

Author: **Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson**

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THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

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

BY SARAH WILKINSON.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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1808.

## THE CHILD

OF

## MYSTERY.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berthalina's response was a deep sigh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"'Tis already disposed of; my word is given; Hildon is the purchaser."

Berthalina burst into tears.

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

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

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

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

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

“And what reply did old antiquity make?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER. II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Elwood proceeded with—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“She affectionately embraced me, and then continued—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### CHAPTER. III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

“Is he my father?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### CHAPTER. IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I rallied my spirits, and replied,

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

“‘You would oblige me by so doing.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER. VI.

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

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

“‘Obliged, Charles!’

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“That was not our first interview Miss Berthalina.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berthalina then proceeded to the conclusion of her history.

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

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

“I lost not a moment in obeying these injunctions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pleased to make.”

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## CHAPTER. VIII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Have you then resolved on any plan?”

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

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

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

## CHAPTER. IX.

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

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

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

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

“Was you at the masquerade?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I hope the contrary, for your sake.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER X.

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

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

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

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

He honoured Melmoth by consulting him.

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

“Why so—your reason?”

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

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

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

But she erred in forming such a supposition.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lord Elwood gave an assenting bow.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Where is Berthalina?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER XII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berthalina uttered a firm, though polite negative.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

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

BY SARAH WILKINSON.

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1808.

THE CHILD

OF

MYSTERY.

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

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

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

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

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

“Where is Morton?”

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You will oblige me.”

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

Miss Radnor inclined her head in acquiescence.

Lord Elwood proceeded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### CHAPTER. III.

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

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

“TO MISS ELWOOD.

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

Yours, &c.

*Oakley Hall.*

G. HARTLEY.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“For Heaven’s sake! what mean you?”

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

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

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

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

Again she called, but with the same negative success.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who is your employer?”

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

“Mr. George Hartley, I presume.”

“Ah, no!” sighed Morton.

“Then you know who it is?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I am to wait here for further orders.”

“When do you expect them?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Elwood inquired the hour.

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

"I thank you. How is my attendant?"

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

“Cannot you send for some medical person?”

“No.”

“Does not your village afford one?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## CHAPTER V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He proposed a careful woman nurse.

Miss Elwood was eager to adopt the plan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You think she will die, then?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berthalina by degrees gathered from her the following particulars.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Pratley,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chance at length aided design.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berthalina retired soon after ten to her chamber. She undressed and went to bed, for fear of exciting suspicion. She was also obliged to extinguish the light, and watch the progress of time, with no other amusement than the rays of hope, which she now suffered to illumine her mind.

At last, for never did it seem so tardy as now, the wished for hour began to be announced from the consecrated edifice.

Berthalina leaped from her couch, and lowered the string.

In a few moments a violent pull gave the signal for its ascension.

She drew it up, and found the letter replaced by a card.

She was impatient to peruse it, but was forced to put a restraint on her feelings, and place the card under her pillow till the next morning, and went to sleep, well pleased with the correspondence so romantically managed with the village apothecary, whom she considered as the best and most paternal of men.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

MISS Radnor's melancholy seemed to gather strength instead of being weakened by the lapse of time.

In vain she strove to conceal her feelings by an assumed gaiety in the presence of her parents.

But their anxious solicitude was not so easily deceived; prudence suggested silence on the subject to Miss Radnor, and they contented themselves for the present, in contriving every species of rational amusement, that could tend to prevent her from indulging the baneful, enervating habit of dwelling incessantly on her secret source of woe.

Miss Radnor had been returned to Grosvenor-place, rather more than three weeks, when lord Elwood's porter brought a letter, which he stated to have been sent with others to his lordship's town house.

It contained most ardent wishes for, and polite inquiries after, her health; also that of her parents; ending with regrets that he was not yet able to send her intelligence of his sister, about whom his unwearied exertions had not met with the least success.

Miss Radnor, at the request of her Father, immediately gave the letter into his hands; and saying she was going to play over some new lesson on her harp, retired.

Neither Mr. Radnor nor his lady were pleased with the style of the letter, nor its being addressed to their daughter; any communication to have been made, ought to be *addressed* to them. It appeared as a first step towards a correspondence, in which they would never acquiesce; at the same time, they observed with pain that Caroline's eyes betrayed a pleasure, both at the receipt of the letter, and its contents, with the exception of that part relating to Berthalina, whom she accused, with more bitterness than belonged to the general tenor of her manner, with base ingratitude to the *best of brothers*.

"I will crush this mischief while 'tis yet in the bud;"—

Said Mr. Radnor.

"Mischief, indeed," sighed his amiable lady; "I would sooner see my adored child the wife of the poorest man on earth, so that he possessed honour and probity, than the partner of a gambling libertine lord."

Miss Radnor did not make her appearance till dinner was served up, and she would then have remained in her boudoir, could she have invented a plausible excuse for so doing.

She was neither guilty in action or word, that could be misconstrued to her disadvantage; but her thoughts and wishes were such, that, could they be analysed, she was indeed undutiful. She therefore shrunk from observation.

When the servants were withdrawn, Mr. Radnor said,

“From the style of lord Elwood’s letter, I am not inclined to judge favourably of his intentions; I should rather suppose he did not wish it to meet my view; for it is inconsistent with reason for him to form an idea, that I should allow my daughter to correspond, on any subject whatever, with a young unmarried man of fashion, unless indeed, (which is a case quite foreign to that we are now discussing), he had gained the approbation of your parents to pay his addresses to you. I shall take upon me to answer his letter, and—”

“My dear father—”

Interrupted Caroline, with burning blushes, and a look in which entreaty was mingled with apprehension.

“My dear father, consider what an appearance it would have.”

“Think not, my child, that I should betray the least hint of a suspicion, that may indeed be founded in error; or hurt your delicacy by a premature caution. No; I only aim at preventing the possibility of a correspondence between you and lord Elwood, which might in time become clandestine; important events often succeed trivial causes.

“I hope, Caroline, you acquiesce in my plan.”

Caroline signified her assent with visible chagrin.

Mr. Radnor was much displeased, and remonstrances were forcing their utterance, when Mrs. Radnor, who read, by the looks of her husband, what was passing in his mind, checked him by a significant glance, which seemed to say, *accept her affirmative*, and take no further notice.

Lady Bevil was returned to town; and Mrs. Radnor, with her daughter, had promised to pass that evening with her in a domestic way. Mr. Radnor was to remain at home, as he expected a visitor of importance. He also took the opportunity of penning an answer to lord Elwood.

“My lord,

“The indisposition of my daughter preventing her from honouring your letter with the attention it deserved, the task devolves on me. Receive our united thanks, for your polite wishes and inquiries. Suffer me to say that our disappointment was excessive, on



receiving a letter superscribed with your lordship's hand; we fondly hoped to have heard tidings of poor Berthalina, who, in spite of appearances that now act to her prejudice, may be innocent. I entreat you, in the name of my family, to favour us with the first account you may hear of your lovely sister, *till then* accept our kind remembrances, &c. &c."

This letter was submitted to the perusal of Mrs. Radnor and Caroline, and then sent by the general post.

It was easy for an interested observer to discern, that Miss Radnor was not pleased with this repulse to the correspondence of lord Elwood. She thought her father had acted too harshly. Supposing it possible, she argued to herself, that his lordship had, or should have, honourable intentions towards her, (as for dishonourable, that was out of the question. Who would dare to harbour such towards *her!* Ah! self pride! how you impose on your votaries). There was no degradation in his alliance. He was not a Melmoth. He had foibles it was true; she could not deny that unwelcome truth, even to herself: but who was free from them.

Berthalina was still regretted, still loved, but not as formerly. The complaints she had made were attributed to caprice; and sometimes to a worse motive: making herself appear amiable, and prejudicing her brother, in the eyes of his friends, previous to her elopement, which she now supposed to have long been pre concerted.

Thus did a sudden, ill-placed passion stifle the emotions of a heart, naturally generous, and fraught with virtuous sentiments.

To how great a length this uncharitableness might have been carried, had not Miss Radnor's delusion been ended by a sudden shock, it is hard to determine. Happily it *was so*, and her mind restored to its wonted energy.

The shock alluded to, was the receipt of Miss Elwood's letter, which arrived in Grosvenor-place, three days subsequent to that of his lordship.

The instant Miss Radnor cast her eyes on the superscription of the letter, she faintly uttered the name of Berthalina, and burst into a flood of tears.

As soon as she was somewhat recovered, she gave the letter to Mrs. Radnor.

"Open it my dear madam, I have not power; it is from Miss Elwood, and my agitation is excessive; my mind is divided between hope and fear on her account."

Mrs. Radnor slightly glanced over the contents, before she ventured to read it aloud to Caroline.

Berthalina's description of her sufferings, and her pathetic appeal for aid, surcharged the heart of the amiable matron with sympathy; and the loud "*Thank Heaven she is innocent,*" burst from her lips.

“*Where* is she, *who* is she with. If innocent, she must have been deluded from the abbey by treachery. *Who* is the wretch that has dared to—”

“Softly, my *chère* Caroline. All your questions cannot be answered at once. *Where* she *now* is, she *must* not *remain*. I wish Mr. Radnor would return from his walk. He must have extended it far beyond his usual limits.”

“My dear mother, you alarm me, you have evidently a wish to procrastinate the intelligence you receive from the letter.”

Miss Radnor was right.

Her affectionate mother had remarked, with heart-felt concern, that Caroline, during her residence at Stanton Abbey, had imbibed a passion for lord Elwood.

He was not the character she wished, for a son-in-law; for a husband to the daughter on whom rested her every hope. She judged, from the good sense and other internal endowments Caroline possessed, that the disclosure of his unwarranted cruel conduct to Berthalina, would entirely erase every tender impression that his insinuating manner, and handsome person, had made on her heart. Yet she was aware that Caroline must have a struggle to make a complete revolution in her sentiments, and the convictions of lord Elwood’s depravity, so suddenly announced, (when she had flattered herself into a belief that he was all amiable, and that her first opinion of him was founded on an unpardonable prejudice she imbibed from the representations of Berthalina,) must be attended with acute sensations of regret and disappointment.

There are some persons who may censure Mrs. Radnor’s feelings, as bordering on an unnecessary refinement. If so, the foible was of a tendency too amiable to merit the slightest reproof.

Alive to the tenderest solicitude in all that concerned her husband and child, she shrunk from the idea of their ever being afflicted with needless pain.

To alleviate the sufferings that befel those loved objects of her care, either mental or personal, had ever been her study. And with a starting tear and affectionate accents, she thus addressed Miss Radnor.

“My sweet child, you have never *actually* swerved from the duty you owe to your father and myself, yet there is a painful something passing in your heart, which you have not disclosed. Though it was easily seen through, you have considered our opinions of lord Elwood as harsh and prejudiced. You will now see your error—Retire, my love, to your chamber, peruse Berthalina’s letter with attention; reason with yourself; summon your judgment and fortitude; and at dinner, I expect to see you, if not happy, calm and grateful: that the delusion you have laboured under is dispersed *ere* too late.

Caroline wished to make some reply, but her heart was full, and she could not give utterance to a syllable.

Mrs. Radnor perceived her emotions, and repeated her wishes for Caroline's retiring.

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## CHAPTER IX.

CAROLINE perused the letter with minute attention. Her agitation was extreme. She felt her mother's kindness; and was most happy to be without witnesses of her grief.

She had given way to reflections of the most painful nature above an hour, when hearing her father rap, she took a sudden resolution; and hastening down to the parlour, cast herself on her knees before them.

"Let me thus acknowledge my faults, and trust to your unparalleled kindness for pardon. Never will I again harbour a concealment. This has cost me many a pang."

Mr. Radnor tenderly raised his suppliant daughter, and placing her by her mother on the sofa, seated himself on the opposite side.

"We will now listen, my dear child, to what you have to relate; your auditors are favourably disposed; nor do they entertain a suspicion to your prejudice."

Miss Radnor candidly related what had passed in her mind, with regard to lord Elwood; and the shock she received from his espousing the cause of Mr. Melmoth; as it proved to her, that the sentiments she entertained for him were not reciprocal, previous to that conversation.

The ambiguous behaviour of his lordship had at times led her to suppose she was not indifferent to him. But now all her hopes vanished.

Returning to Grosvenor-place, she tried to erase the passion she had so unfortunately imbibed, but her attempts were vain. Neither could she believe any thing that was said to the prejudice of his lordship.

An idea instilled itself into her brain, that was unpropitious to her design of conquering this *penchant*.

She supposed it more than possible that lord Elwood had recourse to the passion Melmoth so visibly entertained for her, as a plan to discover the state of her heart. For his manners had undergone a great change, and previous to her departure from the abbey, he had behaved with polite gallantry.

The letter she so unexpectedly received from him, strengthened this supposition; and she flattered herself that he would ere now have made a direct avowal of his attachment, had he not been prevented by the trouble arising from the mysterious absence of Berthalina.

Miss Radnor ended her (can it be called) confession, with observing “that she now felt as one awaking from a dangerous dream. All her infatuation was gone, and she regarded all that her dear friends had said of lord Elwood as strictly just. She had escaped from a dangerous precipice, and resolved to have no more concealments of the like tendency.”

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor were highly incensed at the conduct of lord Elwood, in regard to Melmoth.

They were convinced he thus sought the interest of his friend and flatterer, and from no trial of Caroline’s sentiments in his favour.

No doubt but her manner artlessly discovered the secret she had before assiduously endeavoured to conceal, and gave a turn to his thoughts. His letter was evidently studied to draw her into a clandestine correspondence with him, and to make her the victim of her own credulity: for lord Elwood was well known, in the fashionable world, to be of that order of unprincipled beings, who think the more beauty, innocence, and rank, a woman possesses, the greater their triumph if they despoil her of that virtue, which alone gave value to those blessings she enjoyed.

Miss Radnor was the first to observe, that “while they were thus discussing their own affairs, poor Berthalina was suffering in her captivity.”

“She is, indeed,” said Mr. Radnor, to whom his lady on his entrance, had given a hasty account of Miss Elwood’s situation.

Caroline produced the letter.

Mr. Radnor having perused it, remained buried some moments in meditation; then declared that “there was not a moment to be lost, in endeavouring to extricate the fair maid from the perils that surrounded her.”

Mr. Radnor proposed setting out the next morning, at break of day. He did not think it eligible to use his own travelling-carriage. A servant was therefore sent to procure a hired chaise and four, to be in readiness at the appointed hour.

Mr. Radnor wished to have some respectable female, as a companion on this enterprise.

His lady and daughter were entirely out of the question. He did not wish to expose them to the bustle that he naturally expected to ensue. Neither could they conveniently leave town, and their circle of friends, at so short a notice, without exciting a curiosity they wished to avoid.

Mrs. Aubrey was too infirm; neither did they wish at present to acquaint her that they had heard from Berthalina, till they could speak with more certainty as to her fate; fearful that the old lady's feelings would be too much harassed, by the painful mystery of lord Elwood's proceedings.

A note was dispatched to Mrs. Warner, requesting her attendance in Grosvenor-place, on important business.

Not doubting that the Radnor family had some tidings to communicate respecting her beloved Miss Elwood, she delayed not a moment in complying with their request.

Mr. Radnor communicated to her the contents of Miss Elwood's letter. She rejoiced in the innocence of Berthalina, and was severe in her reprehension of lord Elwood's behaviour.

Mrs. Radnor observed, that "A strange mystery appeared to cloud the day of this interesting orphan."

Mrs. Warner replied, that "the birth of that young lady was unfortunate, both for herself and parents."

"It was not altogether so clever," said Mr. Radnor. "But as Miss Elwood was the progeny of his late lordship, subsequent to his divorce from her mother, I do not see that such a material difference should be made, or the affair lapt in mystery, as it was from the very first."

"Was I at liberty, sir," said Mrs. Warner, "I could easily elucidate these circumstances.—But I am sworn to secrecy.—Nor dare I ever reveal what I know of this hapless affair, without some material events or discoveries take place, of which I foresee not the least possibility."

"Can you," asked Mr. Radnor, "provided your husband consents to the arrangement—can you accompany me to Woodmount?—Or are you under any restrictions that will prevent you from adopting a plan I have much at heart?"

"From the goodness of my husband's disposition, I am inclined, sir, to think he would not oppose my wishes, in so momentous a concern.

"I am under no ties to any one else, that shall prevent me from following the dictates of a heart, that throbs with emotion to serve the dear child of a still dearer, though erring, mistress. It is true, should lord Elwood be apprised of my interference, he may feel great displeasure. But no interested views shall deter me from doing what I consider as an important duty."

Mr. Warner made not the slightest objection to the scheme, but was forward in its promotion; and accompanied his wife to Grosvenor-place about ten in the evening.

When all was adjusted, the amiable family felt greatly exhilarated: even Caroline resumed a great portion of her former vivacity.

She rallied her father and Mrs. Warner most unmercifully, on their intended expedition from town; assuring them that “if they were recognised on the road, they must expect to be paragraphed by the scandal-mongers!”

“How so, my dear Caroline? What can that illiberal set have to say of me and Mrs. Warner?”

“What a question!

“But I will give you a specimen:—

“We hope soon to present our numerous readers, and fashionable patrons, with the particulars of *what*—we can *now* give them only a slight sketch. Mr. R—— a wealthy commoner, rather past the meridian of life; and whose town house is not half a day’s walk from Hyde-park Corner, was seen yesterday, on the Bedford road, in a post-chaise and four, accompanied by Mrs. W——, the wife of a respectable grocer. We *sincerely* lament the desertion of the amiable Mrs. R——, and sympathize in the feelings of the injured husband, who has, to the great injury of his business, set off in pursuit of his faithless spouse and her innamorato, who will most possibly—”

“Hold! Hold! I beseech you,” said Mr. Radnor. “It is true, some people are capable of most base falsehoods. But I flatter myself, that Mrs. Warner and I will escape unnoticed.”

Mrs. Radnor took leave of Mrs. Warner over night. But Caroline who was eager to show every respect to her dear parent, and contribute to his comfort, arose at five to do the honours of the *déjeûné*, and wish success to the *adventurers*, as she playfully styled them, and a happy deliverance to the *lady* from her enchanted castle.

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mr. Radnor and Mrs. Warner arrived at Woodmount, they ordered the servants (for they were accompanied by two, out of livery, and well armed) to inquire at Mr. Pratley's, at whose house they alighted.

The worthy apothecary was at home; and when informed who were his guests, and that they came in consequence of the letter he had so honourably forwarded to Grosvenor-place, he received them with all imaginable politeness and respect.

Mr. Radnor did not think proper to explain to Mr. Pratley who the young lady at Mrs. Belton's was, till he had obtained an interview with Miss Elwood, and learned her sentiments in this respect.

Mr. Pratley was already convinced that the young lady was not an inmate of Mrs. Belton's through choice; and he felt happy in the prospect of her being restored to her friends. Without seeking into the particulars of the case, trusting to time, and the future confidence of the parties, for the gratification of his curiosity.

It was determined that Mr. Pratley, who had not been at Mrs. Belton's during the three preceding days, should go there on the following morning, accompanied by Mr. Radnor. While Mrs. Warner should remain at the apothecary's.

Miss Elwood sat in the window-seat, reading an odd volume of *Clarissa Harlowe*, the only book, besides a Bible, Common Prayer, and Glasse's *Cookery*, that Mrs. Belton's closet could produce, when the gentlemen rang at the gate.

Berthalina raised her eyes from the page, and beholding Mr. Pratley, accompanied by the father of her loved friend, she had nearly fainted. But the fear of prematurely arousing Mrs. Belton's suspicions, obliged her to repress the feelings which agitated her bosom.

Mrs. Belton was up stairs; but perceiving the gentlemen, whom she deemed most unwelcome intruders, she hastened down, and entered the parlour at the same time with themselves; and with astonishing volubility and effrontery said,

"The young woman is perfectly well, sir. She does not want either advice or medicine now."

"So much the better; so much the better, madam. This gentleman and myself only came with a friendly call—."

"That gentleman is a stranger to me."



“I am so,” said Mr. Radnor, advancing. “But we may soon know more of each other. Till then, there is a young lady here, whose friendship I will claim.”

Berthalina’s spirits were now more calm; and thus encouraged, she sprung forward, and was presently clasped in the arms of Mr. Radnor, who shed a sympathizing tear on the pale visage of the interesting girl.

With the fury of a tigress despoiled of her young, Mrs. Belton rushed towards Berthalina, and caught her arm.

“Pretty doings truly in my house! Do you think I’ll suffer it!—Mr. Pratley, I desire you, and that man whom you have presumed to bring here, will take yourselves off. As for you, miss, go up to your chamber, and wait till I call you.”

Mr. Radnor was at first so astonished, by this vulgar ebullition of rage, and display of impotent authority that he had not power to check its progress.

Berthalina was really terrified at this virago, and drew closer to the two gentlemen, to whom she naturally looked for protection.

“Am I to be obeyed or not,” said this *feminine* stentor. “Leave the room miss, before you oblige me to force you hence.”

“Woman!” exclaimed Mr. Radnor, in a voice that pronounced he was not to be trifled with, “by whose authority do you thus dare to assume this insolent command over this young lady?”

Mrs. Belton was silent; and Mr. Radnor continued. “You are on the brink of a dangerous precipice: your share in this scandalous transaction may bring a weighty punishment on your head.

“Do not trust too much on the promises of lord Elwood; nay, do not start!

“Your employer is well known to me, and shall be called to account for his extraordinary and unmanly conduct. This young lady goes with me.

“Mrs. Warner, my love, has been so good as to comply with Mrs. Radnor’s desire of accompanying me to Woodmount, on your account. She now waits for you at the house of this worthy gentleman, whither we will conduct you.”

“Most willingly will I accompany you, sir. Is Morton to go with us?”

“By all means; she is not exactly what I wish, but for the present we will wave the discussion.

Mrs. Belton was loud in her declarations, that the young lady should not quit the house without the permission of lord Elwood, who had placed her there.

“Lord Elwood is certainly the guardian of this young lady; but as he has exceeded legal authority, and seems to have some clandestine views that I cannot fathom, I shall make a complaint to the lord chancellor, who will right this injured orphan. And on your peril dare to detain her.”

“But sir,” said Mrs. Belton in a tone rather softened, “how can I answer to lord Elwood, for this breach of the trust reposed in me?”

“Under what pretext did his lordship prevail on you to take charge of this young lady, and unjustly deprive her of liberty; withholding from her writing materials, and—”

“That was by his lordship’s desire,” hastily interrupted Mrs. Belton.

“I should be sorry,” replied Mr. Radnor, “to comply with the desires every person might think proper to make me. But that is wide from the point I wish to ascertain; and I again repeat, what reason did your honourable employer give you, for his dishonourable actions?”

“I am not a child, to be thus interrogated; I was satisfied with what lord Elwood said, and that is enough for me.”

“When do you expect lord Elwood here?”

“I have expected him every hour, for these three days.”

“When he arrives give him this card. He will there find the lady. She shall not be denied to him.—Speak not; remember you have no authority to detain her; and if your employer conceives himself injured, he knows where to apply for a remedy.”

In vain was the boisterous resistance, and furious arguments of Mrs. Belton.

The two gentlemen led Miss Elwood and Morton away in triumph, amidst the revilings of their late hostess. Who watched them till they were out of sight, and then retired into the parlour, that she might consider how to act in this dilemma.

After due deliberation, she wrote, or rather scrawled, a letter to lord Elwood, in which she enclosed Mr. Radnor’s card, and gave a hasty sketch of that gentleman’s visit and the consequences.

## CHAPTER XI.

LORD Elwood's self-consequence was much hurt at the receipt of Mr. Radnor's answer to his letter addressed to Caroline, instead of one from the hand of the fair lady.

He pronounced a hearty curse on all meddling fathers, and made such comments to Melmoth, to whom he communicated the contents of the letter, as fully proved, that the worthy gentleman had not erred in his conjectures.

Lord Elwood had indeed discovered, that he had a preference in Caroline's heart, and he resolved to make his advantage of it.

He gave her credit for every virtue, and he also perceived that she had *that* credulity, which is always inseparable from a good heart, of believing all that an artful person wishes them to believe. Abhorring deceit themselves, they suspect it not in others; till, alas! it is oft too late to withdraw from the snare in which they are entangled.

He now eradicated all thoughts of Miss Radnor from his breast, which was easily done; for his heart had no share in his designs on her. He wrote to lady Laurentia Brierly, in the most lover-like style: a tribute to her charms, *alias* her fortune, he had never omitted every third or fourth day, since her departure from the abbey.

He calculated that a marriage with her would be perfectly convenient, and augment his felicity; not by connubial endearments, for them he had little predilection. No, his enjoyments were *tout au contraire*.

All his other affairs dispatched, he turned his thoughts on Berthalina. His designs on that fair-one were now ripe for execution.

Mr. Hildon arrived that day at the abbey; and it was agreed that he should accompany his lordship and Mr. Melmoth, on the second morning from this period, to Woodmount, unattended by any servant except Gregory, who had been a very active agent on several occasions, to lord Elwood and his companions.

On the preceding evening to their intended excursion, as the three gentlemen sat over their wine, and swallowing large bumpers to the success of their enterprise, Gregory entered the room with a precipitation that startled the bacchantes, and announced hasty tidings.

"What's the matter, my man?" said Melmoth, "you look as though you had encountered a ghost in your way. Why your teeth chatter, and your very hair stands on end!"

“Matter enough! matter enough! though I am not in fault, good luck be thanked for it. No, if you had taken Gregory’s advice this would not have happened. Oh! women are so artful, ’tis impossible to keep fast hold of them.”

Lord Elwood started up and demanded an explanation.

“Here is a letter for your lordship, enclosed as you ordered when any communication was to be made, under cover to me; and in that cover my sister informs me, that Miss Elwood has been taken away from her house, by a gentleman who threatens to have recourse to the law against your lordship, and all that have been concerned in this business.”

“Silence! I command you; and quit the room till you are sent for.”

Gregory withdrew, muttering, and lord Elwood railed at his impertinence, without considering that when a gentleman condescends to bribe an inferior to the commitment of a base action, he puts himself on the level with his associate, and must expect those liberties at which he revolts.

Lord Elwood opened the letter, the card dropt on the table. He took it up, perused it, and was entranced by amazement.

The eager and repeated inquiries of his friends for intelligence, at length aroused him; and he burst into an ebullition of wrath, which had better be consigned to oblivion than repeated.

When the tempest had partly spent itself by its own violence, he turned to Melmoth, and gave him Mrs. Belton’s letter.

“Frederic, decypher, if you can, these mystic characters, these infernal lines that jade has sent me. I have not patience to look on them.”

Melmoth obeyed, and Gregory’s account was corroborated, with the addition that the unwelcome intruder, and despoiler of their schemes, was Mr. Radnor.

“Pon honour this is an unlucky affair,” exclaimed Hildon, with a forced smile, “all our plans are gone to the bottom.”

“We may yet bring them to bear. I shall set off to-morrow for Mr. Radnor’s, and demand Berthalina. ’Tis a curst unlucky business. I must make some promise or compromise. In fact I must *say, swear*, any thing, or the whole will be discovered.”

“The talents of your lordship are so admirable, that it is beyond a doubt that your invention will bring you well through the piece. Why not instantly pursue your runaway and her meddling friend, in the character of her guardian and brother, force her back, put

on a high spirit, use lofty words, and intimidate them. The wedding once over, you may set them at defiance. Who dare interfere!”

“Bravo, Hildon! I’ll adopt your plan; what say you, Melmoth?”

“I am ready to attend your lordship if—if you require my company.”

“Come, come, Melmoth, let’s have no return of your old qualms of conscience. Remember, if we succeed you are to have a commission in the army.”

Melmoth bowed, suppressed a rising sigh, and assured lord Elwood and Mr. Hildon of his readiness to attend them.

“There you are wrong;” said the latter gentleman: “I must not appear before old Radnor, that would spoil all. I shall wait snug at the abbey, till I hear from you; I shall not be wanted till the end of the farce. What time do you propose setting out, my lord?”

“I shall order Marshall to call me at four. But I am tired with this posing.

“Call another subject. Melmoth give us a canzonet. Let us be jovial tonight, though we are a despoir tomorrow.”

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## CHAPTER XII.

MISS Elwood was received by Mrs. Warner with unfeigned transport, and they retired with Morton and Mrs. Pratley, while Mr. Radnor, at the desire of our heroine, related, under the seal of secrecy, the particulars of her history, to the friendly apothecary.

Mr. Radnor next communicated the measures he meant to adopt, which were highly approved by Mr. Pratley; who gave him some useful hints on the subject.

The gentlemen concluded that Mrs. Belton would dispatch intelligence of Miss Elwood's departure, without delay, to his lordship. They sent a boy to watch, and were soon apprised that a letter had been sent off by a man on horseback.

It would be utterly impossible for his lordship to arrive till the next day at Woodmount. He therefore resolved to get the start of that young nobleman, and, by travelling that night, avoid meeting him on the road; a circumstance that might be attended with the most unpleasant consequences, and at all events was the best to be avoided.

A dinner was procured from the next inn, and Mrs. Pratley made her guests some excellent tea and coffee. This worthy woman (who had now been admitted into the same confidence with which her husband was honoured) appeared to attach herself greatly to Miss Elwood, who greatly respected her, and drew a mental comparison between her and Mrs. Belton, which placed the other in a very disadvantageous light.

Morton was to follow, the next morning, by the stage; and the chaise being arrived, Mr. Radnor, Berthalina, and Mrs. Warner, took leave of the worthy apothecary and his wife, with a promise, that they should hear from them as soon as they had any important event to communicate; Mr. Pratley undertaking, on his part, to communicate what should transpire at Woodmount, respecting Miss Elwood.

"Come here, my sweet little maiden," said Mr. Radnor to a rosy-cheeked cherub of a child, "take this trifle, and give it to mamma, to buy cakes and dolls for you, and the rest of her pretty children. Nay, no thanks, my worthy pair. Drive on postillion. Adieu, adieu."

The travellers moved on; and the amiable pair, overwhelmed with gratitude and joy, returned into their neat habitation; thankful for this wholly unexpected, yet seasonable relief, so delicately given by the magnificent donor; who considered Mr. Pratley's conduct as meriting the highest reward, and grieved that merit like his should be suffered to waste in obscurity. He kindly resolved to take some plan into consideration, by which Mr. Pratley and his family might be benefited, as soon as he had settled Berthalina, whose affairs now engrossed the whole of his attention.

It was near midnight when they arrived at Biggleswade; they had a slight supper and retired immediately to their respective chambers, as they intended to leave the inn at an early hour, and proceed to Barnet before they took breakfast.

Mr. Radnor, and his fair companions, had arrived within two miles of Barnet, when the hind wheel coming suddenly off the chaise, the vehicle was overturned with dangerous violence.

The servants dismounted and hastened to their assistance.

It was with some difficulty that the unfortunate trio, were extricated from their perilous situation. Mr. Radnor and Mrs. Warner received little injury (if we except a few slight bruises) from the accident. Berthalina was not so auspiciously fated. One of her arms was sprained, and she had received a severe cut in her upper lip, from the broken glass, which bled profusely.

A gentleman who was travelling that road, ordered the postillions to stop; and immediately alighting, advanced, and offered his assistance in the most polite terms, which was gratefully accepted.

The stranger was a handsome middle-aged man in deep mourning, and of the most prepossessing manners.

He assisted Mr. Radnor in placing Berthalina into his chaise, which he resigned to the use of that lady and Mrs. Warner, who seemed nearly terrified out of the powers of self-recollection.

The two gentlemen mounted the horses belonging to Mr. Radnor's servants, who were left to proceed on foot, and continued their route to Barnet, where a surgeon was summoned to Berthalina, who having placed her arm in proper bandages, and dressed her lip, declared that she would be able to reach town, after a few hours rest. Mrs. Warner of course remained with her; and the gentlemen breakfasted together; after which repast the courteous stranger took leave of Mr. Radnor, and left the inn with his servant.

Berthalina had a refreshing slumber; she awoke with renovated spirits, and at noon sent word to Mr. Radnor, that she was able to attend him.

During the remainder of their journey, Mrs. Warner appeared so embarrassed, and overwhelmed with tremulous agitation, that it excited much surprise. But she could account for it no other way, in answer to the kind inquiries she received, than the fright had affected her spirits.

A servant had been sent on before, to announce the approach of the travellers, and they found Mrs. Radnor and Caroline anxiously waiting their arrival.

The latter flew to meet them in the hall; but shrunk back with apprehension, when she saw Berthalina's arm in a sling, and her lip wounded.

"Fear not, my love," said Mr. Radnor, "we have not been in the wars; we encountered but one foe, and that a female; so we had no occasion for arms."

"But then, my poor Berthalina!—And Mrs. Warner looks not like the same woman, as when she left Grosvenor-place: I fear, papa, you have been an ungallant conductor to the ladies; but I must kiss you for all that, since you have brought my sweet friend with you."

Miss Elwood received a maternal embrace from Mrs. Radnor. None of the ladies retired to dress, but the time was passed, till dinner, in mutual explanations.

Mrs. Radnor prevailed on Mrs. Warner to stay till evening, when she would set her down at her own door, as she passed to lady Bevil's.

During the dessert, Miss Radnor rallied Berthalina on the attentions she had received from the stranger: remarking, "It was a pity that the hero of the tale had not been younger; then a pretty love story might have been formed."

"You may laugh at me, Caroline, if you please; but I must own," said Berthalina, "that I never, since my birth, beheld a countenance that so forcibly interested me."

"Love at first sight—"

"It was not, is not, love, dear girl: it was an indefinable something, I cannot describe; respect, admiration! In short, his image is ever present to my eyes."

Mrs. Warner gave utterance to a deep sigh.

"Bless me," said Miss Radnor, "this gentleman has made sad havoc in your hearts: even Mrs. Warner is troubled with an heigh-ho! But have you no chance of seeing the gentleman again?"

"He has promised me the honour of a visit in a few days," said Mr. Radnor. "I certainly was not so impolite as to omit an invitation due to him for the civilities we received."

"His name, papa, his name?"

"There, my dear inquisitive girl;" throwing the card on the table.

"Sir Edward Wingrove, a baronet, Berthalina; now if he has fortune more than equal to the support of his rank, marry him, my dear, and be my lady."



“Fie! Caroline, fie! the gentleman is old enough to be my father.”

“He is, indeed,” observed Mrs. Warner, with pointed emphasis. “Miss Elwood has too much sense to indulge thoughts of such a nature.”

A long silence followed this speech.

Miss Radnor felt hurt at the remark, and Miss Elwood perceived it, but knew not how to apologise for Mrs. Warner’s inadvertence of speech, for such she esteemed it.

Mr. and Mrs. Radnor’s thoughts were different from those imbibed by the young lady. They considered Mrs. Warner as a woman of sense and discretion. From the circumstance of her leaving her home, to oblige them, they had treated her with the greatest familiarity, and retained her at their own table; yet she had never taken the least liberty in conversation, or, indeed, seldom spoke but when addressed. Since the incident of meeting Sir Edward Wingrove, she was uncommonly thoughtful; nor could they avoid supposing, that she had previously known the baronet, and was hurt at his re-appearance. This idea was strengthened, when they came to canvass matters over by themselves, from an observation Mr. Radnor made, that Mrs. Warner carefully screened her face from the observation of the baronet, and, when they arrived at the inn, studiously avoided his presence.

### CHAPTER XIII.

THE third morning of their arrival in town, proved an eventful one at Mr. Radnor's; Morton, who had come to town the preceding evening, was dismissed with a handsome present.

However her repentance might entitle her to forgiveness, or consideration, Berthalina was reasoned into the same opinion as her friends, that Morton, would by no means, be an eligible attendant for her. As she had once consented to be bribed to an action inimical to the peace of her benefactress, there was no longer a dependance on her faith; the mind was weak that gold would sway.

To spare her feelings, which seemed deeply wounded on this occasion, she was informed, that Miss Elwood did not mean for the present to retain a person in her department, but would give her a recommendation suitable, to procure her admission in another family.

Morton had scarce left the breakfast-parlour, when sir Edward Wingrove was announced; and was sincerely welcomed by Berthalina and Mr. Radnor.

His manners were so engaging, that Mrs. Radnor and Caroline, internally joined in the encomiums they had previously heard of the baronet; and the conversation became lively and animated.

Of a sudden the baronet became thoughtful: then turning to Berthalina, he said,

"I presume Miss, by the name you bear, that you are related to lord Elwood, of Stanton Abbey."

"Very nearly so sir, I am sister to the present lord."

"Impossible! It cannot be!"

"Sir!"

"Excuse my freedom, shall I be pardoned by you and your amiable friends, if I ask you a material question; not the result of curiosity, but a far different motive?"

Miss Elwood assured sir Edward that they should esteem what he called a *freedom*, as a favour.

"I never heard, my dear young lady, that the late lord Elwood entered into a third marriage."

“He did not, sir Edward.”

“You are then a natural daughter.”

Berthalina answered not, her cheeks were dyed with scarlet.

“I was fearful of this my sweet girl, nor would I, for worlds, have asked a question of so delicate a nature, had I not felt myself interested on your account.”

Miss Radnor could not avoid stealing an expressive glance at her friend, as much as to say, “*My dear you have made a conquest.*”

This playful vivacity, had not the effect it was intended to produce. Berthalina’s spirits were not so easily raised, and she remained despondent.

Mr. Radnor, ever friendly and attentive, took on himself to answer that “Berthalina was the daughter of that lady Elwood, who was so hapless as to deviate from the duty she owed herself and husband, and was eventually divorced from him. The birth of a child happening at this unpleasant crisis, lord Elwood, though its father, shrunk from acknowledging himself as such to the world; fearful of its taunts and falsehoods. The child was therefore nursed in obscurity, and might ever have remained so, had not the dying mother interested herself in the behalf of a child, still dear to her, though she had not beheld it since it was a fortnight old.

“Previous to her death, she saw lord Elwood and her daughter, she gained over the former to acknowledge his child as *such*, and he was faithful to his promise.

While that nobleman lived, Berthalina was eligibly provided for, and he promised to leave her a fortune, that should place her perfectly independent, and enable her to live in a manner consistent with her rank: but mark the sad reverse! Lord Elwood, wrought on by the artifices of his son, has left Berthalina solely in his power; he is her only guardian, and most improperly has he filled that office.”

Here Mr. Radnor entered into particulars of the transactions that had taken place since lord Elwood’s decease, and the present perplexing state of Berthalina’s affairs.

Sir Edward, instead of commenting on what he had heard, complained of a sudden indisposition, and, with a slight apology, retired.

“How strange,” burst from the lips of every individual of the groupe.

“What can this mean?” said Mr. Radnor, “sir Edward seems much affected! Why should *he* be so inquisitive about Berthalina?”

Mrs. Radnor was about to make some remark, when a carriage drove to the door; it was lady Bevil, and the conversation was of course suspended.

During lady Bevil's stay, Caroline chanced to mention, that sir Edward Wingrove had been their visitor that morning.

"I knew not, brother, that you were acquainted with the baronet, he has lived chiefly abroad during the latter part of his life."

Mr. Radnor related the incident that had introduced them to each other, and his respectful politeness to Berthalina; "and I know not," continued he, laughingly, "whether we might not attribute the baronet's visit, this morning, to her account, for she seems to have created a great interest in his *heart*."

Lady Bevil with uplifted hands, exclaimed, "sir Edward *Wingrove* an admirer of Miss Elwood!"

"Nay, my dear sister," said Mrs. Radnor, "you take your brother's words too seriously; you know his propensity to *badinage*:—Sir Edward, I am certain, has no matrimonial intentions towards our friend."

"Heaven forbid! the destroyer of the mother's happiness, nay, the destroyer of her very existence, can have no thoughts of the daughter;—nor ought he to obtrude himself into her sight."

"What mean you, madam!" said Berthalina, almost gasping for respiration, so much was she shocked.

Lady Bevil turned pale.

She took Berthalina's hand.

"Did you not know, my love, that in the person of sir Edward Wingrove, you beheld that vile colonel Rainsforth, who was the seducer of your unfortunate mother?"

Our heroine sighed the name of Rainsforth, and sank on the ground, in a state of insensibility.

Lady Bevil was seriously alarmed.

"What have I done," said she. "Could I suppose it possible that you were all ignorant of a circumstance so generally known?—I was shocked to hear that he was amicably received in this house."

The ladies busied themselves in the restoration of their young friend, without the aid of any of their attendants; as they were apprehensive Miss Elwood, on her recovery, might make use of some expressions, which they might not choose to be heard by any persons, not interested in this affair.

When Miss Elwood revived, they would fain have persuaded her to retire to her chamber; but such was the desire that reigned in her breast, of conversing with lady Bevil, that she over-ruled all their objections; and, with a voice scarcely articulate, through sorrow, she entreated that lady to conceal nothing from her.

“Had I known you were yet to learn this painful truth, I should have shrunk from the mention of it; for I cannot bear the idea of giving pain to those I esteem.”

Berthalina bowed.

“Your mother, Miss Elwood, was the daughter of a country clergyman; she was an only child. Relations she had none, except her tender father, and this circumstance redoubled his cares on her account. She was born to him late in life; he was now fast declining towards the grave, and had but a small fortune to bequeath her.

“Her uncommon beauty attracted many admirers. The fair Olivia had titled heads in her train. It appeared that lord Elwood’s offers were more frank and honourable, than those of his rivals. The anxious father added his entreaties to the petitions of the lover, and Olivia became the bride of one, who was then esteemed among the most agreeable men of the british court. Lord Elwood then was not the same lord Elwood as you have known, soured by ingratitude and disappointed love.

“Lady Elwood had not been married above three months, when she lost her father, who died happy in the thoughts of his daughter’s honourable settlement. He was thus spared the pain of her disgrace.

“Lady Elwood was a blazing-star in the fashionable circles. Indulged, by her adoring lord, in the most expensive style of dress, she outshone her fair competitors for admiration. All this might have been very well, had she not added fashionable follies to the rest.

“To receive the incense of flattery, and to attend to the gaming parties, of the dissipated part of her connexion, became her principal pursuits.

“Her frequent calls for money, opened the eyes of her lord. He looked in vain for the tender, grateful, wife:—She was lost in the lady of fashion. His tender remonstrances were disregarded, his advice ridiculed; at length, tired of her dissipation, he assured her, that the next gaming debt she contracted, should be to him the signal of separation.

“Lady Elwood was at first cautious of incurring such an eclipse to her elevation. Alas! one fatal night, prudence slumbered; she rose from the cassino table penniless, and six hundred pounds in debt.

“To apply to lord Elwood would be her ruin.

“To raise that sum on her jewels could not be done. She was under several engagements to parties, when that appendage of splendor could not be dispensed with. It would betray what she wished most to conceal. Every other resource had already been tried to the utmost.

“Her ladyship past a sleepless night, lord Elwood was gone on a shooting-party, and would not return for a week. His absence at this crisis was a relief to his lady, for she could indulge her sighs and tears unquestioned.

“Colonel Rainsforth had been, for some time past, her very shadow, the importuning lover.

“Lady Elwood, as yet, had persisted in denying him the triumph over *hers* and her *husband's* honour.

“But, as she allowed him to be her constant chaperon in public, and to visit at her house whenever he pleased, those denials only served to inflame his passions the more, and appeared to him more as the art of a coquette, to try her power, than connubial virtue.

“The second morning, subsequent to this catastrophe, as her ladyship was at breakfast in her boudoir, (considering her case as hopeless, having in vain racked her brains for ways and means to pay her debt, which she had promised to do, that very evening; lord L——'s agent having been appointed to call in Seymour-street for that purpose,) her evil genius brought colonel Rainsforth as her guest.

“He remarked her dejection; and, in sweetly soothing accents, inquired the cause of his Olivia's distress.

“At first, she answered only by her tears: but, won by his entreaties, lady Elwood confessed the cause.

“The colonel laughed; and Olivia, offended, railed at his mirth, as unfeeling.

“Rainsforth treated the matter as a mere trifle; condemned the parsimony of lord Elwood, towards such a lovely wife; swore, that was he emperor of the Indies, he would pour their wealth into her lap; and, lastly, prevailed on her to accept a draft of a thousand pounds, to be paid when her ladyship had more money than she knew what to do with.

“Her ladyship was all gratitude; her colonel all eloquence, and false sophistry. She believed his arguments, and betrayed the best of husbands.

“A few weeks after this event, lord Elwood was apprised, by some tattler, of the loss his lady had sustained; and also, that the debt had been paid with a punctuality that surprised the receiver. How the money had been obtained, was a point yet to learn.

“If lord Elwood was hurt, at the little effect his prohibition against gaming had had on his lady, he was much more so, at the facility with which the matter had been settled, and kept from his knowledge.

“While his lordship was revolving, in his own mind, how to gain possession of this important secret, whether he should openly avow what he had heard, to Olivia, and extort from her the truth, or take other means for its development, the indiscretion of the lovers betrayed itself to detection.

“The guilty pair fled, and it was two months before their retreat was discovered: as they had retired to an obscure town, in or near Northumberland: where they passed as a married couple, under an assumed name; attended by a faithful valet of the colonel’s, and a waiting-woman of her ladyship’s.

“Lord Elwood sued for damages: and the colonel, under pretext of coming to town, to employ counsel, &c. left his lady, and soon arrived in the metropolis. A few weeks after, to the surprise of every one, and the indignation of many, he married the heiress of a Mr. Wingrove, a gentleman of immense riches, gained by successful commerce, and suffered judgment, in the cause pending between him, and the injured husband, to go by default, and he was cast in very weighty damages.

“He wrote to lady Elwood, with a weak attempt to justify his conduct, by alleging, that a prior contract, between him and Miss Wingrove, existed before he had the honour of her ladyship’s acquaintance; and that the friends of his bride had pressed him to fulfil his promise, notwithstanding the late affair, which, he thought, would have made an alteration in their sentiments, and left him at liberty to marry lady Elwood, when her divorce was effected. At the same time he hinted, that should any consequences of a tender nature result from their connexion, he should think himself bound to provide nobly for his offspring.

“I heard from an unquestionable quarter, that the reply of lady Elwood was spirited and resentful. She returned some notes of valuable amount, that he had sent her; and assured him, that he need be under no apprehensions of having a child committed to his care, as the cruelty she had experienced, had prematurely dissolved that tie.

“Lord Elwood, though most wronged, was the first to feel for Olivia. He received from her several letters, expressive of her penitence and regret. She assured him that she

wept incessantly; but was aware that oceans of tears could not wash out stains like hers: yet she besought him to pity and forgive her.

“He did so, and bestowed on her a sum sufficient for an elegant retirement: as she expressed a desire to seclude herself entirely from a world, in which she had been disgraced.

“Lady Elwood sued for a parting interview with her lord, but it was not granted. He told a friend, that he did not dare trust himself in the presence of a woman he still adored, lest he should forget how deeply she had injured him, and act with a weakness that, in his situation, would be reprehensible, both in effect and example.

“Lady Elwood’s divorce did not take place, till near a twelvemonth after its cause: she immediately left England; and, about two months after, her death was announced; and lord Elwood paid a tribute of respect to her memory, by wearing mourning for a few weeks.

“Now, what I can collect from this unhappy circumstance, is, that poor lady Elwood must have been pregnant, before her fatal deviation from the paths of honour: a circumstance at first concealed from lord Elwood; but of which he must afterwards be well convinced, or he would never have acknowledged Berthalina.

“The colonel, soon after his marriage, resigned his commission, and entered into traffic with his father-in-law. He had three sons, who, with his lady, about ten years since, went to Bengal. Mrs. Rainsforth’s health was injured by the change of climate, and she returned to England, after an absence of five years, and died at Bristol. About a twelvemonth after, the newspapers apprised us of her father’s death.

“The widower now appears as sir Edward Wingrove, having taken that name, by a grant from government, in compliance with his father-in-law’s will. He is now in mourning for the only son who survived his lady. He has thus, you perceive, been visited by domestic calamities, and suffered for his former crimes.”

Berthalina’s spirits were so greatly exhausted by what she had heard, that she requested permission to retire; and Miss Radnor accompanied her to the boudoir.

Berthalina, reclining on the sofa, burst into an agony of tears.

“Did I not tell you, dearest Caroline, that my heart never acknowledged the late lord Elwood as a father? Sir Edward Wingrove, I am convinced, is—”

“Heavens! what a rap! is the baronet returned? Look, dear Caroline.”



Miss Radnor obeyed her friend, but started back from the window with precipitation, exclaiming, "It is your brother and Mr. Melmoth! Summon your fortitude, to meet them with composure, should our presence be required."

The two friends remained above an hour, in painful expectation, when Mrs. Radnor entered the room, with a countenance that indicated both grief and apprehension.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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THE CHILD OF MYSTERY,

A NOVEL.

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THE  
CHILD OF MYSTERY,  
A NOVEL,  
IN THREE VOLUMES,  
FOUNDED ON RECENT EVENTS.

BY SARAH WILKINSON.

VOL. III.

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1808.

## 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.

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## 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.

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### 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.

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