love as agitated my bosom at the sight and voice of my, I fear, ill-fated mother.

“To divert my thoughts I assisted Mrs. Aubrey in making some little alterations and additions in the adornments of our cottage, earnestly wishing that Mr. Elwin would make his promised visit, and acquaint me with the particulars of my birth.

CHAPTER. IV.

“A WEEK had more than elapsed, when Mr. Elwin came to Woodford. His spirits were evidently dejected, and it was obvious that he used every stratagem that could be devised in conversation, to avoid entering on the promised explanation.

“Mrs. Aubrey considered that to interrogate him on the subject of my birth would be too great a liberty for her to take, and my spirits were too much depressed, not to say awed, by the manner he assumed, to remind him of the elucidation he had led me to expect. It was with evident chagrin that I saw him depart, and then, bursting into tears, I cast myself on a sofa, and lamented, in forcible terms, the death of my mother; ‘Had she but been permitted a longer existence, she would,’ I exclaimed, ‘have loved her Berthalina, nor thus have suffered me to be tortured by suspense.’

“‘Remember, my dear young lady,’ said Mrs. Aubrey, ‘that your mother was under the most unpleasant restrictions—nothing can be more evident—and I think it probable that she only desired to see you as supposing her end fast approaching; had she lived in the possession of health to a very old age, from her former behaviour it is not likely you would have ever been acknowledged by her as a daughter; then take my humble counsel, and repine not for the blessings Providence has been pleased to withhold from you, but be thankful for a mother’s blessing, a mother’s fond embrace, ere she expired; that is surely a comfort to my Berthalina.’

“‘It is, indeed,’ I replied, but sighing deeply I continued, ‘yet the behaviour of Mr. Elwin—my *father*, I should say—greatly affects me; it is incomprehensible and afflicting.’

“Mrs. Aubrey observed that she had no doubt that my father had weighty reasons for his present conduct, which he would, at a proper time, develop to our mutual satisfaction.

“Her arguments on the subject inspired me with fortitude and strength of mind; I resumed my employments, and passed the rest of the evening in peaceful serenity.

“The next day, Martha, a nice little girl that Mr. Elwin had hired purposely to attend on me, came running into the parlour with a letter which the postman had left with my superscription.

“That it was from my father, (why should I so reluctantly give him that appellation!) I had no reason to doubt; and I eagerly broke the seal, and read,

“Your countenance, dearest Berthalina, is expressive, uncommonly so, to me, who have long made human nature my study, (and agree, that ‘The proper study of mankind is man.’) It serves as an index of your mind. It told me yesterday that I had disappointed,

nay, *displeased* you. I own I was not satisfied with my own conduct; but my feelings overpowered me, and prevented me fulfilling that promise I had voluntarily entered into. I could not speak of your mother, I could not expose her errors to your view. Her recently interred form, seemed to stand before me; she was a martyr to the prejudices of the world, she would rather have died the most violent death, than to have acknowledged you as a daughter. Then shrink not my child, from what I now desire of you as a duty: seek not to withdraw the veil that gives to oblivion the follies of your parents. Oblivion, did I say! ah, no! I fear some one will yet hold them up to view, with an unsparing hand. But let not that hand be Berthalina's; let it not be mine. Suffice it then to say, that in me you have a parent who regards you with the tenderest affection, who will supply your every want. For the future you will have no care, as a considerable portion is your's. What more can I write, to give comfort to my child. I will put matters in a proper train for acknowledging you as one of my family. Till then, if you wish to write to me, direct to J. Elwin, Esq. under cover to Lord Elwood, Seymour-street, Portman-square."

"This letter did not lessen my perplexities. He would place matters in train to acknowledge me as his daughter, at the same time he refused to explain the particulars of my birth.

"I was now attended by masters of every kind, and my progress gave great pleasure to my father, who at every visit was a strict investigator of my acquirements.

"A year passed in this manner, with little variation, but I complained not of this monstrous solitude, on the contrary, it was highly pleasing; my books, my drawing, and my music, and long walks with Mrs. Aubrey, were the sources from which I always derived pleasure.

"I had worn mourning robes during the whole twelvemonth, out of respect to the memory of my mother. I now, by the desire of my father, changed my sables, for some beautiful white dresses he had sent me down, accompanied by a number of expensive ornaments, and a note, desiring me to dress myself with particular care on the following Thursday, as he should be at Woodford by eleven in the morning, to convey me to town.

"I obeyed his injunctions, and punctual to his appointment Mr. Elwin arrived at the cottage.

"A fresh novelty was now opened to my view. Mr. Elwin came to Woodford, in a superb chariot, attended by two footmen, whose liveries I recognized to be the same as those I had first seen at Alnwick, when Mr. Elwin conveyed me thence.

"From that period he had always been alone, and unattended in his visits to me, generally on horseback, or if the weather prevented that mode of travelling, he came in a hired post-chaise, which circumstance led me to conclude that the equipage in which he came to the north was not his own; but I was now convinced of my error, for the respect paid him by the domestics, and the orders he issued, set the matter beyond a doubt.

“Mrs. Aubrey had prepared a *petite* collation proper for the hour. Mr. Elwin thanked her for this attention, and partook of it with more complacent cheerfulness than in general marked his deportment.

“It was near one before we left the cottage, Mr. Elwin signifying to Aubrey that I should return on the Saturday evening.

“She has since acknowledged that her heart palpitated with joy at beholding her Berthalina, her dear young lady, in so much splendor.

“But Mrs. Aubrey did not, at that moment consider that neither wealth nor pomp can give happiness, unless the mind is at peace to enjoy them

When we arrived in Seymour-street, we found a large company assembled, who by what they asserted, had been anxiously waiting our appearance.

“A handsome young gentleman approached Mr. Elwin, and said, ‘My lord, I rejoice you are come, not that I speak out of disrespect to Mr. Elwood, he has done all in his power to entertain us; but your absence was protracted so much beyond the time you mentioned, that we began to be alarmed, lest you and the young lady had been detained by some displeasing occurrence.’

“‘I thank you, Melmoth,’ said my father, ‘and I am happy to say that your fears are unfounded.’

“Then taking my hand, he addressed his visitors in the following speech; but his voice was scarcely articulate through emotion.

“‘My good friends, I flatter myself that, in the present circle, who have done me the honour to assemble at my particular request, there is no one but holds the happiness of me and mine as dear to them; not birds of passage, that bask in the rays of a summer’s sun, and flee from the chilling blasts of winter. Thank Heaven, I never impaired, but rather augmented the noble fortune that devolved to me, through a line of unsullied ancestry, but I have had domestic woes—’

“Here he paused a few moments, as if collecting fortitude to make some unpleasant disclosure, and then continued,

“‘I believe I mentioned severally, in my notes of invitation, that I wished to introduce to your notice an interesting young female, nearly related to me by the ties of consanguinity.

“‘This is her—Miss Berthalina Elwood—my daughter.’

“Most of the company forcibly expressed their surprise, but paid their congratulations both to me and my father, in a manner that exhilarated my spirits, and made me rely on their assurances of esteem; but I was doomed to experience a severe shock. My father turning to Mr. Elwood, said, ‘Come here Charles, and embrace your sister.’

“‘Hell and the devil!’ exclaimed Mr. Elwood, and clapping his hands to his forehead with a motion that almost evinced distraction, rushed out of the room.

“My feelings were hurt, I felt this repulse so forcibly, that every nerve was agitated, and giving an involuntary, but faint scream, should have fallen to the ground, had not the arms of my parent supported me.

“‘Be secret as to what has passed ere you came here,’ whispered lord Elwood, as he led me to a sofa (of the Egyptian costume) that was placed in an arched recess; then beckoning to an old lady of a pleasant countenance, he said, ‘I will entrust my daughter to your tenderness and care, till she is recovered from the faintness that oppresses her, and I will go in search of Charles, who I—’

“‘Be that task mine,’ said Mr. Melmoth.

“‘Any interference on your part, my lord, however kind or rational, will have the appearance of authority. He will listen to the voice of a friend, and impart, in confidence, the cause of his unpolite exclamation, and abrupt departure. I think I can answer for Charles, that he is now actuated by one of his eccentric whims, and not by any dislike to his amiable sister, or the discovery you have been pleased to make.’

“Lord Elwood signified his assent, and Melmoth left the drawing room.

“He was absent about half an hour, and then returned, unaccompanied by Mr. Elwood.

“In answer to my father’s questions, he said, ‘that his friend Charles had requested to be excused re-appearing till dinner time, when he should be happy to convince his friends that he rejoiced in the acquisition of so amiable a sister.’

“‘He has deputed me,’ continued Mr. Melmoth, ‘to apologize for his behaviour, which arose from a sudden recollection of an engagement of consequence, that he had left unfulfilled, and obliged him to write letters immediately, that no ill consequences might arise from his neglect.’

“The company accepted this excuse; but I could perceive that my father, (now self-transformed from Mr. Elwin to Lord Elwood) was much chagrined, though he forbore commenting on the subject.

“My father, who wished his son’s presence at the explanation he meant to make, and also to give me time to recover my spirits, postponed it till the conclusion of our dinner.”

At this period of her story Miss Elwood was prevented from proceeding, by the return of Mr. Radnor, when the conversation became desultory, and Berthalina returned, at the hour of ten, to Seymour-street.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. and Miss Radnor were early visitors to Miss Elwood on the subsequent morning, being impatient to hear the remainder of the interesting particulars with which she had honoured them.

Lord Elwood had been up the whole of the preceding night, engaged in a routine of resources to kill time, among which, gaming was not the least.

He had not yet risen, and Berthalina continued her eventful story.

Mr. Elwood was true to the promise made by his friend Melmoth; he joined us at dinner, and made his apologies in a manner that could not fail to be accepted, and do away any impressions we might have formed to his disadvantage.

When the cloth was removed, and the servants withdrawn, my father proceeded to gratify the curiosity that he had raised in the bosoms of his auditors.

“I believe it is generally known, that I was married, early in life, to the lovely heiress of sir John Belton of Leicestershire.

“I lost my amiable partner, in the fourth year of our marriage. Her death was rather sudden, but the primary cause was a violent cold, which she inadvertently caught by sitting on some grass soon after the falling of a heavy shower of rain, to gather some small field-flowers, for her son, the present Mr. Elwood, who, of three children, alone survived his tender mother.

“Her death forcibly affected me. I had revered her and her virtues, no discord had ever interrupted our matrimonial felicity, but each strove to augment the happiness of the other.

“I lay a stress upon this circumstance, because our marriage did not arise from mutual inclination, but was in compliance with the will of our parents, who had entered into a contract to espouse us to each other long before we were of an age to fulfil their wishes.

“Here suffer me to digress, while I give my opinion, that I think this conduct ought to be avoided by an enlightened people, as highly reprehensible, and teeming with danger to the morals and happiness of their offspring.

“How many instances are we shocked with, of separations and divorces that have occurred through nuptials prompted by convenience or parental authority, in which the heart has no share.

“Happily for lady Elwood, when she honoured me with her hand, though I was not the choice of her *heart*, yet that *heart* was not another’s, and unremitting tenderness on my side so wrought on her mind, that her affections soon became irrevocably mine.

“I thought I loved the gentle Palmarina, and still I feel assured, that had she lived, the idea would have remained the same; not for worlds would I have wronged her delicate love, even in thought. But, the second winter subsequent to her disease, I was fated to experience a passion that nought but death can erase from my heart. Even now that the loved form of the fair enslaver of my passions lies mouldering in dust in the narrow confines of her tomb, e’en now she holds me in her chains, and I look forward for the moment when my translation from this world of treachery and disappointment shall reunite me to her, whom on earth I shall never cease to regret, though her weak credulity first plunged my fair prospects into despair and pierced my heart with the barbed arrow of disappointed *love*.

“Let me glance slightly over this part of my narrative, would it were a blank in my memory!

“The lovely Olivia whom I had raised from comparative obscurity, whom I almost worshipped, whom I—But why recount each circumstance to wound me by the repetition! she was false—seduced by the insidious arts of a villain; she left me—a public divorce was the consequence, and, a few months after, the death of lady Elwood was announced to the world.

“But that she had in her retirement given birth to a daughter was a circumstance concealed with the most rigid exactness, even from me, the father of the hapless infant, and many years revolved before I was acquainted with that important truth.

“Though the errors of the mother will always retain a place in my memory, yet injustice shall find no advocate in me, and my daughter shall be fostered with as much tenderness, and portioned as largely as if her birth had been attended with the happiest circumstances; she is no-ways culpable, nor will I visit on her the laudable resentment I once bore her misguided parent. I say *once*, as the grave that received her lovely form, was also the grave of that *resentment*, from a conviction that we should not carry hatred beyond its awful boundaries.’

“Here my father ceased speaking, the company renewed their congratulatory compliments and Mr. Elwood embraced me with the most affectionate warmth.

“Our visitors left us at an early hour, Mr. Elwood also departed with his friend Melmoth to the opera, and I was left tête à tête with my mysterious father.

“A considerable time elapsed in a silence which neither of us seemed disposed to break. At length lord Elwood said: ‘My Berthalina is doubtless surprised at the words which she has heard fall from my lips.

“I essayed in vain to speak, for my voice was rendered inarticulate by a contrariety of emotions that warred in my bosom.

“‘Speak, my child,’ continued he mildly, ‘cannot you confide in my tenderness, and act with candour? you are not in the presence of a rigid judge.’

“I took his hand, kissed it with filial tenderness, and bedewed it with my tears.

“‘Blest drops of sensibility!’ said lord Elwood, pressing me to his bosom—‘But mind me, Berthalina, let reason always be the guide of your actions; trust to her voice, lest too much sensibility betray thee to thy ruin.’

“Replacing me in my chair, he took repeated strides across the room, and then, with some abruptness, resumed the question of what opinion I had formed of his integrity, when I had heard such a widely differing account given to his friends of the decease of my mother to what I really knew to be the case.

“I rallied my spirits, and replied,

“‘I will tell you with sincerity, my lord, what were my thoughts on that subject.’

“‘You would oblige me by so doing.’

“‘I supposed, my lord, that you had weighty reasons for concealing from your friends the very recent death of my mother; and yet, at the same time, felt yourself obliged to state a sort of falsehood to satisfy the curiosity that you knew must inevitably be raised by my appearance in the world as your daughter.’

“‘You were right, Berthalina; I rejoice that you had sense to impute what you knew to be a false assertion to the real cause.

“‘When I first placed you at Woodford it was my intention to settle on you a handsome fortune under the name of Elwin, (a name I assumed in my journey to Northumberland, as being so near my own, that should I by chance be recognised by any one, I might pass it off as a mere mistake made by the rustics around me), and not to publicly acknowledge you as a daughter without an event took place which I had then some remote ideas of, but despaired of bringing to bear. It was happily accomplished, but under the seal of secrecy; as for the *real* story of your lovely unfortunate mother, I have taken a solemn oath never to let it pass my lips, the happiness of a noble family depends on my secrecy, and humanity bids me be silent.’

“Assuming a more solemn and impressive tone, he continued: ‘Death, dearest Berthalina, may snatch me from thee, before, by connubial ties, you are under the protection of one worthy of you.—Most happy should I be to give thee in marriage to a

youth sensible of your virtues, and blest with your guileless heart. Yet it may not be, for I have an innate, an indescribable sensation, that tells me I am not a long sojourner here.

“Be cautious then, my child, to whom you give your affections; avoid conversing with any persons that bear the name of Rainsforth, and above all, shun marriage with them, as you would the deadliest snare; horror is in the thought, and it is better for you to cast yourself into a gulph of flaming fire, than to hurry yourself to perdition by such an alliance.’

We had supper at an early hour, and lord Elwood, observing that I looked pallid and fatigued, (for the occurrences of the day had overcome me, and added to a dejection that frequently hung on my spirits since my melancholy interview with my mother) expressed a wish, to which I cheerfully acceded, of my immediate retirement to my chamber.

“He added that his breakfast hour was ten, when he should expect my company, and hoped, by that time, that the sweets of repose would restore me to calm serenity, so requisite for my health.

“I was attended to my chamber by a decent elderly woman, who soon withdrew and left me to the solitude I panted for, that I might arrange my scattered thoughts.

“The behaviour of Mr. Elwood rushed on my mind, and seemed to impress itself deeper than every other incident of the past day.

“I could ill reconcile his polite demeanor and apparent suavity of manners to every individual he addressed; with the reception he had given me; his whole behaviour was a mystery, and my heart felt pained when I reflected that I had, in my wishes being gratified of my parents claiming me from the hands of the good Mrs. Aubrey, found new troubles, and anguish before unknown.

“I slept but little, and that sleep was annoyed by dreams that presented the most fearful images to my view, and left a gloomy horror on my mind.

“Previous to my descending to the breakfast-parlour, I endeavoured to assume a more cheerful aspect, and I believe that I succeeded tolerably in disguising my feelings; for lord Elwood praised me for my study to oblige him, and observed that there was nothing more repugnant to him than to see young people give way to *sombre* reflections.

“After breakfast lord Elwood informed us that he had particular business to transact with his attorney, and requested his son to chaperon me to some of the places calculated to entertain a young stranger.

“He complied with seeming pleasure and I returned to my chamber to equip myself in my walking dress.

“As I was descending the stairs I was met on the first landing by lord Elwood’s valet, who opening the door of his master’s dressing room, (which adjoined my brother’s) requested I would wait there for his lordship, who wished to have a few minutes conversation with me before I went out.

“I had not been long in this apartment, when I was shocked by the duplicity of Mr. Elwood, whose voice I recognised speaking in the next room.

CHAPTER. VI.

“THE repetition of my name aroused my attention. To *listen* I should have despised; but the thinness of the partition, which is only a temporary one run up to divide a large room (which was useless to the family in that state) into two boudoirs, rendered that meanness unnecessary; for situated as I was, I could not, had I wished it, have prevented the words reaching my ear.

“‘To be obliged to parade the streets with such a rustic, unformed thing—’tis absolutely insupportable; but I was obliged to comply.’

“‘Obliged, Charles!’

“‘Why, the case is this, Melmoth; What with my late losses on the turf, a bad run at the tables, and two or three little gifts I have lately been obliged to make to keep a certain lady in tolerable temper, as she began to grow jealous of the little opera girl; I have cursedly run out, and must apply for a heavy loan to my dad; it will not, therefore, be politic to affront him on the eve of making this request, though, *entre nous*, he has extremely disconcerted me by the introduction of this girl.—Curse it, I should not have cared had she been a bastard, but her legitimacy makes me mad; and then, lord Elwood is so fond of her; and by the pains he takes in providing masters of the first celebrity to attend her at Woodford, there is no doubt but he means to portion her in a manner highly detrimental to the expectations I had formed, of immense wealth at his decease, and for which I should find due occasion. However, I shall leave no method untried that can be done with safety, to root her from his affections, and then—’

“The conclusion of this *fraternal* speech I was not doomed to hear; for lord Elwood at that moment entered the room, with a handsome silver net purse in his hand.

“He said, with a good-natured smile on his countenance,

“‘Ladies are apt, in their walks, to see several little trinkets they admire, and want to purchase; as I *wish* to gratify your laudable inclinations as much as possible, take this purse; the sum it contains is, I own, rather more than it is consistent with prudence to give to a young girl, who, from her birth to the present hour, has scarce known what it was to have a shilling in her own possession; but such is my confidence in the good sense and amiable heart of my Berthalina, that I bestow it without a fear.’

“I kissed the hand of the donor, and I would have given utterance to the grateful ebullitions of my heart, but lord Elwood hurried from the chamber exclaiming in low, faltering accents, ‘Spare her, O God! Let not the sins of her parents be visited on her guiltless head.’

“The kindness of lord Elwood, and the deceit of his son, so agitated me, that I had scarce power to examine the contents of the purse. When I did, I found notes and cash to the amount of a hundred pounds, and a small locket miniature of himself, with which I was much pleased.

“I was aroused from a train of reflections into which I had fallen, by the entrance of a servant with ‘Mr. Elwood waits madam.’

“After what had passed, it is needless to say, that I felt the utmost repugnance at the thoughts of a morning promenade with Mr. Elwood. But I considered, and I hope with propriety, that my refusing to accompany him would subject me to the inquiries of my father as to the cause, and the revealing the truth would raise me an implacable enemy in the person of my brother, and give him a pretext for endeavouring to alienate the affections of lord Elwood from me.

“Mr. Elwood was accompanied by his friend Melmoth, from whom I received much assiduous attention. We visited Somerset-house, the Panoramas, and the European Museum, and I returned to Seymour-street, delighted with what I had seen, and reflecting on a remark made to me by my all polished fashionable brother.

““That to betray pleasure and surprize at any novelty in public, was regarded as a sure test of ructicity, and ill breeding by the present modish circles.’

“To which I only replied, ‘Then I fear I shall frequently offend against their prescribed rules of decorum, for I admire *sincerity*, (and I laid a particular stress on that word), at all times, and to express my sentiments without disguise.’

“Mr. Elwood spoke not; but Melmoth, with an expressive glance at his friend, observed ‘That I must imbibe a fresh set of ideas, or I should create myself many enemies among the *haut-ton*, where insincerity, and a string of unmeaning compliments was the order of the day.’

“My brother laughed, and in a satirical tone, congratulated me on having, already, more than half converted Melmoth to my opinions.

CHAPTER VII.

“ON the Saturday morning my brother set out for Wiltshire, where he was going to pass a few weeks with Sir Edward Blargrave, a young gentleman just come in possession of an ample estate; but his many virtues were superior to his riches.

“Thus my father described him, and expressed much satisfaction that Charles had so readily, at his request, acceded to accept the invitation of his friend.

“But from some few words that passed in my presence, between lord Elwood and his son, it appeared to me that the former had settled the pecuniary difficulties of the latter, on express condition that he would lessen his correspondence with a set of young men who had early initiated him into a number of dangerous vices, and as a preliminary to this step, it was thought prudent for him to accept sir Edward’s invitation, as it would save the appearance of breaking off with abruptness from his usual routine of engagements.

“We dined at an early hour, the carriage being ordered at five, to convey us to Woodford.

“We were just ready to depart, when lord Elwood told me that a humble friend of mine was waiting in the anti-room of the library, to inquire after my health, and take leave of me, having obtained his permission for that purpose.

“I ventured to inquire who it was that had thus pleased to interest herself on my account.

“But his lordship, with a frown that was natural to him when his commands were not implicitly complied with, waved his hand to the door, and I left the room.

“I entered the anti-room with some perturbation, being unable to conceive who was my visitor.

“A genteel dressed woman advanced towards me, and in a few moments I recognised Mrs. Charlton, the faithful attendant of my deceased mother.

“She expressed great pleasure at seeing me, and acknowledged her obligations for the kindness of lord Elwood, who had sent to let her know that I was in Seymour-street, when she immediately came to see me.

““Your attachment to your late lady, Mrs. Charlton,’ I said with a smile, ‘is, I suppose, the source that prompts you to interest yourself so kindly about me.—I, who am in fact a stranger to you, whom you have only seen on one occasion—a fatal *one* to me.’

“That was not our first interview Miss Berthalina.’

“You amaze me! it must have then been in my infancy, for I cannot call such a circumstance to recollection.’

“When your eyes first opened to the light, these arms received you, and I was for a few weeks your constant attendant.’

“Indeed! then you can tell me many particulars that I wish to know, my good Mrs. Charlton, and thus, by obliging me in this instance, add to the many services I owe you.’

“Mrs. Charlton shook her head expressively, and on my repeating the question, replied, ‘My dear young lady, I have been entrusted by those whom I have had the honour to serve, particularly by lord Elwood, and your late mother, my dear lamented mistress, with secrets of the utmost importance; and I have the happiness to observe, that I never betrayed their confidence; and you have, I am convinced, too much prudence, and too high a sense of honour and duty, to wish me to swerve from this conduct on your account, particularly as lord Elwood cautioned me not to lose sight of my circumspection, in the interview he so obligingly granted me with his amiable daughter.’

“The fidelity thus displayed by Mrs. Charlton, highly pleased me, though it had denied me the gratification of knowing, minutely, the particulars of my birth, to which I felt a great mystery attached.

“From Mrs. Charlton I learnt, that she was married soon after the decease of her lady, to a respectable grocer, in the vicinage of Golden-square, with whom she was comfortably settled.

“I took the directions, with the promise of calling on her, when I next came to town, if I could get my father’s consent for that purpose.

“Previous to our parting, I would have had Mrs. Charlton to accept of ten guineas, as a token of my respect; but she persisted in her refusals, and I could only prevail on her to take two of them, which was to purchase a broach for her to wear for my sake, as I had nothing of the kind with which I could present her, without the fear of incurring lord Elwood’s displeasure.

“Mrs. Aubrey received me with great pleasure on my return, and listened with avidity to the account I gave of what I had heard and seen during my absence.

“She renewed her exhortations for me to be patient under this apparent mystery; but censured the behaviour of my brother, as unfeeling in the extreme.

“I continued to reside at Woodford where I was frequently visited by lord Elwood, and sometimes by his son, but it was very seldom that I was invited to Seymour-street,

and my time would have passed with much heaviness, had I not been honoured with the notice of an amiable family, who purchased a charming seat at Woodford, soon after the period of my being acknowledged as the daughter of Lord Elwood.

“O my beloved friends, for it is to you that I allude, I can never be sufficiently grateful for your kindness, it is indeed invaluable!”

Mutual compliments passed between the fair friends, and they were sincere.

Berthalina then proceeded to the conclusion of her history.

“About two years from the period of my being announced as Miss Elwood, my father was seized with a violent indisposition, the physicians who were called in, unanimously declared his life was drawing to a close.

“A letter was sent to me, imparting the distressing news that my father could not survive many days longer, and that I was to take a post-chaise, and come immediately to Seymour-street, with Mrs. Aubrey.

“I lost not a moment in obeying these injunctions.

“The half-closed window-shutters, and the gloomy countenances of the servants, seemed to predict that lord Elwood was no more, and I had the mortification to learn that he had expired about an hour before my arrival.

“I expostulated with my brother on his cruelty in delaying to send, that I might have received the blessing of my father, and duteously have closed his eyes.

“He seemed all attentive kindness, and assured me that he had not the most remote idea, that the dissolution of his parent was so fast approaching: he added, that he had proposed to lord Elwood the sending for me, on the first day of his illness; but this he strenuously objected to, and it was with some difficulty, that he at length obtained his permission to write the letter I received, alas! too late for the purpose it was intended to answer.

“I had no right to doubt the veracity of my brother, and could only lament the hapless fatality that seemed to attend my days.

“I felt miserable during the day, and retired to my chamber early in the evening, where I found Mrs. Aubrey waiting for me, and from her account I learnt that my brother had acted with the basest and most incomprehensible duplicity towards me. The old housekeeper had informed my tender, faithful nurse, that her late lord had expressed the utmost anxiety to see me, and it was evident that he had something of importance to disclose which materially concerned me.

“He knew not his commands to his son were disregarded: he pretended to comply with his desire of writing immediately to me, and forged an answer, which stated that I was myself too ill to leave my bed, but would come to Seymour-street the first moment that I should be able to sit up.

“Lord Elwood’s uneasiness increased at this intelligence. He desired I should be sent for to town, even in a litter, so that he could but see me. But his son took care to use every stratagem to prevent this laudable desire, till his principal physician, seeing the disorder of his patient’s mind, offered to come in person for me. Lord Elwood thankfully accepted this voluntary kindness, and Doctor B—— was just leaving the house for that purpose, when Mr. Elwood confessed that I had never been sent for, and ascribed the apparent undutifulness of his conduct, to the fear he had of rendering his father worse by the emotions a farewell parting with me must give rise to.

“Dr. B—— was not so easily deceived, he could penetrate through this flimsy pretext, and treated it with the stern rebuke it merited.

“Instead of quitting the house, he returned to the chamber of Lord Elwood, and disregarding the entreaties of his son, acquainted his patient with what had passed.

“Lord Elwood sighed deeply, and requested an immediate and private audience with his son.

“Mr. Elwood was sent for, and when he entered the room, Dr. B—— and the attendants withdrew.

“The conference between father and son was extended to a considerable length, and on its termination Mr. Elwood ordered one of the grooms to take horse immediately, and convey a letter to me which my brother delivered him.

“Lord Elwood was now attacked with violent spasms in the stomach, which threatened speedy dissolution.

“Dr. B——, and the rest of his medical attendants, (who had been sent for) did not attempt to deceive him; but answered to his anxious inquiries, that it was next to impossible that he should survive till my arrival.

“He appeared sensibly affected with this awful crisis, and desired that his counsellor, and Mr. Edwards, an attorney, who was much respected by him for his tried probity, might be sent for.

“Dr. B——, who had long been in the habits of strict intimacy with my father, ventured to say, that ‘It was a pity lord Elwood should have his mind burthened with temporal affairs, and not have settled them at the first commencement of his illness.’

“‘My dear friend,’ replied lord Elwood, ‘I had settled every thing to my perfect contentment some months since; but I now fear I confided too far in one important circumstance—and Oh!’

“Mr. Elwood, whose countenance had undergone a variety of changes while his father was speaking, took advantage of his pain-caused pause, and pressing his pallid hand, said,

“‘Do not, my dear parent, thus needlessly distress yourself. I know to what you allude. Harbour not a doubt that I will not faithfully discharge the trust you have reposed in me. I explained to you the real cause of my keeping your illness a secret from Berthalina. You did not condemn it; why then this perturbation?’

“Lord Elwood essayed to speak, but in vain he made the effort—the powers of utterance were gone. The icy fangs of death had seized on his frame; deep groans and convulsive struggles alternately succeeded each other for the space of two hours, when his lordship ceased to breathe, and exchanged a mortal for an immortal existence.

“These particulars, and the comments made on them by Aubrey, gave me much uneasiness. The night was past in sleepless sorrow, and the next morning I found myself so much indisposed, that I sent a message to my brother, now lord Elwood, intimating my wish that I might be allowed to pass the time in my own apartments, till my dear parent should be interred in the mausoleum of his ancestors.

“My request was obligingly complied with, and during the fortnight that the corpse of our parent remained in the house, my brother came every morning to the door of my boudoir, and made the most affectionate inquiries after my health, and omitted nothing that could be supposed to contribute to my personal comfort, or tranquillize my mind.

“With such refined delicacy were his attentions shown, that I felt grateful for his conduct, and began to cherish a hope, that he had repented of his former unkindness, and imbibed sentiments of fraternal love.

“Lord Elwood had frequently declared, in my presence, that he had settled on me a handsome fortune, and that I should find myself, when I came of age, perfectly independent, besides a large sum, that was set apart as a marriage portion.

“How great was my surprise, when I found, by the reading of the will, that I was left, with the exception of a very trifling annuity, entirely dependant on my brother. There was, certainly, eight thousand pounds to be paid me on my marriage day; but that was clogged with a proviso that it should be with the (entire and solicited) approbation of Charles.

“He was left sole executor, no other person being joined with him in the trust, nor in his guardianship over me.

“It was doubtless, this unlimited power that he had delegated to his son, that made the late lord Elwood so uneasy in his dying moments, and had the arrival of the gentlemen of the law, whom he had sent for, taken place while he was in possession of his faculties, there is no doubt that he would have made a material alteration.

“The remains of lord Elwood were scarce interred, when our house became a scene of dissipation, and wild disorder.

“The present lord Elwood seems to exist no longer than he is surrounded by volatile companions, and too frequently plunges with them into excesses, degrading to his rank in society, and baneful to his character as an individual.

“Since the death of his father, lord Elwood has entirely revolutionized his behaviour towards me, the most disgusting fondness and levity has taken place of the frigid rudeness that then preponderated.

“There is scarce a day passes that I am not shocked by some of his boisterous love, so different from that pure disinterested affection that ought to subsist between brother and sister.

“If I remonstrate, I am laughed at; and lord Elwood tells me that he loves me ten times better than ever sister was loved before.

“Each time of my requesting to return to Woodford, he did not absolutely refuse his assent, but used various artifices to protract my stay in Seymour-street.

“The increasing absurdity of his behaviour became at length so provoking, that I acquainted him with my determination of waiting no longer for his consent, but to return immediately to my Woodford cottage. He entreated me to remain till the next day, and he would no longer oppose my wishes of retirement. Alas! his word was not adhered to.

“It is needless and uninteresting to repeat all that passed on this occasion. Suffice it to say, when he had completely worn out his talents for procrastination, that he acknowledged having disposed of my loved retreat to Mr. Hildon, one of his fashionable friends.

“This act of tyranny, on his part, makes me more than ever anxious to quit a roof where I am constantly exposed to insult, but know not which way to accomplish it.

“Under this dilemma, I have ventured, my dearest friends, to solicit your advice; and such is my respect for, and thorough knowledge of, your amiable virtues, that I voluntarily promise to be guided by you, and abide by the determination you may be

pleased to make.”

CHAPTER. VIII.

MRS. Radnor shed tears of sympathy, and lamented, in terms of unfeigned regret, the peculiar situation of her young friend; she departed from Seymour-street, with a promise of consulting Mr. Radnor, and when they had duly reflected on the subject, she would impart the result to Berthalina.

Mr. Radnor had no engagements for the evening. At the instigation of his lady, orders were issued to the porter that they were not at home to any company, and this truly happy and domestic pair sat *tête à tête*, by the drawing-room fire, (Miss Radnor having accompanied her aunt, lady Bevil, to Drury-lane theatre, to witness the performance of a new comedy, from a female pen, which met with deserved applause,) while Mrs. Radnor repeated, and her husband attentively listened to Berthalina's history.

“With a few embellishments,” remarked Mr. Radnor, “the adventures of our young friend and favourite, my dearest Emma, might be swelled into a wondrous tale by some fair scribbler in this *novel-writing*, and *novel-reading* age, and the lovely Berthalina shine with lustre as the heroine of the piece, after she has undergone a few more distresses, horrors, disappointments, love, and a whole train of *et ceteras* calculated for the composition.”

“From which, all good angels guard her!” said Mrs. Radnor, laughing.

“But trifling apart, I am sorry, my dear Emma, for the lovely girl: her youth and inexperience, unprotected by a female guardian, and her admonitory counsels, are in dangerous hands. There is certainly a most strange mystery in the actions of the late lord Elwood, to us impenetrable, for we have no clue by which to guide our researches. I may err in my thoughts; but I own myself apt to imagine the assertion first made by him, when under the assumed name of Elwin, to Mrs. Aubrey, that he was not the father of her young charge, to be the truth, and that some after circumstance, perhaps the request of the dying lady, might make him acknowledge Berthalina as a daughter, and impose a story on his friends which they could not well contradict, as the divorced lady Elwood fled from society with her seducer, and did not again appear in the gay world. It is true, her death was reported, but not generally believed.

“Let the real cause be as it will, lord Elwood was wrong; his actions with respect to Berthalina reflect discredit on his memory. He ought not to have left her mind wrapt in painful mystery; had he, from peculiar circumstances, been compelled to conceal her real history from her knowledge, he ought to have substituted one that would carry with it a plausible appearance, and entrusted her and her *fortune*, since it appears, by his own assertions, frequently used, that a noble one was her due, to the care of some friends, in whom he could confide, and not to his libertine son; surely he must have been infatuated, to have committed such an error against common sense and propriety.”

“I must own, Mr. Radnor, that your suggestions have raised in me a hope that lord Elwood is not the brother of Berthalina, and that he himself is conscious there exists no such tie between them. It would clear him of that degree of criminality which I have perhaps wrongfully attached to his conduct—you know to what I allude.”

“I do, and you will also admit, that if such is in reality the case, his actions, though not criminal, are highly reprehensible, as it makes Berthalina suffer the worst of mental agonies; nor can he blame the world, (for what has it to judge by but appearances?) if it attaches to him guilt with which he is unacquainted; when he acts with such inconsistency the character of a guardian and brother. But our comments are of no use to Berthalina, we must act as well as think.”

“Have you then resolved on any plan?”

“I have not; it is an important concern, and requires much consideration. Suppose, for the present, we instruct Caroline to ask, as if the invitation was her own planning, Miss Elwood to accompany her to Myrtle Bank, where she is going to wile away the Christmas.”

“I approve your plan, and as the party will mostly be a juvenile one, there can appear no singularity in the request.”

“Be it so then, dear Emma, you will impart our wishes to Caroline; I can anticipate her readiness to obey them.”

CHAPTER. IX.

LORD Elwood and Berthalina were just sitting down to a late breakfast, so occasioned by the former having been up till five in the morning at the marchioness of T——'s masquerade, when the fair Caroline entered the parlour.

“You have breakfasted, Miss Radnor, I presume,” said lord Elwood, after the first compliments had passed.

Caroline thought he spoke this with much coolness; but she dissembled her ideas, and replied, with great gaiety,

“Your presumption is right, lord Elwood; I have breakfasted long since—so long that I had almost forgot it; so I will take a cup of coffee with you.”

“Was you at the masquerade?”

“No, my lord; I was honoured with a ticket, but I was old-fashioned enough to decline attendance, on account of a pre-engagement to attend lady Bevil to Drury-lane, a new comedy being performed, the production of an amiable authoress who has found a liberal patroness in my aunt: a-propos, Berthalina, I am charged with a commission for you, from that lady: she intends to pass her Christmas among her tenantry at Myrtle Bank, in Gloucestershire; to enliven the scene, she intends to invite a large party, a few of her own select friends, and the rest are to be composed of young people, out of compliment to poor Elinor.”

“How is that dear, ill-fated girl?” asked Miss Elwood.

“Much more tranquillized, Bertha—but I will talk of her to you at some other period. Now I must really chide you for this interruption.”

“I entreat pardon,” said Miss Elwood, in childish, lisping accents, “and will do so no more.”

“On that condition, I forgive you, unthinking child,” replied Caroline, with equal mimicry, “but you have put me out of the thread of my discourse, that I scarce know how to resume it—now I have it.

“Among the juveniles, lady Bevil *expects* Miss Elwood, and her niece Caroline Radnor *commands* it; we shall not set out till next Tuesday. My aunt, myself, you, and the lively Miss Lavenant, whom you so much admired when she was on a visit to us at Woodford, will fill the travelling-coach, and our attendants will follow in another vehicle.”

Berthalina was at no loss to comprehend the motive from whence this invitation sprung; and her heart overflowed with grateful emanations, which she expressed in an intelligent glance, to the amiable Caroline, while she replied,

“My thanks are due to lady Bevil. I will avail myself of her kindness, and shall be in Grosvenor-place at an early hour on the appointed day.”

Lord Elwood’s face was crimsoned with the suffusions of rage and disappointment, which he in vain strove to conceal by the affected mildness with which he said,

“Berthalina, I cannot consent to your acceptance of this invitation. My sincere thanks are due for the honour lady Bevil has bestowed by her favourable notice of my sister; but I have engaged a large party of my friends to accompany me to Stanton Abbey, where I mean to remain at least two months, and expect Berthalina to do the honours of my house, as there are several ladies who have accepted my invitation.”

“I wish,” said Berthalina, “that you had apprised me of your intention; I should have then been prepared, and not committed this error.”

“As for the error, that Miss Radnor will excuse, since she is acquainted that you knew not I had pre-engaged you, when you so readily accepted her invitation; had you first consulted me, you would have acted with more propriety.”

“You men are strange creatures,” said Miss Radnor, jestingly, “born with a wish to rule; and most rigidly do you exact obedience from the weaker vessels, over whom you claim authority.”

“Nay, now you are too severe.” “Not at all, my lord, you cannot deny what I advance; I am sorry I cannot stay now, to argue the subject with you, but I have three or four engagements on my hands this morning, and among the rest, I must to lady Bevil, and give a negative to the hopes she had formed of Miss Elwood’s company to Myrtle Bank. Adieu, Berthalina, I shall expect you to visit me in Grosvenor-place, previous to my setting out.”

Berthalina sighed out an affirmative, but her spirits were so much depressed, that she could scarce return the adieus of her fair friend, as lord Elwood handed her to the chariot.

Berthalina, when her brother returned to the parlour, prudently forbore to expostulate on the refusal he had given, and mildly inquired who was to be their guest at the Abbey.

“O it is time enough, we shall see; I do not intend to leave Seymour-street this fortnight.”

“It is time enough, we shall see!” repeated Berthalina; “why you told Miss Radnor your party was formed.”

“It is so; I did not understand your question: my mind is ill at ease. I wish Melmoth was here, he promised to execute a little commission for me, and from his delay, I fear he has not been successful.”

“I hope the contrary, for your sake.”

“Is it possible that you are interested in my happiness?”

“Most assuredly I am; should not the near affinity in which we stand related to each other inspire an affectionate solicitude.”

“Yes, dear amiable girl; and believe me, I rejoice that my father introduced you so happily to my notice, and did not suffer us to remain in that ignorance of each other that marked our younger years.”

The entrance of Mr. Melmoth proved a seasonable relief to Berthalina, who had found it difficult to listen, with patience, to the unmeaning flattery of her brother; for what else could she term it, when his actions were so widely at variance with his words.

She retired to her chamber, and wept for the disappointment she had experienced in her brother’s non-acceptance of lady Bevil’s kindness.

She had no resource from which comfort was to be derived. Mrs. Aubrey, her long, affectionate, faithful friend, grew daily worse; and Berthalina anticipated, with a kind of horror, the dissolution of this venerable worthy woman.

Lord Elwood was from home during the remainder of the day, and the weather being frosty, and the pavements perfectly dry, our heroine determined on a walk; recollecting she had some orders to give to her dress-maker in Sackville-street, she chose that for her promenade, accompanied by Morton, a genteel young woman, who had been hired to attend immediately on her person, soon after lord Elwood’s decease.

Having completed her commands to the obsequious Madame Lavie, she was returning; when just at the entrance of the Albany, she encountered Mrs. Warner (late Charlton). A gleam of pleasure shone in both their countenances, and testified the sentiments the meeting inspired, before they could articulate a sentence.

“Will you go home with me, Miss Elwood, and rest yourself a little?”

“I will accept your kindness, for I feel rather fatigued, provided we have not far to go.”

“Not above twenty yards, my dear lady. When you come into this neighbourhood, you might honour your poor servant with a call!”

“Had I known, Mrs. Warner, that Golden-square had been so near, I should certainly have called on you; but I am such a stranger to this part of the world, that I had not the least idea of what part of the metropolis you was in.”

A few minutes brought them to Tichbourne-street, and they soon entered the respectable residence of Mrs. Warner.

A man, whose prepossessing countenance was certainly a passport to the heart of a sensible observer, for the good-nature and honesty there displayed, respectfully bowed to our heroine.

“Miss Elwood, my dear,” said Mrs. Warner, “the young lady whom you have heard me mention with so many encomiums.”

“I must confess,” replied the good man, “that I thought you were biassed by partiality, whose exaggerations are often excusable; but my opinion is now reversed, and I do not think you have said enough in praise of this young lady, to do her justice.”

Berthalina thanked him for this compliment, by a graceful inclination of the head, and congratulated him on his marriage with her worthy friend.

She remained above half an hour in the back-parlour, with Mrs. Warner, when the entrance of some young gentlemen and ladies, who said they were come to make inquiries of the health of the latter, interrupted a conversation in which Berthalina found herself interested.

The cheeks of Mrs. Warner, which usually shone with the ruddy glow of health, were now transformed to a deadly pale. Instead of introducing Miss Elwood, and her visitors, to each other, she made signs to the former, that she wished her immediate departure, and Berthalina complied.

In passing through the shop Miss Elwood descried a servant in an elegant livery, apparently in attendance on the party who had occasioned her departure.

As she stopt to speak to Mr. Warner, this domestic, who was a man considerably past the meridian of life, gazed on her with fixt attention; not that there was the least appearance of impertinence in his scrutiny, but seemed to take its rise from some innate suggestion of importance.

As she was quitting the shop, she overheard the man ask Mr. Warner her name; but her attention was drawn off from the subject, by observing a barouche, in which sat

two ladies, drest (or rather undrest), in the extreme of fashion, and Mr. Melmoth. Lord Elwood was the driver.

Berthalina hoped to avoid their recognition; but she was disappointed, for lord Elwood, stopping to notice some passing object, beheld his sister.

Melmoth had previously observed Miss Elwood, and he also *observed* that Miss Elwood did not wish to attract their attention, and his temper was too accommodating to hazard the giving her the least uneasiness.

Mr. Melmoth was one of those persons who have the happy and valuable art of making scarcely a moderate income supply the place of a large fortune.

To effect this, he insinuated himself into the favour of those who were greatly pre-eminent in the possession of the good things of this life.

To lord Elwood he had made himself particularly useful, by the undertaking of variety of commissions, with regard to his amours, gaming, &c. and being an incessant flatterer, and outward approver of all his lordship's actions.

In return, he commanded all the luxuries of life, being an almost constant inmate with lord Elwood.

Lord Elwood checked the horses, and the barouche stopt, while he cast a scrutinizing gaze on the house Miss Elwood had just quitted, and a stern one at her.

He then drove furiously on, and Berthalina, incensed by this insulting behaviour, and equally hurt by what had occurred at Mrs. Warner's, returned home dejectedly.

An apologizing note that she received in the evening, from the latter, while it explained the behaviour of Mrs. Warner, and erased the fear that Miss Elwood had imbibed, of her not being thought worthy of an introduction to them, gave fresh pain to her thoughts.

Mrs. Warner apologized for a rudeness that she expressed herself constrained to act, as she knew it to be the express wish of her late lady, and lord Elwood, that Berthalina and the young party who had entered so unexpectedly, should never form the least acquaintance with each other, could it possibly be prevented. "And I should have thought myself (continued Mrs. Warner) highly culpable, had I in the least accelerated what they so much wished to avoid."

Berthalina, calling to mind what lord Elwood had said respecting the Rainsforth family, did not entertain an idea but it was them she had accidentally seen, and felt a reluctance at the prohibition; for their exterior graces were such as highly prepossessed her in their favour, and gave rise to a wish of reciprocal friendship.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN lord Elwood descended to the breakfast-parlour, among other notes, he found a card from the Radnor family, inviting him and Miss Elwood to dinner on the subsequent day.

Strange to tell, lord Elwood had an invincible dislike to these amiable people, but for which he would, if questioned, find it hard to account.

To two causes alone, could Berthalina, to whom this aversion had, in several instances become apparent, ascribe it; the one, that he thought himself humbled in their presence by their superior virtues and pursuits, so dissimilar from those followed by him and his associates; and the other, the friendship they extended towards her—strange cause for a brother's hatred.

On the entrance of Melmoth, who had slept in Seymour-street, the preceding night, lord Elwood was yet undecided with regard to the assenting, or giving a negative to the invitation.

He honoured Melmoth by consulting him.

He gave his opinion, that it should be, by all means, accepted.

“Why so—your reason?”

“Recollect, my dear lord, you refused Miss Elwood the pleasure that she and her fair friend seemed to have so much at heart, a visit to Lady Bevil; this second negative would seem like a direct break, and I think it is good policy to keep as well as we can with every one, even those we dislike in our hearts.”

“You are right, Melmoth; I believe I shall be guided by you, in this instance, for my refusal may only set those wise-headed Radnors plotting with Berthalina, against me. So write a note, in my name, that I will do myself the honour of waiting on them at the proposed time.”

Miss Elwood heard, with pleasure, the invitation of the Radnors, and its acceptance; and she flattered herself that she had been deceived in the angry glances lord Elwood had cast on her the preceding day; or that he had obliterated from his mind the circumstance that gave rise to his ireful emotions.

But she erred in forming such a supposition.

Lord Elwood was one of those characters that are too fond of *power* to let the most trivial opportunity pass unnoticed, by which it could be displayed.

When Berthalina rose to leave the room, lord Elwood, with a well-assumed authority, said,

“I have no wish to enter into inquiries concerning your motives for condescending to visit Mrs. Warner; but I strictly prohibit you, while under my protection, from repeating it. It may lead to inconveniences of which you are not aware.”

“Will you be pleased to explain them?” said Berthalina.

This was a question for which lord Elwood was not the least prepared, and he stammered out some common-place invectives on woman’s curiosity.

Berthalina, with great spirit, replied, she “did not think her laudable desire of being apprised of events which materially concerned her, could in any way be compared with the *curiosity* on which he commented;” and with these words she left the room.

Nothing material occurred till their visit in Grosvenor-place, when lord Elwood and his sister were surprised at finding themselves the only expected guests.

The dinner was elegant, such the polished urbanity of the donors, that lord Elwood, in spite of his prejudices, could not avoid being delighted with the amiable trio that composed the family.

But this sentiment was of short duration, being put to flight by Mrs. Radnor during the dessert.

That lady observed to lord Elwood, that “their motive for inviting him to Grosvenor-place, was not entirely disinterested, as they had to entreat a favour of him.”

The answer was such as politeness dictated—his “happiness to oblige,” &c.

“My daughter, (continued Mrs. Radnor), informs me that your lordship and our young friend Berthalina pass your Christmas at Stanton Abbey, Bedfordshire.”

Lord Elwood gave an assenting bow.

“And that you take a large party with you, to enliven the gloom.”

Lord Elwood wondering what this was meant to preface, answered,

“That owing to it being so determined, he was, though reluctantly, forced to give a negative to lady Bevil’s invitation. Most sorry to separate his sister from her amiable friend, whose society was such an invaluable acquisition.”

The lively Caroline, with a stifled laugh, whispered to Berthalina,

“How easy it is to flatter: your brother is a wholesale dealer in that commodity; but I am afraid, (that is, I hope,) he will lay a trap to catch himself.”

Berthalina was at a loss to fathom the meaning of her friend, till Mrs. Radnor solved the mystery, by saying,

“I am happy, my lord, that it is in my power to point out to you the means by which you can accelerate the felicity of the young ladies, without infringing on your engagements. I was apprised by lady Bevil, (a few hours after Caroline’s return from Seymour-street,) that her son had invited, without her knowledge, a young gentleman to join them at Myrtle Bank, whom it would not be pleasant for Miss Radnor to meet, as he had been rejected by that lady, on his offering her his hand, and received his dismissal with a very ill grace.”

“Now, my lord, we are not such unreasonable parents as to desire our Caroline to stay with two croaking old folks, when she can be so much better engaged with companions suited to her years; and though we may err in point of etiquette, yet we think formality ought to be set aside, when people esteem each other, and as a proof of what I say, we wish you to permit my daughter to accompany Miss Elwood to the abbey. What say you, my Lord?”

What, indeed, could he say?—but he was “most happy in this arrangement—proud of the honour they had done him, and hoped Miss Radnor would find Stanton Abbey, and the company, agreeable to her taste. What he thought, was another consideration—his bosom was the seat of stifled rage, and his attentive observers could perceive strong emotions of chagrin, passing like clouds over his countenance, which all his art could not conceal.

Berthalina was all joy, and she freely expressed it. Caroline was in high spirits, at her scheme, for she was the plotter, having succeeded, and her parents delighted. This gave a lively turn to the conversation, and lord Elwood, ashamed of appearing the only one not pleased in the quintetto, joined in their mirth, with feigned vivacity, till he really felt, what he at first assumed.

Thus was the evening spent in innocent conviviality. Mrs. Radnor detained their guests to supper; and they parted at a late hour, with lord Elwood’s invitation for the amiable family to dine at his house on the following Monday, when he would fix the day on which the party would set out for Bedfordshire.

That lord Elwood was taken in his own toils, soon became apparent, from a number of unguarded circumstances that fell under the observation of Berthalina, and she soon found that he had all the guests to invite that were to accompany them to the abbey.

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor, and Caroline, dined at lord Elwood's according to the appointment; and on that day fortnight, the party, consisting of eight gentlemen, and six ladies, left town for the abbey, in close carriages, owing to the intense severity of the weather.

Miss Radnor and Berthalina soon found their associates not to be in the least suited to their wishes, or the ideas they had formed of rational society; but they kept these observations to themselves, and behaved with a rectitude of conduct that while it repelled the libertine, assured their admiration.

Lord Elwood seemed to attach himself to lady Laurentia Brierly, who had accompanied her sister lady Mary Bellinger, and her husband, to the abbey. She was co-heiress to the personal estates of the late Earl of Carrisfort, and as such was esteemed a great fortune.

She had nearly completed her twenty-seventh year, and was yet unmarried. As she was not deficient in personal charms, this long celibacy had excited much wonder, and a variety of opinions; some attributing it to her excessive vanity, and others to a juvenile disappointment, of which her ladyship had been suspected; but the particulars never transpired.

Mr. Melmoth aspired so far as to heave soft sighs for the lovely, soul-enchancing, Caroline Radnor, which were not regarded; or if they were, it gave rise to a painful sigh, that he had inspired a passion she could not return, and well she knew the pangs of hopeless love. In her fair bosom *romantic, unsought* affection, and the dictates of prudence were at war. She loved, in fact, where she could not esteem, and oft, in the dead of night, while Berthalina slept, for they shared one chamber, she gave way to tears of poignant regret, that she had volunteered herself a visitor to Stanton Abbey. While Berthalina, amid other woes, could not reckon hapless love; her heart was yet her own.

CHAPTER XI.

THE gay party had enlivened the gloomy pile of Stanton Abbey, above six weeks when an incident occurred, that proved an ever memorable one in the mind of Berthalina.

A party was formed for skating on a piece of water, about a league distant from the abbey. Miss Radnor declined going, as she had a severe cold, and Berthalina, as she was no proficient in the exercise, remained with her. Mr. Melmoth followed her example, replying to the raillery of his companions, that he could not be so wilfully erring against the laws of gallantry, as to leave two fair ladies together for their own amusement.

He was not to be dissuaded from his purpose, though the ladies would have absolved him from all unpoliteness, and even requested him to accompany the skaters.

Miss Radnor sat netting by the fire, Melmoth at the piano, playing over some music which had been sent from London, the preceding evening, and Berthalina reading in the window-seat, when a loud scream from the latter, electrified her companions, and made every nerve thrill with terror.

Melmoth flew towards her, and eagerly inquired the cause of her alarm; speechless through apprehension, she could only point towards an object which instantaneously awakened every particle of humanity in his breast, and to his honour be it spoken, he possessed a considerable share.

We have spoken of his failings, and injustice, let us acknowledge he had virtues also.

Melmoth bounded from the parlour, with the rapidity of lightning, followed by Berthalina; while Miss Radnor, to whom the whole scene was inexplicable, arose, and walked to one of the windows, in hope of discerning the cause that had prompted such speed; but she was disappointed.

Melmoth was already out of sight, being hidden from view by a copse of trees, belonging to the abbey; but the light form of Berthalina pursuing his steps along the high road, only served to increase her astonishment; and had she believed in the tales so often told, of magical influence, she would have considered them as spirited away by its power.

She really felt alarmed for their safety, and determined to go as far as the copse of trees that now obstructed her view, to see if she could there be more fortunate in her discoveries.

Wrapping her shawl round her, she sallied forth, regardless of her indisposition, while anxious for the friend of her bosom. She had nearly gained the spot appointed,

when she discerned Melmoth, running towards her with the same celerity that he had left the abbey.

Had it not been for the scream with which Berthalina prefaced this mysterious incident, Miss Radnor would have imbibed the idea that they had been running a race for the ascertaining a superiority of swiftness; but she dismissed the passing thought, as grossly absurd, and hurried on to meet Melmoth, and learn from him the cause of this alarm.

“For Heaven’s sake, my sweet Caroline, do not impede my progress. I must hasten to the abbey, and procure assistance; you will endanger your health by proceeding, and can be of no service: a sad accident has occurred, and—”

“Where is Berthalina?”

“Just by the bridge, employed in a tender act of humanity.”

Melmoth hastened to the abbey, and Miss Radnor proceeded on till she arrived at the spot, where Berthalina sat on the ground, supporting on her lap the head of a youth whose form was bathed in blood, and evinced but faint signs of life.

As soon as Berthalina (who was greatly revived by the Hungary-water with which Miss Radnor chased her temples) could articulate, she informed her friend, that as she sat reading by the window, she happened to raise her eyes, and discerned a horse dashing on with frightful velocity, by the road that skirted the sloping lawn, with his unfortunate master trailing on the ground, one foot being entangled in the stirrup.

It was this caused her scream, and Melmoth’s precipitancy, which happily had so much effect as to rescue the young gentleman from his perilous situation, at the instant the animal plunged into the rapid stream, which was now finishing his career.

Melmoth returned, with four servants, bearing a litter, most commodiously contrived: on this they placed the young gentleman, who apparently was not more than fourteen or fifteen years old, with an intent to carry him to the abbey.

They had nearly reached the gates, when a servant in livery came riding towards them, and expressed, in terms that evinced gratitude, love, affection and duty united, his grief at the conformation of his fears. And he slowly followed the mournful train to the abbey, from whence a servant was instantly dispatched to the next town, for surgical assistance.

The man having informed them that this unfortunate youth was the honourable Edward Hartley, younger brother to the gentleman whom he had the honour of serving, departed to apprise his master of the catastrophe.

The surgeons having attended to their interesting patient, were happy to announce to Melmoth and the ladies, (who were impatiently waiting to hear their opinion,) that none of the many contusions he had received, were dangerous, and there was no fear of his doing well, if he was kept quiet, and his mind composed.

In less than an hour the honourable George Hartley was announced as the brother of their young guest.

To a form not ungracefully *embonpoint*, and above the middle height, Mr. Hartley added a visage in which every perfection of masculine beauty seemed united; his eyes, of the deepest hazel, shone with transcendent brightness, mellowed by expressive sensibility. His manners were truly polished, devoid of austerity, or pedantic affectation: his age twenty-three.

From him they learnt that he had lately purchased the estate of Oakley and its hall, together with the stud and other appurtenances.

Among the horses was one, so spirited that none of the grooms cared to mount him. But Mr. Edward, in whose mind was blended a considerable share of vivacity and courage, would insist on breaking in the animal. In the course of a few days, by exercising him about the grounds, he became tractable, and the youth, in the absence of his tutor and brother, ventured with him on the road, when the animal, being startled by a passing vehicle, became unruly, and exerting a frightful speed, was soon, with his youthful rider, out of sight of the attending groom.

As the road branched forth in three various directions, the man was at a loss which to take, and this dilemma considerably retarded the fulfilment of his wish to know the fate of his beloved young master.

To Miss Elwood the gratitude of Mr. Hartley was unbounded, and Melmoth's vanity and interest both gratified by his share of merited praise, and an invitation to be as constant a guest as he pleased, at Oakley Hall, where his presence would always be esteemed a favour.

Lord Elwood and his friends did not return to the abbey till the approaching darkness indicated that it was time for them to finish their erratic, which had extended to a much greater length than was at first proposed.

Dinner being ordered at five, the company separated in the hall, and repaired to their respective boudoirs, as they had scarce time to make their toilettes before their appearance would be required.

When they assembled in the drawing room, (previous to their being summoned to the dinner-saloon,) the absence of Misses Elwood and Radnor was accounted for by the

entrance of an attendant, who came to announce that they were both too much indisposed to appear at table, but hoped to be able to join their friends in the evening.

Lord Elwood anxiously inquired the cause, and was answered by Mr. Melmoth, with a concise relation of the events of the morning, with a conclusion, that Miss Radnor's cold had been so much increased, and Miss Elwood's spirits so hurried and overcome by the accident, that they were both obliged to have recourse to their chamber.

Lord Elwood seemed greatly agitated, and remained some time in an attitude that indicated deep thought—at length he said,

“Why, Melmoth, did you bring young Hartley to the abbey; was not the Bell-inn equally as near?”

Thus questioned, and shocked by the unfeeling remark of his patron, Melmoth knew not how to reply: his heart suggesting to him that he had done right, yet fearful of alleging as much, lest he should offend one who had laid him under a multitude of obligations.

He was relieved from this perplexity by dinner being announced, which suspended the subject. But it required no penetration to observe that lord Elwood was restless and uneasy; nor did he once visit the chamber where Mr. Hartley lay, to make the least inquiries concerning his situation.

Miss Radnor entered the drawing-room soon after dinner; but Berthalina was not visible that evening, and her brother imputed that to caprice, which was really caused by languor, the consequence of terror, and a violent cold which she had caught, through leaving the abbey bare-headed, and without any shawl to defend her tender form from the chilling air.

The honourable George Hartley visited his brother daily, and was happy to observe that he made a rapid progress towards recovery.

His feelings were hurt, by observing, that from some cause, to him inexplicable, lord Elwood always contrived to be absent, or engaged, at the time of his visit to the abbey. Nor was this his only cause of wonder; Mr. Melmoth, whom he really esteemed for the eminent service he had rendered Edward, had not, though repeatedly invited, paid one visit to the hall.

This he attributed to the influence of lord Elwood, who in a manner held Melmoth dependent on him; and not to the latter, who seemed flattered by, and very willing to avail himself of, this preliminary towards an honourable friendship.

From the behaviour of his lordship, Mr. Hartley felt himself under much constraint, and would have devised means of removing his brother to the hall, had he not

been aware, that by so doing, he should wound the feelings of Berthalina, who attended the youth with the benign softness of a ministering angel, and seemed greatly hurt at the sullen demeanour of her brother.

Miss Radnor also joined her friend in the humane office of attending her patient, and practising every innocent stratagem to keep up his spirits, and enable him to bear his sufferings, which were really great, with patience and fortitude: for the loftiness of his youthful spirit rendered him at first very irritable and peevish under his confinement.

The behaviour of his fair friends had all the effect they desired, and the tranquillity of his mind greatly accelerated his recovery, and made his heart burn with grateful emanation, towards the lovely pair who abridged their own pleasures, to contribute to his comfort; and he frequently declared, that he “knew not which to admire most, Miss Radnor, for the tales of fancy that she recited with such graceful vivacity, or Miss Elwood’s sweet voice, when she accompanied her harp with his favourite canzonettes.”

CHAPTER XII.

MR. Edward Hartley had been an inmate of the abbey a month, before his removal took place to the hall.

Lord Elwood, and those individuals of his family who had been of such invaluable service to the youth, received from the amiable brother of their late guest, complimentary letters of gratitude.

The two young ladies were each presented with a miniature of the youth, elegantly mounted, and attached to a gold chain of incomparable workmanship.

Mr. Melmoth's letter was accompanied by a gold repeating watch.

And, though last mentioned, not the least valuable, nor then sent, was the present for lord Elwood: a cup of silver, gilt, and embossed with emblematical devices of the accident which brought the youth to the abbey, and the shelter it afforded him.

On the perusal of this letter, a half-smothered "*damnation*" burst from his lips, with

"I wish Hartley would keep his gifts to himself, I hoped to hear no more of him, now his brother is gone to the hall."

"Is gratitude among your catalogue of faults, brother, as you shew such undeserved resentment, at a few memorials being presented?"

Lord Elwood darted an angry glance at his sister, and left the room with an indignant "Psha."

Lady Laurentia Brierly inquired of the party present, if any of them could suggest a cause for the hatred which lord Elwood bore the Hartley family?

But the negative was general, nor was it understood that there ever had been any correspondence existing between them.

Mr. Bellinger remarked, that twenty years since, it was well known in the fashionable circles of that day, that circumstances of a singular nature, most tenaciously concealed from publicity, obliged the Earl of Wynchcombe to reside in Italy. His lordship was then a widower, and he took with him his two children, lord Hartley, and Mr. George, who were then extremely young.

The Earl entered into second nuptials with an Italian lady, about four years after his emigration.

By this lady he had several children, most of whom survived their mother, who died in a decline, about four years since, at Old Brompton; she had not been resident in England many months when her dissolution took place. She was accompanied to England by her own children, and the honourable George Hartley, who had always behaved to her with the most filial tenderness and affection.

Lord Wynchcombe and his eldest son remained at Castella Nuova, and it is presumed that his lordship does not intend to revisit his native land.

“Was the Italian lady handsome?” exclaimed lady Laurentia, with an eagerness of expression that excited a smile at her expense.

“Dear sister,” said lady Mary, (ere her husband could frame a reply,) “how could you ask such a question, did not Mr. Bellinger say that she died in a decline!”

“That might indeed despoil her of personal charms; but is no argument that she had not once possessed beauty, and that in a superlative degree.”

Lady Mary replied, with some tartness, that “Laurentia’s question was not delivered in a manner that expressed that meaning.”

Mr. Bellinger terminated this little *brûlé*, which began to wear a serious aspect, by saying,

“It has been rumoured that lady Wynchcombe was *‘fairest of the fair*; but it would be a difficult task to ascertain the fact, without the liberty (which no curiosity, however great, could warrant,) of applying to Mr. George Hartley, for his decision. As lady Wynchcombe, while at Castella Nuova, was never visible to any company, but a few select friends, and during her short residence in England, though many of her lord’s family, out of compliment to him, waited on her, she refused to see them on the plea of indisposition, and they contented themselves with sending cards of inquiry after her health.”

One of the ladies observing that the late countess must have been an extraordinary, or at least, an eccentric character;

Mr. Bellinger replied, that “her ladyship’s opinion might possibly be correct, but he must acknowledge, he rather supposed the countess to have been the victim of heart-felt sorrows, which led her to so rigid a seclusion; and as the earl was the exact reverse from a tender or conciliating disposition, her fate might have been severe, but, it was to be hoped, unmerited.”

The re-entrance of lord Elwood put a period to this discourse, in which Berthalina felt herself so much interested.

The circumstance of lady Wynchcombe's manner of life, and her dying at Old Brompton about four years since, seemed to coincide with the decease of her mother. Could it be her! The time was certainly the same. That village, she learnt, by an inquiry of Melmoth, was beyond Hyde-park Corner.

Miss Radnor imbibed similar ideas from these observations, and the fair friends exchanged intelligent glances at each other till they retired to dress, when they freely discussed the subject, and Miss Elwood related to Caroline what had passed in her last interview with Mrs. Warner, and a supposition she had formed, that Mr. Edward Hartley was certainly one of the visitors who had entered so mal-a-propos, when she was in Tichbourne-street. It was possible he stood related to her on the maternal side, by the endearing title of brother; but Mr. George Hartley could in no way be so related by the subsequent marriage of his father and her mother, after their respective births. Such was the state of our heroine's heart, that she derived comfort from this suggestion, for much as she admired this amiable young man, she did not wish him for a *brother*.

The settling of this circumstance in her own mind, so engrossed Berthalina, that she almost forgot Miss Radnor being in the boudoir, till that young lady aroused her from this partly-pleasing, painful reverie, by remarking,

“That the precaution of lord Elwood was still an inexplicable mystery, for Rainsforth was not Hartley, and she had hitherto prejudged the former name to belong to the family in which Berthalina might, on her mother's side, claim consanguinity.

The revival of this circumstance, which had for some time lain dormant in her breast, staggered Berthalina's faith in regard of her relationship to the Hartley family, for whom she felt such a strong prepossession, that it seemed, in her opinion, to take its rise from natural instinct; and her thoughts, during the rest of the day, appeared unusually reserved, and abstracted.

In the evening, the party at the abbey, according to previous arrangements, repaired in four carriages to the next town, as they had, at the instance of lord Elwood, condescended to patronize a company of itinerant performers, who had of late been slighted extremely by dame Fortune in the distribution of her favours.

The performance announced for that evening, were Inkle and Yarico, and Fortune's Frolic.

They did not expect to see correct acting from Melmoth's description, who had visited the theatre, *ci-devant* a barn, several times, and declared their tragedies would provoke laughter; and on the contrary, their comedies were so mangled, it was enough to make Thalia's self shed tears. But their motive was humane, and they went with the laudable disposition of pleasing and being pleased.

It occasioned some surprise to every individual of the groupe, but much more to Miss Radnor, that Berthalina should excuse herself from joining in their diversion, just as the carriages were announced.

Her refusal could not be attributed to parsimony, as she had taken several tickets, for which she had paid most liberally.

It is true, she pleaded a sudden head-ach, and that excuse, of course, was accepted by the company, nor did lord Elwood once attempt to alter her resolve.

But not so the affectionate Caroline, she saw through the pretext, and kindly offered to stay with her fair friend.

“It is your heart, my love, and not your head, that is affected. The converse of this morning, and the letters of Mr. Hartley, have caused this dejection of your spirits, going with us will exhilarate them—let me entreat you.”

Berthalina uttered a firm, though polite negative.

“Then suffer me to remain with you: it would excessively pain me, to leave you thus.”

“Be not offended, dear Caroline, when I affirm, that such is my present frame of mind, that I wish for solitude, and you will oblige me by your absence. Nay, do not look with such pique, not for worlds would I offend you, *my more* than sister.”

Caroline thus appealed to, banished a rising emotion that was not favourable to Berthalina, and pressed her extended hand.

Miss Elwood looked so pale, so agitated, that the tender Caroline could not refrain from tears; an unaccountable impression clouded her mind, and she said,

“Instead of a separation for a few hours, I feel as if we had been taking a long, long farewell.”

Berthalina sighed, but rallying her spirits, accused her friend of nourishing a despondency for which *she* had been blaming *her*.

“I fear the infection is epidemic,” said Miss Radnor, half laughing, half seriously; “but I must hasten to the good folks below, who are all in high spirits, and see if I can exchange my languor for some of their hilarity.”

Miss Radnor was met on the stairs by Melmoth, who solicited the honour of handing her to the carriage which was to convey them and lady Mary Bellinger to the *theatre*.

The evening passed away with much pleasantry; but owing to the blunders in scenery, recitation, &c. the hour was late when the curtain dropt.

Lord Elwood had prepared a pleasing surprize for his guests, by an elegant cold collation at the Castle-inn, and it was near three in the morning when the carriages re-entered the gates of Stanton Abbey.

Miss Radnor hastened to her chamber anxious to see her friend, whom she hoped to enliven by a detail of some anecdotes that had transpired that evening.

On withdrawing the curtains of her couch, which was formed (similar to her own) in an arched recess, she shrieked with dismay, for no Berthalina was there, nor had she been in bed.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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