

CHAPTER XVII.

My niece, my daughter, welcome to my care.

RAMSAY.

Such his fell glances, as the fatal light
Of staring Comets.

CRASHAW.

Ah! I'm betray'd, and all my guilt discover'd.

SMITH.

WHEN Eliza and Amherst returned to the house, they found the drawing-room again crowded. Lord Eaglesholme alone was absent.—A group of wondering servants were clustered together at the door,—and even Hawkins, had dared to show his face among them.

Eliza had no sooner advanced within the circle, where Lady Deborah was, than Sir William Percival took the young lady's trembling hand, and presented her to her aunt as the daughter and rightful heiress of Sir Marmaduke Delas-saux. The mighty Lady pressed forward to embrace her niece, with an artful flood of tears ;

but though she acted well, it was evident that it was nothing but acting.

“ Why,” said she, in a theatrical tone, “ why should I have been thus long condemned by a cruel fate, to estrange from my bosom her, whose right to the chief place there is so undoubted ?” She looked at Eliza with unfeigned astonishment, which she was unable to conceal.—“ Yes,” said she, “ there are indeed lineaments in that countenance, which, were there no other evidence, would, of themselves, be sufficient to mark you for a Delassaux—” She hid her face in her handkerchief for some moments as if deeply affected ; then, lifting up her head with an air of uncommon grandeur, and waving her hand round towards the servants, to command their attention,—“ you will henceforth,” continued she, “ consider this young lady as the representative of the ancient house of Delassaux and Brokenhurst, and as the only issue of Sir Marmaduke Delassaux, and Dame Isobel Magdalene St Clair, his wife ; and, consequently, as the rightful possessor of the house and noble estates of Delassaux and Brokenhurst. By the care of Providence she has been preserved, and I now, with pride and joy, welcome

her to her home, and to this beating bosom." So saying she again embraced her, whilst a buzz of approbation issued from every mouth but that of Hawkins.

The little man came slowly forward, and bowing, at some distance, in a cringing manner, began to address the lady who was thus formally installed in her rights:—

“ Hem !—Madam!—Miss Delassaux !—Miss Delassaux of Delassaux and Brokenhurst,—I humbly presume to offer my lowly duty to you—Madam—and to congratulate and felicitate you on your rightful accession to your property, and to express the supreme joy I feel on the glorious and joyful occasion, Ma'am, when Heaven has sent so beautiful, and so sensible, and so genteel a young lady to rule over us. And hoping that you may be induced to continue me in those services, which have been now for so many years devoted to the happiness and well-being of the very considerable population of your estates, as well as to the best interests of my employer, then in possession, I go to hasten the kindling of bonfires, and the ringing of bells, and the drinking of ale, that the glad tidings may speedily spread from

knoll to knoll, and from steeple to steeple, and from mouth to mouth, until the whole county of Kent shall resound them from one end to the other !”

Unfortunately for him, Eliza had already learned enough of the knavish and hard-hearted Mr Hawkins. She felt a new spirit animate her, as she contemplated the vast field of usefulness now opening before her, the idea of entertaining such a prime minister as Mr Hawkins was revolting to her thoughts. After kindly replying to the professions of her aunt, she turned round suddenly upon the astonished steward, who was still going on with his fulsome address, and instantly struck him dumb by her reply.

“ I know not, Sir, upon what grounds you presume thus to address me. Though a stranger, I am already well acquainted with your villainy towards the unhappy young lady, whom, for no fault of her's, it pleased fortune to place on an eminence only to give her the greater fall. Nor am I less aware of the tyranny you have exercised over the unfortunate people under your control. I thank Heaven, that, on committing to me so great a charge, it has placed you like a

beacon on a sunken rock, to warn me to avoid that on which she, who preceded me, was shipwrecked. I beg, Sir, you will immediately leave this house, and I trust you will not dare offend me by again showing yourself within the precincts of my estates."

These words, uttered with great dignity and determination, fell on the little man like a thunderbolt. He cast his eyes around, and as they glanced on the various faces in succession, he beheld in some the chuckle of triumphant joy, and in all the stern smile of inward satisfaction. His mouth was closed, though vexation was preying at his heart. Defeated and crest-fallen, but not abashed, he slunk out of the room followed by a suppressed but general hiss from the servants.

A noise was now heard in the lobby and on the stairs.

"Bring him this way! bring him this way!" cried several voices.

"Aye, aye! but *sangue del Diavolo!*" exclaimed another, "why do you drag me along at this rate? I shouldn't have delivered myself up if I had had any thoughts of escaping. Take me before the magistrate, for I have much to tell."

As the numerous footsteps came upwards, distraction fell upon Lady Deborah; she rose wildly, and took two or three rapid strides towards the door, but her purpose was prevented by the entrance of a large body of constables, bringing in a prisoner. Unlike the proud Lady Deborah Delassaux, she endeavoured to skulk behind the chairs of the party assembled.

“Where is she?” exclaimed Antonio, for it was he, “where is she I say?” whilst, with the eyes of a demon, he pierced into every corner of the room. “Ah,—hah!” he exclaimed,—“ha!—ha!—ha!—hah!—so I have you after all! Oh! this is almost beyond my hopes!”—and again he burst into a fit of laughter, for some time interrupting his speech, and sending a thrill of horror to the heart of every one in the apartment. “*Morte!* I thought you might have slipped through my fingers, and a pretty fool I should have made of myself, coming to dance at the gallows tree, and being jilted after all by my partner!”

Lady Deborah lifted her head slowly and calmly from the back of the great chair she had been leaning on, and raising herself to her full height, she walked forwards with a solemn majesty of step,

and with that proud air of superiority she knew so well how to assume.

“ Antonio !” said she calmly, “ is this madness or intoxication ? you were not wont to be thus.—You forget the respect, as well as the gratitude you owe me !” This she said in a tone peculiarly emphatic, and with a manner that showed she meant to convey something more than met the ear.

“ What !” said Antonio, aside to her in a half under tone, “ can you really believe me to be so simple as to let slip my darling revenge just as I have grasped it?—No, no, no, I am no such fool—so leave your nods and winks.—But let me not hasten my repast—let the feast be protracted, that I may feed slowly on your misery ; bitter as will be the reckoning, I will discharge it with pleasure after such a festival of revenge.—Gentlemen,” continued he, turning to the company, “ I have disclosures to make concerning this Lady,—important disclosures.”——

“ Listen not, gentlemen, I beseech you, to the ravings of this madman,” exclaimed Lady Deborah, interrupting him ; “ let him be carried forth from our presence ; there is something extremely

distressing in hearing this poor creature, who has been for some time out of his right mind, raving about I know not what."

"Gentlemen," said Antonio with a Satanic calmness, even more hellish than his fury or his laugh, "I beg you will listen to me. You already know I am the person who carried off that young lady from Eaglesholme, and who afterwards seized her at York. Both those attempts originated in orders I had from the Lady Deborah Delassaux. In the execution of them, I killed Harrison, and afterwards murdered an unfortunate peasant, for which deeds I know I must die,—But I have much to unfold first—"

"Gentlemen," again interrupted Lady Deborah hastily, "I insist upon this impudent ruffian being carried away; I can no longer listen to such ravings. Officers, take him away, I say—"

Sir William Percival evidently laboured under the most distressing embarrassment; but he said gravely,—“ your Ladyship is aware, that I must do my duty as a magistrate; that duty now demands that I go on with the voluntary confessions of this man. But you have your

remedy by retiring to your apartment until it is over."

"Let her not go, let her not go I beseech you, as you value justice!" cried Antonio,—
"justice— ha! ha! ha!—aye justice!—justice to me!—justice to all mankind; she last night attempted to poison me, —and she is the murderess of her husband!!!"

An exclamation of horror burst from every mouth; but it was perhaps rather horror at the accusation, than at any idea that there could be foundation for it.—Lady Deborah remained unshaken.—She reared her head up to more than ordinary height, and with eyes that darted lightnings,—

"Go!" said she, in a haughty tone. "No! —Lady Deborah Delassaux shall never flee before the envenomed breath of such a reptile!—My noble descent, and my high character, will, I trust, bear me above any suspicions this wretch's testimony may throw upon me.—A vile Italian—a Neapolitan of the lowest cast—his very nation and base quality are enough to forbid his word being credited; and then, a disappointed servant!—a man whose length of services has been more than recompensed, but who even

dared to plot the marriage of his son with her who was by me and all mankind believed to be my niece!—The marriage was actually to have taken place yesterday, but that the cheat was detected and driven forth, together with his villainous father who supported his imposture.”

“ My boy !” exclaimed Antonio, with an unwonted expression of feeling—“ my boy was the pride of my heart—what would I not have done for him !—Hear me gentlemen !” continued he with vehemence—“ hear me, or for ever bid farewell to justice !—There stands an adulteress !—there stands a murderess !—the murderess of her husband !—Thus do I accuse her—I, who now come voluntarily to suffer as the agent of her crimes—”

Lady Deborah arose—the blood had altogether forsaken her face—her eyes were haggard—she tottered across the room to where Antonio was standing, stopping for an instant, and looking at him with an expression of the wildest agitation, where anguish was mingled with entreaty. The ruffian glared upon her like a hyæna ; his teeth were heard to grind fearfully against each other ; and with a devilish laugh,

he called loudly on Sir William to order the officers to secure her.

Lady Deborah fainted away in the arms of her female attendants, and was carried to her own apartment.

A note from Lord Eaglesholme, earnestly entreating a few minutes conference, was now handed to Sir William Percival, who accordingly went to the apartment to which his Lordship had retired.

“ My friend,” said Lord Eaglesholme, as he entered, “ what is this I hear? Has then that wretch Antonio, disregarding his own fate, really returned to accuse his mistress?”

“ He has, my Lord, and of a crime so serious that I cannot now refuse it the fullest investigation.”

— “ Good God!” said Lord Eaglesholme, much affected; “ then all my efforts to save this unfortunate woman from eternal infamy are vain! I know too well the crime—the dreadful suspicion has long haunted me; how dark and intricate are the steps of Providence! But is there yet no way of saving her from the ignominious disclosure that now hangs over her?”

“ My Lord,” replied Sir William, “ I feel for you. But although the crime, from being committed in a foreign country, cannot affect her life, it is my duty,—as it is the duty of every one who would maintain the character of a British magistrate,—to leave no stone unturned to get at the truth, be the culprit of whatever rank or sex. Your Lordship may, however, witness the investigation ; and I shall be glad to listen to any suggestions of yours in conducting it.”

Lord Eaglesholme thought for a moment,—and making up his mind to endure to the utmost, he accompanied Sir William to the room, where Antonio was still standing guarded.

The villain started at the sight of Lord Eaglesholme, but recovered himself immediately; and the chief magistrate being seated, and silence commanded, Antonio was ordered to proceed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Pris'ners and witnesses were waiting by ;
 These had been taught to swear, and those to die.

ROSCOMMON.

But in these cases
 We still have judgment here ; that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
 To plague th' inventor ; this even handed justice
 Commends the ingredients of her poisoned chalice
 T' her own lips.

MACBETH.

“ THE facts I am about to relate,” said Antonio, “ are not only necessary for bringing the guilty to justice, but some of them are essential for removing a delusion from the eyes of those, who perhaps think themselves best informed. I need not tell you who I am ; I come at once to my introduction to the Lady Deborah Delassaux. Her husband—*quel minchione !—quel becco !—*

went to Greece, and left his wife at Naples, to bud and blossom in that hot-bed of the devil. She was not long in coming to maturity in wickedness, and lacking a proper instrument for her purposes, I was introduced to her by a certain *Principessa* whom I had served, and immediately taken into her service, and her confidence.

“ It is not necessary to mention all the intrigues this gay lady plunged into. You know, Lord Eaglesholme, how she inveigled you. While the ardour of her amour with you was at the highest, and its fruit about to appear, she received a letter from her husband, begging her to send out a small vessel to meet him at Corfu to bring him home.

“ Dismayed at the prospect of his return, Lady Deborah held a conference with me in an arbour, where his death was determined upon, and planned. In the ship, went an Italian sailor, charged with his assassination. It was Sir Godmansbury's intention to land at Paestum, to visit its ruined temples, and there the assassin intended to have dispatched him. But it so happened, as you know, Captain Cleaver, that he found the place occupied by a large party of British naval officers,

that rendered any attempt from his single arm utterly hopeless.”

Antonio stopped, and having called on Captain Cleaver to support this part of his evidence, Sir William Percival requested that gentleman to tell what he knew.

“The fellow speaks truth,” said Cleaver, “for a parcel of us were certainly engaged in jollification with our captain, in the Temple of Neptune, when Sir Godmansbury came in, attended by two servants, and an Italian sailor. We asked him to sit down with us; and he and the captain, who had a turn that way, had so much talk about temples, and amphitheatres, and baths, and all that sort of trash, that they became very intimate together in an hour’s time. So happy, indeed, were they in each others society, that our captain agreed to stay for a couple of days there, partly to gratify his own taste, but chiefly for the sake of Sir Godmansbury, who wished to take some drawings, and measurements of the ruins.

“After they had fully satisfied themselves with these heathen remains, we struck our tent, and all set out together on our return to Naples. At Torre-del-Greco, where we arrived just as night

closed, we parted from Sir Godmansbury, after having dined jovially together. He was impatient to rejoin his lady at Naples, after so long an absence, and our captain's intention was to visit the summit of Vesuvius during the night. Guides and mules having been provided for our party, we followed, for some little way, the road Sir Godmansbury had taken, and at but a short distance behind him.

“ The moon was not up, but our attendants had torches, and we were jogging on slowly, when we were alarmed by the report of several muskets, at some distance in our front, and then confused cries reached us from the direction we were riding towards; and immediately afterwards a hired mule, on which one of Sir Godmansbury's servants had left the inn, came galloping back to us with an empty saddle, followed by the animal that carried his baggage, its halter trailing on the ground. We pushed hastily forwards, but before we had ridden fifty yards, the mule that had carried Sir Godmansbury himself came sweeping past us, without its rider. Some fifty or a hundred yards further on, we found a dead mule, and the two servants lying lifeless on the road. Half choked

shrieks came on our ears from the direction of the sea, then but a little way to our left. I instantly dismounted, and rushed towards the spot whence the sounds proceeded, being followed by several of our party. Vesuvius, which was then in action, seemed to aid my intentions, for the crater, just at that moment, threw up a grand column of flame, that illuminated the whole rocky coast of the Bay of Naples with a lurid glare, for several minutes. On a brink of the cliff, hanging over the waves, two men appeared dragging a third by a rope fastened to his neck. He was struggling hard for his life ; but he struggled in vain ; and as vain were my exertions to arrest his fate. The stiletos of the assassins drank his blood, and his murdered body was hurled amid the angry billows, chafing the rocks below. The horrible deed was hardly more than completed, when the ruffians, perceiving us just upon them, made an effort to escape. One of them, who was probably well acquainted with the intricacies of the spot, darted away, and escaped by some crevice unknown to us, and was instantly lost to view ; but the retreat of the other was cut off, and, being surrounded, he was taken after a desperate re-

sistance. He was immediately recognized by some of our party, as a man of the name of Harrison, who had lately deserted from a British man-of-war. I did all I could to make him confess the object of this assassination, and who were his accomplices; but he maintained a sullen silence. Our hopes were yet high, that, notwithstanding his present obstinacy, we might ere long obtain confessions from him; and we pursued our way to Naples, carrying our prisoner with us. But in these hopes we were disappointed. A body of at least twenty armed men came galloping after us. Under pretence of being *sbirri*, they demanded our prisoner, saying, that some preliminary investigation must be gone through in the affair, before the culprit could be sent forward from Torre-del-Greco. We earnestly desired to be present at this inquiry; but our request was peremptorily refused, on the plea that we should be required as witnesses against him; and our names being taken, we were told to pursue our way to Naples, and that there we should probably be examined next day as to what we knew of the matter, so soon as the prisoner should reach the city. But what was our confusion and vexation upon learning from our

landlord at Portici, that we had been deceived."——

“Aye! you were no match for me, *mio bravo capitano!*” exclaimed Antonio, as Cleaver had finished.—“*Il marinaio*, finding that he was foiled at Paestum, immediately dispatched information to Lady Deborah. She wrote to me to Portici, where I then lived. Here is the letter written with her own hand to seal his doom; I have preserved it; 'tis damning proof against her!—ha! ha! ha!”—

After this triumphant laugh, Antonio took breath for a moment, looking round him to watch the effect he was producing on his auditors. The dread silence of extreme horror prevailed.

“Lady Deborah, who now expected that every obstacle to her marriage with you, Lord Eaglesholme, was removed, raved like a maniac, to find all her schemes, and all her crimes, thus rendered abortive by your desertion of her; her disappointed love for you clung to the fruit of your amour. But this fondness for her offspring could not be indulged without the demolition of her character, an idol which her artifices had hitherto enabled her to keep unprofaned. Her infant

niece, the orphan daughter of Sir Marmaduke Delassaux, having been consigned to her care, by the last will of her mother, she resolved to make away with this child, and substitute her own for it, that one dexterous blow might enable her to bring up her daughter without shame, and secure her an ample fortune.

“ To find a hand to execute this new murder, was entrusted to my care. I sent for Harrison, and we met together at night in an orange grove near Lady Deborah’s villa, but when I was in the act of handing him the infant, some thieves coming behind us, snatched away a gold chain ornament, carelessly left upon the babe. Leaving the child, we rushed after the thieves; but they escaped, and when we returned, the child was gone. But as it appeared highly probable, that it had been carried off by the same gang for the sake of its clothes, we had no doubt that it would meet with the very fate to which we had doomed it. Lady Deborah’s child had been secretly put to nurse with my wife at Portici. I had not been there for some days, and when I went privately to fetch it, I found that it had been seized with some sudden illness

the day before, and had died in a few hours. I could not go back to Lady Deborah with this intelligence,—I could not venture to tell her that she had been again guilty of a fruitless crime,—nay, a crime worse than fruitless,—since, as she had now no niece, the Delassaux estates would have gone away to a distant relation, and all right to the management of them would have been lost to her for ever. My wife Teresa observed, that it was a pity our boy Lorenzo had not been a little younger, and a girl, that we might have substituted him for Lady Deborah's child. I bethought me of her cousin's wife, who had a daughter exactly of the age. We accordingly sent for the father and mother of the child, and an agreement was made between us, by which I was to impose the false child upon Lady Deborah, as her own infant; and as the man carried on a trade that yielded him plenty of cash, a large sum of money was to be given me for effecting this deception. The young lady, therefore, who has been so long the representative of the Delassaux family,—whom Lady Deborah Delassaux believed to be her own and Lord Eaglesholme's child,

—is in fact no other than the lawfully begotten daughter of an honest Neapolitan bandit !”

Murmurs of astonishment ran around the company at this unexpected *denouement* ; but they yielded to those of horror, arising from Antonio’s brutal narration of Lady Deborah’s crimes.—The proof of her guilt was too apparent ; it came home to the conviction of all.

“ Hah !” said Antonio, with the usual grinding motion of his teeth, “ by Heaven, she must swing !—Oh I shall die with joy, and cheat the gallows after all !—Ha ! ha ! ha ! was ever Italian revenge more complete ?—Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !” —continued he, laughing horribly, until interrupted by the indignation that broke forth generally from the company.

At this moment loud screams were heard proceeding from Lady Deborah’s apartment, and every one rushed up stairs to ascertain the meaning of them. The constables had already opened the door to ascertain the cause. It was Lady Deborah’s maid who uttered them. Her mistress lay extended on the bed in the last gasp of death.

Silent awe fell upon all around at so instantaneous and dreadful a visitation. The last con-

vulsions had frightfully distorted the haughty features on which they had been working.

To the dismay of all present, a loud laugh burst from some one near the door, and a chill horror ran through every fibre of the spectators.

“Soh!” cried the ruffian Neapolitan, “soh! my accusations have not been altogether ineffectual, then?—she has sent herself to hell with all the stings of a blasted name rankling deep in her soul!”

“Wretch!” exclaimed several voices at once. “What mean ye, demon? what appearance is there of suicide here?”

“Ha! ha! ha! fools!” exclaimed Antonio, with a cool exultation, that made every one shudder,—“see ye not that?” said he, as he made way for himself to approach nearer the corpse, that he might the more easily explain what he meant; “see ye not this fragment of cake clenched in her hand?—nay, give it me,” said he, addressing the dead body, “ye need not grasp it so hard now; it has worked well on yourself; and now I am well content it shall do that it was originally baked for.” He instantly swallowed down some large morsels.

Suspicion flashed upon the minds of those nearest to him; they seized him; but their efforts were too late; the poison had already laid hold of his vitals.

“Hah!” said he, grinding his teeth with more horrible expression than he had ever before exhibited,—“hah!—I feel it—ha! ha! ha!—*è fatto!*—hell has already begun its work within me—I—I—I—I—I feel my heart burning—and my limbs growing cold—hah!—I”——His features became convulsed—his eyes rolled, as if they would start from their sockets—his tongue was thrust out, and his teeth set against it. He lost the use of his limbs, and fell on the bed, where he was laid beside his mistress a stiffened corpse. The spectacle was too horrible for the bystanders—they left the room in a body.

The rest of our story may be soon told. The reader, indeed, must already anticipate the happy union of Amherst Oakenwold and his Eliza. The joy,—the exuberant joy of Sir Cable,—and the calm, dignified, and placid felicity of the noble Earl of Eaglesholme, whose life of repentance was

now repaid by the thought that she, in whom all his affections had centered, had still the nearest and best claim to his tenderness. Miss Margery's colloquies with Mrs Glass, in her preparations for the wedding feast, and Cleaver's critical discussions on the various dishes composing it, mingled with his honest and hearty greetings, may all be readily imagined.

With respect to the faithful O'Gollochar and his joyous Epingle, though little apt in acquiring each other's tongue, they held matrimonial converse no less amusing than were their dialogues when lovers.

For the false heiress of Delassaux, ample provision was made by the munificent Eliza. With this she retired into Italy, and finally, we believe, became the Countess di Montemarone.

THE END.

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