

CHAPTER XIV.

I pray you tread softly, that the blind mole may not hear a foot fall.

SHAKESPEARE.

AMHERST and his servant had no sooner adjusted every thing about the horses than they returned to the tree. In a short time they perceived the Carline, again in the act of leaving the shade of the ruins, not on the same frail conveyance which had borne her thither, but in a little boat, which she rowed quietly towards the shore. Having attached it to the point where she had formerly landed, she again joined them.

“ You must aboard with me !” said she; “ every thing favours our design. But, remember ! be resolute,—and be silent as the grave !—Let not surprise at any thing you may see or hear betray you into a single exclamation, or all may be lost. Forget not that you are but as instruments in my hands,—act but according to the signs I shall

give you, and success must crown our attempt.— Let us away, for we have not a moment to lose !” So saying, she motioned them towards the water’s edge, leading the way to the boat, and they were no sooner seated in it, than she took the oars and rowed them towards the castle.

Passing under the ruins of a large mass, laid open by the dilapidation of great part of the outer wall, she made a sweep round the end of the islet, using the oars so gently that not the least sound was heard, and directing the boat towards the bulwark of stones there forming the artificial foundation. Here Amherst found himself under a lower building, having a narrow window that looked to the lake, from which a ray of light issued forth in one long thin stream.

Having again given them the signal caution of absolute silence, she sprang ashore, motioned to Amherst to follow her, and drew him towards the loop-hole, where, on looking in, he beheld—Miss Malcolm !

His agitation, at the sight of her he so loved, in such a place, had nearly overpowered him. In spite of all the injunctions he had received, he would infallibly have forgotten himself, had not

his conductress pulled him by the skirt, and holding up her finger to her mouth, whispered to him in hollow accents,—

“ Her life depends upon your silence !”

The apartment in which the young Lady was confined,—for the massive door, fastened with strong bolts, sufficiently indicated that she was a prisoner,—was small and comfortless. A fire burned on the hearth, and she was seated opposite to it on the side of a pallet-bed of the most wretched description. She was wrapped up in her mantle and hood, and her dress altogether seemed to augur a preparation for travel. Her face was pale and grief-worn, and from her restless motions, and the frequent anxious looks she threw towards the door, she seemed to be in momentary expectation of some important event. Painful as it was to contemplate Miss Malcolm, under such circumstances, it was so long since his eyes had rested on her beloved image, that Amherst could have gazed for ever. But his active conductress warned him away, and he was compelled to submit.

She now led him round towards the ruins of the broken down mass of wall, under which they had

passed in the boat, where creeping, by her directions, upon his hands and knees among the fallen fragments of masonry, he obtained a view of a vaulted chamber, laid open at one end by the fall of part of the outer works. The fracture had been lately patched up with bits of the rubbish mingled with sods; and a doorway had been left in this rude barricado, which now stood open to permit the escape of the smoke, proceeding from a fire in the interior.

On drawing nearer to it, Amherst observed two men, who lay wrapped up in blankets on the straw near the fire, just within the opening; and in the darker part of the vault beyond, he could just discover five or six heads of sleepers. There were fire-arms, and other weapons of different kinds, disposed in various parts of the place; and a number of common utensils, such as are to be found in a Highland cottage, were scattered about.

The Dwarfie whispered, and pointed to him to hide behind one of the larger masses of the fallen ruins. His position was so near that he could see every thing within, and he was able to watch all her motions. He saw her creep like a cat towards the entrance, as if with the intention of stealing

in. She was already fully in the light; but she drew suddenly back again into the shadow. It appeared that the two men who were nearest the doorway were not yet asleep, for they began to converse, and one of them said to the other,

“ Well, Antonio! since Davy tells us that there is no appearance of my consort on the coast yet, I see nothing for it but to send him back again, to try if he can bribe some trading captain to give you and the lady a passage.”

“ Pshaw!” said the other sulkily, “ a *fico* for such advice!—Where should we find a fellow of that sort who would be trusty?—And then as to a land journey, the chances would be a thousand to one against me.”—He raised himself on his elbow, that he might be better heard by his companion: “ *Veramente ho gran voglio d’amazzarla.*—Were she dead she would be more easily carried. *Capite!*—And if it should turn out after all that we have taken the wrong woman, *che importa vi prego!*—A life or two more or less, you know, is but of little consequence in the scoring up of my account.”

“ That will never do, Antonio,” said Brandywyn, for Amherst now perceived that it was

he ; “ you might be left in the lurch as to the reward,—but with the live bird in a cage, you may make your own terms.”

“ *Per Baccho adesso avete ragione,*” said the other. “ There is some sense in what you say now ; *forse sarebbe meglio restare un poco.* We may as well wait a little longer for the other vessel. Yet it is cursedly hard to be pent up in this *isola cattiva.* But should those rascals succeed in shooting *quel milordino* to-night, we shall have more freedom, and may return to the cottage where we had her before. *Maledetto !* What a deal of trouble he has cost us ! We are at least secure, however, that he can as yet know nothing about her, and if he should, his knowledge is, perhaps, by this time, dead and buried with him. *Ma senta, amico !* Davy Stronach must return to-morrow, to see if he can hear of our ship. And now that all search is over, might we not move down to some of your lurking places nearer to the coast, so as to be ready to go on board immediately on her arrival, and so be off out of this infernal country ?—*Dico bene ?*”

“ I think your plan is a good one,” said Brandywyn. “ But it will at least be prudent

to stay till we hear how Alexander Macgillivray has succeeded, before we venture to move."

After interchanging a few words more, of little importance, the two villains at last composed themselves to rest.

They had hardly begun to show symptoms of slumber, when the adventurous Carline drew herself towards the doorway, and although she still kept herself carefully within the shadow, she looked anxiously in upon the men, as if to ascertain the moment when they should be perfectly asleep. She was no sooner certain that they were so, than with a motion like that of the rattle-snake when it strikes its victim, almost too rapid for the eye to follow, she sprang within the threshold, and snatched something from under the coat, that served the Italian for a pillow, and instantly retreated into the dark. The ruffian was awakened by the twitch. He started up on his elbow, and exclaimed, "*Diavolo chi è!—cosa c'è?*" But looking around him, and seeing all quiet, he again composed himself to sleep with an execration.

After remaining still for a few minutes until he was again sound, the Carline gave Amherst a signal to follow her, and hastened to the spot

where the boat lay. She desired him to get on board, and again cautioning him to remember his promise of silence, she disappeared for an instant. The heavy sound of a withdrawn bolt was heard, through the little loop-hole, from the other side of the low building, and immediately afterwards the Carline appeared, followed by the Lady, wrapped up in her mantle.

In putting her foot into the boat, she had nearly slipped over the side, and Amherst's apprehension was so much excited, that forgetting all the Carline's injunctions in his anxiety for her safety, he sprang forward, and exclaiming, "My life! my Eliza!" he caught her in his arms.

The Carline, standing lightly balanced on the edge of the boat, assumed an authoritative air.

"Silence! or we are yet lost," said she in a deep, but decided tone; and leaping into the middle of it, she grasped the paddles with the utmost alacrity, and moved it forwards with the same silence and caution she had used in approaching the place. Having got about thirty yards off, she began to ply in a wide circle, round that part of the ruins, containing the vaulted chamber occupied by the villains.

The boat was already abreast of it, when Am-

herst observed a dark figure moving among the fallen fragments. He leant forward, and in a whisper, communicated the circumstance to the Carline. She had herself caught a glimpse of the figure, and had already begun to pull with greater force, and with inconceivable swiftness.

“ Hilloah! who goes there?” exclaimed a rough voice from the islet.

But no answer was returned, and they were already mid-way between the castle and the land, when a confused clamour arose from the island. The exertions of the Carline were redoubled, and they reached the shore. There, as Amherst lifted Eliza from the boat, and hurried with her up the steep slope towards the spot where the horses were concealed, loud shouts, and half lost execrations came upon them, and flaming lights were seen appearing and disappearing among the ruins, and immediately afterwards, one or two distinct plunges in the lake convinced them that some of the men, on discovering the escape of their prisoner, and that the boat was gone, had taken the desperate resolution of swimming to the shore. To have dispatched them, while in the water, would have been an easy matter; but

their business was flight—not a moment was to be lost. Miss Malcolm was hastily lifted up behind Amherst, and the Carline, springing like a thing of air upon the neck of O'Gollochar's horse, commanded him to get into the saddle. For a moment he hesitated to obey her, but having seen the necessity of instant decision, he complied. She then called to Amherst to follow, and keep sight of her, and immediately darted off through the wood.

Amherst urged on after her at full speed. Before they had crossed the stream issuing from the end of the lake, the island seemed in a blaze, and the shouts of those behind them were heard echoing from the rocky side of the hill. Conducted by the Carline, they dashed on through brake and mire, and in a very little time, by crossing the river at a ford, they gained the great road leading to the low country.

There they permitted the horses to breathe for some moments. The Carline resigned to O'Gollochar the management of his, and seated herself on the baggage behind him, to which, indeed, she added but little weight. They then pursued their journey with a steady but less ra-

pid pace. It was, however, too quick for conversation.

As for O'Gollochar, notwithstanding all the good he had heard and seen of the Carline, he rode as if he carried the devil *en croupe*. Not a word escaped his lips; but ever and anon he looked round and surveyed the grim face of his companion, and shuddering with horror at its proximity, he withdrew his eyes, and admonishing the sides of Broadbottom with his heels, he endeavoured, since he could not fly from the spectre, at least to keep nearer to his master.

When they came to Mr Macphie's turf-house of entertainment, the horses would have willingly stopped at the stable-door; but notwithstanding the inviting lights that blazed from many a one-paned window of the sod mansion, shooting their rays from a variety of angles, they urged them on unseen, and unwilling to be observed. They left the pass, and the mountain lake behind them, and pushing over the moor, they never halted until they reached that large and romantic river already fully described. There the Carline sprang from behind O'Gollochar, and

leading Amherst's horse by the bridle, she conducted him down some steep, sloping, birch-covered banks, and brought them to a little holm, surrounded on three sides by a beautiful curve of the river, here running broad and deep.

This lovely spot, now under the most beautiful effect of moonlight, was sheltered on all sides by wooded banks. Its tender pasture was most grateful to poor Brisk and his companion, who by this time scarcely required a tether.

Under a steep tufted with trees, and natural shrubbery, in a nook most perfectly concealed, the Carline showed them a place of shelter beneath the projecting granite rock. Having withdrawn the charge from one of the pistols, they easily produced a light, by snapping it under some dry brushwood, and a fire was soon kindled. The provisions which had been put up for Amherst at Lochandhu were now produced, and even the delicate Miss Malcolm did not disdain to do considerable justice to them. A couch of dry moss was prepared for her, and Amherst immediately proposed to leave the place, that she might indulge in a short repose. But this she declined; for, although she was considerably fa-

tigued, her mind was too much agitated to permit her to sleep.

Amherst entreated her to satisfy his anxious curiosity as to her captivity, and she readily complied with his request. But the reader being already acquainted with the manner in which the Lady was carried off, we shall take up her story at that part where the troop of horsemen were last seen, when they swept past Cleaver on the Downs near Sanderson Mains.

Their plans being completely frustrated by the unlooked-for attack on the Charming Sally, and seeing the certainty of her capture, the leaders galloped straight to the retreat in Moatmaldard, then only tenanted by the old man, Davy Stronach, who, though he had a cottage in the neighbourhood, and kept up the appearance of being a *creel*, or rude basketmaker, was, in reality, their storekeeper, and was generally to be found at his post in their vault after dark. Reflecting that the very reasons which had induced them to fly thither, would probably lead others to search for them there, they determined to make every thing secure, by leaving the place immediately, and carrying their captive into the Highlands, where Brandywyn knew

that they were sure of protection and assistance from Lochandhu's gang.

Having reached their neighbourhood, Brandywyn found out Alexander Macgillivray, by whose advice they crossed the Spey, and carried Miss Malcolm to a lonely house, situated far up among the wilds of the forest, near the foot of the Cairngorum. This house was tenanted by one of the gang, and to the wife of this man was the care of the prisoner confided, whilst Antonio and Brandywyn occupied one of the outhouses, and the rest of the party found quarters in the vicinity. There they resolved to wait, until they should receive intelligence of the arrival of the vessel they expected.

Whilst Miss Malcolm remained at this cottage, she was permitted to take exercise, by walking in the neighbourhood. But resolute as her mind naturally was, every hope of escape was cut off, owing to the circumstance of her being invariably attended and watched by the woman.

It so happened, that Amherst, in one of his shooting expeditions, had accidentally passed very near the place of Miss Malcolm's confinement; and this having been discovered by Antonio, he took the precaution of removing her to the

fortalice in the islet, where she had remained for several days.

On the night immediately previous to that of her escape, Eliza was lying on her pallet-bed, ruminating on her sorrows. It was past midnight, and all was silent around her, save the dull sound of the wave, as it lapped against the stones of the bulwark, or the prolonged and melancholy notes of the owl, that, perched upon a broken part of the ruins, replied to the echoes of its own hootings. The reflected moon-beam found its way through the loop-hole, and fell faintly upon the pavement of her cell. Her eyes were vacantly fixed upon it, in the listless dream of hopeless sadness. On a sudden the miserable apartment was obscured, by the approach of some object from without, and, turning her eyes towards the aperture, to ascertain the cause, she, to her great terror, beheld a dwarfish figure, in the act of squeezing itself through the opening, though it appeared to be hardly more than sufficient to admit a cat. She remembered the apparition of the chapel, and she screamed with affright. But it fortunately happened that her guards were at too great a distance at the time to hear her shrieks.

In an instant the Carline stood upon the floor by her bed-side, and seizing her arm with a powerful gripe, she said, in a deep and hollow voice, that chilled her heart, and overpowered even the violent effects of her alarm,

“ Utter not another sound, or you are lost for ever !—I come to save you !” —Then, all at once assuming a tender tone,—“ Eliza, fear me not. This haggard, forbidding-aspect, bodes any thing but evil to you. When you were yet a child, this ghastly visage terrified your infant heart, and you fled from my embrace. Ah ! little did you know of whom you were afraid. But I forgave you ; and, conscious of my own deformity, I vanished from your sight, that I might not shock your young eyes with this hideous form in which God has been pleased to imprison my soul. Nor have I ever dared again to cross your path. But I am your guardian angel ;—and now the dreadful fate that hangs over you compels me to appear, and imperiously demands that you should dismiss the fears of childhood. Summon up your resolution then, and bear to look and listen to one who comes to deliver you from this dungeon, and to whom,

though you are ignorant of it, you are already indebted for life itself.”

Her last expressions were uttered with a remarkable earnestness of manner—the voice gradually mellowing, and even faltering as it approached the conclusion of the sentence,—and Eliza felt the warm tear-drops falling upon the arm which the mysterious being still retained.

“ My child !—my child !” said she, in a voice almost stifled with the strength of her emotions,—“ my beloved child ! what torments have I endured from the cruel necessity of separating myself from you !—What are the scoffs and taunts of the wicked and the unfeeling, compared to the bitter thought of being for ever deprived of the smiles of one, who ought to be eternal sunshine to me !—But,” added she with more composure, as if endeavouring to command herself,—“ the hours pass.—This is not a time to indulge in dreams which ought to have been long ago forgotten, but which now come upon my soul like the beams of the first dawn upon the cold damp shadows of the wide chaos. It behoves me now to ply the active work of your deliverance. Long have I searched before I discovered the place of

your confinement,—and now I come but to prepare you for flight, for as yet the means are to be sought. To-morrow night I see you again. To-morrow night I come with him you love, to snatch you from those perils which here surround you. Nay, start not!—Amherst Oakenwold will be here! Be prepared for a midnight journey. Let not, in the meanwhile, your hopes betray themselves to the ruffians who guard you. Above all, arm yourself with prudence, to ensure your leaving your prison in silence; and let not the sight of Amherst Oakenwold overpower your reason so far as to render all my precautions and endeavours unavailing. Eliza!—my Eliza, I must call you!—farewell for to-night!”

She paused—the partial light showed the strong workings of her emotions;—she bent her head upon the hand she held, and uttering, in a smothered voice, but with inconceivable tenderness, “God, in his infinite mercy, support and protect you, my beloved child!” she escaped—Eliza hardly knew how—so overpowered was she with astonishment, and with the various thoughts, and feelings, which crowded rapidly upon her in consequence of this strange interview.

Having thus explained the manner of Miss Malcolm's preparation for her deliverance, we shall leave the reader to conceive what passed in her mind, until the second visit of the Carline, of which we have already given the particulars.