

CHAPTER IV

Great Heaven! How frail thy creature Man is made!
How by himself insensibly betrayed!
In our own strength unhappily secure,
Too little cautious of the adverse power,
On pleasure's flowery brink we idly stray,
Masters as yet of our returning way:
Till the strong gusts of raging passion rise,
Till the dire Tempest mingles earth and skies,
And swift into the boundless Ocean borne,
Our foolish confidence too late we mourn:
Round our devoted heads the billows beat,
And from our troubled view the lessening lands retreat.

Prior.

All this while, Ambrosio was unconscious of the dreadful scenes which were passing so near. The execution of his designs upon Antonia employed his every thought. Hitherto, He was satisfied with the success of his plans. Antonia had drank the opiate, was buried in the vaults of St. Clare, and absolutely in his disposal. Matilda, who was well acquainted with the nature and

effects of the soporific medicine, had computed that it would not cease to operate till one in the Morning. For that hour He waited with impatience. The Festival of St. Clare presented him with a favourable opportunity of consummating his crime. He was certain that the Friars and Nuns would be engaged in the Procession, and that He had no cause to dread an interruption: From appearing himself at the head of his Monks, He had desired to be excused. He doubted not, that being beyond the reach of help, cut off from all the world, and totally in his power, Antonia would comply with his desires. The affection which She had ever expressed for him, warranted this persuasion: But He resolved that should She prove obstinate, no consideration whatever should prevent him from enjoying her. Secure from a discovery, He shuddered not at the idea of employing force: If He felt any repugnance, it arose not from a principle of shame or compassion, but from his feeling for Antonia the most sincere and ardent affection, and wishing to owe her favours to no one but herself.

The Monks quitted the Abbey at midnight. Matilda was among the Choristers, and led the chaunt. Ambrosio was left by himself, and at liberty to pursue his own inclinations. Convinced that no one remained behind to watch his motions, or disturb his

pleasures, He now hastened to the Western Aisles. His heart beating with hope not unmingled with anxiety, He crossed the Garden, unlocked the door which admitted him into the Cemetery, and in a few minutes He stood before the Vaults. Here He paused.

He looked round him with suspicion, conscious that his business was unfit for any other eye. As He stood in hesitation, He heard the melancholy shriek of the screech-Owl: The wind rattled loudly against the windows of the adjacent Convent, and as the current swept by him, bore with it the faint notes of the chaunt of Choristers. He opened the door cautiously, as if fearing to be overheard: He entered; and closed it again after him.

Guided by his Lamp, He threaded the long passages, in whose windings Matilda had instructed him, and reached the private Vault which contained his sleeping Mistress.

Its entrance was by no means easy to discover: But this was no obstacle to Ambrosio, who at the time of Antonia's Funeral had observed it too carefully to be deceived. He found the door, which was unfastened, pushed it open, and descended into the dungeon. He approached the humble Tomb in which Antonia reposed. He had provided himself with an iron crow and a pick-axe; But this precaution was unnecessary. The Grate was

slightly fastened on the outside: He raised it, and placing the Lamp upon its ridge, bent silently over the Tomb. By the side of three putrid half-corrupted Bodies lay the sleeping Beauty. A lively red, the forerunner of returning animation, had already spread itself over her cheek; and as wrapped in her shroud She reclined upon her funeral Bier, She seemed to smile at the Images of Death around her. While He gazed upon their rotting bones and disgusting figures, who perhaps were once as sweet and lovely, Ambrosio thought upon Elvira, by him reduced to the same state. As the memory of that horrid act glanced upon his mind, it was clouded with a gloomy horror. Yet it served but to strengthen his resolution to destroy Antonia's honour.

'For your sake, Fatal Beauty!' murmured the Monk, while gazing on his devoted prey; 'For your sake, have I committed this murder, and sold myself to eternal tortures. Now you are in my power: The produce of my guilt will at least be mine. Hope not that your prayers breathed in tones of unequalled melody, your bright eyes filled with tears, and your hands lifted in supplication, as when seeking in penitence the Virgin's pardon; Hope not that your moving innocence, your beauteous grief, or all your suppliant arts shall ransom you from my embraces. Before the break of day, mine you must, and mine you shall be!'

He lifted her still motionless from the Tomb: He seated himself upon a bank of Stone, and supporting her in his arms, watched impatiently for the symptoms of returning animation. Scarcely could He command his passions sufficiently, to restrain himself from enjoying her while yet insensible. His natural lust was increased in ardour by the difficulties which had opposed his satisfying it: As also by his long abstinence from Woman, since from the moment of resigning her claim to his love, Matilda had exiled him from her arms for ever.

'I am no Prostitute, Ambrosio;' Had She told him, when in the fullness of his lust He demanded her favours with more than usual earnestness; 'I am now no more than your Friend, and will not be your Mistress. Cease then to solicit my complying with desires, which insult me. While your heart was mine, I gloried in your embraces: Those happy times are past: My person is become indifferent to you, and 'tis necessity, not love, which makes you seek my enjoyment. I cannot yield to a request so humiliating to my pride.'

Suddenly deprived of pleasures, the use of which had made them an absolute want, the Monk felt this restraint severely. Naturally

addicted to the gratification of the senses, in the full vigour of manhood, and heat of blood, He had suffered his temperament to acquire such ascendancy that his lust was become madness. Of his fondness for Antonia, none but the grosser particles remained: He longed for the possession of her person; and even the gloom of the vault, the surrounding silence, and the resistance which He expected from her, seemed to give a fresh edge to his fierce and unbridled desires.

Gradually He felt the bosom which rested against his, glow with returning warmth. Her heart throbbed again; Her blood flowed swifter, and her lips moved. At length She opened her eyes, but still oppressed and bewildered by the effects of the strong opiate, She closed them again immediately. Ambrosio watched her narrowly, nor permitted a movement to escape him. Perceiving that She was fully restored to existence, He caught her in rapture to his bosom, and closely pressed his lips to hers. The suddenness of his action sufficed to dissipate the fumes which obscured Antonia's reason. She hastily raised herself, and cast a wild look round her. The strange Images which presented themselves on every side contributed to confuse her. She put her hand to her head, as if to settle her disordered imagination. At length She took it away, and threw her eyes through the dungeon a

second time. They fixed upon the Abbot's face.

'Where am I?' She said abruptly. 'How came I here? Where is my Mother? Methought, I saw her! Oh! a dream, a dreadful dreadful dream told me But where am I? Let me go! I cannot stay here!'

She attempted to rise, but the Monk prevented her.

'Be calm, lovely Antonia!' He replied; 'No danger is near you: Confide in my protection. Why do you gaze on me so earnestly? Do you not know me? Not know your Friend? Ambrosio?'

'Ambrosio? My Friend? Oh! yes, yes; I remember
But why am I here? Who has brought me? Why are you with me?
Oh! Flora bad me beware ! Here are nothing but Graves,
and Tombs, and Skeletons! This place frightens me! Good Ambrosio
take me away from it, for it recalls my fearful dream! Methought
I was dead, and laid in my grave! Good Ambrosio, take me from
hence. Will you not? Oh! will you not? Do not look on me thus!

Your flaming eyes terrify me! Spare me, Father! Oh! spare me for
God's sake!'

'Why these terrors, Antonia?' rejoined the Abbot, folding her in his arms, and covering her bosom with kisses which She in vain struggled to avoid: 'What fear you from me, from one who adores you? What matters it where you are? This Sepulchre seems to me Love's bower; This gloom is the friendly night of mystery which He spreads over our delights! Such do I think it, and such must my Antonia. Yes, my sweet Girl! Yes! Your veins shall glow with fire which circles in mine, and my transports shall be doubled by your sharing them!'

While He spoke thus, He repeated his embraces, and permitted himself the most indecent liberties. Even Antonia's ignorance was not proof against the freedom of his behaviour. She was sensible of her danger, forced herself from his arms, and her shroud being her only garment, She wrapped it closely round her.

'Unhand me, Father!' She cried, her honest indignation tempered by alarm at her unprotected position; 'Why have you brought me to this place? Its appearance freezes me with horror! Convey me from hence, if you have the least sense of pity and humanity! Let me return to the House which I have quitted I know not how; But stay here one moment longer, I neither will, or ought.'

Though the Monk was somewhat startled by the resolute tone in which this speech was delivered, it produced upon him no other effect than surprize. He caught her hand, forced her upon his knee, and gazing upon her with gloting eyes, He thus replied to her.

'Compose yourself, Antonia. Resistance is unavailing, and I need disavow my passion for you no longer. You are imagined dead: Society is for ever lost to you. I possess you here alone; You are absolutely in my power, and I burn with desires which I must either gratify or die: But I would owe my happiness to yourself. My lovely Girl! My adorable Antonia! Let me instruct you in joys to which you are still a Stranger, and teach you to feel those pleasures in my arms which I must soon enjoy in yours. Nay, this struggling is childish,' He continued, seeing her repell his caresses, and endeavour to escape from his grasp; 'No aid is near: Neither heaven or earth shall save you from my embraces. Yet why reject pleasures so sweet, so rapturous? No one observes us: Our loves will be a secret to all the world: Love and opportunity invite your giving loose to your passions. Yield to them, my Antonia! Yield to them, my lovely Girl! Throw your arms thus fondly round me; Join your lips thus closely to

mine! Amidst all her gifts, has Nature denied her most precious, the sensibility of Pleasure? Oh! impossible! Every feature, look, and motion declares you formed to bless, and to be blessed yourself! Turn not on me those supplicating eyes: Consult your own charms; They will tell you that I am proof against entreaty.

Can I relinquish these limbs so white, so soft, so delicate; These swelling breasts, round, full, and elastic! These lips fraught with such inexhaustible sweetness? Can I relinquish these treasures, and leave them to another's enjoyment? No, Antonia; never, never! I swear it by this kiss, and this! and this!

With every moment the Friar's passion became more ardent, and Antonia's terror more intense. She struggled to disengage herself from his arms: Her exertions were unsuccessful; and finding that Ambrosio's conduct became still freer, She shrieked for assistance with all her strength. The aspect of the Vault, the pale glimmering of the Lamp, the surrounding obscurity, the sight of the Tomb, and the objects of mortality which met her eyes on either side, were ill-calculated to inspire her with those emotions by which the Friar was agitated. Even his caresses terrified her from their fury, and created no other sentiment than fear. On the contrary, her alarm, her evident

disgust, and incessant opposition, seemed only to inflame the Monk's desires, and supply his brutality with additional strength. Antonia's shrieks were unheard: Yet She continued them, nor abandoned her endeavours to escape, till exhausted and out of breath She sank from his arms upon her knees, and once more had recourse to prayers and supplications. This attempt had no better success than the former. On the contrary, taking advantage of her situation, the Ravisher threw himself by her side: He clasped her to his bosom almost lifeless with terror, and faint with struggling. He stifled her cries with kisses, treated her with the rudeness of an unprincipled Barbarian, proceeded from freedom to freedom, and in the violence of his lustful delirium, wounded and bruised her tender limbs. Heedless of her tears, cries and entreaties, He gradually made himself Master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till He had accomplished his crime and the dishonour of Antonia.

Scarcely had He succeeded in his design than He shuddered at himself and the means by which it was effected. The very excess of his former eagerness to possess Antonia now contributed to inspire him with disgust; and a secret impulse made him feel how base and unmanly was the crime which He had just committed. He started hastily from her arms. She, who so lately had been the

object of his adoration, now raised no other sentiment in his heart than aversion and rage. He turned away from her; or if his eyes rested upon her figure involuntarily, it was only to dart upon her looks of hate. The Unfortunate had fainted ere the completion of her disgrace: She only recovered life to be sensible of her misfortune. She remained stretched upon the earth in silent despair: The tears chased each other slowly down her cheeks, and her bosom heaved with frequent sobs. Oppressed with grief, She continued for some time in this state of torpidity. At length She rose with difficulty, and dragging her feeble steps towards the door, prepared to quit the dungeon.

The sound of her footsteps roused the Monk from his sullen apathy. Starting from the Tomb against which He reclined, while his eyes wandered over the images of corruption contained in it, He pursued the Victim of his brutality, and soon overtook her. He seized her by the arm, and violently forced her back into the dungeon.

'Whither go you?' He cried in a stern voice; 'Return this instant!'

Antonia trembled at the fury of his countenance.

'What, would you more?' She said with timidity: 'Is not my ruin completed? Am I not undone, undone for ever? Is not your cruelty contented, or have I yet more to suffer? Let me depart. Let me return to my home, and weep unrestrained my shame and my affliction!'

'Return to your home?' repeated the Monk, with bitter and contemptuous mockery; Then suddenly his eyes flaming with passion, 'What? That you may denounce me to the world? That you may proclaim me an Hypocrite, a Ravisher, a Betrayer, a Monster of cruelty, lust, and ingratitude? No, no, no! I know well the whole weight of my offences; Well that your complaints would be too just, and my crimes too notorious! You shall not from hence to tell Madrid that I am a Villain; that my conscience is loaded with sins which make me despair of Heaven's pardon. Wretched Girl, you must stay here with me! Here amidst these lonely Tombs, these images of Death, these rotting loathsome corrupted bodies! Here shall you stay, and witness my sufferings; witness what it is to die in the horrors of despondency, and breathe the last groan in blasphemy and curses! And who am I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal Witch! was it not

thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul into infamy? Have you not made me a perjured Hypocrite, a Ravisher, an Assassin! Nay, at this moment, does not that angel look bid me despair of God's forgiveness? Oh! when I stand before his judgment-throne, that look will suffice to damn me! You will tell my Judge that you were happy, till I saw you; that you were innocent, till I polluted you! You will come with those tearful eyes, those cheeks pale and ghastly, those hands lifted in supplication, as when you sought from me that mercy which I gave not! Then will my perdition be certain! Then will come your Mother's Ghost, and hurl me down into the dwellings of Fiends, and flames, and Furies, and everlasting torments! And 'tis you, who will accuse me! 'Tis you, who will cause my eternal anguish! You, wretched Girl! You! You!

As He thundered out these words, He violently grasped Antonia's arm, and spurned the earth with delirious fury.

Supposing his brain to be turned, Antonia sank in terror upon her knees: She lifted up her hands, and her voice almost died away, ere She could give it utterance.

'Spare me! Spare me!' She murmured with difficulty.

'Silence!' cried the Friar madly, and dashed her upon the ground----

He quitted her, and paced the dungeon with a wild and disordered air. His eyes rolled fearfully: Antonia trembled whenever She met their gaze. He seemed to meditate on something horrible, and She gave up all hopes of escaping from the Sepulchre with life. Yet in harbouring this idea, She did him injustice. Amidst the horror and disgust to which his soul was a prey, pity for his Victim still held a place in it. The storm of passion once over, He would have given worlds had He possest them, to have restored to her that innocence of which his unbridled lust had deprived her. Of the desires which had urged him to the crime, no trace was left in his bosom: The wealth of India would not have tempted him to a second enjoyment of her person. His nature seemed to revolt at the very idea, and fain would He have wiped from his memory the scene which had just past. As his gloomy rage abated, in proportion did his compassion augment for Antonia. He stopped, and would have spoken to her words of comfort; But He knew not from whence to draw them, and remained gazing upon her with mournful wildness. Her situation seemed so hopeless, so woebegone, as to baffle mortal power to relieve

her. What could He do for her? Her peace of mind was lost, her honour irreparably ruined. She was cut off for ever from society, nor dared He give her back to it. He was conscious that were She to appear in the world again, his guilt would be revealed, and his punishment inevitable. To one so laden with crimes, Death came armed with double terrors. Yet should He restore Antonia to light, and stand the chance of her betraying him, how miserable a prospect would present itself before her. She could never hope to be creditably established; She would be marked with infamy, and condemned to sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence. What was the alternative? A resolution far more terrible for Antonia, but which at least would insure the Abbot's safety. He determined to leave the world persuaded of her death, and to retain her a captive in this gloomy prison: There He proposed to visit her every night, to bring her food, to profess his penitence, and mingle his tears with hers. The Monk felt that this resolution was unjust and cruel; but it was his only means to prevent Antonia from publishing his guilt and her own infamy. Should He release her, He could not depend upon her silence: His offence was too flagrant to permit his hoping for her forgiveness. Besides, her reappearing would excite universal curiosity, and the violence of her affliction would prevent her from concealing its cause.

He determined therefore, that Antonia should remain a Prisoner in the dungeon.

He approached her with confusion painted on his countenance. He raised her from the ground. Her hand trembled, as He took it, and He dropped it again as if He had touched a Serpent. Nature seemed to recoil at the touch. He felt himself at once repulsed from and attracted towards her, yet could account for neither sentiment. There was something in her look which penetrated him with horror; and though his understanding was still ignorant of it, Conscience pointed out to him the whole extent of his crime. In hurried accents yet the gentlest He could find, while his eye was averted, and his voice scarcely audible, He strove to console her under a misfortune which now could not be avoided. He declared himself sincerely penitent, and that He would gladly shed a drop of his blood, for every tear which his barbarity had forced from her. Wretched and hopeless, Antonia listened to him in silent grief: But when He announced her confinement in the Sepulchre, that dreadful doom to which even death seemed preferable roused her from her insensibility at once. To linger out a life of misery in a narrow loathsome Cell, known to exist by no human Being save her Ravisher, surrounded by mouldering Corpses, breathing the pestilential air of corruption, never more

to behold the light, or drink the pure gale of heaven, the idea was more terrible than She could support. It conquered even her abhorrence of the Friar. Again She sank upon her knees: She besought his compassion in terms the most pathetic and urgent. She promised, would He but restore her to liberty, to conceal her injuries from the world; to assign any reason for her reappearance which He might judge proper; and in order to prevent the least suspicion from falling upon him, She offered to quit Madrid immediately. Her entreaties were so urgent as to make a considerable impression upon the Monk. He reflected that as her person no longer excited his desires, He had no interest in keeping her concealed as He had at first intended; that He was adding a fresh injury to those which She had already suffered; and that if She adhered to her promises, whether She was confined or at liberty, his life and reputation were equally secure. On the other hand, He trembled lest in her affliction Antonia should unintentionally break her engagement; or that her excessive simplicity and ignorance of deceit should permit some one more artful to surprize her secret. However well-founded were these apprehensions, compassion, and a sincere wish to repair his fault as much as possible solicited his complying with the prayers of his Suppliant. The difficulty of colouring Antonia's unexpected return to life, after her supposed death and public interment,

was the only point which kept him irresolute. He was still pondering on the means of removing this obstacle, when He heard the sound of feet approaching with precipitation. The door of the Vault was thrown open, and Matilda rushed in, evidently much confused and terrified.

On seeing a Stranger enter, Antonia uttered a cry of joy: But her hopes of receiving succour from him were soon dissipated. The supposed Novice, without expressing the least surprize at finding a Woman alone with the Monk, in so strange a place, and at so late an hour, addressed him thus without losing a moment.

'What is to be done, Ambrosio? We are lost, unless some speedy means is found of dispelling the Rioters. Ambrosio, the Convent of St. Clare is on fire; The Prioress has fallen a victim to the fury of the Mob. Already is the Abbey menaced with a similar fate. Alarmed at the threats of the People, the Monks seek for you everywhere. They imagine that your authority alone will suffice to calm this disturbance. No one knows what is become of you, and your absence creates universal astonishment and despair. I profited by the confusion, and fled hither to warn you of the danger.'

'This will soon be remedied,' answered the Abbot; 'I will hasten back to my Cell: a trivial reason will account for my having been missed.'

'Impossible!' rejoined Matilda: 'The Sepulchre is filled with Archers. Lorenzo de Medina, with several Officers of the Inquisition, searches through the Vaults, and pervades every passage. You will be intercepted in your flight; Your reasons for being at this late hour in the Sepulchre will be examined; Antonia will be found, and then you are undone for ever!'

'Lorenzo de Medina? Officers of the Inquisition? What brings them here? Seek they for me? Am I then suspected? Oh! speak, Matilda! Answer me, in pity!'

'As yet they do not think of you, but I fear that they will ere long. Your only chance of escaping their notice rests upon the difficulty of exploring this Vault. The door is artfully hidden:

Haply it may not be observed, and we may remain concealed till the search is over.'

'But Antonia Should the Inquisitors draw near, and her

cries be heard'

'Thus I remove that danger!' interrupted Matilda.

At the same time drawing a poignard, She rushed upon her devoted prey.

'Hold! Hold!' cried Ambrosio, seizing her hand, and wresting from it the already lifted weapon. 'What would you do, cruel Woman? The Unfortunate has already suffered but too much, thanks to your pernicious consels! Would to God that I had never followed them!

Would to God that I had never seen your face!"

Matilda darted upon him a look of scorn.

'Absurd!' She exclaimed with an air of passion and majesty which impressed the Monk with awe. 'After robbing her of all that made it dear, can you fear to deprive her of a life so miserable? But 'tis well! Let her live to convince you of your folly. I abandon you to your evil destiny! I disclaim your alliance! Who trembles to commit so insignificant a crime, deserves not my protection. Hark! Hark! Ambrosio; Hear you not the Archers?

They come, and your destruction is inevitable!

At this moment the Abbot heard the sound of distant voices. He flew to close the door on whose concealment his safety depended, and which Matilda had neglected to fasten. Ere He could reach it, He saw Antonia glide suddenly by him, rush through the door, and fly towards the noise with the swiftness of an arrow. She had listened attentively to Matilda: She heard Lorenzo's name mentioned, and resolved to risque every thing to throw herself under his protection. The door was open. The sounds convinced her that the Archers could be at no great distance. She mustered up her little remaining strength, rushed by the Monk ere He perceived her design, and bent her course rapidly towards the voices. As soon as He recovered from his first surprize, the Abbot failed not to pursue her. In vain did Antonia redouble her speed, and stretch every nerve to the utmost. Her Enemy gained upon her every moment: She heard his steps close after her, and felt the heat of his breath glow upon her neck. He overtook her; He twisted his hand in the ringlets of her streaming hair, and attempted to drag her back with him to the dungeon. Antonia resisted with all her strength: She folded her arms round a Pillar which supported the roof, and shrieked loudly for assistance. In vain did the Monk strive to threaten her to

silence.

'Help!' She continued to exclaim; 'Help! Help! for God's sake!'

Quickened by her cries, the sound of footsteps was heard approaching. The Abbot expected every moment to see the Inquisitors arrive. Antonia still resisted, and He now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman. He still grasped Matilda's dagger: Without allowing himself a moment's reflection, He raised it, and plunged it twice in the bosom of Antonia! She shrieked, and sank upon the ground. The Monk endeavoured to bear her away with him, but She still embraced the Pillar firmly. At that instant the light of approaching Torches flashed upon the Walls. Dreading a discovery, Ambrosio was compelled to abandon his Victim, and hastily fled back to the Vault, where He had left Matilda.

He fled not unobserved. Don Ramirez happening to arrive the first, perceived a Female bleeding upon the ground, and a Man flying from the spot, whose confusion betrayed him for the Murderer. He instantly pursued the Fugitive with some part of the Archers, while the Others remained with Lorenzo to protect the wounded Stranger. They raised her, and supported her in their

arms. She had fainted from excess of pain, but soon gave signs of returning life. She opened her eyes, and on lifting up her head, the quantity of fair hair fell back which till then had obscured her features.

'God Almighty! It is Antonia!'

Such was Lorenzo's exclamation, while He snatched her from the Attendant's arms, and clasped her in his own.

Though aimed by an uncertain hand, the poignard had answered but too well the purpose of its Employer. The wounds were mortal, and Antonia was conscious that She never could recover. Yet the few moments which remained for her were moments of happiness. The concern exprest upon Lorenzo's countenance, the frantic fondness of his complaints, and his earnest enquiries respecting her wounds, convinced her beyond a doubt that his affections were her own. She would not be removed from the Vaults, fearing lest motion should only hasten her death; and She was unwilling to lose those moments which She past in receiving proofs of Lorenzo's love, and assuring him of her own. She told him that had She still been undefiled She might have lamented the loss of life; But that deprived of honour and branded with shame, Death

was to her a blessing: She could not have been his Wife, and that hope being denied her, She resigned herself to the Grave without one sigh of regret. She bad him take courage, conjured him not to abandon himself to fruitless sorrow, and declared that She mourned to leave nothing in the whole world but him. While every sweet accent increased rather than lightened Lorenzo's grief, She continued to converse with him till the moment of dissolution. Her voice grew faint and scarcely audible; A thick cloud spread itself over her eyes; Her heart beat slow and irregular, and every instant seemed to announce that her fate was near at hand.

She lay, her head reclining upon Lorenzo's bosom, and her lips still murmuring to him words of comfort. She was interrupted by the Convent Bell, as tolling at a distance, it struck the hour. Suddenly Antonia's eyes sparkled with celestial brightness: Her frame seemed to have received new strength and animation. She started from her Lover's arms.

'Three o'clock!' She cried; 'Mother, I come!'

She clasped her hands, and sank lifeless upon the ground.

Lorenzo in agony threw himself beside her: He tore his hair,

beat his breast, and refused to be separated from the Corse. At length his force being exhausted, He suffered himself to be led from the Vault, and was conveyed to the Palace de Medina scarcely more alive than the unfortunate Antonia.

In the meanwhile, though closely pursued, Ambrosio succeeded in regaining the Vault. The Door was already fastened when Don Ramirez arrived, and much time elapsed, ere the Fugitive's retreat was discovered. But nothing can resist perseverance. Though so artfully concealed, the Door could not escape the vigilance of the Archers. They forced it open, and entered the Vault to the infinite dismay of Ambrosio and his Companion. The Monk's confusion, his attempt to hide himself, his rapid flight, and the blood sprinkled upon his cloaths, left no room to doubt his being Antonia's Murderer. But when He was recognized for the immaculate Ambrosio, 'The Man of Holiness,' the Idol of Madrid, the faculties of the Spectators were chained up in surprize, and scarcely could they persuade themselves that what they saw was no vision. The Abbot strove not to vindicate himself, but preserved a sullen silence. He was secured and bound. The same precaution was taken with Matilda: Her Cowl being removed, the delicacy of her features and profusion of her golden hair betrayed her sex, and this incident created fresh amazement. The dagger was also

found in the Tomb, where the Monk had thrown it; and the dungeon having undergone a thorough search, the two Culprits were conveyed to the prisons of the Inquisition.

Don Ramirez took care that the populace should remain ignorant both of the crimes and profession of the Captives. He feared a repetition of the riots which had followed the apprehending the Prioress of St. Clare. He contented himself with stating to the Capuchins the guilt of their Superior. To avoid the shame of a public accusation, and dreading the popular fury from which they had already saved their Abbey with much difficulty, the Monks readily permitted the Inquisitors to search their Mansion without noise. No fresh discoveries were made. The effects found in the Abbot's and Matilda's Cells were seized, and carried to the Inquisition to be produced in evidence. Every thing else remained in its former position, and order and tranquillity once more prevailed through Madrid.

St. Clare's Convent was completely ruined by the united ravages of the Mob and conflagration. Nothing remained of it but the principal Walls, whose thickness and solidity had preserved them from the flames. The Nuns who had belonged to it were obliged in consequence to disperse themselves into other Societies: But

the prejudice against them ran high, and the Superiors were very unwilling to admit them. However, most of them being related to Families the most distinguished for their riches birth and power, the several Convents were compelled to receive them, though they did it with a very ill grace. This prejudice was extremely false and unjustifiable: After a close investigation, it was proved that All in the Convent were persuaded of the death of Agnes, except the four Nuns whom St. Ursula had pointed out. These had fallen Victims to the popular fury; as had also several who were perfectly innocent and unconscious of the whole affair. Blinded by resentment, the Mob had sacrificed every Nun who fell into their hands: They who escaped were entirely indebted to the Duke de Medina's prudence and moderation. Of this they were conscious, and felt for that Nobleman a proper sense of gratitude.

Virginia was not the most sparing of her thanks: She wished equally to make a proper return for his attentions, and to obtain the good graces of Lorenzo's Uncle. In this She easily succeeded.

The Duke beheld her beauty with wonder and admiration; and while his eyes were enchanted with her Form, the sweetness of her manners and her tender concern for the suffering Nun prepossessed

his heart in her favour. This Virginia had discernment enough to perceive, and She redoubled her attention to the Invalid. When He parted from her at the door of her Father's Palace, the Duke entreated permission to enquire occasionally after her health.

His request was readily granted: Virginia assured him that the Marquis de Villa-Franca would be proud of an opportunity to thank him in person for the protection afforded to her. They now separated, He enchanted with her beauty and gentleness, and She much pleased with him and more with his Nephew.

On entering the Palace, Virginia's first care was to summon the family Physician, and take care of her unknown charge. Her Mother hastened to share with her the charitable office. Alarmed by the riots, and trembling for his Daughter's safety, who was his only child, the Marquis had flown to St. Clare's Convent, and was still employed in seeking her. Messengers were now dispatched on all sides to inform him that He would find her safe at his Hotel, and desire him to hasten thither immediately. His absence gave Virginia liberty to bestow her whole attention upon her Patient; and though much disordered herself by the adventures of the night, no persuasion could induce her to quit the bedside of the Sufferer. Her constitution being much enfeebled by want and sorrow, it was some time before the

Stranger was restored to her senses. She found great difficulty in swallowing the medicines prescribed to her: But this obstacle being removed, She easily conquered her disease which proceeded from nothing but weakness. The attention which was paid her, the wholesome food to which She had been long a Stranger, and her joy at being restored to liberty, to society, and, as She dared to hope, to Love, all this combined to her speedy re-establishment.

From the first moment of knowing her, her melancholy situation, her sufferings almost unparalleled had engaged the affections of her amiable Hostess: Virginia felt for her the most lively interest; But how was She delighted, when her Guest being sufficiently recovered to relate her History, She recognized in the captive Nun the Sister of Lorenzo!

This victim of monastic cruelty was indeed no other than the unfortunate Agnes. During her abode in the Convent, She had been well known to Virginia: But her emaciated form, her features altered by affliction, her death universally credited, and her overgrown and matted hair which hung over her face and bosom in disorder at first had prevented her being recollected. The Prioress had put every artifice in practice to induce Virginia to take the veil; for the Heiress of Villa-Franca would have been no

despicable acquisition. Her seeming kindness and unremitting attention so far succeeded that her young Relation began to think seriously upon compliance. Better instructed in the disgust and ennui of a monastic life, Agnes had penetrated the designs of the Domina: She trembled for the innocent Girl, and endeavoured to make her sensible of her error. She painted in their true colours the numerous inconveniencies attached to a Convent, the continued restraint, the low jealousies, the petty intrigues, the servile court and gross flattery expected by the Superior. She then bad Virginia reflect on the brilliant prospect which presented itself before her: The Idol of her Parents, the admiration of Madrid, endowed by nature and education with every perfection of person and mind, She might look forward to an establishment the most fortunate. Her riches furnished her with the means of exercising in their fullest extent, charity and benevolence, those virtues so dear to her; and her stay in the world would enable her discovering Objects worthy her protection, which could not be done in the seclusion of a Convent.

Her persuasions induced Virginia to lay aside all thoughts of the Veil: But another argument, not used by Agnes, had more weight with her than all the others put together. She had seen Lorenzo,

when He visited his Sister at the Grate. His Person pleased her, and her conversations with Agnes generally used to terminate in some question about her Brother. She, who doted upon Lorenzo, wished for no better than an opportunity to trumpet out his praise. She spoke of him in terms of rapture; and to convince her Auditor how just were his sentiments, how cultivated his mind, and elegant his expressions, She showed her at different times the letters which She received from him. She soon perceived that from these communications the heart of her young Friend had imbibed impressions, which She was far from intending to give, but was truly happy to discover. She could not have wished her Brother a more desirable union: Heiress of Villa-Franca, virtuous, affectionate, beautiful, and accomplished, Virginia seemed calculated to make him happy. She sounded her Brother upon the subject, though without mentioning names or circumstances. He assured her in his answers that his heart and hand were totally disengaged, and She thought that upon these grounds She might proceed without danger. She in consequence endeavoured to strengthen the dawning passion of her Friend. Lorenzo was made the constant topic of her discourse; and the avidity with which her Auditor listened, the sighs which frequently escaped from her bosom, and the eagerness with which upon any digression She brought back the conversation to the

subject whence it had wandered, sufficed to convince Agnes that her Brother's addresses would be far from disagreeable. She at length ventured to mention her wishes to the Duke: Though a Stranger to the Lady herself, He knew enough of her situation to think her worthy his Nephew's hand. It was agreed between him and his Niece, that She should insinuate the idea to Lorenzo, and She only waited his return to Madrid to propose her Friend to him as his Bride. The unfortunate events which took place in the interim, prevented her from executing her design. Virginia wept her loss sincerely, both as a Companion, and as the only Person to whom She could speak of Lorenzo. Her passion continued to prey upon her heart in secret, and She had almost determined to confess her sentiments to her Mother, when accident once more threw their object in her way. The sight of him so near her, his politeness, his compassion, his intrepidity, had combined to give new ardour to her affection. When She now found her Friend and Advocate restored to her, She looked upon her as a Gift from Heaven; She ventured to cherish the hope of being united to Lorenzo, and resolved to use with him his Sister's influence.

Supposing that before her death Agnes might possibly have made the proposal, the Duke had placed all his Nephew's hints of marriage to Virginia's account: Consequently, He gave them the

most favourable reception. On returning to his Hotel, the relation given him of Antonia's death, and Lorenzo's behaviour on the occasion, made evident his mistake. He lamented the circumstances; But the unhappy Girl being effectually out of the way, He trusted that his designs would yet be executed. 'Tis true that Lorenzo's situation just then ill-suited him for a Bridegroom. His hopes disappointed at the moment when He expected to realize them, and the dreadful and sudden death of his Mistress had affected him very severely. The Duke found him upon the Bed of sickness. His Attendants expressed serious apprehensions for his life; But the Uncle entertained not the same fears. He was of opinion, and not unwisely, that 'Men have died, and worms have eat them; but not for Love!' He therefore flattered himself that however deep might be the impression made upon his Nephew's heart, Time and Virginia would be able to efface it. He now hastened to the afflicted Youth, and endeavoured to console him: He sympathised in his distress, but encouraged him to resist the encroachments of despair. He allowed that He could not but feel shocked at an event so terrible, nor could He blame his sensibility; But He besought him not to torment himself with vain regrets, and rather to struggle with affliction, and preserve his life, if not for his own sake, at least for the sake of those who were fondly attached to him.

While He laboured thus to make Lorenzo forget Antonia's loss, the Duke paid his court assiduously to Virginia, and seized every opportunity to advance his Nephew's interest in her heart.

It may easily be expected that Agnes was not long without enquiring after Don Raymond. She was shocked to hear the wretched situation to which grief had reduced him; Yet She could not help exulting secretly, when She reflected, that his illness proved the sincerity of his love. The Duke undertook the office himself, of announcing to the Invalid the happiness which awaited him. Though He omitted no precaution to prepare him for such an event, at this sudden change from despair to happiness Raymond's transports were so violent, as nearly to have proved fatal to him. These once passed, the tranquillity of his mind, the assurance of felicity, and above all the presence of Agnes, (Who was no sooner reestablished by the care of Virginia and the Marchioness, than She hastened to attend her Lover) soon enabled him to overcome the effects of his late dreadful malady. The calm of his soul communicated itself to his body, and He recovered with such rapidity as to create universal surprize.

No so Lorenzo. Antonia's death accompanied with such terrible circumstances weighed upon his mind heavily. He was worn down to

a shadow. Nothing could give him pleasure. He was persuaded with difficulty to swallow nourishment sufficient for the support of life, and a consumption was apprehended. The society of Agnes formed his only comfort. Though accident had never permitted their being much together, He entertained for her a sincere friendship and attachment. Perceiving how necessary She was to him, She seldom quitted his chamber. She listened to his complaints with unwearied attention, and soothed him by the gentleness of her manners, and by sympathising with his distress. She still inhabited the Palace de Villa-Franca, the Possessors of which treated her with marked affection. The Duke had intimated to the Marquis his wishes respecting Virginia. The match was unexceptionable: Lorenzo was Heir to his Uncle's immense property, and was distinguished in Madrid for his agreeable person, extensive knowledge, and propriety of conduct: Add to this, that the Marchioness had discovered how strong was her Daughter's prepossession in his favour.

In consequence the Duke's proposal was accepted without hesitation: Every precaution was taken to induce Lorenzo's seeing the Lady with those sentiments which She so well merited to excite. In her visits to her Brother Agnes was frequently accompanied by the Marchioness; and as soon as He was able to

move into his Antichamber, Virginia under her mother's protection was sometimes permitted to express her wishes for his recovery. This She did with such delicacy, the manner in which She mentioned Antonia was so tender and soothing, and when She lamented her Rival's melancholy fate, her bright eyes shone so beautiful through her tears, that Lorenzo could not behold, or listen to her without emotion. His Relations, as well as the Lady, perceived that with every day her society seemed to give him fresh pleasure, and that He spoke of her in terms of stronger admiration. However, they prudently kept their observations to themselves. No word was dropped which might lead him to suspect their designs. They continued their former conduct and attention, and left Time to ripen into a warmer sentiment the friendship which He already felt for Virginia.

In the mean while, her visits became more frequent; and latterly there was scarce a day, of which She did not pass some part by the side of Lorenzo's Couch. He gradually regained his strength, but the progress of his recovery was slow and doubtful. One evening He seemed to be in better spirits than usual: Agnes and her Lover, the Duke, Virginia, and her Parents were sitting round him. He now for the first time entreated his Sister to inform him how She had escaped the effects of the poison which St.

Ursula had seen her swallow. Fearful of recalling those scenes to his mind in which Antonia had perished, She had hitherto concealed from him the history of her sufferings. As He now started the subject himself, and thinking that perhaps the narrative of her sorrows might draw him from the contemplation of those on which He dwelt too constantly, She immediately complied with his request. The rest of the company had already heard her story; But the interest which all present felt for its Heroine made them anxious to hear it repeated. The whole society seconding Lorenzo's entreaties, Agnes obeyed. She first recounted the discovery which had taken place in the Abbey Chapel, the Domina's resentment, and the midnight scene of which St. Ursula had been a concealed witness. Though the Nun had already described this latter event, Agnes now related it more circumstantially and at large: After which She proceeded in her narrative as follows.

Conclusion of the History of Agnes de Medina

My supposed death was attended with the greatest agonies. Those moments which I believed my last, were embittered by the Domina's assurances that I could not escape perdition; and as my eyes closed, I heard her rage exhale itself in curses on my offence.

The horror of this situation, of a death-bed from which hope was banished, of a sleep from which I was only to wake to find myself the prey of flames and Furies, was more dreadful than I can describe. When animation revived in me, my soul was still impressed with these terrible ideas: I looked round with fear, expecting to behold the Ministers of divine vengeance. For the first hour, my senses were so bewildered, and my brain so dizzy, that I strove in vain to arrange the strange images which floated in wild confusion before me. If I endeavoured to raise myself from the ground, the wandering of my head deceived me. Every thing around me seemed to rock, and I sank once more upon the earth. My weak and dazzled eyes were unable to bear a nearer approach to a gleam of light which I saw trembling above me. I was compelled to close them again, and remain motionless in the same posture.

A full hour elapsed, before I was sufficiently myself to examine the surrounding Objects. When I did examine them, what terror filled my bosom I found myself extended upon a sort of wicker Couch: It had six handles to it, which doubtless had served the Nuns to convey me to my grave. I was covered with a linen cloth:

Several faded flowers were strown over me: On one side lay a

small wooden Crucifix; On the other, a Rosary of large Beads.

Four low narrow walls confined me. The top was also covered, and in it was practised a small grated Door: Through this was admitted the little air which circulated in this miserable place. A faint glimmering of light which streamed through the Bars, permitted me to distinguish the surrounding horrors. I was oppressed by a noisome suffocating smell; and perceiving that the grated door was unfastened, I thought that I might possibly effect my escape. As I raised myself with this design, my hand rested upon something soft: I grasped it, and advanced it towards the light. Almighty God! What was my disgust, my consternation! In spite of its putridity, and the worms which preyed upon it, I perceived a corrupted human head, and recognised the features of a Nun who had died some months before!

I threw it from me, and sank almost lifeless upon my Bier.

When my strength returned, this circumstance, and the consciousness of being surrounded by the loathsome and mouldering Bodies of my Companions, increased my desire to escape from my fearful prison. I again moved towards the light. The grated door was within my reach: I lifted it without difficulty; Probably it had been left unclosed to facilitate my quitting the

dungeon. Aiding myself by the irregularity of the Walls some of whose stones projected beyond the rest, I contrived to ascend them, and drag myself out of my prison. I now found Myself in a Vault tolerably spacious. Several Tombs, similar in appearance to that whence I had just escaped, were ranged along the sides in order, and seemed to be considerably sunk within the earth. A sepulchral Lamp was suspended from the roof by an iron chain, and shed a gloomy light through the dungeon. Emblems of Death were seen on every side: Skulls, shoulder-blades, thigh-bones, and other leavings of Mortality were scattered upon the dewy ground. Each Tomb was ornamented with a large Crucifix, and in one corner stood a wooden Statue of St. Clare. To these objects I at first paid no attention: A Door, the only outlet from the Vault, had attracted my eyes. I hastened towards it, having wrapped my winding-sheet closely round me. I pushed against the door, and to my inexpressible terror found that it was fastened on the outside.

I guessed immediately that the Prioress, mistaking the nature of the liquor which She had compelled me to drink, instead of poison had administered a strong Opiate. From this I concluded that being to all appearance dead I had received the rites of burial; and that deprived of the power of making my existence known, it

would be my fate to expire of hunger. This idea penetrated me with horror, not merely for my own sake, but that of the innocent Creature, who still lived within my bosom. I again endeavoured to open the door, but it resisted all my efforts. I stretched my voice to the extent of its compass, and shrieked for aid: I was remote from the hearing of every one: No friendly voice replied to mine. A profound and melancholy silence prevailed through the Vault, and I despaired of liberty. My long abstinence from food now began to torment me. The tortures which hunger inflicted on me, were the most painful and insupportable: Yet they seemed to increase with every hour which past over my head. Sometimes I threw myself upon the ground, and rolled upon it wild and desperate: Sometimes starting up, I returned to the door, again strove to force it open, and repeated my fruitless cries for succour. Often was I on the point of striking my temple against the sharp corner of some Monument, dashing out my brains, and thus terminating my woes at once; But still the remembrance of my Baby vanquished my resolution: I trembled at a deed which equally endangered my Child's existence and my own. Then would I vent my anguish in loud exclamations and passionate complaints; and then again my strength failing me, silent and hopeless I would sit me down upon the base of St. Clare's Statue, fold my arms, and abandon myself to sullen despair. Thus passed several

wretched hours. Death advanced towards me with rapid strides, and I expected that every succeeding moment would be that of my dissolution. Suddenly a neighbouring Tomb caught my eye: A Basket stood upon it, which till then I had not observed. I started from my seat: I made towards it as swiftly as my exhausted frame would permit. How eagerly did I seize the Basket, on finding it to contain a loaf of coarse bread and a small bottle of water.

I threw myself with avidity upon these humble aliments. They had to all appearance been placed in the Vault for several days; The bread was hard, and the water tainted; Yet never did I taste food to me so delicious. When the cravings of appetite were satisfied, I busied myself with conjectures upon this new circumstance: I debated whether the Basket had been placed there with a view to my necessity. Hope answered my doubts in the affirmative. Yet who could guess me to be in need of such assistance? If my existence was known, why was I detained in this gloomy Vault? If I was kept a Prisoner, what meant the ceremony of committing me to the Tomb? Or if I was doomed to perish with hunger, to whose pity was I indebted for provisions placed within my reach? A Friend would not have kept my dreadful punishment a secret; Neither did it seem probable that an Enemy

would have taken pains to supply me with the means of existence. Upon the whole I was inclined to think that the Domina's designs upon my life had been discovered by some one of my Partizans in the Convent, who had found means to substitute an opiate for poison: That She had furnished me with food to support me, till She could effect my delivery: And that She was then employed in giving intelligence to my Relations of my danger, and pointing out a way to release me from captivity. Yet why then was the quality of my provisions so coarse? How could my Friend have entered the Vault without the Domina's knowledge? And if She had entered, why was the Door fastened so carefully? These reflections staggered me: Yet still this idea was the most favourable to my hopes, and I dwelt upon it in preference.

My meditations were interrupted by the sound of distant footsteps. They approached, but slowly. Rays of light now darted through the crevices of the Door. Uncertain whether the Persons who advanced came to relieve me, or were conducted by some other motive to the Vault, I failed not to attract their notice by loud cries for help. Still the sounds drew near: The light grew stronger: At length with inexpressible pleasure I heard the Key turning in the Lock. Persuaded that my deliverance was at hand, I flew towards the Door with a shriek of joy. It

opened: But all my hopes of escape died away, when the Prioress appeared followed by the same four Nuns, who had been witnesses of my supposed death. They bore torches in their hands, and gazed upon me in fearful silence.

I started back in terror. The Domina descended into the Vault, as did also her Companions. She bent upon me a stern resentful eye, but expressed no surprize at finding me still living. She took the seat which I had just quitted: The door was again closed, and the Nuns ranged themselves behind their Superior, while the glare of their torches, dimmed by the vapours and dampness of the Vault, gilded with cold beams the surrounding Monuments. For some moments all preserved a dead and solemn silence. I stood at some distance from the Prioress. At length She beckoned me to advance. Trembling at the severity of her aspect my strength scarce sufficed me to obey her. I drew near, but my limbs were unable to support their burthen. I sank upon my knees; I clasped my hands, and lifted them up to her for mercy, but had no power to articulate a syllable.

She gazed upon me with angry eyes.

'Do I see a Penitent, or a Criminal?' She said at length; 'Are

those hands raised in contrition for your crimes, or in fear of meeting their punishment? Do those tears acknowledge the justice of your doom, or only solicit mitigation of your sufferings? I fear me, 'tis the latter!

She paused, but kept her eye still fixt upon mine.

'Take courage;' She continued: 'I wish not for your death, but your repentance. The draught which I administered, was no poison, but an opiate. My intention in deceiving you was to make you feel the agonies of a guilty conscience, had Death overtaken you suddenly while your crimes were still unrepented. You have suffered those agonies: I have brought you to be familiar with the sharpness of death, and I trust that your momentary anguish will prove to you an eternal benefit. It is not my design to destroy your immortal soul; or bid you seek the grave, burthened with the weight of sins unexpiated. No, Daughter, far from it: I will purify you with wholesome chastisement, and furnish you with full leisure for contrition and remorse. Hear then my sentence; The ill-judged zeal of your Friends delayed its execution, but cannot now prevent it. All Madrid believes you to be no more; Your Relations are thoroughly persuaded of your death, and the Nuns your Partizans have

assisted at your funeral. Your existence can never be suspected; I have taken such precautions, as must render it an impenetrable mystery. Then abandon all thoughts of a World from which you are eternally separated, and employ the few hours which are allowed you, in preparing for the next.'

This exordium led me to expect something terrible. I trembled, and would have spoken to deprecate her wrath: but a motion of the Domina commanded me to be silent. She proceeded.

'Though of late years unjustly neglected, and now opposed by many of our misguided Sisters, (whom Heaven convert!) it is my intention to revive the laws of our order in their full force.

That against incontinence is severe, but no more than so monstrous an offence demands: Submit to it, Daughter, without resistance; You will find the benefit of patience and resignation in a better life than this. Listen then to the sentence of St.

Clare. Beneath these Vaults there exist Prisons, intended to receive such criminals as yourself: Artfully is their entrance concealed, and She who enters them, must resign all hopes of liberty. Thither must you now be conveyed. Food shall be supplied you, but not sufficient for the indulgence of appetite: You shall have just enough to keep together body and soul, and

its quality shall be the simplest and coarsest. Weep, Daughter, weep, and moisten your bread with your tears: God knows that you have ample cause for sorrow! Chained down in one of these secret dungeons, shut out from the world and light for ever, with no comfort but religion, no society but repentance, thus must you groan away the remainder of your days. Such are St. Clare's orders; Submit to them without repining. Follow me!

Thunderstruck at this barbarous decree, my little remaining strength abandoned me. I answered only by falling at her feet, and bathing them with tears. The Domina, unmoved by my affliction, rose from her seat with a stately air. She repeated her commands in an absolute tone: But my excessive faintness made me unable to obey her. Mariana and Alix raised me from the ground, and carried me forwards in their arms. The Prioress moved on, leaning upon Violante, and Camilla preceded her with a Torch. Thus passed our sad procession along the passages, in silence only broken by my sighs and groans. We stopped before the principal shrine of St. Clare. The Statue was removed from its Pedestal, though how I knew not. The Nuns afterwards raised an iron grate till then concealed by the Image, and let it fall on the other side with a loud crash. The awful sound, repeated by the vaults above, and Caverns below me, roused me from the

despondent apathy in which I had been plunged. I looked before me: An abyss presented itself to my affrighted eyes, and a steep and narrow Staircase, whither my Conductors were leading me. I shrieked, and started back. I implored compassion, rent the air with my cries, and summoned both heaven and earth to my assistance. In vain! I was hurried down the Staircase, and forced into one of the Cells which lined the Cavern's sides.

My blood ran cold, as I gazed upon this melancholy abode. The cold vapours hovering in the air, the walls green with damp, the bed of Straw so forlorn and comfortless, the Chain destined to bind me for ever to my prison, and the Reptiles of every description which as the torches advanced towards them, I descried hurrying to their retreats, struck my heart with terrors almost too exquisite for nature to bear. Driven by despair to madness, I burst suddenly from the Nuns who held me: I threw myself upon my knees before the Prioress, and besought her mercy in the most passionate and frantic terms.

'If not on me,' said I, 'look at least with pity on that innocent Being, whose life is attached to mine! Great is my crime, but let not my Child suffer for it! My Baby has committed no fault: Oh! spare me for the sake of my unborn Offspring, whom ere it

tastes life your severity dooms to destruction!'

The Prioress drew back haughtily: She forced her habit from my grasp, as if my touch had been contagious.

'What?' She exclaimed with an exasperated air; 'What? Dare you plead for the produce of your shame? Shall a Creature be permitted to live, conceived in guilt so monstrous? Abandoned Woman, speak for him no more! Better that the Wretch should perish than live: Begotten in perjury, incontinence, and pollution, It cannot fail to prove a Prodigy of vice. Hear me, thou Guilty! Expect no mercy from me either for yourself, or Brat. Rather pray that Death may seize you before you produce it; Or if it must see the light, that its eyes may immediately be closed again for ever! No aid shall be given you in your labour; Bring your Offspring into the world yourself, Feed it yourself, Nurse it yourself, Bury it yourself: God grant that the latter may happen soon, lest you receive comfort from the fruit of your iniquity!'

This inhuman speech, the threats which it contained, the dreadful sufferings foretold to me by the Domina, and her prayers for my Infant's death, on whom though unborn I already doated, were more

than my exhausted frame could support. Uttering a deep groan, I fell senseless at the feet of my unrelenting Enemy. I know not how long I remained in this situation; But I imagine that some time must have elapsed before my recovery, since it sufficed the Prioress and her Nuns to quit the Cavern. When my senses returned, I found myself in silence and solitude. I heard not even the retiring footsteps of my Persecutors. All was hushed, and all was dreadful! I had been thrown upon the bed of Straw: The heavy Chain which I had already eyed with terror, was wound around my waist, and fastened me to the Wall. A Lamp glimmering with dull, melancholy rays through my dungeon, permitted my distinguishing all its horrors: It was separated from the Cavern by a low and irregular Wall of Stone: A large Chasm was left open in it which formed the entrance, for door there was none. A leaden Crucifix was in front of my straw Couch. A tattered rug lay near me, as did also a Chaplet of Beads; and not far from me stood a pitcher of water, and a wicker Basket containing a small loaf, and a bottle of oil to supply my Lamp.

With a despondent eye did I examine this scene of suffering: When I reflected that I was doomed to pass in it the remainder of my days, my heart was rent with bitter anguish. I had once been taught to look forward to a lot so different! At one time

my prospects had appeared so bright, so flattering! Now all was lost to me. Friends, comfort, society, happiness, in one moment I was deprived of all! Dead to the world, Dead to pleasure, I lived to nothing but the sense of misery. How fair did that world seem to me, from which I was for ever excluded! How many loved objects did it contain, whom I never should behold again! As I threw a look of terror round my prison, as I shrunk from the cutting wind which howled through my subterraneous dwelling, the change seemed so striking, so abrupt, that I doubted its reality.

That the Duke de Medina's Niece, that the destined Bride of the Marquis de las Cisternas, One bred up in affluence, related to the noblest families in Spain, and rich in a multitude of affectionate Friends, that She should in one moment become a Captive, separated from the world for ever, weighed down with chains, and reduced to support life with the coarsest aliments, appeared a change so sudden and incredible, that I believed myself the sport of some frightful vision. Its continuance convinced me of my mistake with but too much certainty. Every morning my hopes were disappointed. At length I abandoned all idea of escaping: I resigned myself to my fate, and only expected Liberty when She came the Companion of Death.

My mental anguish, and the dreadful scenes in which I had been an Actress, advanced the period of my labour. In solitude and misery, abandoned by all, unassisted by Art, uncomforted by Friendship, with pangs which if witnessed would have touched the hardest heart, was I delivered of my wretched burthen. It came alive into the world; But I knew not how to treat it, or by what means to preserve its existence. I could only bathe it with tears, warm it in my bosom, and offer up prayers for its safety. I was soon deprived of this mournful employment: The want of proper attendance, my ignorance how to nurse it, the bitter cold of the dungeon, and the unwholesome air which inflated its lungs, terminated my sweet Babe's short and painful existence. It expired in a few hours after its birth, and I witnessed its death with agonies which beggar all description.

But my grief was unavailing. My Infant was no more; nor could all my sighs impart to its little tender frame the breath of a moment. I rent my winding-sheet, and wrapped in it my lovely Child. I placed it on my bosom, its soft arm folded round my neck, and its pale cold cheek resting upon mine. Thus did its lifeless limbs repose, while I covered it with kisses, talked to it, wept, and moaned over it without remission, day or night. Camilla entered my prison regularly once every twenty-four hours,

to bring me food. In spite of her flinty nature, She could not behold this spectacle unmoved. She feared that grief so excessive would at length turn my brain, and in truth I was not always in my proper senses. From a principle of compassion She urged me to permit the Corse to be buried: But to this I never would consent. I vowed not to part with it while I had life: Its presence was my only comfort, and no persuasion could induce me to give it up. It soon became a mass of putridity, and to every eye was a loathsome and disgusting Object; To every eye but a Mother's. In vain did human feelings bid me recoil from this emblem of mortality with repugnance: I withstood, and vanquished that repugnance. I persisted in holding my Infant to my bosom, in lamenting it, loving it, adoring it! Hour after hour have I passed upon my sorry Couch, contemplating what had once been my Child: I endeavoured to retrace its features through the livid corruption, with which they were overspread: During my confinement this sad occupation was my only delight; and at that time Worlds should not have bribed me to give it up. Even when released from my prison, I brought away my Child in my arms. The representations of my two kind Friends,"--(Here She took the hands of the Marchioness and Virginia, and pressed them alternately to her lips)--"at length persuaded me to resign my unhappy Infant to the Grave. Yet I parted from it with

reluctance: However, reason at length prevailed; I suffered it to be taken from me, and it now reposes in consecrated ground.

I before mentioned that regularly once a day Camilla brought me food. She sought not to embitter my sorrows with reproach: She bad me, 'tis true, resign all hopes of liberty and worldly happiness; But She encouraged me to bear with patience my temporary distress, and advised me to draw comfort from religion.

My situation evidently affected her more than She ventured to express: But She believed that to extenuate my fault would make me less anxious to repent it. Often while her lips painted the enormity of my guilt in glaring colours, her eyes betrayed, how sensible She was to my sufferings. In fact I am certain that none of my Tormentors, (for the three other Nuns entered my prison occasionally) were so much actuated by the spirit of oppressive cruelty as by the idea that to afflict my body was the only way to preserve my soul. Nay, even this persuasion might not have had such weight with them, and they might have thought my punishment too severe, had not their good dispositions been repress by blind obedience to their Superior. Her resentment existed in full force. My project of elopement having been discovered by the Abbot of the Capuchins, She supposed

herself lowered in his opinion by my disgrace, and in consequence her hate was inveterate. She told the Nuns to whose custody I was committed that my fault was of the most heinous nature, that no sufferings could equal the offence, and that nothing could save me from eternal perdition but punishing my guilt with the utmost severity. The Superior's word is an oracle to but too many of a Convent's Inhabitants. The Nuns believed whatever the Prioress chose to assert: Though contradicted by reason and charity, they hesitated not to admit the truth of her arguments. They followed her injunctions to the very letter, and were fully persuaded that to treat me with lenity, or to show the least pity for my woes, would be a direct means to destroy my chance for salvation.

Camilla, being most employed about me, was particularly charged by the Prioress to treat me with harshness. In compliance with these orders, She frequently strove to convince me, how just was my punishment, and how enormous was my crime: She bad me think myself too happy in saving my soul by mortifying my body, and even threatened me sometimes with eternal perdition. Yet as I before observed, She always concluded by words of encouragement and comfort; and though uttered by Camilla's lips, I easily recognised the Domina's expressions. Once, and once only, the

Prioress visited me in my dungeon. She then treated me with the most unrelenting cruelty: She loaded me with reproaches, taunted me with my frailty, and when I implored her mercy, told me to ask it of heaven, since I deserved none on earth. She even gazed upon my lifeless Infant without emotion; and when She left me, I heard her charge Camilla to increase the hardships of my Captivity. Unfeeling Woman! But let me check my resentment: She has expiated her errors by her sad and unexpected death. Peace be with her; and may her crimes be forgiven in heaven, as I forgive her my sufferings on earth!

Thus did I drag on a miserable existence. Far from growing familiar with my prison, I beheld it every moment with new horror. The cold seemed more piercing and bitter, the air more thick and pestilential. My frame became weak, feverish, and emaciated. I was unable to rise from the bed of Straw, and exercise my limbs in the narrow limits, to which the length of my chain permitted me to move. Though exhausted, faint, and weary, I trembled to profit by the approach of Sleep: My slumbers were constantly interrupted by some obnoxious Insect crawling over me.

Sometimes I felt the bloated Toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging his loathsome length

along my bosom: Sometimes the quick cold Lizard roused me leaving his slimy track upon my face, and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and matted hair: Often have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my Infant. At such times I shrieked with terror and disgust, and while I shook off the reptile, trembled with all a Woman's weakness.

Such was my situation, when Camilla was suddenly taken ill. A dangerous fever, supposed to be infectious, confined her to her bed. Every one except the Lay-Sister appointed to nurse her, avoided her with caution, and feared to catch the disease. She was perfectly delirious, and by no means capable of attending to me. The Domina and the Nuns admitted to the mystery, had latterly given me over entirely to Camilla's care: In consequence, they busied themselves no more about me; and occupied by preparing for the approaching Festival, it is more than probable that I never once entered into their thoughts. Of the reason of Camilla's negligence, I have been informed since my release by the Mother St. Ursula; At that time I was very far from suspecting its cause. On the contrary, I waited for my Gaoler's appearance at first with impatience, and afterwards with despair. One day passed away; Another followed it; The Third

arrived. Still no Camilla! Still no food! I knew the lapse of time by the wasting of my Lamp, to supply which fortunately a week's supply of Oil had been left me. I supposed, either that the Nuns had forgotten me, or that the Domina had ordered them to let me perish. The latter idea seemed the most probable; Yet so natural is the love of life, that I trembled to find it true.

Though embittered by every species of misery, my existence was still dear to me, and I dreaded to lose it. Every succeeding minute proved to me that I must abandon all hopes of relief. I was become an absolute skeleton: My eyes already failed me, and my limbs were beginning to stiffen. I could only express my anguish, and the pangs of that hunger which gnawed my heart-strings, by frequent groans, whose melancholy sound the vaulted roof of the dungeon re-echoed. I resigned myself to my fate: I already expected the moment of dissolution, when my Guardian Angel, when my beloved Brother arrived in time to save me. My sight grown dim and feeble at first refused to recognize him; and when I did distinguish his features, the sudden burst of rapture was too much for me to bear. I was overpowered by the swell of joy at once more beholding a Friend, and that a Friend so dear to me. Nature could not support my emotions, and took her refuge in insensibility.

You already know, what are my obligations to the Family of Villa-Franca: But what you cannot know is the extent of my gratitude, boundless as the excellence of my Benefactors.

Lorenzo! Raymond! Names so dear to me! Teach me to bear with fortitude this sudden transition from misery to bliss. So lately a Captive, opprest with chains, perishing with hunger, suffering every in convenience of cold and want, hidden from the light, excluded from society, hopeless, neglected, and as I feared, forgotten; Now restored to life and liberty, enjoying all the comforts of affluence and ease, surrounded by those who are most loved by me, and on the point of becoming his Bride who has long been wedded to my heart, my happiness is so exquisite, so perfect, that scarcely can my brain sustain the weight. One only wish remains ungratified: It is to see my Brother in his former health, and to know that Antonia's memory is buried in her grave.

Granted this prayer, I have nothing more to desire. I trust, that my past sufferings have purchased from heaven the pardon of my momentary weakness. That I have offended, offended greatly and grievously, I am fully conscious; But let not my Husband, because He once conquered my virtue, doubt the propriety of my future conduct. I have been frail and full of error: But I yielded not to the warmth of constitution; Raymond, affection for you

betrayed me. I was too confident of my strength; But I depended no less on your honour than my own. I had vowed never to see you more: Had it not been for the consequences of that unguarded moment, my resolution had been kept. Fate willed it otherwise, and I cannot but rejoice at its decree. Still my conduct has been highly blameable, and while I attempt to justify myself, I blush at recollecting my imprudence. Let me then dismiss the ungrateful subject; First assuring you, Raymond, that you shall have no cause to repent our union, and that the more culpable have been the errors of your Mistress, the more exemplary shall be the conduct of your Wife.

Here Agnes ceased, and the Marquis replied to her address in terms equally sincere and affectionate. Lorenzo expressed his satisfaction at the prospect of being so closely connected with a Man for whom He had ever entertained the highest esteem. The Pope's Bull had fully and effectually released Agnes from her religious engagements: The marriage was therefore celebrated as soon as the needful preparations had been made, for the Marquis wished to have the ceremony performed with all possible splendour and publicity. This being over, and the Bride having received the compliments of Madrid, She departed with Don Raymond for his Castle in Andalusia: Lorenzo accompanied them, as did also the

Marchioness de Villa-Franca and her lovely Daughter. It is needless to say that Theodore was of the party, and would be impossible to describe his joy at his Master's marriage.

Previous to his departure, the Marquis, to atone in some measure for his past neglect, made some enquiries relative to Elvira.

Finding that She as well as her Daughter had received many services from Leonella and Jacintha, He showed his respect to the memory of his Sister-in-law by making the two Women handsome presents. Lorenzo followed his example--Leonella was highly flattered by the attentions of Noblemen so distinguished, and Jacintha blessed the hour on which her House was bewitched.

On her side, Agnes failed not to reward her Convent Friends.

The worthy Mother St. Ursula, to whom She owed her liberty, was named at her request Superintendent of 'The Ladies of Charity:'

This was one of the best and most opulent Societies throughout Spain. Bertha and Cornelia not choosing to quit their Friend,

were appointed to principal charges in the same establishment.

As to the Nuns who had aided the Domina in persecuting Agnes,

Camilla being confined by illness to her bed, had perished in the

flames which consumed St. Clare's Convent. Mariana, Alix, and

Violante, as well as two more, had fallen victims to the popular

rage. The three Others who in Council had supported the Domina's

sentence, were severely reprimanded, and banished to religious Houses in obscure and distant Provinces: Here they languished away a few years, ashamed of their former weakness, and shunned by their Companions with aversion and contempt.

Nor was the fidelity of Flora permitted to go unrewarded. Her wishes being consulted, She declared herself impatient to revisit her native land. In consequence, a passage was procured for her to Cuba, where She arrived in safety, loaded with the presents of Raymond and Lorenzo.

The debts of gratitude discharged, Agnes was at liberty to pursue her favourite plan. Lodged in the same House, Lorenzo and Virginia were eternally together. The more He saw of her, the more was He convinced of her merit. On her part, She laid herself out to please, and not to succeed was for her impossible.

Lorenzo witnessed with admiration her beautiful person, elegant manners, innumerable talents, and sweet disposition: He was also much flattered by her prejudice in his favour, which She had not sufficient art to conceal. However, his sentiments partook not of that ardent character which had marked his affection for Antonia. The image of that lovely and unfortunate Girl still

lived in his heart, and baffled all Virginia's efforts to displace it. Still when the Duke proposed to him the match, which He wished to earnestly to take place, his Nephew did not reject the offer. The urgent supplications of his Friends, and the Lady's merit conquered his repugnance to entering into new engagements. He proposed himself to the Marquis de Villa- Franca, and was accepted with joy and gratitude. Virginia became his Wife, nor did She ever give him cause to repent his choice. His esteem increased for her daily. Her unremitting endeavours to please him could not but succeed. His affection assumed stronger and warmer colours. Antonia's image was gradually effaced from his bosom; and Virginia became sole Mistress of that heart, which She well deserved to possess without a Partner.

The remaining years of Raymond and Agnes, of Lorenzo and Virginia, were happy as can be those allotted to Mortals, born to be the prey of grief, and sport of disappointment. The exquisite sorrows with which they had been afflicted, made them think lightly of every succeeding woe. They had felt the sharpest darts in misfortune's quiver; Those which remained appeared blunt in comparison. Having weathered Fate's heaviest Storms, they looked calmly upon its terrors: or if ever they felt Affliction's casual gales, they seemed to them gentle as Zephyrs which

breathe over summer-seas.