

CHAPTER VII.

Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

SHAKESPEARE.

Justa razon, enganàral enganador.

Spanish Proverb.

UNTIL the arrival of the day that was to unite him to Miss Delassaux, the Count di Montemarone never left his fair bride. The young Lady employed herself in giving orders for the speedy preparation of splendid dresses; and the handsomest equipage she possessed was directed to be in readiness, it being the intention of the young couple to set off on a pleasure tour immediately after the ceremony, and to terminate it in London.

Very imperative orders were issued to Mr Haw-

kins, to be prepared by a certain hour, with a large sum of money, to enable the bride and bridegroom to travel with proper eclat. Mr Hawkins had returned rather an unsatisfactory answer as to the money; but he promised, with a grin upon his thin usurious-looking physiognomy, that he would certainly come to wish the happy pair joy. Various were the thoughts that ran through the mind of Miss Delassaux. More than once the image of Amherst Oakenwold crossed her imagination, and she could not help contrasting his noble, open, generous countenance, with the sly expression she observed at times, in the man who was so soon to call her his. Many fears and doubts assailed her, but they were quickly overcome by the pride and obstinacy of her temper; and when the hour for the ceremony arrived, she entered the drawing-room with an air of gaiety, in spite of a certain something that secretly weighed down her heart.

She was surprised to find that her aunt was already there before her, and her surprise was augmented, by observing, that Lady Deborah seemed to be in earnest conversation with the Count, with whom she seldom chose to have much inter-

course. But what was most wonderful of all on the present occasion, she found Antonio, whom she had known to be absent on some business of her aunt's, and of whose return she was not aware, bearing his full share in the dialogue, and with an air of freedom too, much beyond that to which long services sometimes entitle a domestic to presume.

“ No, no !” Miss Delassaux heard him say just before the conversation was hushed by her entrance, “ the trick is too stale ; she may be somewhat leaner than she was, but, *per Baccho!* she is a good quarry yet,—we must have her !”

“ Of what do you thus speak, Antonio ?” inquired Miss Delassaux, with too much eagerness to permit her to assume her usual haughty air, and at the same time glancing at the party to endeavour to read their countenances : that of her aunt, pale and haggard, betrayed in no small degree the internal torture she was enduring. Confusion appeared for a moment on the Count's, and even the stern visage of Antonio was disturbed for an instant. He made a bow, however, of the most obsequious description, and, after a

little circumlocution, adroitly introduced that he might have time to collect his ideas, he told Miss Delassaux that he talked of a heron which frequented a particular pond in the grounds, that he had let fly a favourite pet hawk of Lady Deborah's at it without success. "But," added he with more signification in his dark expression than the nature of the subject warranted, "she must be ours at last, or——"

"Or what?" asked Miss Delassaux, somewhat astonished with the savage look that accompanied this broken sentence.

"Or," continued he, finishing it with a forced look of mildness, and a submissive bow to Miss Delassaux, whilst his set teeth were heard to grind against each other,—“or I will wring the neck of the old hawk Signora, that is all.”

Lady Deborah started, and walked towards the door. The Count approached Miss Delassaux, and took her hand.

"My life!" said he, "let us not think of such trifles at a moment like this. We lose precious time. The clergyman is here, the servants are in attendance, and every thing is ready. Let us

proceed with that ceremony which is to make us both happy for life."

"Happy!" exclaimed Lady Deborah, involuntarily shuddering as she echoed the word. "Heavenly powers!——"

But she had not time to finish her sentence before it was most unaccountably taken up by Antonio, with a Jesuitical air of the utmost seriousness and fervour, though accompanied with a frown, which, however, he took care should be perceptible to no one but Lady Deborah.

"May the powers of heaven indeed shower down their choicest blessings on them both!"

Lady Deborah looked at him with an agonizing glance, and then made an effort to subdue her rising emotions, or at least to hide them, by burying her face in her handkerchief. The clergyman, and then the servants entered, and the ceremony proceeded.

It was hardly more than begun, when a confused noise of voices was heard, as if of several persons entering the house.

"Officers!" exclaimed a voice Miss Delassaux knew to be that of her faithful steward, "secure the carriage and the horses—they are worth

something ; and then let us proceed as fast as we can within doors. Arrest every thing, do you hear, without loss of time, for there may be other creditors upon her before long, and I don't want any one to go snacks with me."

The astonishment and consternation that seized upon the party met to celebrate the marriage, and, most of all, upon the bride and bridegroom, may be more easily conceived than described. Miss Delassaux, who was not much versed in business, was at first disposed to imagine it merely some of those necessary perhaps, but troublesome legal forms, to which Mr Hawkins was every now and then subjecting her. On those occasions, particularly of late, she had been glad enough to get money, even although it was accompanied by so harassing a tax upon her patience. But now she thought his time for such vulgar ceremonial had been particularly ill chosen ; and, breaking off abruptly, she walked with great irritation towards the wide and splendid staircase, to inquire into the meaning of the steward's intrusion.

There she found Hawkins, attended by a train of clerks and bailiffs, employed in taking a list of

the marble statues and busts, the bronzes, the pictures, and the various other items of vertu decorating the hall and the landing-places.

“ Mr Hawkins !” cried she, with an intemperance of voice corresponding to the storm that agitated her mind at the moment, “ I cannot understand how you should dare thus to disturb my house at such a time, by the introduction of so many strangers. If you have any thing of importance to transact, I think you might have waited until I had been gone. This rudeness is what I did not expect of you. But, Sir, you must allow me to tell you, I will not suffer such improper intrusion.”

Hawkins lifted up his little red eyes from the small memorandum book in which he was inscribing the articles of furniture one by one, and looking at her askance, but without permitting her presence to disturb him, he went on repeating,—

“ One stove, with fire-irons to match,—two cariatides of bronze, bearing lamps,” and so he continued to write down the items, one after another, as if he heard not a word she said to him.

The Lady could bear his provoking conduct no longer. “ Mr Hawkins,” said she, with still

greater vociferation, “ I insist on your leaving my house directly, and I desire you will take with you the rude rabble that has followed you hither. Begone, Sir, instantly! I am resolved at least to be mistress in my own house.”

“ One gilt bracket, with an alabaster temple thereon,” said Hawkins, continuing his operations with the most perfect indifference. “ One statue in white marble of the Heathen god Apollo,—one drunken Satyr pressing grapes into a cup, carved out in red marble”——

“ Beast!” cried Miss Delassaux, now altogether forgetting herself in her growing rage.—“ You are yourself a Satyr!—quit my house this instant, I tell you. I discharge you from this moment; and if you do not leave my house immediately, I shall call down one, to whom I must in future look for protection, to rid me of your presence.”

Hawkins seemed to hear at last. “ Your house, Madam!” said he, “ I suspect you are disposed to be merry when you call this your house, and talk of turning me the owner of it out of it. You cannot have forgotten all the friendly efforts I have made for you; the risks I have run to raise

money for your need; nay, you must remember the very last transaction between us, when, in order to enable me to procure cash for your emergencies, you signed this deed of conveyance, making over the house of Brokenhurst-Hall to me in mortgage. The estates, you know, were already mine by various transactions of a similar nature, which took place between us at different times before, all of which you cannot fail to recollect. My advances have been to an extent which, you must be aware, is by no means trifling; and now you cannot wonder that I should endeavour to secure myself in as small a loss as may be, by arresting the furniture, moveables, and trinkets, which might else, perhaps, fall a prey to other creditors." And so saying, he continued his operations with imperturbable *sang froid*.

That certain legal forms had been gone through, as security for large sums of money, Miss Delasaux was well enough aware; but, bad as she had believed her circumstances, she had not the most distant idea that they were so utterly wrecked as Hawkins now represented them. The whole of his rascality at once flashed upon her. Her fury

against him went beyond all bounds, and she lost all command of herself.

“Villain!” she exclaimed—“wretch!—monster!—demon!” and forgetful of appearances, as well as of all modesty and dignity, she sprang at him like a tigress, and would have probably torn out his eyes with her nails had not those who were about him interfered.

Hawkins was for a moment disconcerted, and betrayed some signs of terror; but, retreating behind two of the bailiffs,—

“Miss Delassaux!” said he, at length—“Madam!—do not put yourself into a heat; I have hitherto done much to prove my devotion to you, both by the good advices I have given you, the which, I am sorry to say, you did not take, and by the large sums of money I have advanced to you, the which you never hesitated to accept of. I am now—ahem!—prepared—I say, I have made up my mind,—to do you a generous action—and,—ahem!—ahem!—although neither your language nor your actions have been quite civil, d’ye observe me, upon this occasion, yet I will not go back from my intentions. Your estates, this house, and all it contains are mine,—mine by law

as well as in justice. But I feel for you from the bottom of my soul, Miss Delassaux.—I cannot see you, who have been so long the pride of my heart, turned out to beg your bread in the streets; and therefore I have, look you, made up my mind as aforesaid, to make you again mistress of them all.”

Here the little thin, red-faced, pink-eyed man paused for a moment, his mouth pursed up, and his nose peaked, and Miss Delassaux, who had listened to him at first with an impatience and rage that moderated as he went on, by the time he reached these last words, stood petrified by his unexpected generosity. Her wonder, however, was not yet at its height, for he went on—

“ I say, d’ye observe me, I have made up my mind to restore you to your estates, and home again—that is—and be it so clearly understood—that you resume them by the name and title of Mrs Hawkins, that is—ahem!—by forthwith becoming my wife.”

Miss Delassaux’s rage, somewhat moderated by the seeming generosity breathed in the first part of Hawkins’s speech, now rose with double fury, as she listened to its presumptuous conclusion.

“What! the blood of the Delassaux’s to match with the worm!”—Then seeing herself restrained from making a personal attack upon him by the people of his party, who placed themselves before her, she burst into tears, and, turning to the Count, who, with her aunt, Antonio, and the servants, had been brought to the landing place by the noise,

“Signore,” said she, in an upbraiding tone, “will you permit me to be insulted by such a wretch, at the very moment when I am about to become your wife. Suffer him not to remain an instant in the house!”

But the Count seemed chained to the spot, as if by some strange and unknown enchantment. Meanwhile, Hawkins drew a paper from his pocket-book, and putting it into the hands of the bailiffs,

“Arrest him instantly,” said he, “for the sum of fifty pounds, lent to him three weeks ago on promise of immediate payment, but which I have now no chance of recovering. Instantly seize his person, I tell you!” He had no sooner said this, than the bailiffs rushed in a body upon the broad steps to lay hands on the Count. But, with an

alertness that perfectly confounded every one, he made a somerset clear over all their heads, with the perfection of a harlequin of the very first qualifications, and, lighting on his feet on the landing place at the bottom, he darted off by a back-door, and was lost in a moment.

“As I shall answer, Tummas,” said one of the bailiffs, “that be the very fellow as jumped over seven horses, and seven men with fixed bagonets, in the show at Canterbury fair, summer was three years ago! I thought as how I knowed him again. My gomms, what a jump and a whirl!—Why, he spun in the air like a cock-chaffer!”

“*Sangue del Diavolo!*” exclaimed Antonio, lifting up a chair, “what hinders us from ridding the house of these vermin?—down with the damned sharks!” and setting his teeth together, he whirled the chair over his head, and was in the act of bringing it down with so much force upon Hawkins and the group about him, that half a dozen skulls might have been cracked at once, like so many nut-shells, had not one of the bailiffs interfered in the most intrepid manner, and warding off the descending ruin with a well managed turn

of his pole, bestowed the weight of it with so much alacrity on the right temple of Antonio, before he could recover his arm, that he rolled down the steps to all appearance lifeless.

Miss Delassaux shrieked, and ran up stairs to her apartment; but Lady Deborah, with an eagerness no one could account for, rushed forwards, and bent over his inanimate body. The bailiffs also hastened to examine him, from anxiety to know his real state; so revolting is it even for such men to put a fellow-creature to death, though, (as in the present instance,) in the discharge of their duty. But Lady Deborah scanned his face with increased earnestness. She gazed in his distorted features and fixed eyes, and stooping down, laid her ear close to his mouth, to listen if she heard him breathe; then uttering a loud nervous laugh, she sank down up the steps, exclaiming wildly,—“ He is dead! he is dead! then all is safe!”

“ Dead! Lady,” cried the bailiff who had given him the blow,—“ I hopes not! I never killed a human soul in all my life afore, and I should not like to have the blood of this here un on my conscience; though, for the matter of that, had I

not brought un down, Master Hawkins's skull, and some others, might have been split. But stay, methinks he breathes—lift him up a bit."

"Aye, aye," said the other man, "no fear o' un—he's only in a swound after all. See—he's beginning to come round already! Lord, such a queer twist that was un gave with un's mouth,—he'll soon gather un's legs again, no fear o' un."

"Is he not dead then?" said Lady Deborah, and bending anxiously forwards to look again in the countenance of Antonio, now beginning to display the horrible nervous contortions frequently accompanying returning life; "is not the wretch dead then?"

"Dead!" cried the Italian, gnashing his teeth in frenzy, as his consciousness came back to him, and flashing a lightning glance towards Lady Deborah,—“Who thinks me dead? Hah! was it you who spoke? Give me a knife——”

As he said so, with the countenance and voice of a maniac, he made a desperate effort to rise; but Lady Deborah, in terror, rushed up stairs to her apartment; and the men, throwing themselves together upon the culprit, soon bound

him, and after some consultation, dragged him towards a vaulted cellar, where, as a matter of precaution, they locked him in; and Mr Hawkins, after recovering from the alarm he had experienced, began to go on with his inventory undisturbed.

Whilst matters were in this state below, and the servants were running about full of curiosity, peeping every where, and putting many an unsuccessful query to Mr Hawkins and his assistants, Lady Deborah, who had bolted the door of her apartment, happened accidentally to cast her eyes out of the very window, from which she had looked a few mornings before, when she had descried Antonio, and witnessed the death of the horse that carried him. Evening was now approaching, but the landscape was not yet so much obscured as to prevent her observing a body of men, some on foot and others on horseback, who seemed to be cautiously approaching the house from the same direction whence we formerly described Antonio to have come. Such a sight being altogether unusual, she was led to watch their motions. They advanced at a slow pace, the riders seeming to wait for the pedestrians, when just as they came opposite the thicket

into which Antonio dragged the carcase of the wretched animal, the steeds of two men, who rode in front, suddenly reared and started to one side, and one of the riders came to the ground. The horseman did not seem to have suffered materially from his fall, and his horse being immediately caught, the curiosity of the party to discover what had occasioned the accident, seemed to be awakened, for one or two of the men on foot ran off the road into the thicket. Lady Deborah felt an agonizing interest in all the movements and motions of the men. Her breath came short, and she stretched her very eyeballs by the intensity of her gaze.

The motions of the men now indicated that something had been discovered, for the whole party crowded together into the thicket. Then afterwards some of them appeared engaged in drawing forth the carcase of the horse, which they laid on the grass by the way side, and after some apparent consultation, they left two of their number in the thicket as if to watch, whilst the remainder, to the number of eight or ten, stole off in the direction whence they had come, frequently looking behind them as they went.

Lady Deborah no sooner saw that they had

retreated, than she left the window, and with a speed far beyond what her years warranted, she rushed down stairs. Luckily for her intention, Hawkins and his people were by this time in some other part of the house, and she hastened across the hall, and went along the passage leading to the servants' apartments.

She had already made three or four rapid strides along the passage, when her ear caught some lowly muttered curses, coupled with her own name. She stopped to listen. The sound came from the vaulted cellar to her right.

“*Maledetta sia la femina!*” cried a voice she immediately knew to be that of Antonio. “Ten thousand curses on the woman!—*ebbene benissimo!*—But revenge,—*ha! ha! ha! vendetta! vendetta stupenda!*—*ugh!* *Davvero*, it will be high revenge, ha, ha, ha!—She wished me dead!—*hah!*—Hell itself would be nothing to her—but infamy! Aye, aye, just so—that is the way to—but fool that I am,—*animalaccio!*—my rage makes me think aloud.”

He had already said quite enough for Lady Deborah; however, she felt the necessity of soothing him. She paused a moment to recollect her-

self, and then approaching the door with a few marked and audible steps, as if she were returning from that part of the house occupied by the servants.

“ Antonio, said she, in a half whisper, “ Antonio, are you there ?”

“ *Ah scelerata ! eccoti !*”

“ I am here,” said she, without seeming to observe the epithet ; “ I have been searching for you every where, and only this moment caught your voice, by accident, as I was returning from the servants’ apartments. I have flown to save you—your liberty, your life is sought. The officers of justice are after you,—quick, come forth, and let me find some speedy means of saving one on whose existence mine depends.”

“ Hah ! say ye so, tigress ? in faith you speak true, for you think, no doubt, that the security of your life depends on the sacrifice of mine. But mark me, I shall not hang alone ! ha, ha, ha !

“ What strange delusion has bewildered you, Antonio, that you should thus so unjustly accuse one who, being bound to you as I am, by the strongest ties of gratitude, has uniformly done all in her power to manifest it to you. Even now I

am here—anxiously here, to save your very life; but we lose time,—already, perhaps, the house is surrounded by a band of officers in search of you. They must have traced you, as I feared, from Yorkshire. The horse—the horse! I saw them from my window, examining the carcass. Not a moment is to be lost,—quick, quick!” said she, opening the door of the cellar, in the lock of which the key had been left, and, unbinding him; “let me hasten to save you by the glass door, leading from the library into the garden and shrubbery,—you may yet escape to the coast.”

“Humph!” said Antonio, doubtingly, “could I trust to you,—this, to be sure, does look like a desire to save me, though, *per Dio!* there may be something selfish lurking under it, after all.—*Ma non importa!*—*Ebbene!* I will follow you, then,—it may be just as well to get out of the way of these villains for the present. Since I have escaped so long, ’twould be a pity to be hanged at last, for the paltry sin of borrowing a sorry hackney, and blowing out the brains of the rascally clown who owned him.—*Andiamo!*” and, so saying, he quickly followed Lady Deborah.

The lady led him first to her apartment, where

he was hastily disguised, and where, with a show of kindness that half led him to believe his suspicions had been groundless, she melted into tears, and pressed upon him a purse of money, a flask of wine, and half of a pretty large cake, to prevent the necessity of his going near any human habitation for food, so that he might steal down to the coast without being traced, and then get on board some skiff, or smuggling vessel, which, she trusted, he would certainly have an opportunity of doing early in the morning, if not during the night, and thus secure his retreat into France, whither her bounty should quickly follow him. Then, throwing a shawl round her, and, groping her way without light, she reconnoitred the approach to the glass door leading to the shrubbery, and conducted Antonio thence by a winding path, to a door in the park wall, nearly half a mile from the house, where she parted with him, with so much well dissembled regret, and anxiety for his safety, that the villain left her, almost, if not altogether, convinced that he had been deceived in the symptoms of joy he imagined he had detected, after the blow he had received from the bailiff.

“Get thee gone, fool!” said Lady Deborah to herself, as she double locked the door in the wall, and moved towards the house. “Thank my fates I am now freed from that blackest of villains—the vile tool of my schemes that would have turned its point upon me, and pierced me to the heart,—so necessary for a time, and of late so vexatiously burdensome, and hazardous to me! To have thus rid myself of him is like plucking out a rankling sting, the poison of which gradually consumed me. Misery enough I yet have to endure, but to have shaken off this burden, makes me feel as if all were again well. Whatever may happen, my good name will be safe! But, ah!” continued she, after a pause, as the momentary reflection again overcame her—“she for whom I have done so much—for whose happiness I have sacrificed my own peace of mind—for whom I have —— but let me not think of it; she would be to me punishment enough should no other remain. But, alas! I must carry an eternal punishment here—here—here!” said she, striking her breast with violence. “The grave cannot extinguish this never ceasing fire. Here it must

burn with quenchless fury for an eternity of existence !”

Overcome by her feelings, she now sat down, for a few moments, in a garden chair, by the side of the wall, to recover herself, hiding her face within the folds of her mantle, as if with the vain hope of excluding thought. On lifting up her head, she was surprised, and somewhat alarmed, to observe a small human figure standing before her, enveloped in loose drapery. She had so far recovered from her astonishment, as to be able to demand what this strange person wanted, when a letter was thrust into her lap, and the figure was gone, with a silence and rapidity of motion almost supernatural. The lady grasped the letter as if to convince herself that the whole was not an illusion ; then anxious to ascertain the contents, she started up, and hastily pursued her way homewards.

There she found that her precautions in getting rid of Antonio had not been too soon taken, for a large party of the officers of justice had already surrounded the house, and were in the act of searching every where for him. On the first entrance of these men, and as soon as they had

declared their errand, the bailiffs, who were employed by Hawkins, led them forthwith to the cellar, where they had already, as they thought, secured the prisoner, by accidental anticipation. But he was gone ! Not a corner of the house was left unsearched, but he was no where to be found. At length, seeing they could do no better, they set a watch, under the idea that he might probably return during the night.

After the bustle and confusion excited by this circumstance had in some degree subsided, Lady Deborah retired to her apartment, where we shall leave her to indulge her curiosity, by breaking open the paper she had so mysteriously received.