



The CASTLES *of*
ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE
BY ANN RADCLIFFE

Chapter 7

THLOUISA, Baroness Malcolm, was the descendant of an ancient and honourable house in Switzerland. Her father, the Marquis de St. Claire, inherited all those brave qualities, and that stern virtue, which had so eminently distinguished his ancestors. Early in life he lost a wife whom he tenderly loved, and he seemed to derive his sole consolation from the education of the dear children she had left behind. His son, whom he had brought up to the arms himself so honourably bore, fell before he reached his nineteenth year, in the service of his country; an elder daughter died in infancy; Louisa was his sole surviving child. His chateau was situated in one of those delightful vallies of the Swiss cantons, in which the beautiful and the sublime are so happily united; where the magnificent features of the scenery are contrasted, and their effect heightened by the blooming luxuriance of woods and pasturage, by the gentle winding of the stream, and the peaceful aspect of the cottage. The Marquis was now retired from the service, for grey age had overtaken him. His residence was the resort of foreigners of distinction, who, attracted by the united talents of the soldier and the philosopher, under his roof partook of the hospitality so characteristic of his country. Among the visitors of this description was the late Baron Malcolm, brother to the present Chief, who then travelled through Switzerland. The beauty of Louisa, embellished by the elegance of a mind highly cultivated, touched his heart, and he solicited her hand in marriage. The manly sense of the Baron, and the excellencies of his disposition, had not passed unobserved, or unapproved by the Marquis; while the graces of his person, and of his mind, had anticipated for him, in the heart of Louisa, a pre-eminence over every other suitor. The Marquis had but one objection to the marriage; this was likewise the objection of Louisa: neither the one nor the other could endure the idea of the distance which was to separate them. Louisa was to the Marquis the last prop of his declining years; the Marquis was to Louisa the father and the friend to whom her heart had hitherto been solely devoted, and from whom it could not now be torn but with an anguish equal to its attachment. This remained an insurmountable obstacle, till it was removed by the tenderness of the Baron, who entreated the Marquis to quit Switzerland, and reside with his daughter in Scotland. The attachment of the Marquis to his natal land, and the pride of hereditary dominion, was too powerful to suffer him to acquiesce in the proposal without much struggle of contending feelings. The desire of securing the happiness of his child, by a union with a character so excellent as the Baron's, and of seeing her settled before death should deprive her of the protection of a father, at length subdued every other consideration, and he resigned the hand of his daughter to the Baron Malcolm. The Marquis adjusted his affairs, and consigning his estates to the care of trusty agents, bade a last adieu to his beloved country; that country which, during



sixty years, had been the principal scene of his happiness, and of his regrets. The course of years had not obliterated from his heart the early affections of his youth: he took a sad farewell of that grave which enclosed the reliques of his wife, from which it was not his least effort to depart, and whither he ordered that his remains should be conveyed. Louisa quitted Switzerland with a concern scarcely less acute than that of her father; the poignancy of which, however, was greatly softened by the tender assiduities of her Lord, whose affectionate attentions hourly heightened her esteem, and encreased her love.

They arrived at Scotland without any accident, where the Baron welcomed Louisa as the mistress of his domains. The Marquis de St. Claire had apartments in the castle, where the evening of his days declined in peaceful happiness. Before his death, he had the pleasure of seeing his race renewed in the children of the Baroness, in a son who was called by the name of the Marquis, and in a daughter who now shared with her mother the sorrows of confinement. On the death of the Marquis it was necessary for the Baron to visit Switzerland, in order to take possession of his estates, and to adjust some affairs which a long absence had deranged. He attended the remains of the Marquis to their last abode. The Baroness, desirous of once more beholding her native country, and anxious to pay a last respect to the memory of her father, entrusted her children to the care of a faithful old servant, whom she had brought with her from the Vallois, and who had been the nurse of her early childhood, and accompanied the Baron to the continent. Having deposited the remains of the Marquis according to his wish in the tomb of his wife, and arranged their affairs, they returned to Scotland, where the first intelligence they received on their arrival at the castle, was of the death of their son, and of the old nurse his attendant. The servant had died soon after their departure; the child only a fortnight before their return. This disastrous event affected equally the Baron and his lady, who never ceased to condemn herself for having entrusted her son to the care of servants. Time, however subdued the poignancy of this affliction, but came fraught with another yet more acute; this was the death of the Baron, who, in the pride of youth, constituting the felicity of his family, and of his people, was killed by a fall from his horse, which he received in hunting. He left the Baroness and an only daughter to bewail with unceasing sorrow his loss.

The paternal estates devolved of course to his only brother, the present Baron, whose character formed a mournful and striking contrast to that of the deceased Lord. All his personal property, which was considerable, with the estates in Switzerland, he bequeathed to his beloved wife and daughter. The new Baron, immediately on the demise of his brother, took possession of the castle, but allowed the Baroness, with a part of her suit, to remain its inhabitant till the expiration of the year. The Baroness, absorbed in grief, still loved to recall, in the scene of her late felicity, the image of her Lord, and to linger in his former haunts. This motive, together with the necessity of preparation for a journey to Switzerland, induced her to accept the offer of the Baron.

The memory of his brother had quickly faded from the mind of Malcolm, whose attention appeared to be wholly occupied by schemes of avarice and ambition. His arrogance, and boundless love of power, embroiled him with the neighbouring Chiefs, and engaged him in continual hostility. He seldom visited the Baroness; when he did, his manner was cold, and even haughty. The Baroness, shocked to receive such treatment from the brother of her deceased Lord, and reduced to feel herself an unwelcome guest in that castle which she had been accustomed to consider as her own, determined to set off for the continent



immediately, and seek, in the solitudes of her native mountains, an asylum from the frown of insulting power. The contrast of character between the brothers drew many a sigh of bitter recollection from her heart, and added weight to the sorrows which already oppressed it. She gave orders, therefore, to her domestics, to prepare for immediate departure; but was soon after told that the Baron had forbade them to obey the command. Astonished at this circumstance, she had not time to demand an explanation, ere a message from Malcolm required a few moments private conversation. The messenger was followed almost instantly by the Baron, who entered the apartment with hurried steps, his countenance overspread with the dark purposes of his soul. "I come, Madam," said he, in a voice stern and determined, "to inform you, that you quit not this castle. The estates which you call yours, are mine; and; think not that I shall neglect to prosecute my claim. The frequent and ill-timed generousities of my brother, have diminished the value of the lands which are mine by inheritance; and I have therefore an indispensable right to repay myself from those estates which he acquired with you. In point of justice, he possessed not the right of devising these estates, and I shall not suffer myself to be deceived by the evasions of the law; resign, therefore, the will, which remains only a record of unjust wishes, and ineffectual claims. When the receipts from your estates have satisfied my demands, they shall again be yours. The apartments you now inhabit shall remain your own; but beyond the wall of this castle you shall not pass; for I will not, by suffering your departure, afford you an opportunity of contesting those rights which I can enforce without opposition."

Overcome with astonishment and dread, the Baroness was for some time deprived of all power of reply. At length, roused by the spirit of indignation, "I am too well informed, my Lord," said she, "of my just claims to the lands in question; and know also too well the value of that integrity which is now no more, to credit your bold assertions; they serve only to unveil to me the darkness of a character, cruel and rapacious; whose boundless avarice, trampling on the barriers of justice and humanity, seizes on the right of the defenceless widow, and on the portion of the unresisting orphan. This, my Lord, you are permitted to do; they have no means of resistance; but think not to impose on me by a sophistical assertion of right, or to gloss the villainy of your conduct with the colours of justice; the artifice is beneath the desperate force of your character, and is not sufficiently specious to deceive the discernment of virtue. From being your prisoner I have no means of escaping; but never, my Lord, will I resign into your hands that will which is the efficient bond of my rights, and the last sad record of the affection of my departed Lord." Grief closed her lips. The Baron denouncing vengeance on her resistance, his features inflamed with rage, quitted the apartment. The Baroness was left to lament, with deepening anguish, the stroke which had deprived her of a beloved husband; and reflection gave her the wretchedness of her situation in yet more lively colours. She was now a stranger in a foreign land, deprived by him, of whom she had a right to demand protection, of all her possessions; a prisoner in his castle, without one friend to vindicate her cause, and far remote from any means of appeal to the laws of the country. She wept over the youthful Laura, and while she pressed her with mournful fondness to her bosom, she was confirmed in her resolution never to relinquish that will, by which alone the rights of her injured child could ever be ascertained.

The Baron, bold in iniquity, obtained, by forged powers, the revenues of the foreign estates; and by this means, effectually kept the Baroness in his power, and deprived her of her last resource. Secure

in the possession of the estates, and of the Baroness, he no longer regarded the will as an object of importance; and as she did not attempt any means of escape, or the recovery of her rights, he suffered her to remain undisturbed, and in quiet possession of the will.

The Baroness now passed her days in unvaried sorrow, except in those intervals when she forced her mind from its melancholy subject, and devoted herself to the education of her daughter. The artless efforts of Laura, to assuage the sorrows of her mother, only fixed them in her heart in deeper impression, since they gave to her mind, in stronger tints, the cruelty and oppression to which her tender years were condemned. The progress which she made in music and drawing, and in the lighter subjects of literature, while it pleased the Baroness, who was her sole instructress, brought with it the bitter apprehension, that these accomplishments would probably be buried in the obscurity of a prison; still, however, they were not useless, since they served at present to cheat affliction of many a weary moment, and would in future delude the melancholy hours of solitude. Laura was particularly fond of the lute, which she touched with exquisite sensibility, and whose tender notes were so sweetly in unison with the chords of sorrow, and with those plaintive tones with which she loved to accompany it. While she sung, the Baroness would sit absorbed in recollection, the tears fast falling from her eyes, and she might be said to taste in those moments the luxury of woe.

Malcolm, stung with a sense of guilt, avoided the presence of his injured captive, and sought an asylum from conscience in the busy scenes of war.

Eighteen years had now elapsed since the death of the Baron, and the confinement of Louisa. Time had blunted the point of affliction, though it still retained its venom; but she seldom dared to hope for that which for eighteen years had been with-held. She derived her only consolation from the improvement and the tender sympathy of her daughter, who endeavoured, by every soothing attention, to alleviate the sorrows of her parent.

It was at this period that the Baroness communicated to the Earl the story of her calamities.

The Earl listened with deep attention to the recital. His soul burned with indignation against the Baron, while his heart gave to the sufferings of the fair mourners all that sympathy could ask. Yet he was relieved from a very painful sensation, when he learned that the beauty of Laura had not influenced the conduct of the Baron. Her oppressed situation struck upon his heart the finest touch of pity; and the passion which her beauty and her simplicity had inspired, was strengthened and meliorated by her misfortunes. The fate of his father, and the idea of his own injuries, rushed upon his mind; and, combining with the sufferings of the victims now before him, roused in his soul a storm of indignation, little inferior to that he had suffered in his first interview with the Baron. Every consideration sunk before the impulse of a just revenge; his mind, occupied with the hateful image of the murderer was hardened against danger, and in the first energies of his resentment he would have rushed to the apartment of Malcolm, and striking the sword of justice in his heart, have delivered the earth from a monster, and have resigned himself the willing sacrifice of the action. "Shall the monster live?" cried he, rising from his seat. His step was hurried, and his countenance was stamped with a stern virtue. The Baroness was alarmed, and following him to the door of her apartment, which he had half opened, conjured him to pause for a moment on the dangers that surrounded him. The voice of reason, in the accents of the Baroness, interrupted the hurried tumult of his soul; the illusions of passion disappeared; he recollected that he was ignorant of the apartment of the Baron, and that he had no weapon to assist



his purpose; and he found himself as a traveller on enchanted ground, when the wand of the magician suddenly dissolves the airy scene, and leaves him environed with the horrors of solitude and of darkness.

The Earl returned to his seat hopeless and dejected, and lost to every thing but to the bitterness of disappointment. He forgot where he was, and the lateness of the hour, till reminded by the Baroness of the dangers of a longer stay, when he mournfully bade her good night; and advancing to Laura with timid respect, pressed her hand tenderly to his lips, and retired to his prison.

