

THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

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

BY SARAH WILKINSON.

VOL. II.

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THE CHILD

OF

MYSTERY.

ALMOST inanimate through surprise, she remained with arms folded, and eyes bent on vacancy, till the entrance of Martha, whom she abruptly asked what was become of Miss Elwood.

Martha, starting at the question of her lady, repeated the words Miss Elwood; and then said (with a wild gaze round the room)—

“Bless me, she is not in bed; there is none of her clothes about, nor”—

“Make no more observations,” said Miss Radnor pettishly; “but tell me what you know of Miss Elwood.”

“I have not seen her since you went from home, ma’am.”

“Where is Morton?”

“She took tea with us in the steward’s room, and then said, Miss Elwood had desired her to come and sit with her till bed-time, and she was to take up some wine and sandwiches for their supper.”

“It can hardly be possible she would sit up to this hour,” exclaimed Miss Radnor, as she passed along the gallery to Berthalina’s boudoir; while a lingering hope filled her bosom that some book had occupied the attention of her friend. This consoling idea was soon chased away: the dressing-room was equally deserted with the chamber, and the refreshments which Morton had placed on a side-table remained untouched.

Miss Radnor dispatched Martha to Morton’s chamber, to see if she was there; but she soon returned with an account of the maid’s being absent as well as the mistress.

When Caroline reflected on the behaviour of her friend the preceding evening, she had scarce a doubt that an elopement had been preconcerted; but with whom, she had yet to learn, as she could not for a moment harbour a supposition of the honourable George Hartley being the hero of the tale, as she had never observed on his part the least word or look that could be construed as a symptom of a stronger sentiment than—grateful respect, and friendly admiration.

Anxious for her friend, though shocked at the apparent duplicity of her conduct, Miss Radnor soon made Berthalina's absence known to lord Elwood. His rage was excessive, and, in the height of his resentment, he vowed to sacrifice her to his fury the first moment he could regain her to his power.

Miss Radnor had some difficulty in calming this wrathful ebullition. At length she so far succeeded, as to put matters *en train* for a pursuit.

Servants, mounted on the fleetest steeds, were dispatched in various directions, to make inquiries at the inns, and, if possible, to find a clue to guide them on their progress.

Lord Elwood, and the rest of the gentlemen, proceeded along the main road towards London; and the ladies—none of them professing themselves Amazons willing to go in quest of adventures, retired to their chambers, after they had been so unseasonably disturbed with a variety of conjectures on the flight of Berthalina, most of which were probably widely dissenting from the truth.

In vain the gentle Caroline sought excuses for Berthalina in her own merciful breast. That part of the behaviour which seemed so exceptionable on the part of lord Elwood in Seymour-street, had not been revived at the abbey; and her desertion could only be the effect of a clandestine correspondence most artfully concealed, or an unjustifiable caprice.

During the two subsequent days, the ladies remained alone at the abbey. On the third, the gentlemen returned from an unsuccessful pursuit.

In the course of the week, every individual that had been engaged in the research, returned with the like account; nor could they find the least trace of the fair fugitive, or her attendant.

To leave lord Elwood was now thought expedient by the party, as he might be at liberty to pursue such measures as might be judged requisite with respect to Berthalina, and the alteration her mysterious absence must of course make in his domestic arrangements.

His lordship expressed his regret at the necessity there was for his acquiescence to this proposal, as his occasional absence from the abbey, where he meant to remain a few weeks longer as the most likely place for him to hear intelligence (if any could be procured) of his sister, would prevent him from paying his guests those attentions he could wish, in return for the honour of their society.

Miss Radnor was to return to town in Mr. Bellinger's carriage with that gentleman and lady Mary—lady Laurentia having accepted an invitation to accompany sir John and lady Warrington (who had been of the party) to the north.

Previous to the departure of the amiable Caroline from Stanton Abbey, she had a conversation of a considerable length with lord Elwood.

She heard from him that he had not the least reason to suppose that the honourable George Hartley was concerned, either directly or indirectly, with Berthalina's elopement, though his suspicions had, at first, rested on that gentleman. Every inquiry he had made tended to prove the contrary.

Miss Radnor, with heart-felt tears, deplored the ignorance she was in respecting her loved—yes, still loved friend, and eagerly interrogated his lordship if he had ever any reason to suppose that his sister had any clandestine correspondence.

“Never, my lovely, amiable girl,” was the reply, “though I now conjecture the over earnestness with which she was, for a long time, soliciting me to permit her to return with Mrs. Aubrey to Woodford, had its foundation in that object.”

Miss Radnor, with a long-drawn sigh, felt obliged to cherish the same opinion.

“Your tears, and the tender solicitude you express,” continued lord Elwood, “are, I fear, bestowed on one no longer worthy those precious proofs of friendship. May you”—and he pressed her hands between his own—“May you be happier in a lover—in a husband.”

The suffused cheeks of Caroline betrayed to her observant companion that, with a heart formed for friendship, it was also formed for love, and vibrating with every virtuous emotion of that susceptible passion; and in soothing accents he intreated to know if his friend might hope—

“*Friend*, my lord: what *friend*?—I cannot define your meaning,” replied Caroline, with increasing embarrassment.

“Melmoth—my bosom friend, my brother; I scruple not to avow him such—I believe him worthy of a lady's love.”

Miss Radnor saw the error into which lord Elwood had fallen, and was anxious to remove it, as well as to put a period to any hopes that Mr. Melmoth might have presumed to imbibe. She was aware that his lordship would not mind, in the quixotism of his friendship, aiding his confidant in the securing her hand, by setting him off in the most flattering colours; and she was also aware, that neither her parents, nor herself, could regard Melmoth as a proper alliance; and rallying her spirits, she said:—

“Is it, my lord, at the instance of Mr. Melmoth, that you have thus questioned me?”

“No, by heavens! but I will candidly give you the reason.”

“You will oblige me.”

‘I have long perceived my friend Melmoth to be widely dissenting from that liveliness of manner that forms a leading feature in his character. I frequently pressed him on the subject. Thus urged, he owned it was love—love for an amiable object, now my guest. Nothing further could I obtain. But though he refused me a verbal confession, my curiosity was soon gratified: his eyes, and several tell-tale instances when in the presence of Miss Radnor, disclosed the truth. I knew not how to act; I saw and pitied.—Shall I proceed—or’—

Miss Radnor inclined her head in acquiescence.

Lord Elwood proceeded.

“In our present conversation, when the subject turned on love, there was a certain something, indescribable in language, that betrayed you as labouring under the influence of that passion, tortured by concealment; and it struck me that I might eventually serve both you and Melmoth, by setting matters in a right train between you.”

“Is it possible that lord Elwood can argue thus? Does he suppose I would consent to a clandestine marriage, even allowing’—

Lord Elwood hastily interrupted what she would have said, by urging that love had the power to level all distinctions.

Again she would have spoke, but he went on rapidly, observing—

“It is most true, your parents, Miss Radnor, may not at first approve of such an alliance for their heiress; but, when the first height of their indignation wears off, they will, without doubt, accord their forgiveness, rather than drive you to dilemmas incompatible with your rank; for they must allow your fault to proceed from an affection not in your power to controul.”

“May you, my lord,” said Miss Radnor, with a voice that indicated a proper degree of spirit and feminine resentment—“may you thus consider, if my poor deluded friend, Berthalina, sues your forgiveness, and urges an ungovernable passion as the extenuation of her fault.”

Lord Elwood appeared confused, and at a loss to reply.

And Miss Radnor, unwilling to leave the slightest idea on his mind of her favouring the attachment of Melmoth, continued with much firmness:—

“If your favoured friend, my lord, has unfortunately imbibed a passion of the tender and honourable kind for me, I am truly sorry, though I have never intentionally given him the slightest reason on which to found a hope: for it can never be returned. It is not that duty decrees this, but inclination; and I trust I shall be credited when I aver, that I have not the slightest tincture of partiality for Mr. Melmoth.”

Thus saying, she left the room, and repaired to lady Mary Bellinger’s boudoir, lord Elwood neither having the power or desire to detain her, being struck by her admonitions concerning his sister, and her firm rejection of Melmoth, whom he immediately sought, and related what had passed, as well as a new train of conjectures that had risen in his mind; in which he was strengthened by a coincidence of the opinions of his auditor.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER the escort of the Bellingers, Miss Radnor returned to her parents, but not the lively girl that their fond hearts had anticipated to meet. She had written to them several letters, mentioning the mysterious flight of Berthalina, and circumstances subsequent to that event. This, they would allow, might have caused a dejection on the spirits, but not to that extreme degree in which Caroline indulged; and they mutually reported that, in friendship to Miss Elwood, they had suffered their dear child to such a long absence at the abbey, among a party that not one individual which composed it had their entire approbation, neither for their manners, nor the extravagant examples they afforded.

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor were very minute in their inquiries respecting the absence of Berthalina. The answers they received, though partially given by their daughter, were such as tended to enlarge their suspicions, that lord Elwood was not so uninformed with regard to her elopement as he pretended. But Miss Radnor was strenuous in his justification.

Mrs. Radnor, by the desire of her husband, went to Tichbourne-street, to make some purchases of the Warners, in hopes that they might cast some light on this intricate subject.

But the unfeigned surprise that marked the features of these good people, testified they were utter strangers to the transactions at the abbey, which Mrs. Radnor related; and they joined with her in deploring that a deviation from propriety, on the part of Berthalina, should forfeit her the esteem of her friends.

Mrs. Radnor endeavoured, but without success, to lead Mrs. Warner into some particulars respecting the birth of Miss Elwood; for she was cautiously reserved, and gave such answers as tended to increase, instead of allaying the curiosity of that lady with respect to the lovely orphan.

Unwilling to omit a single circumstance, however remote, that might lead to an elucidation of Miss Elwood's flight, and eventually serve her if innocent, Miss Radnor accompanied her mother to Mrs. Aubrey, who was now, through the addition of grief to her corporeal complaints, unable to leave her chamber.

Mrs. Aubrey was a strenuous advocate for Miss Elwood; she insisted on her being the victim of some base stratagem, and not a voluntary fugitive; nor did she hesitate to accuse lord Elwood of being privy to, if not the author of her absence.

Being interrogated by the ladies what cause she had for suspicion, which seemed to them (particularly to Miss Radnor) so ill-founded, she replied, "that there was a mystery in the whole affair beyond her power of development. From the circumstances that attended the dying moments of the late lord, she was led to conclude that he wished

to make some weighty disclosure that respected Berthalina, then known only to his son, and which the latter was anxious should remain so—and his wishes were crowned with success.

“I can only remark,” continued Mrs. Aubrey, “that I am convinced lord Elwood’s bosom has been labouring, from the moment of his father’s death, with some deep design inimical to the peace of Berthalina. My life on it, the sweet child is innocent—she is purity itself—not mountain snow more unsullied than her, who, from infancy, has been all my care, all my hope.—Ah! dear ladies, sympathise with me; I am old and afflicted.—Ah! you know not, nor can language express the pangs the absence of my dear young mistress gives me. To have shrouded her sweet form for an early grave would not have cut my heart so deeply. We know that the Lord giveth, and he taketh away, and we must bow in resignation to his will. But now the thought that she may be exposed to insult and indignity, and no one to save her helpless innocence, maddens my aged brain.”

Mrs. Aubrey was so overcome, that the ladies exerted themselves to calm her, and inspire a hope that Miss Elwood would be restored to them as lovely, as spotless as ever, and account satisfactorily for an absence that had so pained her dearest friends.

“On that,” replied Mrs. Aubrey, “rests all my earthly wishes, and my prayers are fervent that I may be allowed once more to see the dear child, and to have her cleared from that mystery which now envelops her, and mars all her happiest prospects; for was she mistress of a throne, her mind could never be perfectly at ease when she retraced past circumstances, and had no hopes of their elucidation.”

Mrs. Radnor agreed with her on this point; and then expressed a hope that she had been cautious, in the midst of her distress, not to reveal to any of the servants the circumstance that first introduced Miss Elwood to her notice, or any of her doubts respecting the avowals that either the late, or the present lord Elwood, had made concerning the affinity of Berthalina.

Mrs. Aubrey assured her that she had never lost sight of that necessary caution, as she knew not the consequences that arise from such indiscretions, nor indeed had she any authority but her own surmises for alleging that she did not suppose Berthalina to be the daughter of the late lord Elwood. Mrs. Radnor hinted that she rather coincided in this opinion; but Caroline ridiculed such an idea as romantic and improbable.

Indeed, such was her ardour on this subject, and such the encomiums she artfully introduced on lord Elwood’s behaviour to his sister at Stanton Abbey, that Mrs. Aubrey heard her with surprise, and the fond mother with wonder, at such a marked change in her opinion; for the time was not long to recall, since she had declared that lord Elwood was her aversion.

CHAPTER. III.

WHEN the visitors at the abbey, headed by their host, were departed for the *petit théâtre*, which they meant to honour with their presence, Berthalina, opening her writing desk, drew forth a note, which, though twenty times previously perused, she wished once more to investigate.

It was from the honourable George Hartley, and ran thus:

“TO MISS ELWOOD.

“Most amiable of your amiable sex, convinced that you are entirely free from that vanity which leads many a youthful lady to form that erroneous supposition, that she needs only be seen to be beloved, I have ventured to solicit an interview on a subject which materially concerns my happiness and your peace. From me you have not to fear any premature disclosure of passion—my heart, my affections have long been another’s; but that attachment will not stifle the claims of nature, or justice. O Berthalina! most injured fair one, I have much to reveal; longer concealment would be criminal—confide in me as in a brother—regard me as such; deceit lurks not within my bosom. To-night my faithful spies inform me of the absence of the family, to take place by previous appointment; make some excuse—none so good as indisposition.—Beware how you lose an opportunity, that may not again occur, of hearing an explanation of circumstances that so materially concern you. I will be in the now disused lodge, at the southern extremity of the park, where I shall impatiently await your compliance with this request.

Yours, &c.

Oakley Hall.

G. HARTLEY.”

This letter had been found by Berthalina on her toilette as soon as she arose. She inquired of Morton who had delivered to her that note? Her attendant replied, that it had been given to her by a man habited as a peasant, who desired that Miss Elwood might have it the moment she arose, the contents being of consequence. On her asking the usual question of whom it came from? he asserted that he knew not, but it had been given him by a gentleman, who told him on his life not to fail; that there required no answer, and he gave me a crown for my trouble.

“Being assured the contents were of importance,” continued Morton, “I felt it my duty to comply with the request of the peasant, and I placed the letter in a situation where it could not miss your hands.”

Berthalina testified her approbation of what Morton had done. She would have said more, but Miss Radnor at that moment giving indications of waking, she made a signal of silence, and concealed the note in the folds of her dress.

Several times did she, in the course of the day, steal from society to peruse the lines so curiously worded: to haste only could she attribute its imperfections and want of respect. It led her to suppose that it was in Mr. Hartley's power to clear up the mysteries which had hitherto pained her, and she resolved to grant him the desired interview.

The deepest blushes overspread her face when she read his avowal of a prior engagement of affections, and she shuddered with strong emotion at the thought that she had, by some unguarded word or action, betrayed a partiality for Mr. Hartley. She recalled every time they had been in company back to investigation, but could discern nothing on which it appeared possible for him to found such a conjecture, and her heart was ill at ease.

Far, very far from being pleased with what Mr. Hartley had written, she determined to conceal it from Miss Radnor, though it pained her to be deprived of her advice in such a momentous affair. At length she resolved not to accompany the party on the proposed excursion, but to repair to the lodge as soon as they departed, attended by Morton, from whose fidelity she entertained no apprehensions. She would hear what Mr. Hartley had to disclose, and whether it was of a nature to impart to Caroline, before she gave that lady the least hint of what had occurred. At all events, she pre-determined that this should be the only clandestine interview to which he should obtain her acquiescence.

Miss Elwood had expected much opposition from her brother when she declined the proposed engagement; the facility with which he accorded to her desire of remaining at the abbey, while it pleased, amazed her. But the tears and entreaties of Miss Radnor operated powerfully on her feelings.

More than once she was on the point of stating the real cause of this deviation of her promise, and her positive refusal of allowing Miss Radnor to remain with her: but she checked this praise-worthy emotion, resolving to defer giving an account of the letter received, till she should learn from Mr. Hartley's communication whether her confidence might be so far extended.

When the carriages had left the abbey somewhat more than half an hour, Miss Elwood, wrapping herself up warm from the inclemency of the weather, crossed the park to the lodge.

The door was shut, and in a tremulous voice she ordered Morton to lift up the latch.

Her attendant obeyed, and Miss Elwood entered with a palpitating heart, and cheeks dyed with a carnation blush, expecting at that instant to be accosted by Mr. Hartley.

To her surprise he was not there. She called Morton in, and they sat down in breathless expectation; for the solitude of the place, the gloom of the season, and surrounding darkness, was enough to excite fear in a feminine breast.

Morton trembled violently—her agitation was more than the occasion seemed to warrant, and surprised Berthalina, as she had never previously observed in her the least tendency to that enervating apprehension which now took possession of her soul.

In vain Berthalina repressed her own fears, to assure her attendant there was nought to dread. Her tears and sobs increased, and all she could articulate was intreaties that they might return to the abbey.

Near an hour elapsed, when Berthalina, conjecturing that Mr. Hartley had either been prevented from keeping the appointment, or had repented of making it, arose to leave the lodge; a motion, which seemed to inspire Morton with new life.

They had just reached the door, when footsteps were heard approaching along the gravel-walk.

“He is come,” said Berthalina, and a cold chill pervaded her frame as she cast her eye on the surrounding gloom, and thought on the impropriety of the assignation, which now forcibly struck on her agitated mind.

The footsteps were yet at some distance; but Berthalina’s painful reflexions were turned to horror, by Morton’s catching hold of her arm, and exclaiming in an agonized tone—

“Fly, dearest madam, fly towards the house, while there is yet a moment to spare. Hesitate, and you are lost!”

“For Heaven’s sake! what mean you?”

“Stay not to question, but follow me,” replied her attendant, leading, or rather dragging her to a path that branched out in an opposite direction from that Berthalina supposed Mr. Hartley was pursuing.

Assured by Morton’s manner that she had some hidden motive for this, now to her inexplicable, conduct, Miss Elwood hastened along; fear lent swiftness to her steps, and she had proceeded a considerable distance from the lodge, when a piercing shriek from Morton, who was just behind, impelled her to turn back.

A death-like silence prevailed. Miss Elwood supposed her attendant had fallen to the ground, for it was too dark to discern any object.

She gently called her by name. No answer was returned, and her situation became truly distracting.

Again she called, but with the same negative success.

An idea rushed on her mind that Morton had fallen in a fit, and she attributed her recent behaviour, in forcing her from the lodge, to a tremor of the nerves, which, in some persons, is antecedent to that corporeal infirmity.

To seek her in the dark was useless—she could render her no assistance. It was a painful alternative, and might subject her to many unpleasantries, to hasten to the abbey, and summon some of the servants to the aid of Morton. But there was no other resource, and she resolved to account in the best manner she could for the singularity of the situation in which herself and Morton were placed: but she had not proceeded many paces with this design, when her progress was fatally arrested by two men, who, lifting her from the ground, bore her between them to the gate annexed to the south lodge, which appeared to have been forced open. A carriage with four horses was waiting, and Miss Elwood, almost inanimate through apprehension, was placed in it. One of the men followed, and the vehicle drove off with a rapidity that would have frightened our heroine, had she been collected enough to have noticed that circumstance.

Berthalina was, at first, under such a tremor of spirits, that she did not notice Morton's being in the carriage, but supposed it to be some unfeeling stranger, to whose care she was committed, till a deep sigh, and the exclamation of "O my God! my poor mistress," bursting from the lips of her attendant, aroused the attention of Miss Elwood. "Are you a sharer in my sad destiny, Morton?" said the tender-hearted victim of deception: "ah! I had hoped you were able to effect an escape; I am rightly punished for my credulity, and am truly sorry you are involved in the consequences of my indiscretion. O that a villain's heart should inhabit such a specious form! Who would have regarded the open countenance of Mr. Hartley, and imbibed an idea of his worthlessness?"

"O my dear madam," said Morton, with much energy, "do not wrong Mr. Hartley, he is an angel; but my"—

"Hold your peace, mistress," said the man, in a gruff, discordant voice, "I thought you had learnt the value of silence—your's was a rough lesson, but I see you are as sly as a cat, aye, and as treacherous too—mind, you are fishing in troubled waters; one word more, and I will tumble you, neck and heels, out of the coach."

Berthalina, unused to such vulgar diction, and hurt at the indignity to which she was subjected, felt her spirits rise, instead of being depressed by this insult, and she demanded, with much hauteur of the man, how he thus dared to act in defiance of laws, both divine and human? and whether he supposed lord Elwood would tamely put up with the insult to him in the person of his sister?"

“That I have nothing to do with, madam; let my employer look to that.”

“Who is your employer?”

“You will see him before it is long, fair lady.”

“Mr. George Hartley, I presume.”

“Ah, no!” sighed Morton.

“Then you know who it is?”

Morton was going to reply, when their disagreeable companion, taking a pistol from his pocket, pointed it at her—

“One word more, and it will be your last. ’Sdeath, is there any thing that can stop a woman from chattering? if it had not been for your tongue, you would not have been here now. Happen what will, you have only yourself to thank; you have made your white bread bitter, as the saying is.”

He then muttered something between his teeth, and finished by exclaiming audibly: “Hard, devilish hard, a person cannot, when they take a handsome bride, do their work honestly for it, but must pretend to these qualms of conscience. Pshaw, it is only when they have cheated one party, to see if they can make any thing of the other.”

Silence now ensued, and Miss Elwood was tortured by a thousand conjectures, to which the words of the man had given birth.

Morton had betrayed her—what baseness.—On this girl she had showered a profusion of gifts, from a representation that she had an aged mother, who had no one to look to for assistance but her, and a sister who was unhappily married. She had talked much of gratitude, duty, and respect—but she had acted most vilely.

They entered a small village just as the church clock struck twelve, and alighted at an obscure house about a hundred yards distance from the hamlet. An elderly woman, whose countenance would not have made a favourable impression on a disciple of Lavater, opened the door as soon as the carriage stopped.

Berthalina felt much reluctance at entering the house; but there was no way to avoid it, and she complied in silence.

She was conducted to a small parlour, and Morton followed; but what a scene presented itself to Miss Elwood: her attendant had received a contusion near the right temple, and another on the left arm—the blood had flown copiously from each, and sadly

disfigured her countenance and garments. She advanced with tottering steps, and appeared ready to faint.

Miss Elwood forgot her suspicions—they gave way to pity, and she busied herself in assisting the woman, to whom their conductor had whispered a few explanatory words, in dressing her wounds, and administering to her comfort.

When Morton had taken some warm elder wine, the woman, in a peremptory tone, commanded her to follow.—She obeyed, and quitted the room in silence; but darted a look, as she passed Miss Elwood, in which anguish, terror, and penitence were blended.

When they were withdrawn, Miss Elwood ventured to ask the man, “if they were to remain at that house, or proceed on?”

“I am to wait here for further orders.”

“When do you expect them?”

“Excuse me, madam, I am faithful to my trust—I will go through what I undertake; but I am no hypocrite, I do not serve to betray: so I tell you plainly, young lady, I was to remove you from the abbey here, and here I am to guard against your escape; I will be true to my employer, he paid me most liberally, and any attempts to bribe me from my duty will be in vain, so make none.”

“I am sorry to observe you so zealous in a bad cause,” was all the reply Berthalina made.

The woman returned, and mentioning a few articles she had provided ready for the table, asked Miss Elwood to take her choice for supper.

Her heart was too full of sorrow and chagrin to allow her to eat, she repeatedly declined, but was at length prevailed on to take a slight refreshment.

The man and woman ate heartily, but at a separate table, and the mild manners of Berthalina seemed to inspire them with respect.

It was near the second hour of the morn, when the woman, whom we shall henceforth call Mrs. Belton, conducted her fair captive to a chamber.

They passed through a room, in which there were two beds; Morton was in one, the other was to be occupied by Mrs. Belton, and that prepared for Berthalina was in a large light closet. It was a small couch, and from its superiority to the rest of the furniture, had evidently been conveyed there purposely for her use.

This seemed to argue that she was to remain here for a time. Reflexions of the most painful nature followed—she thought of her brother, of Miss Radnor—even Mrs. Aubrey had a place in her regrets, and she burst into tears; they relieved her—and at length, with a fervent petition to Heaven for safety, she resigned herself into the arms of sleep, and obtained a salutary respite in oblivion.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Berthalina awoke, her first thoughts naturally turned on her present situation, and she shuddered with horror when she reflected on the change a few hours had effected.

Severely did she condemn her own conduct—one step from rectitude had plunged her into this error—an error, which she knew not how to retrieve.

Escape seemed impossible—and could she effect it, how would she be received by lord Elwood, after acting so imprudently, by assenting to Mr. Hartley's proposal of meeting him at the southern lodge?

Morton had indicated that Mr. Hartley was not guilty of this outrage, and accused herself of treachery. Berthalina conjectured that some one (who it was, she could not form the least idea) had prevented Mr. Hartley from keeping his appointment, that they might take advantage of her credulity, and carry so vile a plan into execution.

A contradictory opinion now arose—she had not apprised Morton of the contents of the note till a short time previous to their leaving the abbey, and then only in a cursory manner, by desiring her attendance and secrecy. How then could her maid betray her? She must have opened the letter previous to placing it in her way. It was singular, extremely so. She would give the world to hear the truth from Morton's lips. The girl seemed truly penitent, and the generous heart of Berthalina yearned to pronounce her pardon, on the condition of fidelity in future, and a free confession of the past.

The whole might be a base conspiracy. Mr. Hartley's name might be used to favour the deceit.

There was a consolation in that thought; she wished to find Mr. Hartley worthy of her good opinion, and her mind was on the rack.

If the hand-writing was not Mr. Hartley's, it had been closely imitated, and the author of the fraud must have been perfectly apprised of the secret circumstances of the family. The whole was indeed a mystery, and a painful one.

The entrance of Mrs. Belton with some coffee, gave a truce to these fruitless thoughts.

Miss Elwood inquired the hour.

“It is only nine, madam; but I thought, after the flurry you had been in, you would like your breakfast in bed.”

“I thank you. How is my attendant?”

“She has had a bad night, and is feverish.”

“Cannot you send for some medical person?”

“No.”

“Does not your village afford one?”

“O dear, yes: there is Mr. Pratley, and a clever man he is; he used to attend my husband, and he cured me of the rheumatics. To be sure his bills come high.”

“O, I do not mind that, if he could do Morton any good.”

“Mayhap not: but no doctor shall come here, I promise you.”

“Poor thing! what will then become of her?”

“O, take no heed of that; Gregory is going to set off immediately to my lord, and we shall soon hear what is to be done. I heartily wish she had not come here.”

“And so do I,” rejoined Berthalina, in a sarcastic tone.

The woman replied not, but assisted Miss Elwood to dress; when observing that her robe was much sullied by the disasters of the preceding evening, she directed that lady’s attention to a large chest, which stood at the foot of the bed.

When opened, it presented to the view of our heroine every article fit for a lady’s common dress.

She at first refused to appropriate any of these things to her own use; but on Mrs. Belton’s assuring her that she would remain some weeks in her present abode, her resolution gave way to necessity, and she put on a dark dress, which she found exactly to fit her, and even made to her own pattern; a convincing proof, that her captivity was the result of a long premeditated scheme, in which Morton must have been made a principal agent.

As they passed through the chamber where her treacherous attendant lay, Miss Elwood drew near the bed; but Morton was in a tranquil slumber, a circumstance highly pleasing to her, as she understood from Mrs. Belton that she had not closed her eyes on the preceding night.

They had an early dinner, soon after which Gregory set off on horseback, to convey to his employer an account of the circumstances of the commission he had undertaken, with the addition of the dangerous state of Morton, who had awoken from her

sleep (which had been falsely supposed beneficial) in a high fever. Her delirium was violent, and she became unmanageable, defying the united strength of Mrs. Belton, and a stout servant girl, who had been hired to assist her in domestic affairs.

Thus situated, Mrs. Belton, much against her inclination, was forced to solicit the aid of Berthalina, being fearful of calling in any of the women from the village, lest curiosity should be aroused, and the purpose for which her young charge was brought there be defeated.

The humane heart of Berthalina never evinced itself more fully than on the present trying occasion. She *forgot*, as well as forgave, the injury she had received; she returned good for evil. No fears of her fever being contagious, deterred her; but trusting in the providence of her Creator, she exerted herself about the afflicted sufferer in the most exemplary manner.

Morton raved incessantly—she accused lord Elwood of being the assassin of his guiltless sister—said her dear lady was crushed to death, that a serpent had stung her, and a number of like horrible expressions, the whole tenor of which, though several names were mentioned, only served to criminate lord Elwood and herself.

Berthalina spoke to her several times in the most affectionate manner, but her replies were vague, and she more frequently mistook her for Miss Radnor, and lady Laurentia Brierly, than recognised her as Miss Elwood.

The ensuing night, and subsequent day, was passed by Miss Elwood in painful agitation.

Gregory did not return—Morton grew worse every hour, and Berthalina repeated her entreaties for medical aid. Mrs. Belton was inexorable, till at length fears for her own safety urged her to dispatch Molly for the village apothecary, but not till she had obtained a promise from Miss Elwood to countenance her in a fabrication to impose on the worthy Mr. Pratley, whose discernment she dreaded.

Our heroine, ever an enemy to falsehood, was much hurt to assent to one which tended to abridge her hopes of escaping from her distressing bondage. She cast her eyes on Morton, and no longer hesitated; but, with a deep sigh assured Mrs. Belton, she would consent to all she proposed, sooner than retard, for a single moment, the assistance which the state of her attendant so loudly called for.

CHAPTER V.

MR. Pratley soon made his appearance—he had merit—he had a good heart. But alas! neither his merit nor his heart met the reward they were entitled to on earth: a large family kept him in distressed circumstances. But the apothecary of the next village was a son of affluence, drove his curricule, kept saddle horses, and a thousand *et ceteras*, that constitute the appearance of a gentleman; consequently he was more approved, especially by the ladies, than his humble competitor, who was a plain matter-of-fact man; while Mr. Bonnell was a fund of anecdote, an elegant satirist, and a possessor of the happy art of a general accommodation to the various tempers of his wealthy patients.

With the poorer sort it was far different; he was the pompous doctor, and a rigid creditor.

To this character Mr. Pratley was a contrast. Scandal and flattery were his aversion, he considered them as beneath the dignity of man. Often, when attending on a poor peasant, or a dangerous *accouchement*, made worse by the horrors of poverty, has he dropped a sympathizing tear, and given a mite from his small store. In a word, he was beloved by the poor, and neglected by the rich.

Having thus introduced two characters to our story, we will return to Mrs. Belton.

When she found it indispensably necessary to call in medical aid, she hesitated which of the two gentlemen she should choose.

It is true, as she observed, that she had been attended by Mr. Pratley, but that circumstance had no weight in the present dilemma.

After due pro's and con's with herself, she thus decided:

“If I call in Mr. Pratley, and account to him in a plausible manner, for this young woman and her mistress being in my house, he will give the necessary attendance and medicines, and trouble his head no more on the matter. But Mr. Bonnell—O, he is such a chatterer—and the very idea of a beautiful young lady being *incog.* as it were, at my house, will set his tongue a going to all his patients, and there will be surmises—visits perhaps—and nobody knows what.—Mr. Pratley is my man.”

Molly was sent, and Mr. Pratley appeared in due order.

“But away with repetition,” says the reader, “that will not embellish your story.”

The apothecary felt Morton's pulse, examined the contusions she had received, shook his head, and finally declared her in great danger—not from these outward hurts, but her fever, which seemed to him as arising from excess of mental anguish.

Having dispatched a young boy (who had accompanied him) home for medicines, &c. he questioned Mrs. Belton how this catastrophe had occurred?

She replied, "that the young lady and her maid had been overturned in a chaise as they were proceeding to Woodmount; that Miss Collins (the name she chose to give to Berthalina) escaped unhurt; but, as he saw, her domestic was not equally fortunate.

She artfully led Mr. Pratley into the idea that Miss Collins, being an orphan with a small fortune, had come to Woodmount for the sake of living cheap and retired; while a gentleman to whom she was betrothed, was gone abroad on commercial business, and had given Mrs. Belton's the preference, as she had, many years since, lived servant with her parents.

All this was very natural. Mr. Pratley had not a shadow of doubt as to its truth.

He proposed a careful woman nurse.

Miss Elwood was eager to adopt the plan.

Mrs. Belton, giving her an angry glance, spoke in the negative:—"She did not mind the fatigue, for her part—the young lady would assist—Molly was lusty, and could do a power of work—and, above all, she hated strangers about her; and then there was the expense."

"Well, well, Mrs. Belton, that is as you and the young lady please; but my patient will want never-failing attendance, and watching night and day. Her delirium is high, and fatal consequences are too often the result of that affliction, when the distempered imagination dwells on nought but images of horror, such as are discernible in this young woman.—*Strange*, that the accident should have operated so violently on her feelings; her nerves must be very weak!"

Mr. Pratley now took leave, again charging them to be watchful over the poor girl.

Mrs. Belton felt happy at his departure, for she was not at all pleased with the word *strange*, so apt are the guilty to magnify trifles.

It was near ten at night when Gregory returned, with orders for Morton's removal; she was to be wrapped in warm blankets, and conveyed in a chaise to a place prepared for her, about twenty miles distance.

He seemed much disturbed when apprised of the impracticability of this scheme, and vehemently insisted that there was no occasion to have sent for Mr. Pratley. Mrs. Belton maintained the contrary, and the dispute rose high. The contending pair forgot caution in their revilings and threats, and Berthalina heard enough to convince her that it

was no other than lord Elwood who had plotted her removal from the abbey to Woodmount—for what purpose she had yet to learn.

One thing was certain, she was miserable. His designs could not be in her favour, and she abandoned herself to the tortures of despair.

It appeared to her, that as she had learnt thus much from their inadvertence, it was not impossible but by dint of bribery she might obtain from them some information with respect to the designs of their employer, or who were his colleagues in this undertaking.

But, on more mature thought, she determined to preserve a silence respecting herself, and not condescend to such meanness.

Morton daily grew worse—it is true she gave some signs of returning reason; but these were very faint, and Mr. Pratley appeared to think her recovery next to an impossibility.

On the third day from Gregory's return, he received a letter, and he informed Mrs. Belton that he must set out immediately, and laid positive injunctions on her to be mindful of her charge, as it would be some time before he should return. "You know," said he, "where to write, should any thing particular take place; but, without doubt, you will have further orders in a day or two, how to proceed, as his lordship must make some alterations in his plans, now the young woman cannot be removed from hence."

"As for that part of the story," replied the unfeeling Mrs. Belton, "the girl will not long be a hindrance to you."

"You think she will die, then?"

"I wish I was as sure of twenty thousand pound; all I fear is that she will recover her senses first, and betray us to Pratley."

"Aye, aye, mistress, guard against that, or you will make a fine kettle of fish on it, and lose all your hopes of making a fortune by this windfall."

This dialogue, though not uttered in the presence of Miss Elwood, was distinctly heard by her; and made every fibre in her frame shudder at such mercenary and inhuman sentiments.

Nine days had Morton lingered as it were on the verge of the grave, when her ravings ceased, and a total languor pervaded her; and she lay absorbed in a death-like stupor.

Mr. Pratley, who visited his patient late in the evening, gave it as his opinion, that her dissolution was approaching; she might perhaps continue a day or two in her present state, but if any material change took place in the night, he desired to be sent for.

Mrs. Belton, who was quite worn out with watching and fatigue, committed the care of Morton to Miss Elwood and Molly, and she retired to bed in an upper chamber; having first taken such precautions to prevent the escape of Berthalina, should she be inclined to attempt it, that such a scheme would be wholly impracticable; and it remained a question if even a mouse could have quitted the tenement.

Soon after eleven, Molly took Miss Elwood's advice and laid down on the bed where Mrs. Belton used to sleep, but which she had now declined doing, as she observed "she could not rest well when people were sitting up with a light in the same room."

Molly soon fell into a profound slumber, Miss Elwood leant over her poor attendant who, she flattered herself, began to give some tokens of returning reason, nor was she mistaken; the stupor gradually wore off; she administered a few drops of a reviving tincture, tenderly chafed her temples, and used the most sympathizing accents.

In less than an hour Morton was perfectly rational, her memory returned, undisturbed by the least traces of delirium.

Miss Elwood observing her so tranquil, thought it unnecessary to disturb any body, at least for the present, and she continued her attentions to Morton who at length addressed her, though she spoke with some difficulty, through her extreme weakness.

She expressed great penitence for what she had done, and seemed quite happy in having obtained the forgiveness of Miss Elwood, observing, she did not believe her senses would have failed her if Mrs. Belton would have permitted her, on their first coming there, to have conversed freely with her lady.

Berthalina by degrees gathered from her the following particulars.

Lord Elwood insinuated to Morton, that his sister was on the point of degrading herself by a marriage with Mr. Melmoth, who had gained the elder Mr. Hartley to favour his designs. He found expostulation of no avail, and not wishing to come to an open rupture with either of the gentlemen, he thought it advisable to remove his sister from the abbey, till such time that she would listen to the voice of duty and reason.

He gave her the letter to lay in Berthalina's way, as coming from Mr. Hartley;— and taught her what answers to make, should her mistress question her on the subject.

He did not wish her to accompany her mistress to the retreat he had chosen for her, which he pretended was at the house of a relation in whom he could confide, for not permitting any clandestine visitors or correspondence.

He wished it to appear at the abbey as if Miss Elwood's flight was voluntary. This, he observed to Morton, would irritate Melmoth against her.—Jealous suspicions would ensue, and more effectually wean him from his passion, than all the arguments in the world. He also thought proper it should be supposed that his sister had taken Morton with her. He said it would look better, as he did not wish his sister's character to suffer the least blemish, from what his justice prompted him to do in her behalf; but should seize the first opportunity of explaining every thing to her honour that seemed ambiguous.

Morton ventured to ask him, if she was not in reality to attend her mistress? and was answered in the negative.

He said that the relations to whom Miss Elwood was going, would not allow of her bringing an attendant with her: as they said it was more than probable, she would be brought to assist her mistress in some clandestine proceedings, which it would be impossible for them to guard against.

He then instructed her to lock up her trunks, till a proper time had elapsed, when she might send for them.

Morton had fifty guineas for her share in this scheme; and as soon as she had seen her mistress safe in the carriage prepared for her, she was to withdraw from the vicinity of the abbey as secretly as possible, till she heard from lord Elwood that secrecy was no longer required, and she was at liberty to seek another situation: for the obtaining which he would take care she should have a flattering character. In the meantime her present wages, with a handsome addition, should be continued.

Thus assailed by temptation and the flattery of lord Elwood, who made a great merit of reposing so much confidence in her, she consented.

On second thoughts, she could not avoid considering the conduct of lord Elwood as very strange;—her heart revolted at the idea of performing the services he required.—But she had accepted his bribe, and through a false notion of honour, considered herself as bound to go through what she had undertaken, instead of returning the money, and generously declaring her altered sentiments: an alternative that would have saved her from the severe sufferings that had subsequently followed.

Morton's mind was a prey to uneasiness; every kind expression of her mistress went like a dagger to her heart. From several circumstances that fell under her observation, she thought Mr. Melmoth more particular in his attentions to Miss Radnor than her lady; and on purposely introducing the subject to some of the head servants, she heard that their opinion was unanimously the same with her own; and caused them much wonder, how Mr. Melmoth could think of aspiring to an alliance so obviously unequal.

Morton knew not what to think.—Lord Elwood must be in an error; or, what struck her as far more probable, he had fixed on that as a pretence to evade declaring his real motive for removing his sister from the abbey.

On the very evening that this long premeditated plan was to be carried into final execution, a conversation took place in the steward's room (as they sat with their wine after dinner), that made Morton's crime appear to her in a new and more heinous light than before, and gave the designs of lord Elwood a more serious aspect.

An old servant of the family, who had for some years past been settled in a small farm of his own about two leagues from the abbey, was come to pay the house-steward a balance due to him, out of some dealings they had lately had together on his lordship's account. He was invited to stop dinner, and take part of a bottle before he returned, which was accepted by the honest farmer.

After dinner, the presence of most of the attendants was required in the boudoirs of their superiors, who were preparing for the evening's entertainment.

Morton was exempted from this attendance, as Miss Elwood remained at home; and she undertook to make tea for the second table, instead of the housekeeper who was indisposed.

The conversation between the steward and the farmer, turned on the Elwood family. The latter observed, "that without doubt since the late lord had thought proper to acknowledge his daughter, and introduce her as such to the world, he had left her a noble fortune, adequate to his immense riches."

He seemed both shocked and surprised, when the steward informed him to the contrary, and thus continued:

"It strikes me, friend Morton, all was not fair in that respect. My present lord did not seem to relish the introduction of his lovely sister. He was closeted several times with his father, and their affairs wore another aspect. I fear the deceased put too much confidence in him, and he thought so too, when it was too late to mend it."

The ringing of Miss Elwood's bell obliged Morton to quit the room, which she did with much reluctance, as it prevented her from hearing the remainder of a discourse in which she was much interested.

Morton was wanted to convey Miss Elwood's excuse for remaining at home that evening, to the company. She obeyed with much trepidation. She cast her eyes on lord Elwood, and thought she perceived a peculiar degree of exultation in his countenance, and she shuddered at the idea, that he was influenced to the removal of her mistress by mercenary motives. She repented—but knew not how to recede.

Miss Radnor finding she could not prevail on Berthalina to let her remain with her, strictly charged Morton to be attentive to her; ending with, "But I need not say so much to you, my good girl, for I am sure you will be grateful, in return for the favours you have received."

Morton shed tears, and replied with emphasis, "She has, indeed, been a valuable benefactress to me."

Miss Radnor, ignorant of the real emotions that caused these tears, praised her feeling heart, and departed.

As lord Elwood had prejudged, and Morton dreaded, Miss Elwood required her company to the lodge. This proof of confidence, put all her determinations to flight, and she gave way to the impulse of gratitude, when it was, alas! too late to save Berthalina from the snare; for she wished to lure her back to the abbey without exposing lord Elwood's guilt, till they were in safety.

The men lord Elwood employed in this vile plot, overhearing what Morton said to her lady, thought it most advisable to take Morton with them, as they were fearful of her betraying the whole scheme, if she was suffered to return to the abbey.

Morton was first conveyed to the carriage, and not seeing Miss Elwood, entertained hopes that she had escaped; which desirable event would have happened, had not Berthalina's humanity prompted her to turn back, on hearing Morton scream.

CHAPTER VI.

MORTON was so tranquil that Miss Elwood, notwithstanding Mr. Pratley's opinion, and the predictions of Mrs. Belton, began to entertain slight hopes of her recovery. Nor were her prayers disregarded; The young woman having eased her mind by the confession she had made, and assured of the forgiveness of her angelic mistress, became as it were another creature.

Miss Elwood acted the part of a tender nurse during the remainder of the night. She cautioned Morton not to let a word transpire that they had held any conversation during the time they had been together, and to speak but little before Mrs. Belton, lest she should suspect what had really happened.

As soon as Morton went to sleep, which was just at the dawn of day, Miss Elwood awaked Molly, lest she should be found sleeping, by her mistress, and incur her anger.

A week elapsed without the return of Gregory, or any orders arriving from lord Elwood.

Morton recovered rapidly, to the evident discomfiture of Mrs. Belton, but as the former, by the desire of her mistress, was very guarded in her expressions, the woman's uneasiness of her betraying the affair to Mr. Pratley, rather subsided, and she at length began to consider that Morton had got the better of her conscientious terrors, and meant to study her own interest in future.

This was the only idea that her depraved heart could suggest, to account for a silence she knew she should not practise under the same circumstances, without her lips were secured by a golden padlock.

That one of the principal points in lord Elwood's arrangement was to throw a dark shade on her character, and estrange the good opinion of her friends from her, Berthalina had every reason to suppose.

The pretended elopement threw her wholly in his power; but she had no clue by which she could fathom the extent of his designs.

The Radnors were doubtless prejudiced against her, but they were good people and would listen to the voice of truth, they were esteemed merciful; surely they would not be merciless to her, could she but appeal to them.

How to convey a letter to them, was a difficult matter to ascertain.

Morton submitted a plan she had contrived, to the inspection of her lady, which she approved. It was, indeed, the only way that seemed possible to the fair captives.

There was yet another difficulty; the small store of writing-materials that Mrs. Belton possessed, was carefully secured under lock and key.

Berthalina sighed, and regretted the good old fashion of wearing pockets, stored with pincushions, housewives, and above all, the pencil and memorandum book. "My grandmother," soliloquized the fair-one, "would have sooner extricated herself out of this dilemma than her modish offspring." She was worse off than Philomel, she had not even a sampler on which to pourtray the story of her woes.

The parent of invention, (necessity), often draws forth talents, that, but for her, would have mouldered in obscurity. It sets imagination on the stretch, and is often productive of the happiest consequences.

It was seldom, (such was the watchfulness of Mrs. Belton,) that Berthalina could converse with Morton, undisturbed by her presence.

Such golden opportunities were seized with avidity, and they then communicated the result of their deliberations to each other.

Miss Elwood had got possession of an old newspaper, that lay among some waste-paper at the bottom of the parlour cupboard.

Morton proposed that they should cutout every word or letter that might be of use in composing a note to Mr. Pratley, (of whose humanity and sense they had a high opinion,) and tack them on a piece of brown paper in proper form.

Morton, not being able to leave her room, was left a great deal to herself, Mrs. Belton obliging Berthalina to sit with her, in the parlour; so this new mode of correspondence was given by Miss Elwood to her management.

Berthalina had no opportunity of speaking to Morton that evening, and she retired to bed much chagrined.

It was near the middle of the night, when Berthalina was gently awakened by Morton, who whispered her that Mrs. Belton and Molly, (who now lay in the same room with her) were fast asleep; and sliding into her hand the important paper, on which rested all their hopes, departed.

As soon as the first friendly ray of light illumined her chamber, she left her couch, where she had passed a sleepless night, to inspect what Morton had so curiously put together.

"Mr. Pratley,

“The young lady at Mrs. Belton’s considering Mr. Pratley as a worthy character—one who would sooner save oppressed innocence than aid its oppressors, entreats him to procure her pen, ink, and paper, and deliver it to either herself or attendant, as opportunity best permits, without the knowledge of Mrs. Belton or Molly. Above all, as more immediately necessary to her peace, she supplicates him to preserve a strict silence with regard to this application. If it succeeds she will further confide in his honour to forward a letter to the post, which she will find some means of conveying to his hands.”

This note (if a piece of brown paper so curiously worded could be called such,) was not expressed exactly in the manner Miss Elwood could have wished. This was not a season to stand on *particularities* in diction, and she resolved to make the attempt of delivering it into the hands of Mr. Pratley, on his next visit.

Fate was inauspicious, and not tired with venting its malice on our heroine.

Mr. Pratley sprained his ankle, and Morton being considered in a fair way, he contented himself with making daily inquiries by his eldest son, and sending her accustomed medicine.

This was a severe mortification to the captives. Happily for them, Gregory’s return was still procrastinated, nor did there seem any preparations for lord Elwood’s arrival.

On the fifth day from this ill-timed accident, Mr. Pratley took his usual rounds, and of course called in at Mrs. Belton’s. Morton, for the first time was down stairs and sitting by the parlour fire with her mistress; for the kitchen (which was in fact unworthy of that appellation) being an earth floor, and very damp, was by no means fit for the reception of the poor girl, though her hostess would have consigned her there, but for the expostulations of Berthalina, who threatened to depart from her present passive conduct, in obeying all Mrs. Belton’s injunctions, if such cruelty was persevered in.

When Mr. Pratley entered the house, Mrs. Belton discontinued some culinary business in which she had been attentively occupied, to place herself in the parlour as an attentive spy on every word, look, and action.

This behaviour did not escape the internal notice of the apothecary; he had frequently remarked the watchfulness of Mrs. Belton, and the dejection of the young strangers; various observations convinced him all was not right.

Though not given to curiosity, he felt some forcible touches of it on this occasion, which he despaired of gratifying; for he would have considered it as the height of impertinence, to have hinted such a desire to any of the individuals concerned.

Though the visit of Mr. Pratley was lengthened considerably beyond its usual limits, for they had entered into a pleasing kind of chat on the contrast between antient

and modern fashions of dress, and other similar topics, Berthalina had no hopes of accomplishing her scheme.—Her Argus was too vigilant.

Chance at length aided design.

Molly had been sent to the village to make some purchases;—she now returned, and ringing at the bell, her mistress was forced to quit her station to give her admittance.

She took care this should not be a work of time. She left all the doors wide open and ran across the front garden, with as much precipitation as her bulk, which was none of the least or lightest, would admit.

Undrawing the bolt, she stood not to utter a syllable, but leaving Molly to follow, returned to the parlour with the same haste used in quitting it.

But this short interval of time had more than sufficed Berthalina's purpose.

Seizing the eventful moment, she drew the prepared paper from beneath her robe, and, with a significant, imploring look, handed it to Mr. Pratley.

“Secrete it I beseech you, sir,” said Morton perceiving her lady unable to articulate.

Mr. Pratley was as quick in obeying as she could desire, and Mrs. Belton, on her return, found them pursuing the same topic they had so long been discussing.

O, dissimulation;—How painful is it for the virtuous, ingenuous mind to have recourse to thee! Does it not enhance the guilt of thy persecutors, who drive thee to this expedient—Most assuredly it will.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. Pratley hastened home, anxious to peruse the contents of the paper so cautiously given.

His surprise at this incident was not great; he was in a manner prepared for it by his previous suspicions.

He felt himself much interested in the fair stranger, and resolved to be secrecy itself. Even to the loved partner of his home, though conscious of her worth, did he not divulge the confidence with which he thought himself honoured: rightly judging, that a secret ought to be confined to the bosom of the person to whom it is entrusted.

To avoid suspicion, Mr. Pratley did not appear at Mrs. Belton's for the three succeeding days, which were passed with much uneasiness by the fair captives, who considered him as disregarding their petition.

When he made his appearance, he found means of conveying to Berthalina's hand a small scrap of paper, which informed her, that if she would leave a string attached to the small easement of her chamber, she should have the materials she required fastened to it.

Miss Elwood was careful to observe the injunctions of Mr. Pratley: she fastened several pieces of ribbon together till they came to a proper length, and then tying one end to the grating, with which this window was secured, lowered it by means of a piece of stick affixed to the other extremity.

She then retired to bed. But arose soon after five, and pulled up the string.

Her joy was inexpressible on finding herself in possession of the articles so much wanted; and she concealed them with the utmost care and precaution.

In the course of the next day, pleading a head-ach, Miss Elwood retired to the light closet where she slept, and penned an account of all that had occurred to her and Morton since their sudden absence from the abbey; she dwelt largely on her apprehensions of future ill treatment, and besought Miss Radnor, to whom the letter was addressed, to use her influence with her parents, that they would take active measures to rescue her from impending danger.

Miss Elwood had so much to communicate, and so many remarks to make, that she completely filled three large sheets of paper: which she formed into a packet, and superscribed with Miss Radnor's name and place of residence.

At the next visit of the good apothecary, he presented Mrs. Belton and Miss Elwood, severally, with a small bouquet of flowers, the produce of a gentleman's hot-house, with whom he was on intimate terms.

Berthalina found it impossible to deliver her letter, a circumstance that much chagrined her—though she was obliged to appear tranquil.

While Mrs. Belton was preparing dinner, Morton observed to her mistress, “that she would have her take the first opportunity of examining her bouquet, as she could not avoid conjecturing there was some hidden meaning in the gift.”

Miss Elwood did not place much reliance on this suggestion, yet she thought it was as well to attend to Morton's counsel.

On untying the string that bound the flowers together, she discovered a piece of paper folded, and placed with nice artfulness in the midst of the stalks.

Miss Elwood signified to Morton that she was right, and then flew to the solitude of her chamber, that she might inspect, undisturbed, what her new friend had to impart.

He desired her to be watchful, and exactly at the hour of midnight to lower her letter by the friendly string, when he would be waiting to receive it; advising her immediately to pull it up, lest any untoward chance should betray their mode of conveyance.

She had the precaution to destroy this paper immediately; and falling on her knees, uttered an effusion of thankfulness, for the favour Heaven had bestowed on her, in thus pointing out a path which might extricate her from her perilous situation.

She descended on receiving a summons to dinner, with a cheerful countenance, and the vulgar, assuming haughtiness of Mrs. Belton passed disregarded, with the silent contempt it merited.

The clock of the village church could be distinctly heard at Mrs. Belton's.

Berthalina retired soon after ten to her chamber. She undressed and went to bed, for fear of exciting suspicion. She was also obliged to extinguish the light, and watch the progress of time, with no other amusement than the rays of hope, which she now suffered to illumine her mind.

At last, for never did it seem so tardy as now, the wished for hour began to be announced from the consecrated edifice.

Berthalina leaped from her couch, and lowered the string.

In a few moments a violent pull gave the signal for its ascension.

She drew it up, and found the letter replaced by a card.

She was impatient to peruse it, but was forced to put a restraint on her feelings, and place the card under her pillow till the next morning, and went to sleep, well pleased with the correspondence so romantically managed with the village apothecary, whom she considered as the best and most paternal of men.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS Radnor's melancholy seemed to gather strength instead of being weakened by the lapse of time.

In vain she strove to conceal her feelings by an assumed gaiety in the presence of her parents.

But their anxious solicitude was not so easily deceived; prudence suggested silence on the subject to Miss Radnor, and they contented themselves for the present, in contriving every species of rational amusement, that could tend to prevent her from indulging the baneful, enervating habit of dwelling incessantly on her secret source of woe.

Miss Radnor had been returned to Grosvenor-place, rather more than three weeks, when lord Elwood's porter brought a letter, which he stated to have been sent with others to his lordship's town house.

It contained most ardent wishes for, and polite inquiries after, her health; also that of her parents; ending with regrets that he was not yet able to send her intelligence of his sister, about whom his unwearied exertions had not met with the least success.

Miss Radnor, at the request of her Father, immediately gave the letter into his hands; and saying she was going to play over some new lesson on her harp, retired.

Neither Mr. Radnor nor his lady were pleased with the style of the letter, nor its being addressed to their daughter; any communication to have been made, ought to be *addressed* to them. It appeared as a first step towards a correspondence, in which they would never acquiesce; at the same time, they observed with pain that Caroline's eyes betrayed a pleasure, both at the receipt of the letter, and its contents, with the exception of that part relating to Berthalina, whom she accused, with more bitterness than belonged to the general tenor of her manner, with base ingratitude to the *best of brothers*.

"I will crush this mischief while 'tis yet in the bud;"—

Said Mr. Radnor.

"Mischievous, indeed," sighed his amiable lady; "I would sooner see my adored child the wife of the poorest man on earth, so that he possessed honour and probity, than the partner of a gambling libertine lord."

Miss Radnor did not make her appearance till dinner was served up, and she would then have remained in her boudoir, could she have invented a plausible excuse for so doing.

She was neither guilty in action or word, that could be misconstrued to her disadvantage; but her thoughts and wishes were such, that, could they be analysed, she was indeed undutiful. She therefore shrunk from observation.

When the servants were withdrawn, Mr. Radnor said,

“From the style of lord Elwood’s letter, I am not inclined to judge favourably of his intentions; I should rather suppose he did not wish it to meet my view; for it is inconsistent with reason for him to form an idea, that I should allow my daughter to correspond, on any subject whatever, with a young unmarried man of fashion, unless indeed, (which is a case quite foreign to that we are now discussing), he had gained the approbation of your parents to pay his addresses to you. I shall take upon me to answer his letter, and—”

“My dear father—”

Interrupted Caroline, with burning blushes, and a look in which entreaty was mingled with apprehension.

“My dear father, consider what an appearance it would have.”

“Think not, my child, that I should betray the least hint of a suspicion, that may indeed be founded in error; or hurt your delicacy by a premature caution. No; I only aim at preventing the possibility of a correspondence between you and lord Elwood, which might in time become clandestine; important events often succeed trivial causes.

“I hope, Caroline, you acquiesce in my plan.”

Caroline signified her assent with visible chagrin.

Mr. Radnor was much displeased, and remonstrances were forcing their utterance, when Mrs. Radnor, who read, by the looks of her husband, what was passing in his mind, checked him by a significant glance, which seemed to say, *accept her affirmative*, and take no further notice.

Lady Bevil was returned to town; and Mrs. Radnor, with her daughter, had promised to pass that evening with her in a domestic way. Mr. Radnor was to remain at home, as he expected a visitor of importance. He also took the opportunity of penning an answer to lord Elwood.

“My lord,

“The indisposition of my daughter preventing her from honouring your letter with the attention it deserved, the task devolves on me. Receive our united thanks, for your polite wishes and inquiries. Suffer me to say that our disappointment was excessive, on

receiving a letter superscribed with your lordship's hand; we fondly hoped to have heard tidings of poor Berthalina, who, in spite of appearances that now act to her prejudice, may be innocent. I entreat you, in the name of my family, to favour us with the first account you may hear of your lovely sister, *till then* accept our kind remembrances, &c. &c."

This letter was submitted to the perusal of Mrs. Radnor and Caroline, and then sent by the general post.

It was easy for an interested observer to discern, that Miss Radnor was not pleased with this repulse to the correspondence of lord Elwood. She thought her father had acted too harshly. Supposing it possible, she argued to herself, that his lordship had, or should have, honourable intentions towards her, (as for dishonourable, that was out of the question. Who would dare to harbour such towards *her!* Ah! self pride! how you impose on your votaries). There was no degradation in his alliance. He was not a Melmoth. He had foibles it was true; she could not deny that unwelcome truth, even to herself: but who was free from them.

Berthalina was still regretted, still loved, but not as formerly. The complaints she had made were attributed to caprice; and sometimes to a worse motive: making herself appear amiable, and prejudicing her brother, in the eyes of his friends, previous to her elopement, which she now supposed to have long been pre concerted.

Thus did a sudden, ill-placed passion stifle the emotions of a heart, naturally generous, and fraught with virtuous sentiments.

To how great a length this uncharitableness might have been carried, had not Miss Radnor's delusion been ended by a sudden shock, it is hard to determine. Happily it *was so*, and her mind restored to its wonted energy.

The shock alluded to, was the receipt of Miss Elwood's letter, which arrived in Grosvenor-place, three days subsequent to that of his lordship.

The instant Miss Radnor cast her eyes on the superscription of the letter, she faintly uttered the name of Berthalina, and burst into a flood of tears.

As soon as she was somewhat recovered, she gave the letter to Mrs. Radnor.

"Open it my dear madam, I have not power; it is from Miss Elwood, and my agitation is excessive; my mind is divided between hope and fear on her account."

Mrs. Radnor slightly glanced over the contents, before she ventured to read it aloud to Caroline.

Berthalina's description of her sufferings, and her pathetic appeal for aid, surcharged the heart of the amiable matron with sympathy; and the loud "*Thank Heaven she is innocent,*" burst from her lips.

“*Where* is she, *who* is she with. If innocent, she must have been deluded from the abbey by treachery. *Who* is the wretch that has dared to—”

“Softly, my *chère* Caroline. All your questions cannot be answered at once. *Where* she *now* is, she *must* not *remain*. I wish Mr. Radnor would return from his walk. He must have extended it far beyond his usual limits.”

“My dear mother, you alarm me, you have evidently a wish to procrastinate the intelligence you receive from the letter.”

Miss Radnor was right.

Her affectionate mother had remarked, with heart-felt concern, that Caroline, during her residence at Stanton Abbey, had imbibed a passion for lord Elwood.

He was not the character she wished, for a son-in-law; for a husband to the daughter on whom rested her every hope. She judged, from the good sense and other internal endowments Caroline possessed, that the disclosure of his unwarranted cruel conduct to Berthalina, would entirely erase every tender impression that his insinuating manner, and handsome person, had made on her heart. Yet she was aware that Caroline must have a struggle to make a complete revolution in her sentiments, and the convictions of lord Elwood’s depravity, so suddenly announced, (when she had flattered herself into a belief that he was all amiable, and that her first opinion of him was founded on an unpardonable prejudice she imbibed from the representations of Berthalina,) must be attended with acute sensations of regret and dissatisfaction.

There are some persons who may censure Mrs. Radnor’s feelings, as bordering on an unnecessary refinement. If so, the foible was of a tendency too amiable to merit the slightest reproof.

Alive to the tenderest solicitude in all that concerned her husband and child, she shrunk from the idea of their ever being afflicted with needless pain.

To alleviate the sufferings that befel those loved objects of her care, either mental or personal, had ever been her study. And with a starting tear and affectionate accents, she thus addressed Miss Radnor.

“My sweet child, you have never *actually* swerved from the duty you owe to your father and myself, yet there is a painful something passing in your heart, which you have not disclosed. Though it was easily seen through, you have considered our opinions of lord Elwood as harsh and prejudiced. You will now see your error—Retire, my love, to your chamber, peruse Berthalina’s letter with attention; reason with yourself; summon your judgment and fortitude; and at dinner, I expect to see you, if not happy, calm and grateful: that the delusion you have laboured under is dispersed *ere* too late.

Caroline wished to make some reply, but her heart was full, and she could not give utterance to a syllable.

Mrs. Radnor perceived her emotions, and repeated her wishes for Caroline's retiring.

CHAPTER IX.

CAROLINE perused the letter with minute attention. Her agitation was extreme. She felt her mother's kindness; and was most happy to be without witnesses of her grief.

She had given way to reflections of the most painful nature above an hour, when hearing her father rap, she took a sudden resolution; and hastening down to the parlour, cast herself on her knees before them.

"Let me thus acknowledge my faults, and trust to your unparalleled kindness for pardon. Never will I again harbour a concealment. This has cost me many a pang."

Mr. Radnor tenderly raised his suppliant daughter, and placing her by her mother on the sofa, seated himself on the opposite side.

"We will now listen, my dear child, to what you have to relate; your auditors are favourably disposed; nor do they entertain a suspicion to your prejudice."

Miss Radnor candidly related what had passed in her mind, with regard to lord Elwood; and the shock she received from his espousing the cause of Mr. Melmoth; as it proved to her, that the sentiments she entertained for him were not reciprocal, previous to that conversation.

The ambiguous behaviour of his lordship had at times led her to suppose she was not indifferent to him. But now all her hopes vanished.

Returning to Grosvenor-place, she tried to erase the passion she had so unfortunately imbibed, but her attempts were vain. Neither could she believe any thing that was said to the prejudice of his lordship.

An idea instilled itself into her brain, that was unpropitious to her design of conquering this *penchant*.

She supposed it more than possible that lord Elwood had recourse to the passion Melmoth so visibly entertained for her, as a plan to discover the state of her heart. For his manners had undergone a great change, and previous to her departure from the abbey, he had behaved with polite gallantry.

The letter she so unexpectedly received from him, strengthened this supposition; and she flattered herself that he would ere now have made a direct avowal of his attachment, had he not been prevented by the trouble arising from the mysterious absence of Berthalina.

Miss Radnor ended her (can it be called) confession, with observing “that she now felt as one awaking from a dangerous dream. All her infatuation was gone, and she regarded all that her dear friends had said of lord Elwood as strictly just. She had escaped from a dangerous precipice, and resolved to have no more concealments of the like tendency.”

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor were highly incensed at the conduct of lord Elwood, in regard to Melmoth.

They were convinced he thus sought the interest of his friend and flatterer, and from no trial of Caroline’s sentiments in his favour.

No doubt but her manner artlessly discovered the secret she had before assiduously endeavoured to conceal, and gave a turn to his thoughts. His letter was evidently studied to draw her into a clandestine correspondence with him, and to make her the victim of her own credulity: for lord Elwood was well known, in the fashionable world, to be of that order of unprincipled beings, who think the more beauty, innocence, and rank, a woman possesses, the greater their triumph if they despoil her of that virtue, which alone gave value to those blessings she enjoyed.

Miss Radnor was the first to observe, that “while they were thus discussing their own affairs, poor Berthalina was suffering in her captivity.”

“She is, indeed,” said Mr. Radnor, to whom his lady on his entrance, had given a hasty account of Miss Elwood’s situation.

Caroline produced the letter.

Mr. Radnor having perused it, remained buried some moments in meditation; then declared that “there was not a moment to be lost, in endeavouring to extricate the fair maid from the perils that surrounded her.”

Mr. Radnor proposed setting out the next morning, at break of day. He did not think it eligible to use his own travelling-carriage. A servant was therefore sent to procure a hired chaise and four, to be in readiness at the appointed hour.

Mr. Radnor wished to have some respectable female, as a companion on this enterprise.

His lady and daughter were entirely out of the question. He did not wish to expose them to the bustle that he naturally expected to ensue. Neither could they conveniently leave town, and their circle of friends, at so short a notice, without exciting a curiosity they wished to avoid.

Mrs. Aubrey was too infirm; neither did they wish at present to acquaint her that they had heard from Berthalina, till they could speak with more certainty as to her fate; fearful that the old lady's feelings would be too much harassed, by the painful mystery of lord Elwood's proceedings.

A note was dispatched to Mrs. Warner, requesting her attendance in Grosvenor-place, on important business.

Not doubting that the Radnor family had some tidings to communicate respecting her beloved Miss Elwood, she delayed not a moment in complying with their request.

Mr. Radnor communicated to her the contents of Miss Elwood's letter. She rejoiced in the innocence of Berthalina, and was severe in her reprehension of lord Elwood's behaviour.

Mrs. Radnor observed, that "A strange mystery appeared to cloud the day of this interesting orphan."

Mrs. Warner replied, that "the birth of that young lady was unfortunate, both for herself and parents."

"It was not altogether so clever," said Mr. Radnor. "But as Miss Elwood was the progeny of his late lordship, subsequent to his divorce from her mother, I do not see that such a material difference should be made, or the affair lapt in mystery, as it was from the very first."

"Was I at liberty, sir," said Mrs. Warner, "I could easily elucidate these circumstances.—But I am sworn to secrecy.—Nor dare I ever reveal what I know of this hapless affair, without some material events or discoveries take place, of which I foresee not the least possibility."

"Can you," asked Mr. Radnor, "provided your husband consents to the arrangement—can you accompany me to Woodmount?—Or are you under any restrictions that will prevent you from adopting a plan I have much at heart?"

"From the goodness of my husband's disposition, I am inclined, sir, to think he would not oppose my wishes, in so momentous a concern.

"I am under no ties to any one else, that shall prevent me from following the dictates of a heart, that throbs with emotion to serve the dear child of a still dearer, though erring, mistress. It is true, should lord Elwood be apprised of my interference, he may feel great displeasure. But no interested views shall deter me from doing what I consider as an important duty."

Mr. Warner made not the slightest objection to the scheme, but was forward in its promotion; and accompanied his wife to Grosvenor-place about ten in the evening.

When all was adjusted, the amiable family felt greatly exhilarated: even Caroline resumed a great portion of her former vivacity.

She rallied her father and Mrs. Warner most unmercifully, on their intended expedition from town; assuring them that “if they were recognised on the road, they must expect to be paragraphed by the scandal-mongers!”

“How so, my dear Caroline? What can that illiberal set have to say of me and Mrs. Warner?”

“What a question!

“But I will give you a specimen:—

“We hope soon to present our numerous readers, and fashionable patrons, with the particulars of *what*—we can *now* give them only a slight sketch. Mr. R—— a wealthy commoner, rather past the meridian of life; and whose town house is not half a day’s walk from Hyde-park Corner, was seen yesterday, on the Bedford road, in a post-chaise and four, accompanied by Mrs. W——, the wife of a respectable grocer. We *sincerely* lament the desertion of the amiable Mrs. R——, and sympathize in the feelings of the injured husband, who has, to the great injury of his business, set off in pursuit of his faithless spouse and her innamorato, who will most possibly—”

“Hold! Hold! I beseech you,” said Mr. Radnor. “It is true, some people are capable of most base falsehoods. But I flatter myself, that Mrs. Warner and I will escape unnoticed.”

Mrs. Radnor took leave of Mrs. Warner over night. But Caroline who was eager to show every respect to her dear parent, and contribute to his comfort, arose at five to do the honours of the *déjeûné*, and wish success to the *adventurers*, as she playfully styled them, and a happy deliverance to the *lady* from her enchanted castle.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mr. Radnor and Mrs. Warner arrived at Woodmount, they ordered the servants (for they were accompanied by two, out of livery, and well armed) to inquire at Mr. Pratley's, at whose house they alighted.

The worthy apothecary was at home; and when informed who were his guests, and that they came in consequence of the letter he had so honourably forwarded to Grosvenor-place, he received them with all imaginable politeness and respect.

Mr. Radnor did not think proper to explain to Mr. Pratley who the young lady at Mrs. Belton's was, till he had obtained an interview with Miss Elwood, and learned her sentiments in this respect.

Mr. Pratley was already convinced that the young lady was not an inmate of Mrs. Belton's through choice; and he felt happy in the prospect of her being restored to her friends. Without seeking into the particulars of the case, trusting to time, and the future confidence of the parties, for the gratification of his curiosity.

It was determined that Mr. Pratley, who had not been at Mrs. Belton's during the three preceding days, should go there on the following morning, accompanied by Mr. Radnor. While Mrs. Warner should remain at the apothecary's.

Miss Elwood sat in the window-seat, reading an odd volume of *Clarissa Harlowe*, the only book, besides a Bible, Common Prayer, and Glasse's *Cookery*, that Mrs. Belton's closet could produce, when the gentlemen rang at the gate.

Berthalina raised her eyes from the page, and beholding Mr. Pratley, accompanied by the father of her loved friend, she had nearly fainted. But the fear of prematurely arousing Mrs. Belton's suspicions, obliged her to repress the feelings which agitated her bosom.

Mrs. Belton was up stairs; but perceiving the gentlemen, whom she deemed most unwelcome intruders, she hastened down, and entered the parlour at the same time with themselves; and with astonishing volubility and effrontery said,

"The young woman is perfectly well, sir. She does not want either advice or medicine now."

"So much the better; so much the better, madam. This gentleman and myself only came with a friendly call—"

"That gentleman is a stranger to me."

“I am so,” said Mr. Radnor, advancing. “But we may soon know more of each other. Till then, there is a young lady here, whose friendship I will claim.”

Berthalina’s spirits were now more calm; and thus encouraged, she sprung forward, and was presently clasped in the arms of Mr. Radnor, who shed a sympathizing tear on the pale visage of the interesting girl.

With the fury of a tigress despoiled of her young, Mrs. Belton rushed towards Berthalina, and caught her arm.

“Pretty doings truly in my house! Do you think I’ll suffer it!—Mr. Pratley, I desire you, and that man whom you have presumed to bring here, will take yourselves off. As for you, miss, go up to your chamber, and wait till I call you.”

Mr. Radnor was at first so astonished, by this vulgar ebullition of rage, and display of impotent authority that he had not power to check its progress.

Berthalina was really terrified at this virago, and drew closer to the two gentlemen, to whom she naturally looked for protection.

“Am I to be obeyed or not,” said this *feminine* stentor. “Leave the room miss, before you oblige me to force you hence.”

“Woman!” exclaimed Mr. Radnor, in a voice that pronounced he was not to be trifled with, “by whose authority do you thus dare to assume this insolent command over this young lady?”

Mrs. Belton was silent; and Mr. Radnor continued. “You are on the brink of a dangerous precipice: your share in this scandalous transaction may bring a weighty punishment on your head.

“Do not trust too much on the promises of lord Elwood; nay, do not start!

“Your employer is well known to me, and shall be called to account for his extraordinary and unmanly conduct. This young lady goes with me.

“Mrs. Warner, my love, has been so good as to comply with Mrs. Radnor’s desire of accompanying me to Woodmount, on your account. She now waits for you at the house of this worthy gentleman, whither we will conduct you.”

“Most willingly will I accompany you, sir. Is Morton to go with us?”

“By all means; she is not exactly what I wish, but for the present we will wave the discussion.

Mrs. Belton was loud in her declarations, that the young lady should not quit the house without the permission of lord Elwood, who had placed her there.

“Lord Elwood is certainly the guardian of this young lady; but as he has exceeded legal authority, and seems to have some clandestine views that I cannot fathom, I shall make a complaint to the lord chancellor, who will right this injured orphan. And on your peril dare to detain her.”

“But sir,” said Mrs. Belton in a tone rather softened, “how can I answer to lord Elwood, for this breach of the trust reposed in me?”

“Under what pretext did his lordship prevail on you to take charge of this young lady, and unjustly deprive her of liberty; withholding from her writing materials, and—”

“That was by his lordship’s desire,” hastily interrupted Mrs. Belton.

“I should be sorry,” replied Mr. Radnor, “to comply with the desires every person might think proper to make me. But that is wide from the point I wish to ascertain; and I again repeat, what reason did your honourable employer give you, for his dishonourable actions?”

“I am not a child, to be thus interrogated; I was satisfied with what lord Elwood said, and that is enough for me.”

“When do you expect lord Elwood here?”

“I have expected him every hour, for these three days.”

“When he arrives give him this card. He will there find the lady. She shall not be denied to him.—Speak not; remember you have no authority to detain her; and if your employer conceives himself injured, he knows where to apply for a remedy.”

In vain was the boisterous resistance, and furious arguments of Mrs. Belton.

The two gentlemen led Miss Elwood and Morton away in triumph, amidst the revilings of their late hostess. Who watched them till they were out of sight, and then retired into the parlour, that she might consider how to act in this dilemma.

After due deliberation, she wrote, or rather scrawled, a letter to lord Elwood, in which she enclosed Mr. Radnor’s card, and gave a hasty sketch of that gentleman’s visit and the consequences.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD Elwood's self-consequence was much hurt at the receipt of Mr. Radnor's answer to his letter addressed to Caroline, instead of one from the hand of the fair lady.

He pronounced a hearty curse on all meddling fathers, and made such comments to Melmoth, to whom he communicated the contents of the letter, as fully proved, that the worthy gentleman had not erred in his conjectures.

Lord Elwood had indeed discovered, that he had a preference in Caroline's heart, and he resolved to make his advantage of it.

He gave her credit for every virtue, and he also perceived that she had *that* credulity, which is always inseparable from a good heart, of believing all that an artful person wishes them to believe. Abhorring deceit themselves, they suspect it not in others; till, alas! it is oft too late to withdraw from the snare in which they are entangled.

He now eradicated all thoughts of Miss Radnor from his breast, which was easily done; for his heart had no share in his designs on her. He wrote to lady Laurentia Brierly, in the most lover-like style: a tribute to her charms, *alias* her fortune, he had never omitted every third or fourth day, since her departure from the abbey.

He calculated that a marriage with her would be perfectly convenient, and augment his felicity; not by connubial endearments, for them he had little predilection. No, his enjoyments were *tout au contraire*.

All his other affairs dispatched, he turned his thoughts on Berthalina. His designs on that fair-one were now ripe for execution.

Mr. Hildon arrived that day at the abbey; and it was agreed that he should accompany his lordship and Mr. Melmoth, on the second morning from this period, to Woodmount, unattended by any servant except Gregory, who had been a very active agent on several occasions, to lord Elwood and his companions.

On the preceding evening to their intended excursion, as the three gentlemen sat over their wine, and swallowing large bumpers to the success of their enterprise, Gregory entered the room with a precipitation that startled the bacchantes, and announced hasty tidings.

"What's the matter, my man?" said Melmoth, "you look as though you had encountered a ghost in your way. Why your teeth chatter, and your very hair stands on end!"

“Matter enough! matter enough! though I am not in fault, good luck be thanked for it. No, if you had taken Gregory’s advice this would not have happened. Oh! women are so artful, ’tis impossible to keep fast hold of them.”

Lord Elwood started up and demanded an explanation.

“Here is a letter for your lordship, enclosed as you ordered when any communication was to be made, under cover to me; and in that cover my sister informs me, that Miss Elwood has been taken away from her house, by a gentleman who threatens to have recourse to the law against your lordship, and all that have been concerned in this business.”

“Silence! I command you; and quit the room till you are sent for.”

Gregory withdrew, muttering, and lord Elwood railed at his impertinence, without considering that when a gentleman condescends to bribe an inferior to the commitment of a base action, he puts himself on the level with his associate, and must expect those liberties at which he revolts.

Lord Elwood opened the letter, the card dropt on the table. He took it up, perused it, and was entranced by amazement.

The eager and repeated inquiries of his friends for intelligence, at length aroused him; and he burst into an ebullition of wrath, which had better be consigned to oblivion than repeated.

When the tempest had partly spent itself by its own violence, he turned to Melmoth, and gave him Mrs. Belton’s letter.

“Frederic, decypher, if you can, these mystic characters, these infernal lines that jade has sent me. I have not patience to look on them.”

Melmoth obeyed, and Gregory’s account was corroborated, with the addition that the unwelcome intruder, and despoiler of their schemes, was Mr. Radnor.

“’Pon honour this is an unlucky affair,” exclaimed Hildon, with a forced smile, “all our plans are gone to the bottom.”

“We may yet bring them to bear. I shall set off to-morrow for Mr. Radnor’s, and demand Berthalina. ’Tis a curst unlucky business. I must make some promise or compromise. In fact I must *say, swear*, any thing, or the whole will be discovered.”

“The talents of your lordship are so admirable, that it is beyond a doubt that your invention will bring you well through the piece. Why not instantly pursue your runaway and her meddling friend, in the character of her guardian and brother, force her back, put

on a high spirit, use lofty words, and intimidate them. The wedding once over, you may set them at defiance. Who dare interfere!”

“Bravo, Hildon! I’ll adopt your plan; what say you, Melmoth?”

“I am ready to attend your lordship if—if you require my company.”

“Come, come, Melmoth, let’s have no return of your old qualms of conscience. Remember, if we succeed you are to have a commission in the army.”

Melmoth bowed, suppressed a rising sigh, and assured lord Elwood and Mr. Hildon of his readiness to attend them.

“There you are wrong;” said the latter gentleman: “I must not appear before old Radnor, that would spoil all. I shall wait snug at the abbey, till I hear from you; I shall not be wanted till the end of the farce. What time do you propose setting out, my lord?”

“I shall order Marshall to call me at four. But I am tired with this posing.

“Call another subject. Melmoth give us a canzonet. Let us be jovial tonight, though we are a despoir tomorrow.”

CHAPTER XII.

MISS Elwood was received by Mrs. Warner with unfeigned transport, and they retired with Morton and Mrs. Pratley, while Mr. Radnor, at the desire of our heroine, related, under the seal of secrecy, the particulars of her history, to the friendly apothecary.

Mr. Radnor next communicated the measures he meant to adopt, which were highly approved by Mr. Pratley; who gave him some useful hints on the subject.

The gentlemen concluded that Mrs. Belton would dispatch intelligence of Miss Elwood's departure, without delay, to his lordship. They sent a boy to watch, and were soon apprised that a letter had been sent off by a man on horseback.

It would be utterly impossible for his lordship to arrive till the next day at Woodmount. He therefore resolved to get the start of that young nobleman, and, by travelling that night, avoid meeting him on the road; a circumstance that might be attended with the most unpleasant consequences, and at all events was the best to be avoided.

A dinner was procured from the next inn, and Mrs. Pratley made her guests some excellent tea and coffee. This worthy woman (who had now been admitted into the same confidence with which her husband was honoured) appeared to attach herself greatly to Miss Elwood, who greatly respected her, and drew a mental comparison between her and Mrs. Belton, which placed the other in a very disadvantageous light.

Morton was to follow, the next morning, by the stage; and the chaise being arrived, Mr. Radnor, Berthalina, and Mrs. Warner, took leave of the worthy apothecary and his wife, with a promise, that they should hear from them as soon as they had any important event to communicate; Mr. Pratley undertaking, on his part, to communicate what should transpire at Woodmount, respecting Miss Elwood.

"Come here, my sweet little maiden," said Mr. Radnor to a rosy-cheeked cherub of a child, "take this trifle, and give it to mamma, to buy cakes and dolls for you, and the rest of her pretty children. Nay, no thanks, my worthy pair. Drive on postillion. Adieu, adieu."

The travellers moved on; and the amiable pair, overwhelmed with gratitude and joy, returned into their neat habitation; thankful for this wholly unexpected, yet seasonable relief, so delicately given by the magnificent donor; who considered Mr. Pratley's conduct as meriting the highest reward, and grieved that merit like his should be suffered to waste in obscurity. He kindly resolved to take some plan into consideration, by which Mr. Pratley and his family might be benefited, as soon as he had settled Berthalina, whose affairs now engrossed the whole of his attention.

It was near midnight when they arrived at Biggleswade; they had a slight supper and retired immediately to their respective chambers, as they intended to leave the inn at an early hour, and proceed to Barnet before they took breakfast.

Mr. Radnor, and his fair companions, had arrived within two miles of Barnet, when the hind wheel coming suddenly off the chaise, the vehicle was overturned with dangerous violence.

The servants dismounted and hastened to their assistance.

It was with some difficulty that the unfortunate trio, were extricated from their perilous situation. Mr. Radnor and Mrs. Warner received little injury (if we except a few slight bruises) from the accident. Berthalina was not so auspiciously fated. One of her arms was sprained, and she had received a severe cut in her upper lip, from the broken glass, which bled profusely.

A gentleman who was travelling that road, ordered the postillions to stop; and immediately alighting, advanced, and offered his assistance in the most polite terms, which was gratefully accepted.

The stranger was a handsome middle-aged man in deep mourning, and of the most prepossessing manners.

He assisted Mr. Radnor in placing Berthalina into his chaise, which he resigned to the use of that lady and Mrs. Warner, who seemed nearly terrified out of the powers of self-recollection.

The two gentlemen mounted the horses belonging to Mr. Radnor's servants, who were left to proceed on foot, and continued their route to Barnet, where a surgeon was summoned to Berthalina, who having placed her arm in proper bandages, and dressed her lip, declared that she would be able to reach town, after a few hours rest. Mrs. Warner of course remained with her; and the gentlemen breakfasted together; after which repast the courteous stranger took leave of Mr. Radnor, and left the inn with his servant.

Berthalina had a refreshing slumber; she awoke with renovated spirits, and at noon sent word to Mr. Radnor, that she was able to attend him.

During the remainder of their journey, Mrs. Warner appeared so embarrassed, and overwhelmed with tremulous agitation, that it excited much surprise. But she could account for it no other way, in answer to the kind inquiries she received, than the fright had affected her spirits.

A servant had been sent on before, to announce the approach of the travellers, and they found Mrs. Radnor and Caroline anxiously waiting their arrival.

The latter flew to meet them in the hall; but shrunk back with apprehension, when she saw Berthalina's arm in a sling, and her lip wounded.

"Fear not, my love," said Mr. Radnor, "we have not been in the wars; we encountered but one foe, and that a female; so we had no occasion for arms."

"But then, my poor Berthalina!—And Mrs. Warner looks not like the same woman, as when she left Grosvenor-place: I fear, papa, you have been an ungallant conductor to the ladies; but I must kiss you for all that, since you have brought my sweet friend with you."

Miss Elwood received a maternal embrace from Mrs. Radnor. None of the ladies retired to dress, but the time was passed, till dinner, in mutual explanations.

Mrs. Radnor prevailed on Mrs. Warner to stay till evening, when she would set her down at her own door, as she passed to lady Bevil's.

During the dessert, Miss Radnor rallied Berthalina on the attentions she had received from the stranger: remarking, "It was a pity that the hero of the tale had not been younger; then a pretty love story might have been formed."

"You may laugh at me, Caroline, if you please; but I must own," said Berthalina, "that I never, since my birth, beheld a countenance that so forcibly interested me."

"Love at first sight—"

"It was not, is not, love, dear girl: it was an indefinable something, I cannot describe; respect, admiration! In short, his image is ever present to my eyes."

Mrs. Warner gave utterance to a deep sigh.

"Bless me," said Miss Radnor, "this gentleman has made sad havoc in your hearts: even Mrs. Warner is troubled with an heigh-ho! But have you no chance of seeing the gentleman again?"

"He has promised me the honour of a visit in a few days," said Mr. Radnor. "I certainly was not so impolite as to omit an invitation due to him for the civilities we received."

"His name, papa, his name?"

"There, my dear inquisitive girl;" throwing the card on the table.

"Sir Edward Wingrove, a baronet, Berthalina; now if he has fortune more than equal to the support of his rank, marry him, my dear, and be my lady."

“Fie! Caroline, fie! the gentleman is old enough to be my father.”

“He is, indeed,” observed Mrs. Warner, with pointed emphasis. “Miss Elwood has too much sense to indulge thoughts of such a nature.”

A long silence followed this speech.

Miss Radnor felt hurt at the remark, and Miss Elwood perceived it, but knew not how to apologise for Mrs. Warner’s inadvertence of speech, for such she esteemed it.

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor’s thoughts were different from those imbibed by the young lady. They considered Mrs. Warner as a woman of sense and discretion. From the circumstance of her leaving her home, to oblige them, they had treated her with the greatest familiarity, and retained her at their own table; yet she had never taken the least liberty in conversation, or, indeed, seldom spoke but when addressed. Since the incident of meeting Sir Edward Wingrove, she was uncommonly thoughtful; nor could they avoid supposing, that she had previously known the baronet, and was hurt at his re-appearance. This idea was strengthened, when they came to canvass matters over by themselves, from an observation Mr. Radnor made, that Mrs. Warner carefully screened her face from the observation of the baronet, and, when they arrived at the inn, studiously avoided his presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE third morning of their arrival in town, proved an eventful one at Mr. Radnor's; Morton, who had come to town the preceding evening, was dismissed with a handsome present.

However her repentance might entitle her to forgiveness, or consideration, Berthalina was reasoned into the same opinion as her friends, that Morton, would by no means, be an eligible attendant for her. As she had once consented to be bribed to an action inimical to the peace of her benefactress, there was no longer a dependance on her faith; the mind was weak that gold would sway.

To spare her feelings, which seemed deeply wounded on this occasion, she was informed, that Miss Elwood did not mean for the present to retain a person in her department, but would give her a recommendation suitable, to procure her admission in another family.

Morton had scarce left the breakfast-parlour, when sir Edward Wingrove was announced; and was sincerely welcomed by Berthalina and Mr. Radnor.

His manners were so engaging, that Mrs. Radnor and Caroline, internally joined in the encomiums they had previously heard of the baronet; and the conversation became lively and animated.

Of a sudden the baronet became thoughtful: then turning to Berthalina, he said,

“I presume Miss, by the name you bear, that you are related to lord Elwood, of Stanton Abbey.”

“Very nearly so sir, I am sister to the present lord.”

“Impossible! It cannot be!”

“Sir!”

“Excuse my freedom, shall I be pardoned by you and your amiable friends, if I ask you a material question; not the result of curiosity, but a far different motive?”

Miss Elwood assured sir Edward that they should esteem what he called a *freedom*, as a favour.

“I never heard, my dear young lady, that the late lord Elwood entered into a third marriage.”

“He did not, sir Edward.”

“You are then a natural daughter.”

Berthalina answered not, her cheeks were dyed with scarlet.

“I was fearful of this my sweet girl, nor would I, for worlds, have asked a question of so delicate a nature, had I not felt myself interested on your account.”

Miss Radnor could not avoid stealing an expressive glance at her friend, as much as to say, “*My dear you have made a conquest.*”

This playful vivacity, had not the effect it was intended to produce. Berthalina’s spirits were not so easily raised, and she remained despondent.

Mr. Radnor, ever friendly and attentive, took on himself to answer that “Berthalina was the daughter of that lady Elwood, who was so hapless as to deviate from the duty she owed herself and husband, and was eventually divorced from him. The birth of a child happening at this unpleasant crisis, lord Elwood, though its father, shrunk from acknowledging himself as such to the world; fearful of its taunts and falsehoods. The child was therefore nursed in obscurity, and might ever have remained so, had not the dying mother interested herself in the behalf of a child, still dear to her, though she had not beheld it since it was a fortnight old.

“Previous to her death, she saw lord Elwood and her daughter, she gained over the former to acknowledge his child as *such*, and he was faithful to his promise.

While that nobleman lived, Berthalina was eligibly provided for, and he promised to leave her a fortune, that should place her perfectly independent, and enable her to live in a manner consistent with her rank: but mark the sad reverse! Lord Elwood, wrought on by the artifices of his son, has left Berthalina solely in his power; he is her only guardian, and most improperly has he filled that office.”

Here Mr. Radnor entered into particulars of the transactions that had taken place since lord Elwood’s decease, and the present perplexing state of Berthalina’s affairs.

Sir Edward, instead of commenting on what he had heard, complained of a sudden indisposition, and, with a slight apology, retired.

“How strange,” burst from the lips of every individual of the groupe.

“What can this mean?” said Mr. Radnor, “sir Edward seems much affected! Why should *he* be so inquisitive about Berthalina?”

Mrs. Radnor was about to make some remark, when a carriage drove to the door; it was lady Bevil, and the conversation was of course suspended.

During lady Bevil's stay, Caroline chanced to mention, that sir Edward Wingrove had been their visitor that morning.

"I knew not, brother, that you were acquainted with the baronet, he has lived chiefly abroad during the latter part of his life."

Mr. Radnor related the incident that had introduced them to each other, and his respectful politeness to Berthalina; "and I know not," continued he, laughingly, "whether we might not attribute the baronet's visit, this morning, to her account, for she seems to have created a great interest in his *heart*."

Lady Bevil with uplifted hands, exclaimed, "sir Edward *Wingrove* an admirer of Miss Elwood!"

"Nay, my dear sister," said Mrs. Radnor, "you take your brother's words too seriously; you know his propensity to *badinage*:—Sir Edward, I am certain, has no matrimonial intentions towards our friend."

"Heaven forbid! the destroyer of the mother's happiness, nay, the destroyer of her very existence, can have no thoughts of the daughter;—nor ought he to obtrude himself into her sight."

"What mean you, madam!" said Berthalina, almost gasping for respiration, so much was she shocked.

Lady Bevil turned pale.

She took Berthalina's hand.

"Did you not know, my love, that in the person of sir Edward Wingrove, you beheld that vile colonel Rainsforth, who was the seducer of your unfortunate mother?"

Our heroine sighed the name of Rainsforth, and sank on the ground, in a state of insensibility.

Lady Bevil was seriously alarmed.

"What have I done," said she. "Could I suppose it possible that you were all ignorant of a circumstance so generally known?—I was shocked to hear that he was amicably received in this house."

The ladies busied themselves in the restoration of their young friend, without the aid of any of their attendants; as they were apprehensive Miss Elwood, on her recovery, might make use of some expressions, which they might not choose to be heard by any persons, not interested in this affair.

When Miss Elwood revived, they would fain have persuaded her to retire to her chamber; but such was the desire that reigned in her breast, of conversing with lady Bevil, that she over-ruled all their objections; and, with a voice scarcely articulate, through sorrow, she entreated that lady to conceal nothing from her.

“Had I known you were yet to learn this painful truth, I should have shrunk from the mention of it; for I cannot bear the idea of giving pain to those I esteem.”

Berthalina bowed.

“Your mother, Miss Elwood, was the daughter of a country clergyman; she was an only child. Relations she had none, except her tender father, and this circumstance redoubled his cares on her account. She was born to him late in life; he was now fast declining towards the grave, and had but a small fortune to bequeath her.

“Her uncommon beauty attracted many admirers. The fair Olivia had titled heads in her train. It appeared that lord Elwood’s offers were more frank and honourable, than those of his rivals. The anxious father added his entreaties to the petitions of the lover, and Olivia became the bride of one, who was then esteemed among the most agreeable men of the british court. Lord Elwood then was not the same lord Elwood as you have known, soured by ingratitude and disappointed love.

“Lady Elwood had not been married above three months, when she lost her father, who died happy in the thoughts of his daughter’s honourable settlement. He was thus spared the pain of her disgrace.

“Lady Elwood was a blazing-star in the fashionable circles. Indulged, by her adoring lord, in the most expensive style of dress, she outshone her fair competitors for admiration. All this might have been very well, had she not added fashionable follies to the rest.

“To receive the incense of flattery, and to attend to the gaming parties, of the dissipated part of her connexion, became her principal pursuits.

“Her frequent calls for money, opened the eyes of her lord. He looked in vain for the tender, grateful, wife:—She was lost in the lady of fashion. His tender remonstrances were disregarded, his advice ridiculed; at length, tired of her dissipation, he assured her, that the next gaming debt she contracted, should be to him the signal of separation.

“Lady Elwood was at first cautious of incurring such an eclipse to her elevation. Alas! one fatal night, prudence slumbered; she rose from the cassino table penniless, and six hundred pounds in debt.

“To apply to lord Elwood would be her ruin.

“To raise that sum on her jewels could not be done. She was under several engagements to parties, when that appendage of splendor could not be dispensed with. It would betray what she wished most to conceal. Every other resource had already been tried to the utmost.

“Her ladyship past a sleepless night, lord Elwood was gone on a shooting-party, and would not return for a week. His absence at this crisis was a relief to his lady, for she could indulge her sighs and tears unquestioned.

“Colonel Rainsforth had been, for some time past, her very shadow, the importuning lover.

“Lady Elwood, as yet, had persisted in denying him the triumph over *hers* and her *husband's* honour.

“But, as she allowed him to be her constant chaperon in public, and to visit at her house whenever he pleased, those denials only served to inflame his passions the more, and appeared to him more as the art of a coquette, to try her power, than connubial virtue.

“The second morning, subsequent to this catastrophe, as her ladyship was at breakfast in her boudoir, (considering her case as hopeless, having in vain racked her brains for ways and means to pay her debt, which she had promised to do, that very evening; lord L——’s agent having been appointed to call in Seymour-street for that purpose,) her evil genius brought colonel Rainsforth as her guest.

“He remarked her dejection; and, in sweetly soothing accents, inquired the cause of his Olivia’s distress.

“At first, she answered only by her tears: but, won by his entreaties, lady Elwood confessed the cause.

“The colonel laughed; and Olivia, offended, railed at his mirth, as unfeeling.

“Rainsforth treated the matter as a mere trifle; condemned the parsimony of lord Elwood, towards such a lovely wife; swore, that was he emperor of the Indies, he would pour their wealth into her lap; and, lastly, prevailed on her to accept a draft of a thousand pounds, to be paid when her ladyship had more money than she knew what to do with.

“Her ladyship was all gratitude; her colonel all eloquence, and false sophistry. She believed his arguments, and betrayed the best of husbands.

“A few weeks after this event, lord Elwood was apprised, by some tattler, of the loss his lady had sustained; and also, that the debt had been paid with a punctuality that surprised the receiver. How the money had been obtained, was a point yet to learn.

“If lord Elwood was hurt, at the little effect his prohibition against gaming had had on his lady, he was much more so, at the facility with which the matter had been settled, and kept from his knowledge.

“While his lordship was revolving, in his own mind, how to gain possession of this important secret, whether he should openly avow what he had heard, to Olivia, and extort from her the truth, or take other means for its development, the indiscretion of the lovers betrayed itself to detection.

“The guilty pair fled, and it was two months before their retreat was discovered: as they had retired to an obscure town, in or near Northumberland: where they passed as a married couple, under an assumed name; attended by a faithful valet of the colonel’s, and a waiting-woman of her ladyship’s.

“Lord Elwood sued for damages: and the colonel, under pretext of coming to town, to employ counsel, &c. left his lady, and soon arrived in the metropolis. A few weeks after, to the surprise of every one, and the indignation of many, he married the heiress of a Mr. Wingrove, a gentleman of immense riches, gained by successful commerce, and suffered judgment, in the cause pending between him, and the injured husband, to go by default, and he was cast in very weighty damages.

“He wrote to lady Elwood, with a weak attempt to justify his conduct, by alleging, that a prior contract, between him and Miss Wingrove, existed before he had the honour of her ladyship’s acquaintance; and that the friends of his bride had pressed him to fulfil his promise, notwithstanding the late affair, which, he thought, would have made an alteration in their sentiments, and left him at liberty to marry lady Elwood, when her divorce was effected. At the same time he hinted, that should any consequences of a tender nature result from their connexion, he should think himself bound to provide nobly for his offspring.

“I heard from an unquestionable quarter, that the reply of lady Elwood was spirited and resentful. She returned some notes of valuable amount, that he had sent her; and assured him, that he need be under no apprehensions of having a child committed to his care, as the cruelty she had experienced, had prematurely dissolved that tie.

“Lord Elwood, though most wronged, was the first to feel for Olivia. He received from her several letters, expressive of her penitence and regret. She assured him that she

wept incessantly; but was aware that oceans of tears could not wash out stains like hers: yet she besought him to pity and forgive her.

“He did so, and bestowed on her a sum sufficient for an elegant retirement: as she expressed a desire to seclude herself entirely from a world, in which she had been disgraced.

“Lady Elwood sued for a parting interview with her lord, but it was not granted. He told a friend, that he did not dare trust himself in the presence of a woman he still adored, lest he should forget how deeply she had injured him, and act with a weakness that, in his situation, would be reprehensible, both in effect and example.

“Lady Elwood’s divorce did not take place, till near a twelvemonth after its cause: she immediately left England; and, about two months after, her death was announced; and lord Elwood paid a tribute of respect to her memory, by wearing mourning for a few weeks.

“Now, what I can collect from this unhappy circumstance, is, that poor lady Elwood must have been pregnant, before her fatal deviation from the paths of honour: a circumstance at first concealed from lord Elwood; but of which he must afterwards be well convinced, or he would never have acknowledged Berthalina.

“The colonel, soon after his marriage, resigned his commission, and entered into traffic with his father-in-law. He had three sons, who, with his lady, about ten years since, went to Bengal. Mrs. Rainsforth’s health was injured by the change of climate, and she returned to England, after an absence of five years, and died at Bristol. About a twelvemonth after, the newspapers apprised us of her father’s death.

“The widower now appears as sir Edward Wingrove, having taken that name, by a grant from government, in compliance with his father-in-law’s will. He is now in mourning for the only son who survived his lady. He has thus, you perceive, been visited by domestic calamities, and suffered for his former crimes.”

Berthalina’s spirits were so greatly exhausted by what she had heard, that she requested permission to retire; and Miss Radnor accompanied her to the boudoir.

Berthalina, reclining on the sofa, burst into an agony of tears.

“Did I not tell you, dearest Caroline, that my heart never acknowledged the late lord Elwood as a father? Sir Edward Wingrove, I am convinced, is—”

“Heavens! what a rap! is the baronet returned? Look, dear Caroline.”

Miss Radnor obeyed her friend, but started back from the window with precipitation, exclaiming, "It is your brother and Mr. Melmoth! Summon your fortitude, to meet them with composure, should our presence be required."

The two friends remained above an hour, in painful expectation, when Mrs. Radnor entered the room, with a countenance that indicated both grief and apprehension.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.