

CHAPTER XV.

————— I did hear
The galloping of horse. Who was't came by ?

SHAKESPEARE.

I go, I go, look how I go ;
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

SHAKESPEARE.

MISS MALCOLM'S narrative was hardly concluded, when the Dwarfie suddenly appeared.—“ Away ! away !—to horse !—your pursuers are near !” said she, hastily—and, snatching a hand of each, she hurried them off among the thick underwood, growing at the base of the rocks at one end of the meadow. There she desired them to remain quiet until she should return, and instantly left them.

It now required all Amherst's exertions to support Miss Malcolm in this new and trying alarm. He seated her on the soft moss, under the thick and drooping boughs of a large holly-tree, and

stood by her with a pistol in each hand, ready to defend her to the last extremity.

The trampling of horses' feet was now heard, as if coming down the horse-path, by which they had reached the hollow amphitheatre, and which was the only practicable descent into it.—Men's voices talking loud were also distinguishable, though as yet too distant for the words to be made out. The night was at its darkest hour, and the moon long since set.

A loud halloo was distinctly raised, as if by the person in advance, for the purpose of guiding him that followed. At length, the dialogue of the speakers could be caught.

“ This way, Antonio !—I have got to the flat meadow at last. Here we must rest for a while. All chance of the chace is lost for this bout.”

“ Hah, *maledetto!*—*furie d'inferno!* what a cursed finale to all our exertions !” exclaimed the other, in a tone betraying the utmost rage and disappointment.—“ *Corpo del diavolo!*—it was all your fault—did I not tell you that it would have been better to make sure of her?—*Accidente!*—To lose so much time, and labour, and

travel, by listening to such a chicken-hearted *animalaccio* !”

“ By Heaven ! Antonio, you give your tongue too much licence.—Like a brute as you are, you have forgotten all that I have done for you in this matter—you would fain shift off that blame upon me which belongs to your own carelessness !”

“ *Siete buggiardo !*” retorted Antonio, with bitterness.—“ She might have been dead and safely packed in a box by this time, had it not been for you.”

“ Liar !” exclaimed Brandywyn, “ by Heavens you shall pay for that word—draw, rascal, and defend your life.”

“ Hold, you fool, I meant no harm,” said the other, more coolly ; “ but see what fire is that smouldering yonder amongst the bushes ! Let’s tie our horses to this tree, and examine the spot.”

Both the men were overheard advancing as fast as the darkness of the night would permit towards the overhanging rock, within twenty paces of which Amherst and Miss Malcolm were concealed.

“ *Per Dio!*” exclaimed the Italian, “ some one has been here !”

“ Aye, and lately too,” said the other.

“ *Corpo di Padre!*” cried Antonio, “ there’s a handkerchief—let me see it nearer the light—E. M:—By heavens, it is her’s—she cannot be far off—*Dannazion dell anima mia!*—*presto! presto!*—*bisogna cercare!*—Let’s try every bush.—Hah!—if we had her but again—by heaven and hell, I would make sure of her.”

The two ruffians now began a most active search, smashing the bushes, and poking their swords everywhere around them. From the noise he made, Antonio seemed to be forcing his way through the underwood, in the direction of the very spot where Eliza was concealed. A deadly fear came over her. Amherst cocked his pistols, and stood resolved within himself to blow out the brains of the Italian, as soon as he should be sufficiently close to ensure his destruction. Enough of light came at intervals from the expiring faggots under the rock, to make his form visible, as he advanced in an irregular track through the opposing branches. He came nearer and nearer, trying the copse from right to left, as if resolved that no part

of it should escape him. The fatal tubes were more than once lifted to their object; and Antonio's death would have been sealed, had not Amherst felt reluctance to shed even a villain's blood, in a manner in itself so revolting to a generous mind. But he still came on—two or three random steps brought him to one side of the holly. He struck the branches with his sword. A faint scream burst involuntarily from the lady. It was hardly audible amidst the crashing noise made by Antonio; yet was it sufficient to arrest his attention. He stopped to listen. He was now in shadow, and a thick bough, rising from the ground, so hid his person, as to prevent the possibility of Amherst firing at him with any hope of success, from the spot where he stood. He, therefore, prepared to move forward a single step, to obtain a better aim, when another and a more distinct scream arose a few yards from the place of their concealment.

“Hah—*corpo del diavolo!*—She is there!” cried Antonio, darting into the obscurity of the thicket. “She is here!—She is here!—*qui camerata!*—*camerata!*—*qui!*—*qui!*”

The crashing amidst the bushes increased both

before and behind Amherst, who, in his fears that Miss Malcolm might have moved from her place of concealment, became bewildered. Brandywyn came rushing past within a few feet of where he stood, carrying blazing brands of fir.

“ This way ! this way ! ” cried Antonio ; “ this corner of the thicket is not wide, and she must be between us and the rocks. She cannot escape us.—Fire the copse ! ”

No sooner had Brandywyn passed, than Amherst moved under the bush, and put down his hand to ascertain whether Miss Malcolm had actually quitted it as he feared. His wrist was grasped by the Carline, and, to his infinite joy, he received from her iron fingers the soft hand of Eliza. They silently raised her, and their mysterious conductor led them up a narrow winding path, assisting Miss Malcolm from time to time, in the more difficult parts, with a power of arm almost supernatural.

In an instant the dry copse was in a blaze, illuminating the shaggy steeps around.

“ *Furie d'inferno !* there are figures escaping yonder ! ” cried Antonio.

“ Where ?—where ? ” exclaimed his companion.

“ *Di là, di là!—presto! presto!—Dannazione!*”

“ This way!—here is a path!”

“ *Accidente!—Maledetto!*”

“ Hell and furies!”

The Carline redoubled her exertions, and dragged Eliza up the steep with both hands. Emerging from the brushwood, and reaching the open glade, they found O’Gollochar already on horseback. As they mounted in breathless haste, the shouts of the ruffians pressed hard upon them. The Carline again leaped on before O’Gollochar, darted off, and bade Amherst follow. Led by their wizard guide, they flew up the remainder of the grassy and partially wooded banks, and, as they fled, the flames, and the black clouds of smoke, bearing myriads of burning fragments on their murky bosom, came rolling up from below.

Their way along the precipitous banks of the river, dangerous at all times, was now rendered fearfully so, by the darkness, and by the desperate fury of the Carline’s flight. Fortunately for Miss Malcolm, she knew not always where she was riding. But Amherst, though he felt not for himself, was too anxious about the precious

burden he carried not to tremble as he rode. More than once, the blundering of the jaded animal demanded all his horsemanship to prevent the certain destruction of both. And many and frequent were the cautions he gave his fair charge to embrace him more firmly. Her hands were unconsciously twined over his heart. Amidst all his anxiety he felt their pressure, and it beat as if it would have leaped from its prison.

As to O'Gollochiar, he rode with very different feelings. The Carline urged on Broadbottom with a speed to which, active as he was by nature, he had never before been put, and at which he was very much astonished to find himself moving. The way was so narrow in many of the more perilous places, that a greyhound could hardly have passed them, yet the rapidity of the Carline's flight was never relaxed. At one moment, O'Gollochiar's eyes glanced in horror downwards into the black pools at a frightful depth below, but transiently discovered by the fire that flashed from the flinty rocks at every stroke of the horses' heels. At another, his ears were deafened by the mighty roar of the rapids, chafing among the huge blocks of granite, and appearing white

amidst the darkness of the night. His guide, seated on the neck of the horse, seemed, like some demon of the elements, to give a more than natural energy to the animal. His former superstitious notions regarding her returned with fourfold strength upon him. He clung mechanically to the saddle with knees and hands, in a cold perspiration, until he became persuaded that he was actually riding post to the devil. He lost all other recollection indeed, and shutting his eyes, he might soon have been convinced that he was actually flying through the air, had not his visage been occasionally subjected to some rude shocks, and scrapings, from the projecting boughs, under which the lesser figure of his companion had passed without damage.

In this way they rode, fortunately without accident, until, as the grey morning began to appear, they passed by the thicket where the grotto lay—forded the smaller river at the very place where Amherst had crossed it before, and climbed those wooded banks rising over its bed.

On the breezy brow of the hill overlooking the beautiful scenery of the double valley, so fully described on a former occasion, the Dwarfie halt-

ed. It was not, however, until the poor quadrupeds required it that she thus gave them a temporary repose. Notwithstanding the ablution they had just undergone in stemming the rough stream of the ford, their flanks were covered with a lather, and their chests and necks with foam,—their sides heaved, and their nostrils yawned wide at every inspiration, as if to draw in a whole atmosphere of air. For some minutes after they had stopped, O'Gollochar continued to adhere to the back of his horse,—and, like a landsman after a voyage, still felt the motion of his hurricane passage. He was soon, however, brought to his senses, for Broadbottom, after shaking himself till he made the stirrups ring again, yet without displacing his master, began to kneel down to take the luxurious refreshment of a roll on the grass, in which amusement he was immediately joined by Brisk. Lucky was it for the poor Irishman, that he happened to open his eyes, just as his charger was laying himself leisurely on one side on the green sod;—for the very first tumble would have so squeezed him, that, in the language of the old romances, “he might have had little need of a leech.” As it

was, he had just time to scramble off upon all-fours, ere the armed heels of both the steeds were glittering in the air,—crack went the girths, and off came both the saddles. This was an unlooked-for misfortune that required to be immediately remedied, and O’Gollochar was quickly shaken from his dream to repair the damage. Meanwhile Eliza, much fatigued, was assisted under the shade of a weeping birch, where, seated on the grass, and resting with her back against its rugged bark, she partook of some fragments of food, prudently hoarded up by the Irishman from the feast of the preceding night.

The dawn was as yet little advanced, and objects in the valley were hidden by one of those dense morning exhalations, often filling the hollow troughs in a country where rivers have their courses. O’Gollochar had nearly succeeded in righting the damage occasioned by the untimely frolics of the horses, and was almost ready to fit the saddles again to their backs, when the distant plunge, and splash of water, followed by the clattering sound of hooves, came from the misty void beneath. The noise rose fast upon them, and spread alarm through the group.

All were instantly in motion ; and even Miss Malcolm, fatigued as she was, became reanimated by renewed terrors. The utmost expedition was used to get the horse-furniture adjusted ; but even their very hurry contributed to baffle them. The sound became stronger, and approached nearer—and men's voices were heard—and Amherst began to prepare his arms for resolute defence.

“ Rash young man !” said the Carline, “ think not of conflict where you have so much at stake !—retire by that path winding amongst those birches,—there you will be concealed until you have gained a few moments to fit yourself for flight,—then make for the track over the hill, and spare neither spur nor lash till you have reached the level country. You bear a treasure your life must answer for. Leave me to deal with these wretches.—But hold !—you must ride without your hat and mantle, young Lady, for these are necessary for my purpose.”—So saying, she snatched both the one and the other from Miss Malcolm.

“ Tarry not for me,” she continued in a rapid manner, as she waved her hand towards the

thicket, and parted from them.—“ Here we part!—I have done my work!—and now we part for——!”—Then pausing suddenly, and looking back to Miss Malcolm with an expression of tenderness, of which her ghastly features could hardly have been supposed capable,—she flew towards her, and embracing her knees, she burst into a flood of tears, and sobbed out in half articulate words—“ Oh—say not—say not that it must be for ever !”

She seemed to wait anxiously for the reply, as if her life depended upon the word.—Eliza was so agitated by the approaching perils, that she had hardly breath to utter,

“ No!—my preserver—I must see and thank you again and again !”

But it was enough—“ Thanks ! Thanks !—a thousand thanks !” said the Carline, in a smothered voice, as she burst away from them, and rending up a tall stem of broom, with the withered spray attached to it, she tied the mantle dexterously over it, and putting the hat upon the top, she shrouded herself beneath, and elevating it at the same time, so as to give to her figure something of the height and external appearance of that of Miss Malcolm, she waved them away.

Loud shrieks and yells arose behind them. Forgetful of the fatigue their horses had undergone, they spurred them furiously on again to their full speed. The ground continued to rise, though more gently, and they soon broke from the birch-woods upon the bleak heath. Without halting, they could now look behind them, and, much to their surprise, they perceived two horsemen, whose figures seemed to be like those of Antonio and Brandywyn, galloping across the moor at about a quarter of a mile's distance in their rear, towards an opposite point of the compass, in chace of the apparition of Miss Malcolm, which had suddenly started up before them. The swift Camilla herself never "scoured the plain," nor "flew o'er th' unbending corn," nor "skimmed along the main," with greater speed than did this phantom. Amherst staid not, however, to view the chace, but still urging forwards over the long side of the moor, he, with twisted neck and stretched eye-balls, looked anxiously back for the event. The shouts came feebly from afar. The sun was now fully above the horizon, and sparkled along the dewy surface of the ground. At the dis-

tance they were now seen from, the horsemen appeared like the mimic puppets of a theatre. He saw that the bellies of their steeds grazed the heather-tops from the speed they were stretching at. Now they seemed almost to have overtaken the object of their pursuit, and again the Carline, doubling like a hare, threw them a number of yards out.

At length, after she had excited their eagerness and rage till they became blinded by their fury, she suddenly directed her course towards a vast extent of black and treacherous bog, over which she bounded from tuft to tuft, with all the agility of the wonderful Lady of antiquity, to whom we have just compared her. Hoodwinked by the keenness of their pursuit, the ruffians desperately followed, when, down went their horses, and the riders, in succession, performing somersets in the air, were projected at least twenty feet forward, by their previous impetus, souse into a large peat-hole; and the Carline, uttering wild shouts of laughter, crossed the broad bog in the direction of the valley, and was soon lost amidst the thick covert of its banks.