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CHAPTER X.
THE FESTIVAL.

The cousins Costardo and Austin, as they, with tears (whose mingled current led to joy and reconciliation), spoke to each other again, experienced the weight of human misery, which, by the interposition of the old soldier had been avoided, and promised instead a prospect of affection, unparalleled in the great interchange of domestic life. To each a new field of enterprise was open, calculated to repay their long debt of jealousy with a fond and full requital, and to compromise by a joint reciprocity, their interest and well doing. Austin, with some degree of warmth, clasped Costardo's hand, and rejoining their companions, proceeded directly to their quarters.

Their first business on returning was to wait upon their benefactor, and elicit from him more satisfactory information accruing from the secret which he had divulged to them; besides, to find out particulars relative to himself, and, in conclusion, if all he said was true, to cultivate with ardor his personal acquaintance. Satisfied beyond doubt of his sincerity in the interruption of the duel, both determined to see him privately, and learn of him the cause of his being present.

They repaired thither in high spirits, only to be disappointed—the mysterious stranger had decamped, leaving no trace as to where he might be found. The blow was a cruel one, and only served to render both disconsolate, and suffering under suspense, such as cooled down in some measure their first manifestations of joy. To Austin the disappointment was maddening, as he long cherished in his bosom certain but unaccountable conclusions as to Camillia; and had he now the advantage of seeing her, he would probably have fixed in his mind that all his conclusions were true. Collectively, their ideas of each other were one, and each clung with tenacity to their soul-cherishing dreams. A certain amount of indisposed candor was always the peculiar feature predominating when he rambled with her in their retired meetings; and this he treasured in his bosom, lest his lips should betray the notions he had conceived respecting her. What if his love should at any time induce him to declare his thoughts? what, if after all, they were delusive, and only served to ensnare him in their unforeseen treachery. Were he at home his hours would be devoted in her society, and given to the secret progress of affection by the lake or woodland; but now far away, he cautiously reviewed his own conduct, and concluded that his circumstance was providential. He loved Camillia—wandered with her secretly and alone; and with these circumstantial evidences, which he conjured up respecting her, he thought—and if in their continuance he should err—then he shuddered, and a prayer was for his lips.

Three months passed away. To Austin it was a period of anxiety and doubt—the decamped soldier had not been heard from during that time except on one occasion, and then it involved more mystery than was thought to be necessary. One evening he was retiring to his quarters, when an elderly man tapped him upon the shoulder as he passed along. He turned and interrogated the stranger as to his business, when the other drew from his pocket a letter, and as he placed it in his hand said:—
"Lieutenant Cameon I presume?"
"The same." And he broke the seal and read. It ran thus:—
"Take heed, there are those near you who seek your life, or the custody of your person. Venture not abroad, day or night, whether in company or not. The friend who interrupted the duel between you and your—, speaks to you again. Be warned in time—Venture not abroad."
(Signed) A GUILTY FRIEND.

He turned to accost the stranger but he was gone, and being left alone, he ruminated upon the warning he had just received. It evidently appeared from the whole circumstance, that the communication was true, else why not the stranger come forward, and disclose more fully the purport of his intentions, and also vindicate his conduct, as to his desiring him and his cousin to see him in his quarters, and remove the doubt which necessarily remained by the half-finished revelation which he detailed on the morning of the encounter?

But as he foresaw the truth come, and Austin, with regret, found out that his sufferings were proportionable to his indifference. About a month after his no-gro companion and attendant was missing, and no tidings of her could be found. Search was made and diligent inquiry entered into; but all was fruitless, and Austin fully satisfied that some mysterious agency was working. For a time he cautiously avoided going out except when duty compelled him, but finally, his vigilance became troublesome, and he fell easily into the snare so cunningly devised for his enthrallment.

It was a feast day.—The town presented an unusual degree of bustle, and the army situated round the vicinity were allowed a general parole. In the evening several officers assembled in one of the drawing-rooms of a rich citizen named Beaumont; and the usual revelry attendant on such occasions, assumed a boisterous character shortly after midnight.—

Toasts were freely drank, and topics of the war discussed, till their merriment was interrupted by the loud report of firearms in the street. Several rushed down stairs to mingle in the supposed disturbance, among whom were our two worthies, Austin and his cousin. Some lanterns flickered at a short distance, and owing to their almost intoxicated state, they advanced, with staggering footsteps, to the spot where a crowd seemed to be congregated. Four men, for such the whole company amounted to, were evidently watching the arrival of some one, they bore arms and were wrapped up in overcoats, fully equipped for a journey. On the unruly consuls approaching, one of them came forward, and looked into their vacant faces. He nodded significantly to his companions as he again turned the light upon them, and addressed Austin as the latter essayed to speak:—
"Another drink to the success of the Mountain, eh. Come, boys, another drink, fill for the Lieutenant, we'll all be merry. A poor fellow that never rejoices—aint it, old fellow?"

"Yes, another drink, fill comrades, but what fuss is up—who fired? Drink."
It was Costardo who spoke thus, having indulged himself more freely in the pleasures of the evening—"Drink, but not to the Mountain," he repeated.

The other three now joined them, and a general round was served. All but Austin drank, upon which he took Costardo's arm to bring him away. But the leader interposed saying:—
"Attention, Lieutenant, this ere gentleman aint a recruit, be a soldier and—"

"A villain," interrupted a voice, which caused Austin to start and drop Costardo's arm.

A Villain, Silas, no less—do you hear?" and a man, from an adjoining doorway, stepped out and confronted him with bold firmness. The old soldier who, as a friend, signed himself the "GUILTY," was indeed there, and having finished his audacious accusation, quickly turned to Austin and exclaimed:—

"Lost, lost! I warned you in vain, boy, and could do no more. This night I will tell you all, but it's too late, too late, you have scented out the track of your enemies. You see them. There they are!"

He pointed with his finger at the men, and added:—
"Mr. Edgerton, postpone your night's work. It is not becoming one of your years to commit a deed of blood. The boy is innocent, and able to reward you far better than the vampire who styles himself his father, and who, if you actually succeed in your undertaking, will cheat you to your face, and perhaps hand you over to the law and hang you. Murder will out—Remember!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And the miscreant threw back his head, and laughed again derisively.

"You preach repentance and faith, ha, ha, ha; speak to us in parables, eh? The kingdom of heaven shall rejoice now since the buccaneer, who slipped the plank under fifty's, has become a saint—See you rotten-souled apostate," he added with flushing anger, "where are the thirty pieces you received for Silvio, or the cries that your dead heart were indifferent to when your knife entered his bosom? You preach then to us, do you, eh?" and as he spoke he raised his clenched fist and struck him on the face. His three companions were at work on the signal, and our drunken friends were instantly disarmed, and lying upon the pavement, uttering curses and threats. They were kept in this condition but a few minutes, when their leader, having almost strangled his victim, drew a cloth from a leathern pouch and laid it upon their faces. They were soon silent and unconscious. The cloth was saturated with chloroform.

CHAPTER XI.
THE PICTURE—THE STOLEN WILL.

Gonsalvo, as he lay upon the floor of Camillia's chamber, the blood having subsided by one dark gush from his mouth, slowly sank into that exhaustion which usually prostrates the passions after a long and feverish excitement. Quiet and insensible, the iron-souled demon was now smitten by his own avenging desire, yet the while, Camillia, like an angel of mercy, wept over him, and imparted her burning tears to mingle in the sanguinary tide,—bursting as a volcano from its primary receptacle. One hour did she remain upon her knees bent in anguish over him; and more than one prayer she ejaculated to heaven for his deliverance. It was then that she found out how to love a father, and the yearnings of natural affection found utterance through her lips.—How sad are the reverses of affection, how humanly painful in their effects—there cannot be found a single being among us but what loves somebody; and yet we are as loathe to confess it, as to place our hand in the fire; at least, not till we are visited by sickness or death, and then, fearing to take our secret to the grave, we unwillingly breathe the name, and whisper, in dying accents, the affection that has haunted us through our lives—we must reveal it—we cannot take any thing mortal to our tombs.

If before there was any affection in Camillia for her father, it was now being redoubled under the scene of despair that she contemplated, in the hopeless condition he was reduced to. She watched, with anxiety, each distressing swell of his bosom, and feared that it must break

by the violent agitation that convulsed his whole body; and long and earnestly did she watch the tremulous form, as it lay torn by its ill regulated economy.—After an hour the lurid blackness of his face disappeared, and a cadaverous whiteness remained,—the color of death.

He crawled to his feet upon recovering, and, surprised beyond measure, he scratched his head as if trying to recall the dark visions of some fearful dream. Camillia tenderly arranged his dress, and cleansed the blood from his face; then looking up fondly into it, she whispered in pitiful and earnest tones:—
"Father, take me from this evil place, I will love you, indeed I will."

He brushed aside her hands which were uplifted in token of her eager desire, and was about to depart. She fell upon his bosom weeping, and then lifting her clear tearful eyes beseechingly, exclaimed with choked voice:—
"Father, I will die; let me go with you and love you as mother did. Do take me from this dark place, and be with you always. Father, have mercy upon me!"

And he regarded her for a minute thoughtfully, and again he appeared to have recollections himself. He motioned as if again to depart, but she clasped his arm and sank upon her knees.

"Have pity, and take me with you," she pleaded. "Do, father, let me be with you, or I shall die. I will love you, father, indeed, indeed I will."

He staggered with feeble steps to the door without consulting her in the least; and Camillia retired to the farther end of the chamber, to brood over her captivity.

An hour later, and her father sat alone in his private apartment, while she, with desolate heart, reviewed the dark prospect of her life.

He sat alone, surrounded with all the luxury and magnificence that his immense riches could gratify, yet wanting that treasure which is ever the heritage of the poor—peace of mind. Like Dives, he turned a cold heart upon the world, and wrapped himself up in his own peculiar selfishness. Wanting some confiding bosom, wherein to deposit the every-day occurrences of his life; the miserable man was constantly a prey to his overloaded conscience, and this soured his disposition, and made him passionate and irritable.

Alone in the haunted chamber—the retirement which he always sought out, when harassed by gloomy thoughts; and here, at present, he pondered over the solitude of his heart, and meditated upon the causes which troubled him. Suddenly he arose, as if some dark dream of the past presented itself before him in vivid representation, and advanced with light footstep to a cabinet, situated at some distance. He paused and his lips moved in soliloquy:—
"Yes, I looked with pride on the boy, and calculated that he should remain my son. What dishonor ever clung to him? None. He is noble as the lions of Castile ever gave being to. He is comely, brave and generous,—what more? He is all these—his name is Cameon, his lineage is my own; but not his spirit; no. There is a boundary of blood between both our destinies, and none may adjudge the current to be mine. The tide of years has swept the grim signature from the light of memory, and who shall recall the deed? Not time itself, no, no; it is past, and darkened in its own obscurity, and its memoranda given over to the executive till the consummation."

He opened the cabinet, and it revealed a pile of yellow and time-worn parchments. A roll of vellum, equally colored by age, lay among the heap; it was tied with a strip of dark ribbon, and he unwound the string, and opened it. It was a baptismal certificate, genuine in every particular, and bearing signatures full and explicit. Arnold Gascomber subscribed; together with the usual chaplain's seal and date. It was Austin's! The relic of all he might now claim. Gonsalvo read it over and over, and again murmured mechanically:—
"Arnold Gascomber— forbid it heaven, it is false—false as perdition; he never attended the affair, no, I say it; no," and he looked upon the signature again and continued: "Let me see, yes, it's false; the renegade, the pirate, he to represent Cameon; no, never, it's a forgery, a lying cursed forgery, committed to betray me and extort rewards; oh! but I shall make the miscreant feel, and cram his mean presumption down his throat."

He threw the certificate down and paced the chamber with hurried stride. He kept on muttering indistinctly to himself curses and threats, still continuing his march in a more rapid gait.—All his spirit shone in his dark face, and his uneasiness increased with the motion of his footstep. One hour passed in this way, and he returned to the cabinet, and drew forth a small box securely fastened. He seated himself in his easy chair, and placed it on a table before him, while he relapsed into thought; then he drew from a small drawer a bundle of documents, and perused them. He selected one from amongst the number, and taking his pen, drew upon a similar sheet of paper a correct and even copy of its contents. He placed the paper in his breast pocket, and proceeded to unlock the box—first opening his cravat with a most satisfactory air. Then he took up the treasure and turned it over and over in his hands delighted. Whatever it contained it was dear to its owner, and he examined the exterior with the same interest that a

child does with a new toy. He shook it, but no sound came from within, and he very leisurely inserted the small key and raised the lid. His eyes seemed to burst from their sockets, and uttering a low guttural cry, the cold perspiration appeared to drop from his brow, and he sank heavily from his chair to the ground. The box fell upon the table with the lid still raised—and fixed in such a position as to meet the eyes of any one bold enough to gaze within, was a picture, whose aspect might have called up reflections to the hardest bosom. A young man evidently emerging from boyhood, with inflexible decision of character imprinted on his lofty brow, startled the observer on first looking upon it. He was dressed in uniform, dark green in color, and a heavy sash, or scarf of rich crimson, swung from his right shoulder, and was fastened on the left hip near his sword belt. At the bottom was printed in full—"Silvio, the Unavenged;" and on the margin on either side, was a plain handwriting, and read as follows: "I am here, brother, behold my wounds—they are bleeding, and reveal their own secret. While the world is sleeping injustice is awake, and the mysteries of iniquity are working. Your hands are full of blood. The deed of yours is consummated, and a bloody penalty awaits the oppressor. Mine alone shall triumph, and they alone shall tread upon the neck of their enemy. Silvio is accuser—Gonsalvo the accused, and who shall withhold judgment? *The will, the will—it's gone!*"

Terror soon revived the stricken sufferer, and terror aroused his apprehension that some visible eye was looking down upon the scene. He slid into the chair, and after casting one more glance upon the picture, he covered his face with his hands. He rose to his feet to avoid the dark memories that crowded upon his soul, and again paced up and down. He returned to the table after some minutes, and withdrew the accusing picture with nervous hand. The box was empty; and the ghastly pallor of his face assumed a livid hue—the darling treasure was gone—the sum and substance of all his crimes and uneasiness; and the likeness, which he had never seen before, was the bitter substitute. He read the handwriting over several times, and then placing it under his foot, he murmured with some decision and firmness:—
"He must die—never shall he return with the base hireling to advance claims and hang me; no, no. And herself—yes, she shall marry a contraband rather—a nice plot to purloin witnesses and accuse me; no, no, the chicken-hearted scheme shall perish, and two more victims removed in its fulfillment; it must be so, my safety demands it, and they both shall die. I'll be even with hypocrites, though hell should aid me, rather than the minion should triumph—the pirate shall share their doom!"

He crushed the picture heavily beneath his foot, and gathering the fragments, cast them into the fire. He watched till every particle was reduced to ashes, and then having locked the box returned it to its place in the cabinet; the papers he put away also, and cleared every thing aside—then rang the bell to summon an attendant. While waiting, he wrote upon a small slip of paper and enclosed it in an envelope; and, on the servant appearing, directed that it should be delivered immediately. The letter was addressed to the Hon. Silas Edgerton.

CHAPTER XII.
MIDNIGHT JOURNEYS.

Austin and his cousin lay unconscious upon the cold pavement. The soldier, no other than the enemy of Gonsalvo, was Arnold Gascomber, and appeared under as many aliases as there was days in the week. He was stretched close by, and unable to move from the effects of a heavy blow on the temple, yet he strained his eyes in the direction of the sleepers, and uttered a low groan as the cloth was laid upon their faces, and a heavy breathing proceeded from their lips; but he, too, soon imagined that constables and sheriffs were after him, and he slept quite as soundly as if he were in Elysium, counting over his money bags, and portioning to his two young companions the inheritance to which they were legally entitled to.

Silas Edgerton and his companions now proceeded to dispose of their captives in their own peculiar way; and, after a little hesitation, the leader raised Costardo in his arms, and carried him a short distance; then returning, he ordered the two others to be placed in a wagon, and comfortably housed—the wagon was at the door of a hotel close by, and a couple of spirited horses in waiting. After a little bustle, the prizes were placed as directed, and the whole party seating themselves, the wagon started.

Costardo was left behind. It was not Edgerton's policy to entrap him, but he found it necessary to act as he did, to perform his work the more skillfully. He was not at all ignorant of their great attachment, having baited around them for a considerable time, and becoming fully acquainted with all their haunts, and hence in order to secure Austin, he must temporarily act so with Costardo.

It was night morning when the horses drew up before a quiet country mansion, and the leader, dressed as an officer of the Union army, approached the entrance. His companions were dressed also in the same garb as subordinates, and carried rifles, haversacks, and the general accou-

trements, which soldiers carry on the line of march; one remained on duty before the wagon, and the rest, with reversed arms, followed their commanding officer. They stood to attention before the house, and the owner opening the door bowed respectfully. Edgerton presented him with his commission, duly sealed by the General-in-chief, and endorsed by the civil authorities at Washington; purporting, "that, pursuant to certain information received, the arrest and transportation of the above-named prisoners was enforced, and entrusted to Colonel Benjamin Shirley to be conducted to Fortress Monroe."

They entered, and in a little while the prisoners were located in the best sleeping-room their host could afford, while the rest helped themselves to the good things which were soon prepared. During the early part of the day, the Colonel related with some warmth the popular scenes of the war—told anecdotes portraying the peculiar characters of the different commanders—eulogizing their bravery, and displayed in a great measure his own ability and enterprise. The jovial farmer was delighted, and having inquired whether his guest was married, to which he was answered in the negative; he politely, and with a little embarrassment, affirmed that he had three daughters, all of whom were comely, and wondered why they could not procure husbands.

It was evening when they departed. Austin and his companion were now led forth handcuffed, and took their seats in the wagon. The others seated themselves on either side, and they proceeded on their way. For a time a profound silence was observed, when at last, Austin addressed the leader in a quiet and meaningful tone:—
"Sir, as you appear to be the commandant, pray tell us the nature of this strange abduction; and by what authority it is executed? We don't believe that gold should purchase the honor of such a man as we judge you to be; nevertheless, the public law don't sanction such unaccountable arrest as this. We await your answer, Sir?"

"Believe and be saved," blantly ejaculated Edgerton. "We know our duty perfectly, and mean to perform it. Your places are those of criminals, and you must be silent and submissive. Ask no more."

"Our places are honorable, sir," said Austin, with a little pride, "and yours, from your method of your performance, must necessarily appear in the light you speak of. None skulk in the darkness, but those who fear detection, and again I say that your position is a criminal one." Edgerton laughed in derision, though a little piqued, and said in careless tones:—
"See here, lad. The best policy is to be silent. It matters not to us if you are disposed to be stubborn, your heads shall answer our purpose just as well as if we delivered you alive; our business is to conduct you to your destination in no particular way, only so that your heads are presented. Do you hear, boy?—your heads."

Austin looked upon him disdainfully, and his companion more than once prayed him to be still; but he disregarded his injunctions and replied:—
"I thought so, your occupation instead of being a soldier is a hireling, thank God. The Army is free from the contamination of one scoundrel; but I suppose that your absence is counteracted in another way, and still calculated to do injury—be it so, such men as you need not trouble yourselves about honorable pursuits; enough villainy is performed to enable you to live handsomely, without the labor of honest exertion, and you are a credit to your employers. Your element is villainy—too subtle for honor, too cowardly for the felon, and too mean for the spy."

Austin spoke in anger, and as he finished, he turned a scornful glance upon Edgerton. The latter was too full to speak; but he fixed himself in such a position as to strike Austin with his sword—his companion rose a little and looked upon him with a significant air, and sat down—Edgerton resumed his seat, and remained quietly.

They travelled all night, and by morning they began to look around for some place of rest and entertainment; but the country afforded no such expectation. Our friends kept silently transfixed, and with much interest took note of the surrounding landscape—the old man evidently settled in his thoughts, and planning in his mind some means of release, and Austin now and then watched his face with hope, and depended wholly on his conclusions. They arrived early in the day at a country seat, and were soon comfortably located.

Austin and his companion were placed in an apartment by themselves, with a soldier to report their movements and conversation; and each were obliged to sit apart with the sentry between them. A week passed in this mode of living, until the old man was fatigued in waiting, and determined to contrive some means of escape. He knew perfectly the nature of the men he had to deal with. They arrived at a small village one forenoon, and located in the usual way. The sentry was in his place when the soldier began his operations. Austin had already perceived that something was in his mind, and watched with interest.

"Tobacco, sir, if your please," he observed, and having received it, resumed—
"A weary ride this, and so long. New Orleans is a strange place, and I