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ELLEN CLARE.

BY MISS AGNES STRICKLAND.

Concluded.

"She came hither, my lord, in search of you as we suppose, the evening on which you met my Lady Mowbray to the castle; but she has never been in her right mind since."
"Which that I am?" cried Lord Mowbray, "and that child?" "My lord, he was born on the following day. His poor mamma had hard travail, and was sore distressed in mind; for when my daughter and I, like the women in holy writ, who thought to comfort Rachel, brought the sweet babe to her, and told her she had borne a living and a lovely boy, she replied, in Rachel's very words, 'Call him Be-noni, or the son of sorrow.'"

Lord Mowbray smothered the babe to his bosom, and burst into a passion of tears. "Poor deserted one!" murmured he, "thou shalt be the more dearly cherished, for that I can never compensate the wrongs which I have done to thee and thy hapless mother." "Ah!" shrieked Ellen, who had recognized him, for that loud voice had power to pierce through the cloud that had fallen on her benighted mind, "he is there! It is Mowbray, who has come to behold the ruin he has wrought. Ah, Frederic, I am not like what I was when you called me your beautiful, your only beloved."

How could you say my face was fair,
And yet that face forsake?
How could you win my virgin heart?
Then leave that heart to break.

They tell me I am mad, Frederic. I wish, indeed, I were, for then I might forget you, and what you said to the lady in the lilac satin, and grand white feathers. I have no fine white feathers, Mowbray; if I had, perhaps you would love me still, for I am young and fairer than she. Her eyes are small, and of a dull grey colour—mine are of the darkest hazel. Her hair is red, and you were wont to praise black hair, and to say no hair could be more black and glossy than mine. Its jetty hue is still unchanged. Ask the raven that sits croaking on the thorn opposite the window, if his wing can match it. But you must not mind me, for I am talking very foolishly. Indeed, I never knew that I was fair till you told me so, Mowbray, and then I was only too proud. But I was wrong to believe you, for you have told me much that was untrue; ay, and you have sworn falsely too, for you swore that you would make me your wife, but you have wedded another, and left me to die unpitied."
"Say not so, Ellen, in a hoarse and broken voice." "Oh, Ellen, you have not suffered more than I do now." "Oh, no, no," cried Ellen, laughing bitterly; "you must not tell me so. You cannot tell the pangs of a dishonoured maiden, in the day when her glory is turned to reproach and shame. You cannot feel the distraction of the guilty one who has brought infamy on her father's house, and covered his grey hairs with shame, as I have done; and above all, Mowbray, what should you know of the agonies of the unwedded mother, who has brought the brand of contempt and disgrace upon the son of her bosom?—you have felt nothing of this—yet it is all your work." "Spare me, Ellen, for the love of heaven!" cried Lord Mowbray, dashing his clenched hand against his brow with frantic violence. "I fancy you are going to be mad too," said Ellen, "but then remember it was not my cruelty that made you so." "No, my poor injured Ellen, not you, but the pangs of remorse, which are harder to bear than all you have told me," said Lord Mowbray. "Ha!" shrieked Ellen; "have they found you, betrayer? Then, indeed, will you be punished; for the pangs of remorse are sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of soul and body; but, Mowbray, cruel Mowbray, the stings of falsehood are sharper still."

Lord Mowbray bowed his face upon the bosom of his infant, and wept audibly. The unheeded Sarah, and her daughter sobbed aloud in sympathy of the sufferings of Ellen and their young lord's distress, and the babe whose slumbers had been dispelled by the violence of his father's grief, uttered a feeble and wailing

cry. The appeal was not lost on the heart of the young mother. She raised herself from the pillow with an expression of maternal tenderness and solicitude beaming in her lately rayless and wandering eyes, which restored to them much, very much, of their former beauty. The looks of those lovely dark eyes, which had once been as the loadstars of Mowbray's soul, had indeed been dimmed by excessive weeping, but there was still the perfect moulding of exquisitely marked and snowy lids, with their jetty fringes, which neither sickness nor sorrow could change, and he thought, as she turned them with a look of melancholy fondness on her infant, that he had never seen eyes so beautiful; yet the latent fire of phrenzy lurked in their troubled brightness. "My child," she murmured, "bring him to me Phoebe; I know wherefore he laments, but I cannot relieve him. Other mothers can play the sweet office of a nurse, to their offspring, but this was denied to me; the fountain of maternal nourishment has been turned to tears," she added, pressing her burning hands upon her bosom, "yet I cannot weep now; Sarah weeps, Phoebe weeps, my little one weeps, even Mowbray weeps, but I do not, I have no tears left; I have exhausted them all, and my brain seems as though it were on fire. Mowbray, it is a very dreadful thing to be mad. I am ill, very ill. There is a strange whirl and confusion in my mind, and my memory seems departing from me. They say I have a fever, and people, when they are suffering from such complaints, are subject to painful illusions. A young man in our village, who died of the typhus fever, told me, when I came to bring him nice things, 'that he had a sort of horror upon his mind, which he called 'a waking night-mare'; and he fancied too, that his sweetheart had played him false, and caused his illness; and yet it was not so, for she died of the same fever, and which she had caught while nursing him, and they were both buried in one grave. And perhaps—oh, my beloved Frederic, it is the fantasy of my fever which makes me think you might have wrought my woe. Life of my life! forgive me for the thought. You wrong your poor, fond, confiding Ellen. Oh, no! come near, my own Mowbray, my husband. Nay, do not start and turn away, nor weep so bitterly. I remember it all now. This is your fine castle of Rosecourt, of which you used to tell me so much. The proud Earl, your father is dead, and you are now the Lord of Rosecourt, and I am your Countess. I have borne you an heir. He is the Lord Viscount Mowbray; now Phoebe remember you are to call my baby, my lord. Frederic, you are weeping, but I am going where there is neither sorrow nor shedding of tears. Hark, I am called! Frederic, listen! Did you not hear the voice that said to my spirit, 'Come away!'?" "Other people hear a voice. I feel it—a deep unearthly voice, that thrills through every pulse and nerve, 'Come away!' I cannot stay with you, if I would. It is to my father I am going."

She raised herself up in the bed, and stretching forth her arms, exclaimed, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee—'"

The unfinished sentence died away on her quivering lips, the faint hectic faded from her cheek, and the wild light which had irradiated her large dark eyes vanished, and the raised lid dropped languidly over their glassy orbs, as she sunk back with a low, deep-breathed sigh upon the pillow.

Lord Mowbray, with a fearful apprehension of the truth, raised her in his arms, and resting her cold cheek upon his bosom, conjured her to look up and speak once more; but the call, the unearthly summons of which she spake had been obeyed—it was that of death.

There was a deep and breathless pause, broken only by the stifled sobs of the women, while Lord Mowbray gazed in fearless agony on the victims of his selfish passions, the lifeless mother and the motherless babe. "Yes, oh, my poor murdered Ellen!" he said, "I would not, if I could, recall thee to life, unless I could restore to thee the spotless innocence and cloudless peace of which I cruelly

deprived thee. Thou hast escaped from the gulf of shame and sorrow into which I was the means of plunging thee; and would, my lovely and only beloved one, fly by thy side, as cold and calm as thee! But no! I could not hope to share the rest into which thou hast entered there is no peace for the wicked."

Here a sort of altercation was heard in the outer apartment between Colton and some one who appeared to be demanding admittance, and at length these words were spoken in a passionate tone of distress—"She is here, and nothing earthly shall prevent my seeing her;" and at the same moment the door of the chamber of death was burst open.

Lord Mowbray turned fiercely to the intruder, with intent to demand his business; but, as if smitten by the bolt of heaven, fell prostrate in a swoon at the feet of him who now entered—it was the father of Ellen. "And is it thus we meet, my child?" exclaimed the venerable man, throwing himself on the bed, and clasping the lifeless form of his daughter almost have awakened a responsive pang in the still, cold breast that had ceased to vibrate to the shrill of agony.

As for Lord Mowbray, when the return of long-suspended animation recalled him once more to a full consciousness of the tortures of remorse, he fiercely reviled those who were administering restoratives to him, and dashing himself with frantic violence upon the ground, exclaimed, "Why did you not leave me to die?" "Thy death," said the bereaved father, "can neither heal the hearts which thou hast broken, nor repair the ruin thou hast wrought." "You cannot say anything which can increase my self-reproach, or add bitterness to the agonies of remorse under which I at present suffer," cried Lord Mowbray. "I dare not hope for your forgiveness, though I supplicate for it thus lowly in the dust." "Kneel not to an erring fellow creature, but to your offended God, young man!" cried Mr. Clare; for you have nothing to dread—not even the language of reproach. It is not for the minister of the gospel to speak of wrath, but mercy. Go, and sin no more."

Lord Mowbray was more deeply humbled by the generous forbearance of the man whom he had so irreparably injured, than if the severest punishment had been inflicted upon him by the fat'er of his victim. Hitherto the fountain of the old man's grief had been locked up; but when Phoebe, who had silently watched her moment, approached, and placed the infant of his lost Ellen in his arms, his stern and solemn sorrow melted into tenderness, and his tears fell fast upon its innocent face. "Come to my arms, thou sinless child of sin and shame!" he exclaimed. "Thou art precious in my sight for thy dear mother's sake, although thy birth has brought her maiden glory to the dust, and covered my grey hairs with dishonour. Thou shall go with me, dear babe; and, while I live, shall never want a father's love, though the long grass will soon wave over thy mother's grave." "The child is mine," interrupted Lord Mowbray, with passionate vehemence; "let him remain with me, and I will undertake that he shall have the education and fortune that befit the son of a nobleman." "My lord," said Mr. Clare, "you are a married man, and this child might prove a cause of contention between yourself and Lady Mowbray; but while I live he shall never be reproached with his mother's fault. You say that you will give him the breeding meet for a nobleman's son, I will give him that of a humble Christian; and while I possess a morsel of bread to share with him, I will not receive on his account, any thing that is in your gift."

Lord Mowbray would have made arrangements respecting the funeral of Ellen, but her father replied, "No, my lord, it shall not be; poor as I am, I shall find means to provide my unhappy daughter with a grave, without being indebted to the charity of him who has brought her there."

Lord Mowbray had fondly anticipated glory in his military career, but he arrived in the Peninsula only to share in the hardships of the

disastrous retreat to Corunna. He had sighed for laurels, and at length he gathered them; but it was on that fatal plain where victory was only the herald of flight. He returned to England with the loss of an arm, broken in constitution, and with a settled gloom on his mind, to take possession of the estates and earldom of Rosecourt, to which his father's recent demise entitled him; but the first news that greeted him there, was, that his wife had died in giving birth to a son, who had only lived to receive a name, and was laid, with his mother, in the family vault of the proud Mowbrays.

Lord Mowbray had married this lady in compliance with his father's commands, while his affections were centred in the beautiful but lonely girl to whom he had pledged his fatal vows. But the amiable qualities of Lady Mowbray had won his esteem; his connexions had aggrandized his family, and he had reckoned on enjoying years of quiet happiness in her society, and on seeing a lovely offspring growing up around him, who would carry down his honours to posterity. It was not to be—neither peace nor domestic ties were in store for him.

A long and dangerous illness, brought on by distress of mind, next attacked him, and during the weary hours of his protracted convalescence, conscience was perpetually reminding him that his punishment, however heavy and hard to be borne, was less in proportion than his crimes had merited, and his lonely pillow was incessantly haunted with troubled dreams and self-upbraiding thoughts of Ellen Clare and her child. That child, did it still live? dear! he longed to be permitted to see and embrace it once more? The strong yearnings of parental instinct had been powerfully awakened in his breast by this infant, even in that dark and sorrowful hour in which he first became conscious of its existence; and now that he had been bereaved of every other tie on earth, he clung to its idea with the most impassioned tenacity. At last his feverish longings to behold it once more became so overpowering, that as soon as it was possible to endure the fatigue of travelling, he ordered four horses to his post chaise, and scarcely tarried on the road for rest or refreshment till he found himself self once more in the precincts of Mr. Clare's humble parsonage. Two years only had elapsed since the day when he had parted with the luckless Ellen, but they had been marked with events which had converted them into an age of woe, and scattered grey hairs prematurely among his golden ringlets. It was with a fainting and irresolute hand that he knocked at the lowly portal. His summons was unanswered; and after repeating it several times in vain, finding the door was on the latch, and feeling himself unable to conquer impatience, which now became painfully mingled with alarm, he entered, and turned towards Mr. Clare's study, for he was only too familiar with the ways of the house. His hand was already on the lock, when the voice of lamentation from within struck his ear. He started and turned pale. It was the passionate burst of female sorrow, apparently in that abandonment of woe which refuses comfort. He thought of Ellen, but her broken heart was mingled with the dust; of her child—of his child; on the doubtful possibility of whose existence he had dated to build dearest schemes of earthly happiness amidst the darkness and desolation of his soul; and, forgetful of every other consideration, he entered the room unannounced, and stood for a moment an unnoticed spectator of a scene which for ever extinguished the trembling hope that had lingered within his bosom.

The light was partially excluded from the room by the half-closed shutters, but the slanting beams of the setting sun stole through the feathery wreaths of climatic which mantled over the casement, and, entering the apartment, notwithstanding all obstruction, cast a brightening glory on the silvery locks and pale countenance of Ellen's father, who was kneeling beside a little coffin, over which Phoebe Colton was bending in a mournful attitude, while her tears fell fast on the face of a beautiful dead infant, in whose cold hands she was placing the last pale roses of the year.