

THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

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

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THE CHILD

OF

MYSTERY.

“AH! my dear madam,” said Berthalina, placing her snowy arms round the neck of Mrs. Radnor, “why do you cast such looks of pity on me? Surely lord Elwood does not mean to force me hence!”

“Such is the will of his late father, of which he has now produced an attested copy, that we know not, my love, how to withstand the power delegated to him. He refuses to give satisfactory answers to Mr. Radnor’s interrogatories, and persists in the abominable falsehood, that he removed you from Stanton Abbey for no other purpose than to prevent a clandestine union between you and a person unworthy of such an alliance.

“I left Mr. Radnor and his lordship in high altercation, for I had not patience to continue longer in the room.”

Berthalina wept, and Miss Radnor, apprehensive for her beloved friend, sympathized in her sorrows. Mrs. Radnor endeavoured to comfort the fair mourners, assuring them that Mr. Radnor would do nothing rashly, nor was he a character to be intimidated by weak unmeaning threats. “He will not permit you to return to your brother without some surety that your former treatment is not to be renewed. If persuasion and arguments will not prevail, other means must be resorted to: we will not tamely submit to see you wronged.”

The grateful answer of Miss Elwood was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who came from Mr. Radnor, to request the presence of the ladies.

They complied, with the keenest sensations of reluctance.

Lord Elwood received them with a cool bow, but cast on Miss Radnor a scrutinizing glance, which she treated with deserved contempt; and such was her self-command, that his lordship began to suspect he had deceived himself, in supposing the fair Caroline had a predilection for him; yet he was unwilling to admit an idea that so much lowered his self-consequence.

Mr. Radnor, turning to Miss Elwood, said, “Your brother, madam, has deputed me to make the following proposals to you. I will state them candidly, without making the least attempt to bias your inclination.

“You have no wish to return to your brother’s house, to superintend his establishment?”

“Certainly not: that situation was scarce supportable before the cruel deceit practised on me at Stanton Abbey, now it would be the worst of hardships; I never could feel myself secure, or place any confidence in lord Elwood.”

“I foresaw this refusal, and prepared his lordship for it. He then proposes your immediate marriage:—on your compliance he will give your fortune of eight thousand pounds, and the small annuity the late lord settled on you shall be doubled, and settled on yourself and heirs.”

“I think,” replied Berthalina, “that this proposal comes prematurely, as lord Elwood, however he has been pleased to declare the contrary, is aware that I have no suitors.”

Mr. Radnor smiled.

“You are wrong, Miss Elwood, you are wrong; your brother has convinced me that you have a suitor, one that meets his approbation, not your clandestine lover.”

Miss Elwood’s thoughts turned on Mr. Hartley,—could she flatter herself that he had made proposals.

At that moment she truly felt the dread to ask, and yet the wish to know.

Lord Elwood impatiently asked Berthalina her determination.

This hasty proceeding recalled her wandering imagination, and she replied,

“I am not going to enter into any premature promises; I hold my word as sacred, and ere I give it, I must be aware of my ability to perform the obligation in which I engage.”

Lord Elwood made some acrimonious remarks, when Mr. Radnor interfered, with—

“Your lordship’s impetuosity leads you to forget that you acquainted me with the particulars that you wished to meet Miss Elwood’s ear; and promised to withhold all interference till her answer was given.”

“I cannot give an answer, sir, till I am apprised from whom proceeds the offer.”

“Certainly not, my dear child: lord Elwood tells me, the gentleman who has done you the honour of making proposals, is a bosom friend of his, young, possessing ample fortune, and agreeable manners, Mr. Hildon.”

Berthalina turned pale, and the starting tear proclaimed her feelings.

“No sir, never, Mr. Hildon, and his dissipated principles, are my aversion. No, I would sooner brave the most abject poverty, than yield myself a willing victim to such a conspiracy against my peace.”

Lord Elwood took fire at the word conspiracy, and harshly demanded an elucidation of Berthalina.

“Seek it in your own breast, my lord, ’tis fertile of invention. After your contrivance in removing me from the abbey, and your endeavours to prejudice me in the opinion of the few, but truly amiable, friends I possess, no machinations of your’s will surprise, though it may excite my indignation.”

Lord Elwood’s rage was excessive, it knew no bounds, and the terrified Berthalina, in reply to some soothing remarks of Caroline, said, in agony,—

“Why have I not, like you, the protection of a tender father? Miserable orphan that I am. O my mother! Dear hapless parent, your sad presentiments are too well accomplished: you feared I should be wretched.”

At this instant the parlour door opened, and sir Edward Wingrove entered, unannounced, and excessively agitated.

“I apologize, Mr. Radnor, for this intrusion; impute it, I entreat you, to a momentous concern, that, at present, engages all my thoughts, and not to want of respect.”

“Sir Edward Wingrove can never be an intruder,” said Mr. Radnor, with a coolness which the account of lady Bevil had given birth to.

The entrance of the baronet had silenced lord Elwood, but no sooner was his name pronounced, than his lordship was affected with a visible tremor, every feature of his face betraying apprehension, and a warring of the passions.

Pleading a recollected engagement, he entreated permission to retire, and renew the subject they were discussing on the subsequent morning.

Mr. Radnor and the ladies bowed assent, but sir Edward Wingrove, barring his progress as he was leaving the room, exclaimed—

“My lord, you depart not thus; no mean subterfuges—’tis you I am here to seek, nor will we part without a mutual explanation. Though my person is a stranger, my name is not; speak, I conjure you, with that truth as you would before the tribunal of Heaven, is Berthalina your sister?”

Lord Elwood paused a considerable time, and then stammered out an affirmative.

“’Tis false!” exclaimed the baronet, in a voice of thunder.

“False! I am not used to such language, and shall insist on a reparation of my injured honour.”

The ladies, terrified, began to interfere.

“Be under no apprehensions, ladies,” said Sir Edward, “I am no duellist, I condemn that mode of deciding differences equally with that of suicide, as a defiance to our Creator.”

“You have chosen this mode of reply as a screen to your cowardice.”

“No, young man, I am no coward, beware how you provoke my vengeance.”

“I heed not you or your threats,” said lord Elwood, with much effrontery, “nor wish for any interference in your concerns; in fact, I am at a loss to know why you thus attack me with such an absurd question.”

“The feelings of a parent are not to be trifled with; too long have I been a stranger to my child—I knew not the happiness that awaited me—the deep-rooted resentment of her mother contrived a scheme to sunder us, as she hoped, for ever, but nature will assert her rights, and instinct speaks to the heart. Berthalina, my child, my adored daughter, come to the arms of an affectionate father. Ah, if thou knowest a mother’s wrongs let them not steel thy bosom against me, nor add by thy hatred to the woes I have and do now suffer. All the children I had by my late wife have been consigned to an early grave, you only are left to console your parent. Does not your heart speak for me?”

“It does, indeed,” said Berthalina, with emphasis, “from the first moment I saw you, sir Edward, an indefinable something, language cannot express, led my heart towards you.”

“What combination, what mockery is this?” said lord Elwood, his eyes flashing with resentful fire, “I wish you would bring forward some proofs of this new-claimed relationship, the farce really grows absurd.”

“Then the sooner we put a *dénouement* to it the better. Mr. Radnor, how can I sufficiently apologize to you and your amiable lady, for the unprecedented liberties I have

taken; but you are parents, and can feel for me. Will you ring the bell, and give orders that the two persons who accompanied me hither may be introduced?"

This request was granted without hesitation, and in a few seconds Mrs. Warner, and a young man whose appearance, to use a common-place remark, was shabby genteel, entered the room.

"Wilsden, you here!" said lord Elwood.

"My lord, call to mind what happened when we last met, and you need not be surprised, that I should seek from the baronet that aid you had the meanness to deny me, to the utter disregard of all your promises, and the obligations I had conferred on you."

"Obligations! you insignificant reptile—but you are beneath my notice. Sir Edward, you will find me at home any hour to-morrow morning you may please to call in Seymour-street. I have some proposals to make you, by way of accommodation, that I hope will meet the approbation of you and that lady," (turning to Berthalina).

"My lord, you may depend on my attendance. I shall hear what you have to offer with impartial candour. I injured your father, grossly injured him, yet he was kind to my child. He did that in compliance with the wishes of her mother, that I question no other man in the universe would submit to. It was, in fact a blameable weakness, but it was one of those, that while it did discredit to the head, shews a generous, a feeling heart. Out of respect to his memory I will endeavour to accommodate matters with you in that way as to screen the truth of this affair from public knowledge, and consequently save your name from public obloquy. I speak harshly, young man, the days of flattery are past with me, but sincerity has taken its place; trust then on my honour, that I will not unnecessarily injure you."

Lord Elwood bowed, then, making a few slight compliments to Mr. Radnor and the ladies, and casting a look of mingled rage, contempt, and revenge, on Wilsden and Mrs. Warner, left the house.

CHAPTER II.

SIR EDWARD WINDGROVE acquainted Mr. Radnor, that he had required the presence of Wilsden and Mrs. Warner there in case of lord Elwood's having the effrontery to persist in the strange fabrication that his father was led to join in, of declaring Berthalina his sister. Their appearance, at the command of the baronet, convinced his lordship, that he was in possession of the required proofs of his guilt, and that it was useless for him to contend against so formidable an antagonist.

Wilsden was now dismissed, with an appointment from the baronet, to attend him the next morning, at nine, at the Gloucester Hotel, where he remained till he could purchase a house, and form a proper establishment.

The baronet was invited by Mr. Radnor and his lady to take a dinner *en famille*, with them and the young ladies.

He complied with pleasure, being as eager to give an elucidation of these seemingly mysterious circumstances as they were to hear them. Mrs. Warner also made one of the party, as with her rested a very material part of the desired explanation.

Indeed, the baronet thought her communications so necessary to connect the various events together, that, by his express desire, she took the precedence of him in narration, which we shall give in the personal tense.

“On the marriage of Lord Elwood to his second lady, I was hired to attend immediately on her person; her affable condescension and liberality, with the extreme kindness I experienced from her in a dangerous illness with which I was afflicted, soon after my being received into her service, sincerely attached me to my lady.

“I at once revered her as a mistress and superior, and loved her as a sister.

“On her unhappy fall from honour and virtue, my relations, who are trades-people of the first respectability, wished me to leave my lady, and connect myself in partnership with one of my cousins, who was going into the haberdashery line; but I resisted all their importunities, and yielded to the request of my lady, who with tearful eyes besought me not to leave, and I vowed fidelity to her through every change of fortune.

“On sir Edward's desertion of my lady, her anguish, which amounted almost to distraction, gave me sensible fears for her life, or, what was worse than death, a continual derangement.

“Contrary to my expectation, she suddenly recovered her usual energy of mind. Her passions were strong, and her resentments violent; she was one of those characters that must either love or hate, she knew no medium. Her pride was severely hurt, she

determined to leave her native country—but was at a loss for money, to carry that plan into execution; she rejected, with disdain, pecuniary assistance from her seducer.

“I was commissioned by her to repair to lord Elwood, and paint to him her penitence and distress, with the omission of one material circumstance; my lady was in her *accouchement* of a daughter, born before the divorce was granted, but yet the undoubted child of colonel Rainsforth.

“‘Gracious heaven,’ exclaimed the baronet, ‘how cruel of Olivia to deprive her child of a father’s protection, when she herself denied her maternal care. But proceed, Mrs. Warner, I am anxious to hear her motives.’

“My lady considered the poor child as the severest punishment of her crime, and a perpetuation of her disgrace. The mention of the child would revive the story of the mother, and she determined to conceal its birth, particularly from the colonel, whom she now hated, and lord Elwood, either of whom she knew would counteract her intentions; the former from the ties of nature, the other from the impulse of humanity.

“Lord Elwood, who was the most generous of men, settled on his *ci-devant* lady a liberal annuity, and presented me with a handsome sum of money for her present use. He was pleased to praise my fidelity to my mistress, and deeply lamented the fatal error that had for ever separated him from the only woman he had or could truly love.

“When I returned to my lady, she wept bitterly over the farewell letter of lord Elwood, exclaiming, ‘Ah! what a husband has my folly lost me!’

“She was now tolerably recovered, and the birth of the child, who was baptized by the name of Berthalina Olivia Rainsforth, and registered as such, was only known to a very few individuals, whose interest it was to keep the secret, small pensions being assigned them, which would terminate on the breach of their faith.

“My lady now wished to carry the plan into execution, that she had arranged for the disposal of the child, previous to its birth.

“I had hoped that the sight of her infant, and the maternal office she had performed, of nourishing it at her own breast, would have diverted her from the unnatural purpose of abandoning it, but she steadily persevered in her resolve. In vain I pleaded for the little innocent—she forbade me, on pain of her eternal displeasure, and a separation between us, to press her on the subject again, vowing that the child of her shame should not be a perpetual monument before her eyes, to remind her of her fall. No finger should point at, nor no tongue should say, that was lady Elwood’s daughter, nor should the colonel, however secretly he might provide for his child, have that pledge to boast of Olivia’s adulterous love, since he had denied her the only reparation that was in his power to make, a reparation that she certainly had looked forward to, when the divorce was effected.

“About twelve miles from her retirement, lived a Mrs. Burton, a widow, who supported herself by needle-work, &c. and a few aids she received from her dutiful children, who were servants in respectable families.

“Mrs. Burton had lived some years with lady Elwood’s father, and on that lady’s aggrandizement by marriage, she had written to her for pecuniary assistance, having about that time a violent fit of sickness.

“My lady rode several times to Mrs. Burton’s, whose residence she now remembered, as very a-propos to her purpose.

“She gradually unfolded her schemes to this woman, and found her a very pliant tool for her purpose. She advised consigning the child to the care of a worthy family of the name of Aubrey, as the most likely people she knew that would foster the helpless innocent.

“Her advice was accepted, and she entrusted with the execution of it, which she artfully accomplished.

“She immediately returned to her cottage, and put on a disguise prepared for her, then walking to the next town, she took a place in the stage, and set off for London, where we soon joined her, every thing being prepared for our journey, previous to my lady resigning the child to Mrs. Burton. I parted from the dear babe with many tears, and a fervent prayer that I should again behold her, a circumstance I had then little reason to expect. I believe my lady suffered greatly, but pride got the ascendancy of her feelings, and from that hour she forbade me to mention the child, unless she first started the subject; and I was careful to obey her.

“We travelled under borrowed names, and in a humble manner. We stopped but two nights in the metropolis, and that at a first floor in Holborn, which Mrs. Burton had engaged for my lady’s reception.

“Mrs. Burton had engaged to go abroad with us as an under servant. My lady not choosing to leave behind her a person who was entrusted with a secret of such importance, and who might, by a few inadvertent words, expose her, and overthrow all her plan.

“We settled at a small distance from Pisa; my lady saw no company, and lived in a most retired way, never going beyond the limits of her own grounds, which were extensive and elegant, and screened from public view by rich embowering shades.

“Lord Elwood paid her annuity with great exactness, and at her request, gave out to the world that she was deceased, a report that she took care to propagate by other means.

“She never extended the honour of her confidence so far as to elucidate her motives for so strange a proceeding, though I conjectured that it was to put a termination to the various conversations and paragraphs of that day, lady Elwood being then a fashionable topic for the scandalous chronicle, with many cruel additions to the truth.

“We had been at Pisa nearly three years, when an accident that befel lord Wynchcombe, laid the foundation for a very unexpected event.

“A weak state of health, and some other causes, had made his lordship choose Italy for his residence; he frequently rode past our villa, but knew not that Mrs. Macduff, an Italian lady by birth, but the widow of a brave Scotch officer, for as such my lady caused herself to be reported, was the lovely divorced lady Elwood, of whom his lordship, on his first becoming a widower, had been a gallant admirer.

“One eventful morning, as he was taking his accustomed exercise, his horse being suddenly startled, flung him, and he was conveyed into one of our saloons, at the request of his servant, the accident occurring immediately before our house.

“By the aid of some drops in water he soon revived, being merely stunned by the fall.

“Just at that instant, my lady, who had been walking in the orangery returned, unapprised of the event that had taken place in her absence, and entered the saloon, where the earl of Wynchcombe was reclining on the sofa.

“A mutual recognition took place, and his lordship renewed his devoirs.

“I have reason to believe that the earl left no means untried to plunge my lady still further into the abyss of dishonour, but all his schemes and arguments were ineffectual, and at length they were married in the most private manner.

“It was generally known that lord Wynchcombe had entered into second nuptials, but not the smallest circumstance transpired that could lead any one to conjecture that the bride had once been lady Elwood, as they were only visited by a few Italian families, and the countess relaxed very little from her former mode of seclusion.

“My lady had several children by the earl, to whom she was a fond indulgent mother.

“Their innocent prattle and endearments used to recal forcibly to her mind thoughts on the child she had deserted.

“Mrs. Burton died a short time subsequent to my lady’s second marriage, nor had we heard the least tidings of Berthalina, yet the countess was continually on the alarm, and apprehensive of a discovery.

“The Earl, for obvious reasons, was not apprised of this circumstance, and my lady frequently declared that such a circumstance meeting his ears would be her death.

“Notwithstanding her second marriage, of which I, by her order, apprised him by letter, for no correspondence existed between them, lord Elwood continued her annuity, though at first greatly incensed at her change of situation.

“He expressed much regret and surprise at this circumstance, in the reply which he did me the honour to make. He had cherished a hope that she would have devoted the remainder of her days to penitence and piety. He did not think, that circumstanced as she was, it was prudent for her to marry; and he hinted his fears, that her happiness, instead of increasing, would be diminished by this alliance.

“He was, indeed, prophetic, and his conjectures were realized.

“Lord Wynchcombe, in a few weeks, threw off the mask of adulation. He was, indeed, a tyrant.

“His reason for marrying soon unfolded itself to view; he wanted a wife to wait on every caprice, to be the very slave of his will.

“In the divorced lady Elwood he reckoned on finding a proper subject for his imperious will. With no friend to protect her, no relation to assert her rights, and dead to the world, he thought her spirit was broken, and might be moulded to any form.

“But he was wrong: my lady was not one of those who would tamely submit to injustice; past circumstances had soured her temper, and chased away that agreeable vivacity for which she had been distinguished, and her company courted.

“In short they lived a very unhappy life, mutual recriminations frequently taking place; nor could the private circumspect life which the countess led, wholly suppress the jealousy of the earl, which seemed an habitual failing in his nature. He feared machinations against him, even in her rigid retirement; and had more than once the ungenerosity to say in her presence, that ‘A female who had made one false step, was never after on a sure footing.’

“The countess suffered the most excruciating anguish of mind, and a consequent debility of frame; for grief preyed on her very vitals, and brought on a premature old age, at the very period when she should have shone in the prime of life.

“Often, when we were by ourselves, did she draw comparisons between lord Elwood, colonel Rainsforth, and the earl, which invariably tended to exalt the husband she had so fatally injured. This dangerous indulgence of her reflections, while it urged her to continual self-reproach, made her regard lord Elwood with enthusiasm; she loved him now with an ardent affection, before unknown, and it was one of her chief wishes to see him before she expired, and receive his verbal forgiveness.

“Lady Wynchcombe was at length pronounced to be in a most alarming state by her physicians, and her own feelings too well testified to the justice of their opinion.

“My lady was advised to try the air of her native land, and an agent was employed to fit up a house for her reception, at Old Brompton, it being esteemed a salubrious spot for persons labouring under her malady, and handy for medical advice, from its nearness to the metropolis.

“It being impossible for my lady to see any person in her new habitation, without betraying herself to the world, she readily accepted the offer of his lordship, to take her own children with her to England, as companions in her solitude.

“The honourable George Hartley, was sincerely attached to my lady: he was several years older than her own children, and had been the confidant of her sorrows, in every thing but the close concealed circumstance of Berthalina.

“His wish of escorting my lady to England, was highly agreeable to her, and thus attended, she bade adieu to her lord, and Castella Nuova, where they had resided some years past.

“My lady seemed to look forward with pleasure to revisiting England, though her enfeebled frame was scarcely able to support the fatigue of the journey.

CHAPTER III.

“No sooner were we settled at Brompton, than lady Wynchcombe wrote to lord Elwood, beseeching him, if he had the least regard to her soul’s peace, to grant her an interview.

“He complied, and according to the instructions of the countess, came privately to Brompton. I had previously caused to be conveyed to him the key of a small gate, that opened from the garden into the lane. He waited for me in the summer-house, and as soon as I was aware that I could do so without detection, I introduced his lordship into my lady’s boudoir.

“Had I known that these interviews had been concerted for the most guilty purposes, instead of the innocency that attended them, of which I was a witness, being desired by the countess never to leave the room, lest the affair should be misrepresented, I could not have suffered more trepidation, or fear of discovery, from my knowledge of lord Wynchcombe’s temper, and I thought my lady ran great hazards.

“Only one interview was at first intended, but on their meeting, such an interesting subject was started, that they continued till the countess’s decease.

“On his lordship’s entering the boudoir, the countess was so overcome by the singularity of her situation, that I could scarce keep her from fainting.

““Ah, still dear, regretted Olivia,’ said his lordship, ‘why do we meet *thus*, like guilty lovers? Could I ever suppose, when I led you, blooming in native grace and beauty (like our first mother) to the altar, that our interviews would be stolen ones? Ah! beloved woman, how must I ever deplore the fatal weakness that divided us. Why marry lord Wynchcombe?—But for that, we might have yet been happy.’

““Impossible, Charles.—Mine was a crime beyond your efforts to pardon.’

““Olivia,’ replied lord Elwood, ‘to you I may reveal that weakness I have hitherto concealed from the world. Previous to your quitting England, I did not dare trust myself in your presence; I knew I should forgive—perhaps forget.—’

“After a pause, lord Elwood proceeded.

““From the repeated accounts of Mrs. Charlton, and your continued seclusion, I began to feel confidence and respect for your virtues, regarding your fall as the consequence of youthful follies now abjured.

““To brave the fixed opinions of my country, and the prejudices of all my friends, was an herculean task I could not attempt, but I thought I might persuade you to retire

with me to some distant kingdom, where, in the society of each other, we might end our days in that happiness to which we had long been strangers.

“‘With such a scheme in contemplation, I was ill prepared to hear of your second marriage; and again I had to learn the painful lesson of resignation to an irremediable evil.’

“The countess appeared overwhelmed with anguish and remorse, and labouring for a reply.

“Lord Elwood observed it, and said, ‘I seek for no apology, you owe none to me, you were mistress of your own actions, besides it would now be of no avail: I came not to upbraid you—you have my sincerest forgiveness, and my friendship, I will not give it a tenderer name. Say then, Olivia, is there aught on earth that I can do to prove my sincerity, or to give ease to your mind; concealments often press heavy on the heart, and are productive of the most fatal consequences.’

“This speech, and the penetrating look that accompanied it, startled the countess, and I must own it had the same effect on me.

“Lady Wynchcombe was silent for a considerable time, and then faintly repeated the word concealment.

“‘Come, come, Olivia, be frank. I had hoped that a mother’s feelings would have predominated, and on meeting with one on whose faith you could place reliance, you would have put matters en train to arrive at some intelligence concerning the infant you deserted. As I have previously said, I came not to reproach, my thoughts on that subject shall not meet your ear.’

“The countess sunk on her knees, ‘Tell me,’ said she, gaspingly, ‘how you became possessed of that fatal secret;—*secret* did I say? perhaps it is here generally known, and my name bandied about as an unfeeling monster. O death, death! *thou art* the fairest cover of my shame.’

“Here my unfortunate lady was so agonized, that I intreated his lordship to retire, that I might ring for assistance.

“He obeyed me, having first given the countess a solemn assurance that the affair was an entire secret, and safe in his keeping; an assurance that tended greatly to her recovery.

“My lady passed a sleepless night; her thoughts were divided between lord Elwood and Berthalina, for whom he had awakened her strongest feelings, and she acknowledged to me, that the child had oftener been the object of her thoughts than she had formerly cared to own, after what she had done.

“The next morning the countess received a letter from lord Elwood, in which he acquainted her, that Mrs. Burton had proved unfaithful to her trust, notwithstanding the precautions used to prevent her.

“A few days previous to her death, she addressed a letter to lord Elwood, humbly imploring pardon for the liberty she had taken, but alleging as an excuse, that she could not die in peace, without she disburthened her conscience of a weight that lay heavy on it.

“She then recapitulated every circumstance respecting the child, who, she observed, was condemned unjustly to obscurity, and perhaps servitude, when it, if now living, had so many rich friends, nor was it unlikely, a father, who might be proud to acknowledge her.

“She then reflected on herself for burthening the worthy Aubreys, from whom she had received many essential favours.

“She concluded by assuring his lordship, on what she called her dying word, that she had never revealed that circumstance to any mortal but himself, whom she now chose on account of his superior judgment and humanity, and left the whole to his discretion.

“The astonished lord Elwood took the earliest opportunity of satisfying himself with respect to Berthalina.

“By the private inquiries he caused to be made, he found there was such a child at farmer Aubrey’s.

“He determined to have an eye over her, and was the secret benefactor to whom she had such obligations.

CHAPTER IV.

“ON lord Elwood’s next visit, the interview was truly affecting, and the countess pathetically lamented the error she had been led into by a false pride, of deserting her babe. Had it shared her retirement, had she fulfilled her maternal duty to it, she now conjectured that Providence would have ordained her happier days.

“From the money allowed her by lord Elwood, and her jointure from the earl, she had realized twelve thousand pounds, for her retirement had rendered the expense of dress very trivial for her rank. She had also a casket of jewels of immense value, which was the gift of a foreign relation of the earl, through the hands of Mr. G. Hartley.

“When on a visit to Castella Nuova, the marchioness took a great fancy to my lady, and was much affected by her visible sorrow and dejection. She also saw the stern manners of the earl, for whom she had no great partiality, and resolved to be a friend to the countess, whom she erroneously supposed to labour under pecuniary embarrassments, which caused her woe, and altercations with lord Wynchcombe.

“To remove a cause she feelingly deplored, she no sooner returned home than, unknown to the earl, his second son received the casket I mentioned, for my lady, accompanied by a deed, purporting it to be a free gift to and for the sole use of the countess, with power to dispose of it as she pleased.

“This casket, of itself a noble fortune, and the twelve thousand pounds, were, in my presence, delivered to lord Elwood, with some writings and necessary attestations of my lady, as Berthalina’s portion.

“This duty performed, the countess, still anxious to make every reparation for her former neglect, was contriving means for Berthalina’s introduction to the world in a rank suitable to her fortune.

“She at length, by tears and entreaties, gained a reluctant assent from lord Elwood to adopt Berthalina as his own, and to keep her consanguinity to colonel Rainsforth a perfect secret.

“The dissolution of the countess seemed approaching with rapid strides. She wrote a letter to the earl, which was to be a posthumous one. In it she apprised him of the existence of a daughter, Miss Elwood, acknowledging that the concealment of this child arose from an error that she now abjured, and the ties of nature had predominated.

“From the conversation and arguments of lord Elwood, the countess imbibed the wish, certainly a natural one, of seeing her child, and folding her in her arms, ere death’s unsparing hand closed her eyes for ever.

“Lord Elwood’s love was so infatuated (I speak with truth, for the personal regard I had for my lady did not blind me to her defects and the absurdity of her arrangements, and I lamented them, though I did not dare to give my free opinion on subjects on which I had not the honour to be consulted) that he now became a pliant instrument in the hands of the countess, which she made subservient to the gratifying every wish of her heart that could possibly be accomplished.

“She therefore deputed to him the task of fetching Berthalina privately from Alnwick.

“Lord Elwood acknowledged that, through pity for the deserted child, and out of consideration of her being Olivia’s offspring, he had been a secret protector to her; yet the idea of colonel Rainsforth would be so strongly revived at the sight of Berthalina, that he would rather decline the task.

“But my lady was not to be diverted from the purpose on which she had fixed her mind. She told him, *that* was the only proof he could give her of his fulfilling the promise he had made her, of being the reputed father to Berthalina when she was no more.

“I need not recount lady Wynchcombe’s interview with her daughter; of that the young lady (I must not now call her Miss Elwood) has informed you the particulars.

“As soon as lord Elwood had departed with his lovely charge, my lady caused her other children to be assembled round the bed, and took a pathetic leave of each, while she bathed them with her tears.

“They would fain have remained with her to the last moment; but this she would not permit, and they retired in the deepest affliction.

“Of Mr. George Hartley she had previously taken the most affecting farewell, and this excellent young man shewed all the solicitude of the tenderest son to the most beloved of mothers, sending every half hour to make inquiries, and expressing the most pious and consoling wishes that the tongue could utter or the heart dictate.

“The countess charged me with several little commissions to him, that had been forgotten at their melancholy interview.

“She expressed to me, that her happiness would be excessive, and all her sufferings as nought, if she could have had the power so to order affairs, that Berthalina might have a husband, and a protector, in that worthy youth; but since that was impossible, she could only pray that time might bring about such an event. She observed, that he would soon discover, though she had not revealed it to him, that Berthalina was her daughter, and might love her in remembrance of the mother he so much respected.

“Her fortune, and passing as lord Elwood’s daughter, might entitle her to such an eligible match. Hence one of the countess’s motives to consign the illegitimacy of her child to oblivion.

“My lady was many hours in the agonies of death, but retained her speech and recollection nearly to the last.

“Truly penitent for her follies, she severely censured herself, and deeply regretted their commitment.

“Let me not pass over a circumstance in which you, sir, (turning to the baronet,) are much interested.

“About an hour before my lady’s death, recovering from a profound meditation, she ordered me to send the nurses out of the room. I did so.

“She then said—‘Charlton, I will not die with malice in my breast: I forgive the colonel. Had I been more circumspect, and kept to my duty as a wife, he would not have been guilty. Certainly his desertion of me was cruel; but there are few men who like to unite themselves to a woman who has betrayed an unwarrantable weakness in their favour.

“‘I hope I have arranged matters prudently for Berthalina’s happiness. I think I may repose in security on lord Elwood’s honour; but should any circumstance arise, from which my dear child might be benefited by the disclosure of her real father, think me not capricious when I declare, that I absolve you from the promises of secrecy that I have oftentimes made you repeat; but do not *this* rashly, nor ever while Mrs. Rainsforth lives; she shall not triumph over the child of a rival she detested. Let not, I conjure you, this counsel meet lord Elwood’s ear; it will look like distrust, and might prevent him discharging the important task he has undertaken with the pleasure and confidence I should wish him to feel.’

“I could not avoid, at this awful juncture, speaking the sentiments of my heart, that I wished this compact had never been entered into, and that the paths of truth were, in general, the fairest roads to happiness.

“She replied, ‘that she believed I was in the right, but it was now too late to retract.’

“Being seized with a return of her convulsions, I summoned the attendants.

“From this time she spoke little; but the last words she uttered were something respecting lord Elwood, too faint to meet my ear.

“I left the earl’s family soon after the interment of my lady.

“Her children were to remain in England for education, under the joint guardianship of the honourable George Hartley, and a maiden sister of the earl’s, lady Justiana Hartley, with whom they now reside in Berkeley Square.

“Mr. Hartley, by bequests from his mother’s relations, and her jointure, which devolved to this son, is perfectly independent of the earl, and the possessor of two considerable estates in this country, which he has no intention of quitting.

“He has frequently honoured me with a call, and I heard from him the surprise he felt on discovering that lord Elwood had a sister, and that sister the daughter of his loved step-mother.

“The recluse manner in which the late lord Elwood kept Miss Berthalina, and his acknowledging her as a daughter only to a small circle of friends, made this circumstance but rarely known.

“His lordship acknowledged to me, when I waited on him with a request to see the dear young lady, and acquaint him with my marriage (according to his desire of knowing any material event that might befall me) that he had felt much reluctance in performing the promise he had made to lady Wynchcombe; nor could he ever have brought himself to have done so, had not he heard of colonel Rainsforth’s death, who was then falsely reported to have fallen in a duel.

“He likewise added, that he never, previous to his seeing Berthalina, could bring himself to like her, even in idea: but now he felt the sincerest love for her, and only regretted that she was not in reality his daughter.

Mrs. Warner’s narrative ended here, and nothing was wanting to complete the elucidation, but *that* of sir Edward Wingrove, which was given as they sat over their coffee.

CHAPTER V.

“I WILL not attempt,” said the baronet, “to say aught in extenuation of my conduct in regard to lady Elwood. My crime was an offence not to be palliated. If our fashionable youths knew the misery they entail on their old age, the many lingering hours of unavailing regret and sharp remorse, they would shun seduction, particularly of married women, as they would a burning pit that was ready to engulf them.—But to my story.

“Lady Elwood was not the woman I could ever think of making my wife. Her addiction to gaming, and levity of conduct, was my disgust: while I admired the woman, I hated her follies. My engagement with Miss Wingrove called for completion; my fortune was involved, and called for remedy. One I must marry: I chose the latter, as most eligible in every point of view.—I meant to provide largely for lady Elwood, and the infant that she had given me to understand she was then pregnant of. I did not suppose her to be possessed of a heart that would droop under my desertion, though her pride might be wounded. The sequel has shewn I did not err widely in my conjectures.”

As this part of the narration was merely a repetition of what lady Bevil had stated, it would be needless to give it again in the baronet’s words.

“The report of lady Elwood’s death soon reached my ears; I was greatly shocked, nor had I the least reason to doubt its truth. I thought myself highly culpable, and that my behaviour had accelerated her dissolution: thank Heaven, that crime is now taken from my burthened conscience!

“The resemblance my Berthalina bears to her ill-fated mother, forcibly assailed my imagination; but when informed of her bearing the name of Elwood, the years she numbered, and other circumstances of her story, I had no doubt of the fraud that had been practised with regard to my child; but for what purpose, or by whom contrived, I knew not, unless by lady Elwood, to deprive me of a parental right, as a punishment for the injury I had done her. I thought this a refinement on barbarity, and resolved to leave no means untried to fathom the depth of this mystery.

“The perturbation of my mind caused my sudden and impolite departure from this house, and I hastened to my hotel, plunged in a labyrinth of thought.

“I recollected Charlton as the faithful attendant of Olivia: could I trace her out, she must be the most likely person to give me a chief part of the information I so earnestly desired to collect.

“A faint idea struck me, that she was actually the person I had seen at Barnet with the young lady who had so greatly interested me. There certainly was a something of the air and figure; but a lapse of years had made a great difference, as is naturally to be expected.

“I had no sooner entered my apartments, than my valet informed me that a young man had inquired for me in apparent anxiety three several times that morning, during my absence.

“‘Do you know his business?’

“My servant replied in the negative; but supposed it to be of importance, by the impatience of the inquirer. He said that it was useless to leave his name, as I should have no knowledge of it; but he would take a few turns in the adjacent square, and call again.

“Situating as my mind was, with respect to Berthalina, I was ill prepared to see any one, especially strangers: but as the young man had taken so much pains to get to my presence, I thought it hard to give a denial: I therefore ordered Morley to shew him to my dressing-room when he called again, which was in less than half an hour after my return.

“He entered the room with a modest but confused air, and commenced with a long string of apologies that put me out of patience.

“‘To business, my man,’ said I, ‘without unnecessary preface, or I cannot attend to you, for I am engaged in an affair of importance.’

“‘You *can* be engaged in no concern, sir Edward,’ replied he, ‘more momentous to your peace than the one that brought me hither.’

“‘Indeed!—Psha!’ and I believe an incredulous smile appeared on my countenance. However, I motioned to him to proceed.

“‘I take shame on myself, sir Edward, when I confess the motives that brought me here, and acknowledge that, *but* for my *deserved* poverty, you might never have beheld me.’ Here he paused. I was silent, and rather ruffled.

“He then said, with some abruptness, ‘you once bore the name of Rainsforth? You were acquainted with Olivia, lady Elwood?’

“‘I was so, young man; but your questions are singular,’ I replied, ‘and I hope, for your own sake (for I am not one of those who will be trifled with or insulted with impunity) that you can bring forward good reasons for making them.’

“‘I can, sir Edward, or I would not be thus impertinent; I will also be as concise as possible.

“‘The late lord Elwood was passionately fond of literature; there were few publications but what he honoured with a perusal, and criticised according to his own judgment of their perfections and demerits.

“Most of these critiques were committed to paper, not in regular manuscripts, but loose sheets, of various sizes, and roughly sketched. Of these, there was matter enough to fill more than three folio volumes.

“Whether it was his lordship’s intent for these to meet the public eye I cannot take upon me to say.

“However, about eight months before his death, he resolved to have them arranged according to their dates, and correctly copied into blank paper books that he had caused to be bound for that purpose.

“He applied to an eminent book-seller, to recommend him a young man competent to the task, who was to board and lodge in the house, and receive a handsome compensation for his trouble.

“I had the good fortune to be appointed to this desirable office, having, a few days previous to his lordship’s application, entreated the bookseller, who had some knowledge of me and my family, to procure me a similar situation, as a private secretary or copyist.

“While I was engaged in this business, his lordship’s son would frequently come into the room, and amuse himself with the papers, to which he now, for the first time, had access.

“At other times he would discourse, in a most condescending manner, on various topics, and inquire into the particulars of my abilities, saying he should make a point of procuring me employ when his father had no more occasion for my services.

“Among other things, I rashly confessed to Mr. Elwood, that I possessed the dangerous facility of accurately imitating any person’s hand-writing.

“He caused me to make some experiments in his presence. I did so. He expressed himself satisfied that I had not boasted of more than I could perform.

“He paused a little, and then asked me if my skill in imitating was much known?

“I assured him that it was a talent I had no care to own, nor had I acknowledged it to any one but himself.

“He commended my prudence, and, giving me some money, desired I would not extend my confidence to any one, as he might possibly, at some future time, put some gold in my way, by making use of my dexterity for some innocent purpose.

“Thus the affair rested. When I had finished the work for which I was engaged, his lordship kept me employed in one little office or other, such as arranging his library, taking inventories, &c. and, in just praise to his memory, let me acknowledge, that I believe these latter commissions were given more with a view of serving me, than from any essential utility his lordship could derive from my services. But such was the delicacy with which he always conferred his favours.

“During the few days illness with which his lordship was affected, previous to his decease, Mr. Elwood appeared uncommonly agitated, and labouring with undigested thought.

“Two nights before his lordship’s dissolution, Mr. Elwood appointed me to come to his chamber. When I was sure the family had retired, and I was not perceived, I obeyed his commands.

“He made me promise secrecy, and then informed me that Miss Elwood was not his sister, but only adopted as such by lord Elwood. He had not long been apprised of this circumstance himself. His father, fearful that some disclosure might take place after his death, which might place the young people in an awkward predicament, recounted to his son every particular relative to Berthalina’s parents, and the manner in which lady Wynchcombe prevailed on him to make the adoption, which he then disliked, but now seriously repented, being assured that the young lady’s father was now existing, and had some thoughts of returning to his native country.

“Mr. Elwood repeated to me the account which he had received from his lordship, which I am now ready to repeat to you, sir, if you will honour me with attention.’

“You may rely on it,” said the baronet, “that I was now as ready to hear, as he was to repeat.

“I learnt, to my surprise, that Olivia was the lady Wynchcombe he had just mentioned, and of her very recent death, to the one announced to the world. In short, every particular that had occurred, from Berthalina’s being deserted by her mother, to the day preceding lord Elwood’s death.

CHAPTER VI.

“WILSDEN,” continued the baronet, “having brought his story to this point, thus proceeded:

““Lord Elwood having recounted to his son every particular of this singular affair, with the most minute exactness, delivered into his keeping some papers, written by lady Wynchcombe, which rather bordered on the confessional order, and explained past circumstances: the date of her leaving lord Elwood, and the day of Berthalina’s birth; a sufficient proof of her not being the offspring of that nobleman.

““Lord Elwood had settled on his adopted daughter a small annuity, which was still to remain in force, by his will, with a legacy of eight thousand pounds.

““To his son he delivered papers, purporting that a particular casket of jewels, in his cabinet, was Berthalina’s, together with twelve thousand pounds, which was in the hands of one of the principal bankers in Pall Mall.

““For obvious reasons, these were not mentioned in the will; but they were to be delivered to the young lady on her attaining the age of twenty-one, as a legacy from her mother.

““Lord Elwood also gave a strict charge to his son, that, on colonel Rainsforth’s (now sir Edward Wingrove) return, he was to use the utmost, though secret, vigilance to discover if that gentleman, on hearing that a daughter of lady Elwood was in existence, should betray any suspicion of her being his own, or take any means to satisfy his doubts.

““If so, and his heart should yearn with paternal affection towards his child, he charged him, as he valued his future peace, to disclose the facts to the baronet, and then leave him to act as he should think proper, either to acknowledge Berthalina as his daughter, or let her pass for the offspring of *him*, who in his life-time loved and respected her.

““On the contrary, if sir Edward betrayed no curiosity on the subject, Berthalina was to be introduced at court when she came of age, as Miss Elwood, and the secret of her birth was to be consigned to lasting oblivion.

““It appeared, by Mr. Elwood’s account, that Berthalina had received, from her supposed father, a prohibition, to avoid all intercourse with persons of the name of Rainsforth, and marriage especially, as she would the deadliest snare. This proceeded from a dread, as the colonel *had then* several sons, of an attachment taking place between one of them and Berthalina, and their marrying in ignorance of their consanguinity. That fear, unhappily for the father of so promising a family, was now removed, by their several deaths.’

“Wilsden observed to me, that, during the time of Mr. Elwood’s giving him this insight into the secret affairs of the family, he thought it strange that so much confidence should be reposed in him, and longed for the conclusion of the account, that he might know for what purpose Mr. Elwood had so far condescended, and at the same time so flagrantly broken his faith to the trust his father had reposed in him.

“At length the important crisis arrived, and Wilsden found, that his liberal friend wished to make him the worst of villains.

“He at first strenuously refused to have any share in the iniquitous scheme proposed by his tempter, till, his reason overcome by the powerful arguments, and still more powerful bribes, promised by Mr. Elwood, he yielded to his request.

“It was far from the intention of Mr. Elwood to fulfil the injunctions of his father, with respect to Berthalina. Had his lordship survived till that lady attained her twenty-first year, his son’s schemes would have been rendered abortive; but Heaven ordained otherwise.

“His first care was to remove from the cabinet the casket of jewels, and carefully secrete it in his own boudoir. He also contrived to get possession of the documents relative to the twelve thousand pounds belonging to the fair one.

“‘This completed,’ said Wilsden, ‘I had to imitate lady Elwood’s handwriting, and drew up a paper, purporting Berthalina to be the child of lord Elwood, affixing false dates to the same, to give them a plausible appearance.

“‘My next task was, to take the same liberty with his lordship’s hand, and to make a codicil to his will, of which I signed myself a witness.

“‘This codicil gave to Mr. Elwood the unjust (and by his father never intended) power of depriving Berthalina of her eight thousand pounds, in case of her marrying without his consent, which, he observed, with an arch slyness of look, she should find difficult to obtain, unless it was a marriage to suit his own convenience; for he supposed it would not be difficult to select one, from among the herd of needy beaux, who would take her with three or four thousand pounds, and find his account in the alliance; and as to Berthalina, he would, in character of brother and guardian, treat her with such roughness, that she would be happy to consent to any marriage he should propose, to release her from his authority.

“‘It was now Mr. Elwood’s interest to keep Berthalina from the presence of his much injured father, who had expressed a great wish to see his adopted child.

“‘Had this meeting taken place, Mr. Elwood’s schemes would have been rendered abortive, as his lordship undoubtedly would have informed the young lady how her

property was disposed, and the real value of the legacy bequeathed by lady Wynchcombe.’

“Wilsden remarked, that lord Elwood saw through the duplicity and avarice of his son, when too late to remedy the indiscretion of which he had been guilty, and thus, undesignedly, laid the first steps of the persecution that had attended the innocent young lady.

“Every circumstance favoured the ill intentions of the present lord Elwood, and Berthalina was completely entangled in the snare.—But the worst was yet to come.

“Attracted by the beauty and amiable manners of Berthalina, lord Elwood began to waver in his thoughts respecting her future destination.

“He more than once hinted to Wilsden, that he was half resolved to acquaint his supposed sister with the truth of her birth, and marry her himself, thus securing her fortune *his* beyond all hazards.

“This certainly, could he have carried it into effect might have been the most eligible plan: but avarice was his ruling passion.

“Lady Laurentia Brierly, and her fortune, attracted his attention.

“His devoirs to her ladyship were honoured with the utmost encouragement.

“Mr. Hildon admired Berthalina; but would not have thought of aspiring to her hand, had not lord Elwood suggested to him, that he would promote, instead of opposing, his wishes, though his lordship was aware that Mr. Hildon never could gain the affections of the lady, she having frequently expressed a decisive detestation of his character and pursuits.

“The plan was soon arranged to destroy the unsullied fame of Berthalina in the opinion of her friends, and further the intended marriage.

“Miss Radnor’s presence at Stanton Abbey was, at first, a perplexity to the abettors of this vile scheme; but they at length determined to turn this to their advantage, and for ever destroy the bands of amity that linked together the hearts of two of the most amiable females the world could boast, by making the involuntary absence of Berthalina appear an elopement of the most artful kind.

“Wilsden was one of the vile agents of a still viler employer, who aided in conveying Berthalina from Stanton Abbey to Woodmount, when they had lured her from the house by the pretended letter from Mr. G. Hartley. The plan they had adopted previous to their leaving London, was declined in favour of this one, which the accident

Mr. Edward Hartley had met with, and the consequent visits of his brother to the Abbey, had rendered feasible.

“Lord Elwood being incensed with some observations made by Wilsden, who began to detest the business in which he was engaged, suddenly gave him his dismissal, with a hundred pounds for his services.

“Accustomed of late to an extravagant style of living, Wilsden soon expended this money, together with his former savings.

“Thus situated, lord Elwood’s promises recurred to his mind: he wrote humbly to him; no answer was returned.

“His distresses forced him to write in arrogant language: he gave his lordship some hints of making discoveries that could not be agreeable—*tout au contraire*.

“This had the effect desired, and procured him a temporary supply.

“Wilsden being disappointed (or, at least, he says so, as a palliation) in every effort he made to obtain employment, was soon in the same predicament as before.

“Emboldened by his former success, he had recourse to the same method; but lord Elwood was adamant either to threats or entreaties.

“On his lordship’s arrival in town, Wilsden obtained an interview, and had recourse to every expedient to extort money from him, in vain.

“Lord Elwood defied his taunts, laughed at his threats, and bade him remember, that what he had done placed his life in the power of the law.

“Wilsden retorted, that it was better to be hanged for the vile forgeries he had committed, than to perish with famine, as there would be a glorious satisfaction attending his punishment, in unmasking the crimes of his lordship to the world, and making him a sharer in his perdition.

“Lord Elwood lost all patience, and flinging him a single guinea, desired him to leave the house, if he wished to avoid the disgrace of being turned out by the porter.

“Burning with rage, disappointment, and revenge, sharpened by the goading sting of poverty, Wilsden turned into the first coffee-house that met his eye, and, ordering a bottle of wine, sat down to meditate how he had best to act.

“However he had braved to lord Elwood, he was not without his apprehensions, that he could not injure his lordship without involving his own safety in a more imminent degree.

“As he sat lost in a labyrinth of thought, his attention was aroused involuntarily, by hearing the name of sir Edward Wingrove pronounced by a gentleman in the next box.

“Wilsden was attentive to the passing conversation, and learnt that the baronet, the ci-devant colonel Rainsforth, had just arrived in London, after a long absence from his native country, and was now at the Gloucester Hotel.

“A new field was now opened to the view of Wilsden.

“He took courage, drank bumpers of wine to his own success, and resolved to confess all, and cast himself on the mercy of the baronet and the injured Berthalina, whose pardon he did not doubt of obtaining, in return for the service rendered them.

“From Wilsden, sir Edward learnt the abode of Mrs. Warner, and accompanied him to her house.

“She was at first reserved, and gave evasive answers, till, being clearly given to understand the present state of affairs, and disgusted at the unwarrantable conduct of lord Elwood, in every stage of his behaviour to her respected young lady, she thought it now a fit time to avail herself of the conditional absolvment lady Wynchcombe had made of the vows of secrecy she had received from her, and offered herself as a principal witness on the part of sir Edward and his daughter, should lord Elwood be refractory, or make the affair (though it was hardly possible he should be so daring) a subject of legal litigation.”

CHAPTER VII.

SIR Edward and his daughter affectionately embraced each other, on the conclusion of the long elucidation given by the former.

Berthalina was invited, by her sincere friends, to make a longer stay in Grosvenor-place.

Her eyes expressed assent and satisfaction, but her tongue refused its office, for the important events of the day, with its happy *dénouement*, had deprived her of the power of articulation.

Sir Edward answered for her, and gracefully requested that his daughter might remain with her amiable friends, till he had settled pecuniary affairs with lord Elwood, and formed his own domestic arrangements, when he hoped Miss Radnor would favour his Berthalina with her estimable company.

Mrs. Warner retired home, having first fervently thanked Heaven, that her dear Miss Berthalina was safe from the machinations of lord Elwood, and under the protection of a tender father.

The baronet did not leave Grosvenor-place till a late hour.

He received several entreaties to breakfast there the next morning, which he declined, not choosing to see his daughter again, till the proposed interview between him and lord Elwood had taken place.

Perturbation of mind, arising from sorrow, had often caused our heroine to pass a sleepless night.

Ever affected by extraordinary emotion, joy had now the same influence on her tender frame.

She reflected on her pillow on all that had passed, and discovered that there were still wanting some essentials to make her perfectly happy.

She longed to be clasped in the arms of her venerable friend, the steady assertor of her innocence, the good Mrs. Aubrey, and of her mother's children, the young Edward, who had, through his accident, been so singularly placed under the same roof with herself, and received from her the attentions of the sister, when the fraternal tie was unknown to them, and those dear interesting beings she had seen in Tichbourne-street, when Mrs. Warner, for motives now easy to be defined, had so abruptly put a period to her stay.

Must we also confess, that though Mr. George Hartley was not her brother, nor any way related to her by the ties of birth, being lord Wynchcombe's son, by a prior marriage, she also wished to see him, and his form recurred to her mind as often, if not more frequent, than any of those human beings whose presence she thought requisite to the completion of her peace; but this was a secret confined to the recesses of her own guileless bosom, nor could she, apt as mortals are to revel in the flowery regions of hope, scarce flatter herself that he ever bestowed a thought on her; nay, it was more than possible that his affections were honourably engaged to another, notwithstanding the innocent mirth and raillery of Caroline, who often asserted that, at Stanton Abbey, George Hartley's eyes told tales, and pronounced that Berthalina had made a conquest of his heart.

Lady Bevil was a visitor the next morning, when the fair subject of these memoirs was introduced to her ladyship, as the acknowledged daughter of sir Edward Wingrove.

She congratulated her on the occasion, but owned she felt rather awkward at having commented so freely on the baronet's former conduct, which she hoped would not reach his ears.

"That speech," said Mr. Radnor, with a smile, "but ill accords with the known sincerity and openness of your character. I will answer for the baronet, for whom I now feel the sincerest friendship, that the remarks you made would not offend him; they became a virtuous woman. His errors are abjured, and he holds the very remembrance of them in detestation. But I must introduce you to each other, and then you are a widow, and sir Edward is yet a handsome man—so place a guard on your hearts."

Lady Bevil replied, that her heart was proof against love's power, and her wishes centered in the dear children left her by an ever regretted husband.

She spoke this so seriously, that Mr. Radnor desisted from *badinage*, and the conversation took another turn.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD Elwood received sir Edward Wingrove with extreme embarrassment and agitation.

He was in a loose morning gown, his hair in disorder, and his whole appearance indicated that the boudoir had been wholly neglected, and the night passed in excruciating reflexions.

The baronet's pity surmounted his resentment, and he extended his hand in the most friendly manner.

Lord Elwood was affected, and said, with much emotion, "This behaviour, sir Edward, is highly generous. *You*, who have more reason than any man on earth to be my foe, and regard me as a mercenary, detestable—."

"Hold, I entreat you," said the baronet. "I came not here your enemy, provided I found you ready to make what reparation remained in your power, for the injuries my daughter has received. Justice is all I want, and it will be your own fault, if any exposure takes place, beyond the small circle to whom our affairs are at present known, and for their secrecy I will pledge my life."

Lord Elwood stammered out a few sentences, in a vain extenuation of his conduct.

Sir Edward frankly remarked, that lord Elwood's was a bad cause to defend, and the less that was said about it the better.

It appeared, on a candid explanation, that lord Elwood, at the time of his father's death, was greatly embarrassed, by the fashionable expenses he had launched into, and the extravagance of a dashing female, whom he then, and for a long time, supported, and who, by various artifices, had gained from him bonds to a large amount. On his remonstrances with her on various parts of her conduct, particularly the encouragement she had notoriously given to a young ensign in the guards, and expressing a wish for an eternal separation, she demanded immediate payment of the claims she had on him, which had for some time been procrastinated by valuable presents to the fair creditor, who now perceiving her reign was at an end, and no further emolument was to be expected from the folly of his lordship, clamorously insisted on no further delay. Lord Elwood therefore took his leave, with five thousand pounds, and the expensive furniture, plate, &c. that he had purchased to embellish the residence of his Dulcinea.

Berthalina's twelve thousand pounds presented itself as very agreeable towards paying off these various incumbrances, without dipping so deeply into his paternal fortune. To this purpose it was then devoted. But he offered to make restitution of the whole, without any further delay than was absolutely necessary, according to the explanation he gave the baronet, for gathering so large a sum of ready specie together.

The casket of jewels, the real papers of lady Wynchcombe and lord Elwood, with the letter of Mrs. Burton, which the latter had given to his son, were placed on the table against the baronet's arrival, to be delivered into his possession.

This momentous affair being so far settled, sir Edward declared his resolution of relinquishing the eight thousand pounds left by the late lord as an affectionate legacy to the child of his Olivia, a measure in which he knew Berthalina would be perfectly acquiescent.

He directed, however, two thousand pounds to be distributed in different public institutions for charity; the remaining six was to be at lord Elwood's disposal.

The annuity that the late lord had settled on Berthalina was still to remain in force, sir Edward remarking, that it would serve to remind her of the generosity of the best of men, who made a sacrifice of his own feelings to serve her.

Sir Edward was preparing to depart, when lord Elwood claimed a few minutes further attention.

After an elaborate speech, in which he set forth his resolution of an entire reformation from the pursuits which had involved him in such dangerous dilemmas, he solicited the baronet's interest with Berthalina to accept him as a lover.

The baronet, shocked at the evident meanness that dictated this request, gave a peremptory denial, alleging that he could not perceive one reason for his compliance, but a hundred against.

"I wished to settle our affairs in as amicable a manner as possible," continued the baronet, "not for my own sake, or my child's, but for yours, out of respect to your injured father, whose memory shall ever be sacred to me. I revolted from the idea of making your name a sport to the multitude, or subjecting you to a legal process and punishment; but remember, my lord, the grievances I have received can never be wholly obliterated from my mind, nor can I receive that man into my house, as a guest, who has calmly plotted the ruin of my child.

"Consider, my lord, how widely differing must have been my sentiments towards you, had you acted with the noble integrity dictated by the will of your father. Call this to mind, and then blush at the littleness of your own request! Nay, distort not your countenance with a frown; these truths may be unwelcome, but they are just."

Sir Edward then rose; lord Elwood did not press his further stay, and the baronet departed with much formality.

He went from Seymour-street to Grosvenor-place, where he found his daughter, and her friends, anxiously expecting him, the former especially, as she had endured some serious apprehensions, that her father and lord Elwood, from mutual irritation, might have recourse to a more dangerous way of deciding their differences than mere words.

The baronet concisely repeated what had passed, concluding with his remarks, of being disgusted at such a compound of meanness and avarice as formed lord Elwood's character.

"Many of our modern young men of fashion," observed he, "dissipate their fortunes, and involve themselves in difficulties; but, in the midst of this wild career, how many noble qualities burst spontaneously forth, and call on us for admiration that the most rigid cynic cannot withhold!"

"With what benevolent munificence do they often raise amiable objects, suffering in the paths of penury, to peace and competence, to the diminution of their own finances! But as to lord Elwood, now I have heard the real state of his lordship's finances, he has sunk lower than ever in my opinion.

"Had I found him involved in difficulties, I would not only have afforded him pity and forgiveness, but have given him every assistance in my power; but his real fortune is little impaired, and would have scarcely been broken into, had his schemes succeeded with my poor Berthalina, as he meant to plunder her for the clearing off his incumbrances, and, by some future sale of her jewels, make a splendid addition to his fortune. Sordid avarice in young men is contemptible. Lord Elwood and I must ever be strangers, unless an almost miraculous change takes place in his manners and sentiments.

"I hope, my dear girl," continued the baronet, turning to Berthalina, "that, in this respect, your opinion coincides with mine."

"Perfectly, my beloved father! Allow me to say, that I am quite satisfied with every step you have taken, and I hope, for lord Elwood's sake, that his future conduct will speak in his favour, and entitle him to the friendship of yourself, and this amiable family."

"Do you entirely except yourself, Berthalina, from this future amity," said sir Edward, with a pleasant laugh? "or are you resolved to outdo me in generosity of sentiment, and, when I offer friendship, give your love?"

Berthalina assured her father, who, with all his assumed gaiety, entertained a real anxiety on the occasion, that she knew too well the state of her own thoughts, to doubt, for a moment, of *ever* regarding lord Elwood with more than friendship: at present, though she perfectly forgave him all the ills she had suffered by the baseness of his contrivances, she could not say, that she harboured in her bosom that *esteem* which was essential towards the forming of a perfect friendship.

Sir Edward expressed much pleasure at this declaration, and tenderly embraced his darling daughter.

By Mr. and Mrs. Radnor's invitation, the baronet dined in Grosvenor-place.

In the evening, lady Bevil, and her son and daughter, added to their party, and formed a domestic concert.

Berthalina's fine form appeared to great advantage at the harp, which she handled most gracefully.

She received many compliments from the admiring circle of her friends.

The enraptured father was silent; but his expressive dark eyes spoke a language not to be misunderstood, as he inwardly thanked Heaven for its benignant mercy, in sparing him such a treasure to comfort his decline of life!

At supper, the conversation chiefly turned on public places of amusement.

Sir Edward declined appearing at any, till he had taken proper measures for declaring Berthalina his daughter, and obtained a grant for her taking his name, and other preliminaries, necessary for her reception in public, in the character now proper for her to assume.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE months flew away on downy pinions, when Berthalina, leaving her hospitable friends, repaired to the house sir Edward had purchased, in Cumberland-place, and fitted up with the utmost elegance and taste, for the reception of his lovely daughter.

Berthalina, now Miss Wingrove, was introduced into the first circles of fashion with great eclat. Lady Bevil kindly undertook to be her *chaperon*; Miss Bevil and Miss Radnor were her constant companions, and were generally known by the appellation of the graces. Indeed there was seldom seen, among the beauties that grace the fashionable circles, a more lovely or interesting group.

The modest dignity that marked the conduct of our heroine, joined to the amiable fascination of her manners, gained her universal applause, and soon put to the rout all the malevolent remarks that envy and ill-nature, at first, raised against her, on the real story of her birth being made public.

Several letters passed between sir Edward Wingrove and the earl of Wynchcombe, his eldest son and Mr. George Hartley, who were then in Italy, on a visit to their father, in consequence of a violent bilious attack under which his lordship had laboured.

Out of respect to the earl, his family, and the deceased countess, the circumstance of the divorced lady's after-marriage was not suffered to transpire, beyond the few confidential persons to whom that important secret had been entrusted.

Wilsden was amply provided for, by sir Edward's interest, in the West Indies, and, previous to his departure, received a handsome present of money. But all this was on express condition of his never returning to England; for it was justly considered, that he was a person in whom no *confidence* could be reposed without danger. He had done good; but the manner of performance spoke not in his favour; and his treachery to the late lord Elwood, in altering his will, who had been such a generous benefactor to him, was inexcusable.

In compliance with lord Wynchcombe's plan, the children he had by the countess Olivia were not to be acquainted with the consanguinity existing between them and Berthalina.

He thought it best that they should never know the error of their mother; yet he had no objection for them to visit, and maintain a friendly intercourse.

Berthalina could not but assent to the propriety of this wish of concealment on the part of the earl, at the same time that her affectionate heart regretted that she could only meet those dear relations as friends, whom she so ardently longed to fold to her bosom in their true character.

Mr. Edward Hartley, and his three sisters, felt a sincere affection for Berthalina, which they attributed not only to her amiable manners, but to the gratitude they owed her for the services she had rendered their youth at Stanton Abbey.

The multiplicity of visits she had to make, and visitors to receive, seldom left Berthalina disengaged.

One morning the baronet had just gone out with some gentlemen, and Berthalina was at her harp, when the honourable George Hartley was announced.

A tremor pervaded her whole frame: but, ashamed of her embarrassment, at least its becoming visible, she exerted herself to receive this unexpected visitant with propriety.

Mr. Hartley's behaviour evinced a sensible and manly heart.

He was but just arrived from the continent, and hastened to pay his respects to sir Edward and Miss Wingrove, and to deliver some letters from the earl of Wynchcombe.

The affairs they had to converse on were of a delicate nature, and Mr. Hartley glanced as lightly as possible over the exceptionable parts of lady Elwood's conduct.

Berthalina expressed a fervent sense of gratitude for the firm friendship, and disinterestedness, which had always marked his conduct to her dear mother.

He replied, that he had revered lady Wynchcombe with the most filial affection, for, he must say, in justice to her memory, that she daily evinced a thousand good qualities, and many were the distressed beings that she relieved, in so private a manner, that it was next to impossible for them ever to guess who was their benefactress.

He observed, that he must ever deplore the silence lady Wynchcombe had invariably observed to him, with respect to Berthalina. He made no doubt, the reserve, on her part, arose from a mixture of shame and pride, which deterred her from so important a disclosure, and not from a fear of his betraying her to the earl.

"Possibly, sir," replied Berthalina, with an expressive sigh, "my poor mother dreaded the loss of your esteem by such a confession, which certainly was to her disadvantage."

"The motive you describe, Miss Wingrove, most probably, was the real one.

"I often observed lady Wynchcombe deep in thought, and labouring with agitation.

“It now appears to me, on a recall of these circumstances, that my valued friend (for so I shall always esteem her for the kind interferences and mediations she made between me and the earl, when an unhappy dispute severed us from each other,) was often on the point of confiding to me the secret woe that rankled in her bosom, and then timidly shrunk from the painful task.

“Permit me, Miss Wingrove, again to repeat my regrets, that I was not apprised of the circumstance, not on my account, but yours, and your ill-fated mother’s. I would have interfered, and saved her from many a pang, and the cruel, unjust treatment you received, in consequence of your adoption into the Elwood family, have been avoided, as well as the remarks that ill-suggested plan gave rise to.

“It is painful to me, as a *son*, to observe that lord Wynchcombe’s general demeanour is harsh; his behaviour to your mother was not calculated to win her confidence, though he now severely reflects on her memory, for what he terms the basest concealment, without making allowances for the singularity of the situation which influenced her conduct.”

Engaged in a theme so interesting to both, painful, yet pleasing, the time passed imperceptibly away, and Mr. Hartley and Berthalina sat conversing till the return of sir Edward Wingrove.

Berthalina introduced them to each other.

This was their first personal interview, and they felt a mutual restraint.

The behaviour of the baronet to the seduced lady Elwood rose with renovated force in the mind of Hartley.

Sir Edward perceived it, and with difficulty concealed the mortification he felt.

By degrees, this mutual embarrassment wore off, their conversation became lively, and they separated with an invitation, which was accepted, for Mr. Hartley to meet the Radnor family the next day, to dinner, in Cumberland-place.

The letters sir Edward and Miss Wingrove received from the earl, were formally distant and polite; they conveyed a tacit consent to the manner in which the late countess had disposed her fortune.

He added, that the discovery that had taken place, since her decease, had been highly painful to him, and made a weighty addition to some calamities of a private nature, that had, long since, deeply wounded his peace.

He now entreated, that all correspondence might terminate between them, as it only tended to give birth to reflections of a most distressing nature in his diseased mind.

He wished the baronet and his daughter every happiness, and concluded his letters by entreating, that the friendship he denied to himself might be transferred to his children, who, he was aware, would be perfectly happy in receiving attentions from sir Edward and Miss Wingrove.

When the letters had been mutually read by father and daughter, sir Edward remarked, that he had often heard the earl of Wynchcombe commented on as a surly, unfeeling, misanthropic character. He could not now agree in this opinion. He appeared to him as a man deeply wounded in his peace, and lost to all the pleasures of existence.

The same ideas had suggested themselves to Berthalina; but she remarked, that it was, in her opinion, a blamable weakness, to estrange yourself from all society, because you were injured by a few individuals.

“Cruelty, injustice, and disappointed affection,” remarked the baronet, “operate, my love, variously on the minds of men, and impel them to extremes: some have recourse to the misanthropy you condemn; others, to a more dangerous habit, that of endeavouring to chase away their care by a continual routine of dissipation.

“Lord Wynchcombe and your mother must have been most fatally ill-paired. The earl most assuredly had his secret sorrows; Olivia had hers. No confidence, that endearing charm of connubial felicity! appears to have existed between them; they distrusted each other, and must have dragged on an existence that affluence could scarce have rendered tolerable.

“How much happier would that lovely, unthinking woman have been, in the elegant retirement which the generosity of lord Elwood enabled her to establish! How blest, could maternal affection have overcome her repugnance to own you as a daughter, to cheer her solitude, and repay her by those endearments which none but a parent can know, or justly appreciate! May her example prove a warning to mothers, to suffer poverty, reproach, nay, any ill, sooner than estrange themselves from their offspring!—But your tears begin to flow, my Bertha—let us dismiss this melancholy theme.

“I have, this morning, received a letter of acknowledgment from Mr. Pratley.

“He rejoices in your happiness, of which he styles himself an humble instrument.

“He adds, that lord Elwood was so much incensed at Mrs. Belton, for her want of what he termed proper vigilance, that he even struck her a blow on the head, and left the house with curses on this (really) vile woman, whom he had enriched, as it proved, for no purpose but defeat and disappointment.

“Mrs. Belton’s punishment did not terminate in Lord Elwood’s revilings; her story had circulated about Woodmount, and she was held in universal abhorrence. The scorn of

her neighbours was too marked to escape her observation, and she suddenly sold her furniture, and retired to some other part of the kingdom.”

Berthalina spoke in high terms of Mr. Pratley, and repeated her thanks to the baronet, for the generosity with which he had acted towards that worthy man and his amiable family.

CHAPTER X.

IN a few days subsequent to this period, the newspapers announced to the world the marriage of lord Elwood and lady Laurentia Brierly.

Berthalina felt an anxiety to know how this intelligence operated on her fair friend, Caroline Radnor. This desire was laudable, as it did not take its rise from mere feminine curiosity, but a far different sentiment, an ardent desire for the happiness of that amiable girl.

She was not long in doubt; that day she was to accompany sir Edward to Mr. George Hartley's, in Hanover-square, to return the visit they had received from that Gentleman. Of course, the Radnors were invited, and Berthalina looked forward to the appointed hour with some degree of impatience.

Sir Edward returned home so late from his ride, to dress, that they did not arrive in Hanover-square till the moment of dinner's being announced. This prevented Berthalina's having any conversation with her friend; but she was grieved to observe, by the paleness of her look, that her heart was ill at ease.

Her vivacity was assumed, and, though she talked much more than usual, the very means she took to hide the perturbation of her thoughts, betrayed them to the friendly penetration of Miss Wingrove, and she perceived, with a sigh of regret, that all Caroline's resolves and promises were not proof against the pangs that were inflicted by the idea that lord Elwood was the husband of another.

These sentiments were, however, transient: the native good sense that young lady possessed, surmounted them, and the passing cloud was soon chased away by the sweet smiles of parental affection.

While Berthalina was thus scrutinizing, her loved friend, Miss Radnor, was not wholly inattentive on her part.

From the polite addresses, and delicate attentions, of Mr. Hartley to Berthalina, she indulged a hope that they were destined for each other. She had read so much of her friend's heart, as to be perfectly apprised she would have no repugnance to such an arrangement; and, from the behaviour of the gentleman, which grew more marked on every repeated interview, she was led to conclude, that love had wounded his heart with one of the keenest arrows.

Thus mutually inclined, she saw no impediment to their union, if, to use a common-place expression, the ice was once broken; and that some happy incident might accelerate this event, was the secret wish of Caroline Radnor, who thought it would be a lamentable circumstance, if fate should sunder two such accomplished beings.

If the fair Caroline had been an enchantress, and possessed unbounded influence with the attendant spirits who bear a sway over the destinies of mortals, she could not have contrived to facilitate her wishes better, in regard to Mr. Hartley and Miss Wingrove, than chance effected for her, in a short time subsequent to their visit in Hanover-square.

Sir Edward Wingrove possessed a noble estate, on which there was an elegant mansion, in Somersetshire, which was bequeathed him by his father-in-law. He also had a hunting seat, near Theobalds, which was a paternal inheritance.

From the length of time that sir Edward Wingrove and his father-in-law resided abroad, these respective dwellings were much out of repair. Different workmen were now employed in each, to make the necessary improvements and alterations.

This precluded the possibility of their visiting those places till the following summer.

The baronet had also a number of affairs to settle, relative to his late Indian concern. As it would be some months before a final arrangement could be made, he did not wish to quit town.

Kindly attentive to the health of Berthalina, he was fearful that a residence with him, during the intense heat of July, would be a prejudice to one so little accustomed to the confined air of the metropolis.

He therefore yielded to the request of Miss Radnor, that her friend might accompany herself and parents, in an excursion they were going to make to the Isle of Wight.

Their journey to Portsmouth was amazingly pleasant.

To the young ladies, the scene that presented itself was entirely novel, and, out of compliment to them, Mr. and Mrs. Radnor agreed to remain at Portsmouth for three days, that they might accompany them to view the dock-yard, shipping, and other places interesting to a stranger.

They more readily laid down this plan, as Portsmouth, at this time, was much thinner than usual, and they could procure proper accommodations at the principal inn.

They had just returned from their first promenade, and the fair friends stood at one of the windows, conversing on what they had seen, and replying with much *gaiété de coeur* to the *badinage* of Mr. Radnor, who was teasing them on the polite compliments they had received from several gallant officers, during their excursion, when an

exclamation of surprise, from Caroline, with “What an attractive magnet you are, dear Bertha!” drew that gentleman to the window.

“A magnet, indeed,” said he, laughingly! “I wonder, Caroline, you do not expire with envy!”

“For what, sir?” said Berthalina; “who is she thus to envy?”

“What a sly question! Can you suppose the poor girl is so stoical, as to behold, unmoved, Miss Wingrove, followed by a train of sighing lovers, like a heroine of romance, when she cannot attract one admirer?”

“You must excuse me, sir; you make an erroneous assertion: Miss Radnor has many admirers.”

“They are very silent on the subject, Berthalina. I dare say your friend would rather hear some of their eloquence. But what is become of Mr. Hartley, that he does not make his appearance? he has entered the inn some time since.

“Most possibly,” said Berthalina, “he does not know of our proximity to him.”

Mr. Radnor looked incredulous.

Mrs. Radnor proposed sending their compliments to him, with an invitation to join their party.

This was declined by Mr. Radnor, who assured them he should go in person to seek this *love-inspired* swain, and, with a significant glance at Berthalina, he left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. Radnor was certainly wrong in his conclusion. Miss Wingrove was, indeed, the object of Mr. Hartley's love; a love founded on esteem, for he regarded her to be as near approaching to perfection as this human state would permit. But he had not come to Portsmouth from any idea of meeting her, who possessed his *undeclared* affection. He knew not of her intended excursion to the Isle of Wight.

When he was last in Cumberland-place, he was informed by the baronet, that Berthalina had accepted an invitation from her beloved friends, to accompany them, for a couple of months, on a visit to Mr. Radnor's aunt.

A respectful temerity restrained him from minute inquiries at that time, not doubting but some fortunate chance would, in a few days, reveal to him the route they had taken.

A valued friend of his, the young count Rozella, had been some time in England, on a visit to Mr. Hartley, whom he accompanied from Italy, but was now gone with a party to the Isle of Wight, from which the latter excused himself, as he had no predilection for the tour.

At Newport, the Italian was attacked by a severe indisposition.

Mr. Hartley was hastening to Newport on the wings of friendship, when his chariot was seen to enter the courtyard of the inn by Berthalina and her fair friend.

Mr. Radnor soon perceived, from the surprise of Mr. Hartley, that he had been rallying Berthalina without a cause.

The gentlemen expressed mutual pleasure at meeting, and Mr. Hartley accepted Mr. Radnor's cordial invitation to dine with him, and followed to the apartment where Mrs. Radnor and the young ladies were sitting.

On the opening of the door, he started back with surprise.

"Surely," said he, "this is enchantment, or an illusion of the senses.

"Mr. Radnor led me to believe he was alone. I return him many thanks for the agreeable surprise he prepared for me."

He then advanced, and paid his respects to the ladies in the most prepossessing manner.

They heard with concern of the count Rozella's illness; they had frequently seen him with Mr. Hartley, and he ranked high in their estimation.

As it was not proper for Mr. Hartley to delay his progress, on account of his friend, and they wished to cross over to the Isle of Wight in company, it was proposed to leave Portsmouth on the following morning, and to suspend their survey till their return.

The passage, which is but seven miles across, was to be made in an open boat.

The servants, with the exception of those who remained to take care of the respective carriages, were to follow in another boat.

Berthalina, who had never been on an aquatic excursion before, felt, at first, an extreme timidity, which her friends anxiously strove to dispel.

The day was beautiful, and presented a clear, unclouded sky; a soft zephyr rippled the waves; the scenery around was majestic and sublime.

Berthalina's fears gradually subsided, and she became, by the time they were two miles from the Portsmouth shore, an enthusiastic admirer of her situation.

Mr. Radnor was in uncommon spirits; Hartley, all animation; the ladies joined in the lively converse with great gaiety, and every countenance expressed the most sensible pleasure, when their felicity received a severe shock, from an incident that had nearly proved fatal to our heroine.

Listening with attention to some quaint remarks Mr. Hartley was making on the modern costume of dress, she dropped her parasol into the water, and making a hasty and incautious attempt to recover it, she precipitated herself into the sea.

The piercing shrieks of Caroline, and the distressing situation of Mr. and Mrs. Radnor (for the gentle Emma had fainted in the arms of her husband), joined to the imminent danger in which the fair-one, whom he valued beyond life itself, was placed, inspired him with amazing strength and courage, and he lost not a moment in plunging after the hapless Berthalina.

He dived to a considerable depth without perceiving her.

Filled with the most alarming apprehensions, he hastily arose.

The force of the water had carried Berthalina to an alarming distance from the place where she fell.

Exerting all his skill, he was hastening to her, when she again sank from his aching sight.

He dived after her, and providentially caught hold of her left arm, as she was sinking to rise no more.

The struggles of Berthalina greatly retarded him from preserving her. She had just sense enough left to perceive some one had hold on her, and eagerly strove to cling to them, unconscious that she was thus endangering herself and deliverer.

He prudently exerted himself to keep her at arm's-length from him, for their mutual preservation.

They were happily discerned by the watermen, who hastened to their assistance with the utmost speed.

Mr. Hartley was quite exhausted, and they were both nearly lifeless when taken into the boat.

Mr. Radnor raised his eyes to heaven in fervent thankfulness, and then exerted himself in assisting his unfortunate companions.

Unhappily, none of them had any smelling-bottles, and Mr. Radnor, with his anxious daughter, was at a loss how to act.

One of the boatmen, to whom such scenes were not new, took from a locker a flask of brandy, which he pronounced to be excellent.

And we must, in justice to the honest veteran of the waves, allow that he was as good a judge as long experience could make him, and verified the old adage,

“Practice makes perfect.”

He strenuously recommended a good bumper to be given to each of the sufferers, as the best restorative in the world.

Mr. Radnor made no scruple in following this advice, as to Mr. Hartley.

He proceeded more cautiously with Berthalina.

Totally unused, as she was, to such strong beverage, he was fearful that its effects might be too powerful.

He contented himself with giving her a few drops, and directed Caroline to rub her temples and hands plentifully with this potent liquor.

Mr. Hartley soon recovered, without feeling any further inconvenience than what arose from his sea-drenched garments.

But Miss Wingrove was violently ill, from the effects of the salt water that she had involuntarily swallowed.

The situation of the whole party was, indeed, pitiable, as a considerable time elapsed before the boat gained the opposite shore.

On landing, a crowd soon collected round them, from the forlorn appearance of Mr. Hartley and Berthalina.

Happily a respectable inn was adjacent.

Miss Wingrove, wrapped in Mr. Radnor's great coat, was conveyed thither by the boatmen, followed by Mr. Hartley and her beloved friends.

As their baggage was entrusted to the servants, who were not expected to arrive at the Isle of Wight for some hours, they were obliged to have recourse to the owners of the inn for a change of habiliments for Mr. Hartley and Berthalina.

They most respectfully supplied them with what they wanted, and behaved with the greatest humanity and attention to the unfortunate party.

A few hours rest completely renovated Mr. Hartley, and he joined his friends at dinner, without appearing to have sustained any injury by the recent disaster.

He was anxiously minute in his inquiries after Berthalina.

Miss Radnor, who had just left her bed-side, informed him that she was now in a composed slumber, from which they hoped the happiest effects.

From the time of her being taken out of the water, she had remained in an alarming torpor; every faculty seemed benumbed. The surgeon, who attended on their arrival at the inn, advised a copious bleeding in the arm, which proved very beneficial, a gentle opiate was administered, and she soon reposed in the reviving arms of sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE heart of the amiable Berthalina was inspired with the most lively sensations of love and gratitude, for him who had so heroically saved her from a watery and premature grave.

On their interview, the next morning, Berthalina acknowledged to Mr. Hartley, the most grateful sense of the obligation he had conferred on her.

“But for you,” exclaimed the lovely girl, “my father would have now been childless. Words are too weak to express what I feel: I must leave to the baronet the thanks so much your due.”

Mr. Hartley entreated her not to overwhelm him by such expressions.

“Independent,” continued he, “of the happiness the human breast must feel, at being instrumental in the saving of a fellow creature’s life, how much more have I individually to felicitate myself, in recovering from so imminent a peril as surrounded her, the amiable Miss Wingrove. The accomplishing my purpose was, in itself a rich reward; and though, out of friendship to *him*, I must regret the occasion that called me to the Isle of Wight (the count Rozella’s indisposition) yet, on *your* account, I can never be sufficiently thankful to the providence that so unexpectedly made me of your party.

“Believe me, Miss Wingrove, I have, for some time past, been a fervent admirer of your person; more so, of the many virtues that adorn it; yet I was fearful of offending your delicacy, by a premature declaration.

“Perhaps,” continued the youth, while a scarlet glow suffused his noble countenance, “perhaps I am now trespassing beyond forgiveness.”

Here he paused, and bent his earnest gaze on Berthalina, who spoke not, but bashfully reclined her head on the shoulder of her fair friend, while Caroline inwardly exulted at the confession of Mr. Hartley’s sentiments, as she was perfectly aware, that the happiness of Miss Wingrove, in a great measure, depended on such a disclosure.

Mr. Radnor, willing to dispel the embarrassment that mutually distressed Mr. Hartley and Miss Wingrove, said, with much pleasantry, to the former, “My respected young friend, do you suppose that declaring a fervent admiration for a lady is an unpardonable trespass?”

“Not exactly, sir; but I believe I ought not to have done so, by the common etiquette in such cases, only to the fair-one herself. The honourable passion I have for Miss Wingrove is of that nature, I would not shrink from proclaiming it to the whole world. I have no clandestine views. If I am to suffer the mortification of a positive refusal,

it will cause me the most severe regrets, not that I have spoken thus openly, for the attempt to gain the affections, and the hand, of the lovely, accomplished Berthalina, must reflect credit on my taste and discernment.”

Mr. Hartley arose, and respectfully advancing to Berthalina, took her hand, and said, in the most prepossessing accents—“My sweet girl, think not that I mean now to obtain from you a definitive answer, to a passion as sincere as ardent. No; all now I dare ask is, will you allow me, during our mutual residence at this place, to visit you in the character of a lover, and suffer me to hope, that time and assiduity will effect a purpose on which my future peace depends?”

After some little hesitation, Miss Wingrove replied—“Far from giving me the slightest offence, by the declaration of the sentiments with which you honour me, in the presence of these, the dearest, most valued friends I have on earth, such frankness most powerfully interests my bosom in your favour.

“To you, sir, the preserver of my life, at the extreme hazard of your own, to you, who so tenderly strove to assuage the sorrows of my hapless mother, and speak the language of peace to her troubled mind, I need not hesitate to declare the value I have for your merit. Reserve, or affectation, under such circumstances, would, in me, be criminal.

“Conscious that I speak before those who will do justice to my meaning, and not accuse me of forwardness, or erring against the propriety becoming my sex, I confess that I—I—”

At this instant, Berthalina was so overcome, from a fear that the animation with which she spoke had hurried her too far; that confusion rendered her incapable of proceeding.

Caroline was affected, even to tears, by her feelings for her loved friend.

Reassured by the kind remarks of Mr. and Mrs. Radnor, and the respectful behaviour of her lover, Berthalina acknowledged a preference in his favour; that she felt for him gratitude, esteem, and love.

She also yielded to the entreaties of Mr. Hartley, her permission for him to write to sir Edward Wingrove, for his approbation of the virtuous engagement into which they had entered.

They remained, during that day, at the inn.

Had it not been for the reflections that would sometimes obtrude, of the count Rozella’s situation, the most perfect happiness reigned.

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor were pleased with the prospects of their young friends.

Caroline was delighted; her wishes were accomplished.

With the amiable lovers, she entertained little or no doubt of sir Edward's acquiescence. That obtained, no obstacle existed to their union, a union which promised the most perfect happiness to the parties concerned.

On the subsequent morning, as soon as breakfast was concluded, Mr. Hartley, parting with reluctance from Berthalina, and, with the utmost respect, from her friends, left them, to repair to the count Rozella.

The same day, Mr. Radnor, and the ladies, set out to the house of their expecting relation, which was situated about fifteen miles distant from the inn where they had made their temporary abode.

Mr. Hartley and Berthalina were several miles distant from each other.

Such was the respect he paid to the object of his admiration, that scarce a day elapsed but she saw Mr. Hartley, and every interview increased the sentiments of love and esteem that they felt for each other.

Mr. Hartley wrote to the baronet, on the day subsequent to his leaving the inn.

Berthalina also addressed a letter to her father, on the alarming incident that had occurred, and her obligations to Mr. Hartley. Hers was accompanied by one from Mr. Radnor.

A considerable time elapsed before any answer was received to these letters.

When they arrived, they severally expressed a high sense of, and regard for, the merits of Mr. Hartley, and a perfect approbation of his becoming the husband of his darling daughter; yet he advised, that the earl of Wynchcombe should be consulted in this affair, as there could be no perfect felicity in the marriage state, where the consent of either parent was withheld.

He concluded by observing, that an indisposition, from which he was not yet perfectly recovered, had occasioned the delay in his answers to their letters.

That to Mr. Hartley was highly flattering. The pathetic, yet grateful strain, in which he commented on Berthalina's deliverance from the horrors of such a death as seemed to surround her, was affecting in the extreme, while it served as a convincing proof of the unbounded regard the baronet had for his deserving child.

These letters were a real source of affliction to Berthalina, and Mr. Hartley was ill at ease.

Though perfectly independent of the earl, his father, he wished not to offend him.

He had, from the first, been aware, that his lordship would not readily be brought to give his consent to Berthalina's being made one of his family; since he could not, without betraying much petulance, even hear lady Wynchcombe's daughter spoken of.

Such was the regard of Mr. Hartley for the amiable girl, that he could not resolve to sacrifice all his expected happiness to his father's prejudices.

He thought it, of the two, the most advisable to marry without the earl's consent than against it.

He therefore postponed writing to Italy, at least on that interesting subject, till he had personally seen the baronet, and conversed with him on the obstacle he had raised.

The style of the letters written by sir Edward were so languid, so unlike himself, that the filial fears of Berthalina were aroused.

She immediately wrote to the baronet, expressing her anxiety, and conjuring him, by the endearing ties existing between them, and to which they had long been strangers, to be candid with her, and acknowledge if he was seriously ill, that she might return to him, and try, by her affectionate cares, to alleviate his pain.

"Let not, I entreat you," wrote the charming girl, "your fears of abridging the pleasure I enjoy, in the society of my friends, induce you to silence on the subject of your ailments.

"I should be miserable to remain here, if my dear father was indisposed. Say but that word, and I will return immediately to you. My anxiety makes me truly miserable.

"The amiable preserver of your Berthalina's life has just been here. His solicitude almost equals mine. How it endears him to me!

"He announces the count Rozella to be rapidly recovering his health.

"Mr. Hartley and his friend, out of compliment to the Radnors and myself, intended to remain at the Isle of Wight during our stay here, and escort us home.

"But they now obligingly mean to conduct me, should your answer render it necessary, safe to your protecting arms, as Mr. Radnor, and the dear ladies, cannot accompany me till the promised term of their visit to the agreeable relation, at whose house we are now entertained, is expired."

Berthalina concluded her letter by a renewal of entreaties to return home, if her beloved parent was not in perfect convalescence; yet hoped to remain longer with her friends, as, in that case, she should have to exult in sir Edward's health, as she firmly trusted her *suspense* would be removed by the explicitness of his reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE baronet's reply was most affectionate.

He acknowledged that he had been dangerously ill, being attacked, the very day subsequent to her leaving him, with a dangerous complaint, attended by spasmodic symptoms in his stomach.

Fearful of alarming his dear child, he had concealed this from her knowledge, and only mentioned his having been slightly indisposed.

He now assured her, on his honour, that he was in excellent health, his recovery being, in comparison, as rapid as his illness was sudden.

He requested that she would make herself perfectly happy, and remain with her valuable friends till their return home.

The society of his child, he observed, would always be a delight to him; nay, it was a blessing, for which he could never be sufficiently grateful to Heaven, who had preserved her, to cheer the remainder of a life that retrospection frequently imbibited.

She must not, therefore, from his desiring her stay at the Isle of Wight, imbibe the idea that her presence was not desirable. The continuance of her health made him, at this season, wish her absence from town.

His late illness had also retarded the final adjustment of his affairs, and he was now daily engaged with his agents, &c. To use his own expression, he was "elbow deep in musty papers and parchments."

This letter was a great relief to Berthalina.

No longer anxious about her dear parent, and happy in Mr. Hartley's affection, her face was drest in smiles.

The languor that usually pervaded her countenance, from the long series of woes that had occurred to torment her, was now dispelled, and innocent gaiety had taken its place.

The count and Mr. Hartley attended the young ladies, in the excursions which they made every morning that the weather permitted, as the heat, which had been intense, was now relieved by frequent showers, which sometimes confined them to the house, when music, reading, working, and converse, varied the scene, and rendered it equally agreeable.

The evening previous to their leaving the Isle of Wight, Mr. Radnor, and the ladies, made their respective adieus to their elegant entertainer, and were conveyed in her carriage, to the inn whither they had repaired on their first entering the island.

They expected Rozella and Mr. Hartley to breakfast on the following morning, in compliance with the arrangement that had been made.

They had but just sat down to the table, when one of the waiters entered with—"A gentleman, who is personally known to Mr. Radnor and the ladies, presents his compliments, and would, if agreeable, be happy to join them at supper."

Mr. Radnor returned—"that they would be most proud of the gentleman's company."

The waiter withdrew with an obsequious bow.

"Emma," said Mr. Radnor, "you look surprised at my answer. Depend on it, my best love, none but an intimate friend would have sent such a message, with even his name unannounced. No doubt, some agreeable surprise is intended us.

Caroline had just time to observe, that she supposed it to be either Mr. Hartley or the count, who, from some concerted pleasantry, had thus prematurely joined them.

The door opened, and Mr. Radnor, who had the opportunity, from his seat, of first beholding the visitor, exclaimed, "An agreeable surprise, indeed! my dear sir, how rejoiced I am to see you!"

A moment more, and Berthalina was in the arms of the dear intruder—sir Edward Wingrove.

Berthalina had, at his request, informed him, of the appointed day of their leaving the Isle of Wight; when he immediately set off, attended by one servant, to join them.

As they were not exact to the appointed time, the baronet had been waiting for them two days at the inn.

The next morning the party received a welcome addition in the persons of the count and Mr. Hartley.

The meeting between the baronet and the latter gentleman was highly interesting; but the baronet would not give a tacit consent to the union of Mr. Hartley and Berthalina, till the earl of Wynchcombe had been consulted. From peculiar circumstances, he thought this indispensable.

This cast a melancholy shade on the minds of the young people, as Mr. Hartley did not, in the least, flatter himself with obtaining the earl's approbation to such an alliance; indeed, he even dreaded (such was the stern inflexibility of his character) to write to him on a subject which must, of course, recall the late lady Wynchcombe to his mind, and, with it, a train of thoughts that would but irritate him against the desired nuptials.

As they travelled but a few miles each day, and stopped to view those places most worthy of attention, it was nearly three weeks ere they arrived in town.

When the carriage stopped at the baronet's house, Berthalina no sooner alighted, than she flew to the apartment of the venerable Mrs. Aubrey, who now lived in Cumberland-place, on the footing of a respected friend, receiving every attention that could contribute to her comfort, or evince the gratitude of sir Edward and his amiable daughter.

Since the favourable turn of Berthalina's affairs, the old lady had enjoyed peace of mind, her health returned with it, and, though infirm through age, she appeared as if Heaven would yet spare to her many years of existence.

Berthalina had been conversing some time with her dear Aubrey, when her servant informed her, that sir Edward and Mr. Hartley wished her company in the library.

In answer to her inquiry, of how long Mr. Hartley had been there, she was answered, "About half an hour."

Berthalina descended with some trepidation; she thought some particular incident must have occurred to bring Mr. Hartley thither, as he had appointed not to come to Cumberland-place till the next day at dinner.

On her entrance into the library, sir Edward called Berthalina to him, when taking her hand, he put it into that of Mr. Hartley, with a paternal benediction, and fervent prayer to Heaven, for their happiness in the connubial state.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO account for the behaviour of the baronet, Berthalina was informed that Mr. Hartley, on his return to Hanover-square, found letters from Italy, which had lain there several days, announcing the sudden decease of the earl of Wynchcombe.

He had left Mr. Hartley an unexpected addition to his fortune, and requested him, as the ill health, and retired habits of his successor would be ill fitted to such a charge, to be as a parent to the younger children.

Berthalina was also remembered in his will, his lordship bequeathing her a thousand pounds, as a testimony of respect to the virtues she possessed.

No obstacle remaining, sir Edward withheld not his consent, and the nuptials were celebrated as soon as the mourning for the earl expired.

At the same time Miss Radnor was led to the altar by the count Rozella, who obtained the consent of the parents of his lovely bride, on condition that the new-married pair chiefly resided in England, and only occasionally visited their Italian estates.

Sir Edward Wingrove and the honourable George Hartley formed but one establishment, and Berthalina, in the society of a beloved husband and an affectionate father, was perfectly happy.

Soon after the birth of their first child, Mr. Hartley, by the decease of his brother, succeeded to the title and estates.

The countess was frequently blessed with the company of Edward and the beloved ladies. By her marriage, she could now call them brother and sisters, without infringing on their father's commands, though their real affinity still remained a profound secret.

Lord Elwood, rendered miserable in his marriage, by the extravagance and dissipation of lady Laurentia, frequently looked back with regret at the opportunity he had neglected, of obtaining an amiable wife in the lovely Caroline, now countess Rozella.

Mr. Hildon had long since dissipated his fortune, and gone abroad, to avoid the clamorous importunities of his creditors.

Melmoth, on a sincere abjuration of his follies, and despising the meanness of his situation with lord Elwood, found sincere friends and patrons in sir Edward Wingrove and Mr. Radnor, who placed him in a situation where the great abilities and accomplishments he possessed were displayed to advantage, and rendered him not only independent, but wealthy, and he soon after united himself in marriage to a most amiable woman.

The worthy apothecary of Woodmount, Mr. and Mrs. Warner, and every individual who had, in the least instance, forwarded the felicity of Berthalina, were most nobly rewarded by that lady and her friends.

Mrs. Aubrey lived five years after the marriage of her beloved, respected Berthalina.

Forgetting the difference of their rank, in the remembrance of the obligations she had received from her, in the helpless years of infancy, the countess attended her death-bed with a tenderness that could scarce be exceeded by filial love, and performed, with her own hands, the pious office of closing the aged matron's eyes.

THE END.