

CHAPTER III

While in each other's arms entranced They lay,
They blessed the night, and curst the coming day.

Lee.

The burst of transport was past: Ambrosio's lust was satisfied;
Pleasure fled, and Shame usurped her seat in his bosom. Confused
and terrified at his weakness, He drew himself from Matilda's
arms. His perjury presented itself before him: He reflected on
the scene which had just been acted, and trembled at the
consequences of a discovery. He looked forward with horror; His
heart was despondent, and became the abode of satiety and
disgust. He avoided the eyes of his Partner in frailty; A
melancholy silence prevailed, during which Both seemed busied
with disagreeable reflections.

Matilda was the first to break it. She took his hand gently, and
pressed it to her burning lips.

'Ambrosio!' She murmured in a soft and trembling voice.

The Abbot started at the sound. He turned his eyes upon

Matilda's: They were filled with tears; Her cheeks were covered with blushes, and her supplicating looks seemed to solicit his compassion.

'Dangerous Woman!' said He; 'Into what an abyss of misery have you plunged me! Should your sex be discovered, my honour, nay my life, must pay for the pleasure of a few moments. Fool that I was, to trust myself to your seductions! What can now be done? How can my offence be expiated? What atonement can purchase the pardon of my crime? Wretched Matilda, you have destroyed my quiet for ever!'

'To me these reproaches, Ambrosio? To me, who have sacrificed for you the world's pleasures, the luxury of wealth, the delicacy of sex, my Friends, my fortune, and my fame? What have you lost, which I preserved? Have I not shared in YOUR guilt? Have YOU not shared in MY pleasure? Guilt, did I say? In what consists ours, unless in the opinion of an ill-judging World? Let that World be ignorant of them, and our joys become divine and blameless! Unnatural were your vows of Celibacy; Man was not created for such a state; And were Love a crime, God never would have made it so sweet, so irresistible! Then banish those clouds from your brow, my Ambrosio! Indulge in those pleasures freely,

without which life is a worthless gift: Cease to reproach me
with having taught you what is bliss, and feel equal transports
with the Woman who adores you!"

As She spoke, her eyes were filled with a delicious languor. Her
bosom panted: She twined her arms voluptuously round him, drew
him towards her, and glewed her lips to his. Ambrosio again
raged with desire: The die was thrown: His vows were already
broken; He had already committed the crime, and why should He
refrain from enjoying its reward? He clasped her to his breast
with redoubled ardour. No longer repressed by the sense of
shame, He gave a loose to his intemperate appetites. While the
fair Wanton put every invention of lust in practice, every
refinement in the art of pleasure which might heighten the bliss
of her possession, and render her Lover's transports still more
exquisite, Ambrosio rioted in delights till then unknown to him:
Swift fled the night, and the Morning blushed to behold him still
clasped in the embraces of Matilda.

Intoxicated with pleasure, the Monk rose from the Syren's
luxurious Couch. He no longer reflected with shame upon his
incontinence, or dreaded the vengeance of offended heaven. His
only fear was lest Death should rob him of enjoyments, for which

his long Fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite. Matilda was still under the influence of poison, and the voluptuous Monk trembled less for his Preserver's life than his Concubine's. Deprived of her, He would not easily find another Mistress with whom He could indulge his passions so fully, and so safely. He therefore pressed her with earnestness to use the means of preservation which She had declared to be in her possession.

'Yes!' replied Matilda; 'Since you have made me feel that Life is valuable, I will rescue mine at any rate. No dangers shall appall me: I will look upon the consequences of my action boldly, nor shudder at the horrors which they present. I will think my sacrifice scarcely worthy to purchase your possession, and remember that a moment past in your arms in this world o'er-pays an age of punishment in the next. But before I take this step, Ambrosio, give me your solemn oath never to enquire by what means I shall preserve myself.'

He did so in a manner the most binding.

'I thank you, my Beloved. This precaution is necessary, for though you know it not, you are under the command of vulgar

prejudices: The Business on which I must be employed this night, might startle you from its singularity, and lower me in your opinion. Tell me; Are you possessed of the Key of the low door on the western side of the Garden?'

'The Door which opens into the burying-ground common to us and the Sisterhood of St. Clare? I have not the Key, but can easily procure it.'

'You have only this to do. Admit me into the burying-ground at midnight; Watch while I descend into the vaults of St. Clare, lest some prying eye should observe my actions; Leave me there alone for an hour, and that life is safe which I dedicate to your pleasures. To prevent creating suspicion, do not visit me during the day. Remember the Key, and that I expect you before twelve. Hark! I hear steps approaching! Leave me; I will pretend to sleep.'

The Friar obeyed, and left the Cell. As He opened the door, Father Pablos made his appearance.

'I come,' said the Latter, 'to enquire after the health of my young Patient.'

'Hush!' replied Ambrosio, laying his finger upon his lip; 'Speak softly; I am just come from him. He has fallen into a profound slumber, which doubtless will be of service to him. Do not disturb him at present, for He wishes to repose.'

Father Pablos obeyed, and hearing the Bell ring, accompanied the Abbot to Matins. Ambrosio felt embarrassed as He entered the Chapel. Guilt was new to him, and He fancied that every eye could read the transactions of the night upon his countenance. He strove to pray; His bosom no longer glowed with devotion; His thoughts insensibly wandered to Matilda's secret charms. But what He wanted in purity of heart, He supplied by exterior sanctity. The better to cloak his transgression, He redoubled his pretensions to the semblance of virtue, and never appeared more devoted to Heaven as since He had broken through his engagements. Thus did He unconsciously add Hypocrisy to perjury and incontinence; He had fallen into the latter errors from yielding to seduction almost irresistible; But he was now guilty of a voluntary fault by endeavouring to conceal those into which Another had betrayed him.

The Matins concluded, Ambrosio retired to his Cell. The

pleasures which He had just tasted for the first time were still impressed upon his mind. His brain was bewildered, and presented a confused Chaos of remorse, voluptuousness, inquietude, and fear. He looked back with regret to that peace of soul, that security of virtue, which till then had been his portion. He had indulged in excesses whose very idea but four and twenty hours before He had recoiled at with horror. He shuddered at reflecting that a trifling indiscretion on his part, or on Matilda's, would overturn that fabric of reputation which it had cost him thirty years to erect, and render him the abhorrence of that People of whom He was then the Idol. Conscience painted to him in glaring colours his perjury and weakness; Apprehension magnified to him the horrors of punishment, and He already fancied himself in the prisons of the Inquisition. To these tormenting ideas succeeded Matilda's beauty, and those delicious lessons which, once learnt, can never be forgotten. A single glance thrown upon these reconciled him with himself. He considered the pleasures of the former night to have been purchased at an easy price by the sacrifice of innocence and honour. Their very remembrance filled his soul with ecstasy; He cursed his foolish vanity, which had induced him to waste in obscurity the bloom of life, ignorant of the blessings of Love and Woman. He determined at all events to continue his commerce

with Matilda, and called every argument to his aid which might confirm his resolution. He asked himself, provided his irregularity was unknown, in what would his fault consist, and what consequences He had to apprehend? By adhering strictly to every rule of his order save Chastity, He doubted not to retain the esteem of Men, and even the protection of heaven. He trusted easily to be forgiven so slight and natural a deviation from his vows: But He forgot that having pronounced those vows, Incontinence, in Laymen the most venial of errors, became in his person the most heinous of crimes.

Once decided upon his future conduct, his mind became more easy.

He threw himself upon his bed, and strove by sleeping to recruit his strength exhausted by his nocturnal excesses. He awoke refreshed, and eager for a repetition of his pleasures. Obedient to Matilda's order, He visited not her Cell during the day.

Father Pablos mentioned in the Refectory that Rosario had at length been prevailed upon to follow his prescription; But that the medicine had not produced the slightest effect, and that He believed no mortal skill could rescue him from the Grave. With this opinion the Abbot agreed, and affected to lament the untimely fate of a Youth, whose talents had appeared so promising.

The night arrived. Ambrosio had taken care to procure from the Porter the Key of the low door opening into the Cemetery. Furnished with this, when all was silent in the Monastery, He quitted his Cell, and hastened to Matilda's. She had left her bed, and was drest before his arrival.

'I have been expecting you with impatience,' said She; 'My life depends upon these moments. Have you the Key?'

'I have.'

'Away then to the garden. We have no time to lose. Follow me!'

She took a small covered Basket from the Table. Bearing this in one hand, and the Lamp, which was flaming upon the Hearth, in the other, She hastened from the Cell. Ambrosio followed her. Both maintained a profound silence. She moved on with quick but cautious steps, passed through the Cloisters, and reached the Western side of the Garden. Her eyes flashed with a fire and wildness which impressed the Monk at once with awe and horror. A determined desperate courage reigned upon her brow. She gave the Lamp to Ambrosio; Then taking from him the Key, She unlocked

the low Door, and entered the Cemetery. It was a vast and spacious Square planted with yew trees: Half of it belonged to the Abbey; The other half was the property of the Sisterhood of St. Clare, and was protected by a roof of Stone. The Division was marked by an iron railing, the wicket of which was generally left unlocked.

Thither Matilda bent her course. She opened the wicket and sought for the door leading to the subterraneous Vaults, where reposed the mouldering Bodies of the Votaries of St. Clare. The night was perfectly dark; Neither Moon or Stars were visible. Luckily there was not a breath of Wind, and the Friar bore his Lamp in full security: By the assistance of its beams, the door of the Sepulchre was soon discovered. It was sunk within the hollow of a wall, and almost concealed by thick festoons of ivy hanging over it. Three steps of rough-hewn Stone conducted to it, and Matilda was on the point of descending them when She suddenly started back.

'There are People in the Vaults!' She whispered to the Monk;
'Conceal yourself till they are past.

She took refuge behind a lofty and magnificent Tomb, erected in

honour of the Convent's Foundress. Ambrosio followed her example, carefully hiding his Lamp lest its beams should betray them. But a few moments had elapsed when the Door was pushed open leading to the subterraneous Caverns. Rays of light proceeded up the Staircase: They enabled the concealed Spectators to observe two Females drest in religious habits, who seemed engaged in earnest conversation. The Abbot had no difficulty to recognize the Prioress of St. Clare in the first, and one of the elder Nuns in her Companion.

'Every thing is prepared,' said the Prioress; 'Her fate shall be decided tomorrow. All her tears and sighs will be unavailing. No! In five and twenty years that I have been Superior of this Convent, never did I witness a transaction more infamous!'

'You must expect much opposition to your will;' the Other replied in a milder voice; 'Agnes has many Friends in the Convent, and in particular the Mother St. Ursula will espouse her cause most warmly. In truth, She merits to have Friends; and I wish I could prevail upon you to consider her youth, and her peculiar situation. She seems sensible of her fault; The excess of her grief proves her penitence, and I am convinced that her tears flow more from contrition than fear of punishment. Reverend

Mother, would you be persuaded to mitigate the severity of your sentence, would you but deign to overlook this first transgression, I offer myself as the pledge of her future conduct.'

'Overlook it, say you? Mother Camilla, you amaze me! What? After disgracing me in the presence of Madrid's Idol, of the very Man on whom I most wished to impress an idea of the strictness of my discipline? How despicable must I have appeared to the reverend Abbot! No, Mother, No! I never can forgive the insult. I cannot better convince Ambrosio that I abhor such crimes, than by punishing that of Agnes with all the rigour of which our severe laws admit. Cease then your supplications; They will all be unavailing. My resolution is taken: Tomorrow Agnes shall be made a terrible example of my justice and resentment.'

The Mother Camilla seemed not to give up the point, but by this time the Nuns were out of hearing. The Prioress unlocked the door which communicated with St. Clare's Chapel, and having entered with her Companion, closed it again after them.

Matilda now asked, who was this Agnes with whom the Prioress was thus incensed, and what connexion She could have with Ambrosio.

He related her adventure; and He added, that since that time his ideas having undergone a thorough revolution, He now felt much compassion for the unfortunate Nun.

'I design,' said He, 'to request an audience of the Domina tomorrow, and use every means of obtaining a mitigation of her sentence.'

'Beware of what you do!' interrupted Matilda; 'Your sudden change of sentiment may naturally create surprize, and may give birth to suspicions which it is most our interest to avoid. Rather, redouble your outward austerity, and thunder out menaces against the errors of others, the better to conceal your own. Abandon the Nun to her fate. Your interfering might be dangerous, and her imprudence merits to be punished: She is unworthy to enjoy Love's pleasures, who has not wit enough to conceal them. But in discussing this trifling subject I waste moments which are precious. The night flies apace, and much must be done before morning. The Nuns are retired; All is safe. Give me the Lamp, Ambrosio. I must descend alone into these Caverns: Wait here, and if any one approaches, warn me by your voice; But as you value your existence, presume not to follow me. Your life would fall a victim to your imprudent curiosity.'

Thus saying She advanced towards the Sepulchre, still holding her Lamp in one hand, and her little Basket in the other. She touched the door: It turned slowly upon its grating hinges, and a narrow winding staircase of black marble presented itself to her eyes. She descended it. Ambrosio remained above, watching the faint beams of the Lamp as they still proceeded up the stairs. They disappeared, and He found himself in total darkness.

Left to himself He could not reflect without surprize on the sudden change in Matilda's character and sentiments. But a few days had past since She appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as to a superior Being. Now She assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse but ill-calculated to please him. She spoke no longer to insinuate, but command: He found himself unable to cope with her in argument, and was unwillingly obliged to confess the superiority of her judgment. Every moment convinced him of the astonishing powers of her mind: But what She gained in the opinion of the Man, She lost with interest in the affection of the Lover. He regretted Rosario, the fond, the gentle, and submissive: He grieved that Matilda preferred the

virtues of his sex to those of her own; and when He thought of her expressions respecting the devoted Nun, He could not help blaming them as cruel and unfeminine. Pity is a sentiment so natural, so appropriate to the female character, that it is scarcely a merit for a Woman to possess it, but to be without it is a grievous crime. Ambrosio could not easily forgive his Mistress for being deficient in this amiable quality. However, though he blamed her insensibility, He felt the truth of her observations; and though He pitied sincerely the unfortunate Agnes, He resolved to drop the idea of interposing in her behalf.

Near an hour had elapsed, since Matilda descended into the Caverns; Still She returned not. Ambrosio's curiosity was excited. He drew near the Staircase. He listened. All was silent, except that at intervals He caught the sound of Matilda's voice, as it wound along the subteraneous passages, and was re-echoed by the Sepulchre's vaulted roofs. She was at too great a distance for him to distinguish her words, and ere they reached him they were deadened into a low murmur. He longed to penetrate into this mystery. He resolved to disobey her injunctions and follow her into the Cavern. He advanced to the Staircase; He had already descended some steps when his courage failed him. He remembered Matilda's menaces if He infringed her orders, and

his bosom was filled with a secret unaccountable awe. He returned up the stairs, resumed his former station, and waited impatiently for the conclusion of this adventure.

Suddenly He was sensible of a violent shock: An earthquake rocked the ground. The Columns which supported the roof under which He stood were so strongly shaken, that every moment menaced him with its fall, and at the same moment He heard a loud and tremendous burst of thunder. It ceased, and his eyes being fixed upon the Staircase, He saw a bright column of light flash along the Caverns beneath. It was seen but for an instant. No sooner did it disappear, than all was once more quiet and obscure. Profound Darkness again surrounded him, and the silence of night was only broken by the whirring Bat, as She flitted slowly by him.

With every instant Ambrosio's amazement increased. Another hour elapsed, after which the same light again appeared and was lost again as suddenly. It was accompanied by a strain of sweet but solemn Music, which as it stole through the Vaults below, inspired the Monk with mingled delight and terror. It had not long been hushed, when He heard Matilda's steps upon the Staircase. She ascended from the Cavern; The most lively joy

animated her beautiful features.

'Did you see any thing?' She asked.

'Twice I saw a column of light flash up the Staircase.'

'Nothing else?'

'Nothing.'

'The Morning is on the point of breaking. Let us retire to the Abbey, lest daylight should betray us.'

With a light step She hastened from the burying-ground. She regained her Cell, and the curious Abbot still accompanied her. She closed the door, and disembarrassed herself of her Lamp and Basket.

'I have succeeded!' She cried, throwing herself upon his bosom: 'Succeeded beyond my fondest hopes! I shall live, Ambrosio, shall live for you! The step which I shuddered at taking proves to me a source of joys inexpressible! Oh! that I dared communicate those joys to you! Oh! that I were permitted to

share with you my power, and raise you as high above the level of your sex, as one bold deed has exalted me above mine!

'And what prevents you, Matilda?' interrupted the Friar; 'Why is your business in the Cavern made a secret? Do you think me undeserving of your confidence? Matilda, I must doubt the truth of your affection, while you have joys in which I am forbidden to share.'

'You reproach me with injustice. I grieve sincerely that I am obliged to conceal from you my happiness. But I am not to blame: The fault lies not in me, but in yourself, my Ambrosio! You are still too much the Monk. Your mind is enslaved by the prejudices of Education; And Superstition might make you shudder at the idea of that which experience has taught me to prize and value. At present you are unfit to be trusted with a secret of such importance: But the strength of your judgment; and the curiosity which I rejoice to see sparkling in your eyes, makes me hope that you will one day deserve my confidence. Till that period arrives, restrain your impatience. Remember that you have given me your solemn oath never to enquire into this night's adventures. I insist upon your keeping this oath: For though'

She added smiling, while She sealed his lips with a wanton kiss;

'Though I forgive your breaking your vows to heaven, I expect you to keep your vows to me.'

The Friar returned the embrace which had set his blood on fire. The luxurious and unbounded excesses of the former night were renewed, and they separated not till the Bell rang for Matins.

The same pleasures were frequently repeated. The Monks rejoiced in the feigned Rosario's unexpected recovery, and none of them suspected his real sex. The Abbot possessed his Mistress in tranquillity, and perceiving his frailty unsuspected, abandoned himself to his passions in full security. Shame and remorse no longer tormented him. Frequent repetitions made him familiar with sin, and his bosom became proof against the stings of Conscience. In these sentiments He was encouraged by Matilda; But She soon was aware that She had satiated her Lover by the unbounded freedom of her caresses. Her charms becoming accustomed to him, they ceased to excite the same desires which at first they had inspired. The delirium of passion being past, He had leisure to observe every trifling defect: Where none were to be found, Satiety made him fancy them. The Monk was glutted with the fullness of pleasure: A Week had scarcely elapsed before He was wearied of his Paramour: His warm constitution

still made him seek in her arms the gratification of his lust:

But when the moment of passion was over, He quitted her with disgust, and his humour, naturally inconstant, made him sigh impatiently for variety.

Possession, which cloy's Man, only increases the affection of Woman. Matilda with every succeeding day grew more attached to the Friar. Since He had obtained her favours, He was become dearer to her than ever, and She felt grateful to him for the pleasures in which they had equally been Sharers. Unfortunately as her passion grew ardent, Ambrosio's grew cold; The very marks of her fondness excited his disgust, and its excess served to extinguish the flame which already burned but feebly in his bosom. Matilda could not but remark that her society seemed to him daily less agreeable: He was inattentive while She spoke: her musical talents, which She possessed in perfection, had lost the power of amusing him; Or if He deigned to praise them, his compliments were evidently forced and cold. He no longer gazed upon her with affection, or applauded her sentiments with a Lover's partiality. This Matilda well perceived, and redoubled her efforts to revive those sentiments which He once had felt. She could not but fail, since He considered as importunities the pains which She took to please him, and was disgusted by the very

means which She used to recall the Wanderer. Still, however, their illicit Commerce continued: But it was clear that He was led to her arms, not by love, but the cravings of brutal appetite. His constitution made a Woman necessary to him, and Matilda was the only one with whom He could indulge his passions safely: In spite of her beauty, He gazed upon every other Female with more desire; But fearing that his Hypocrisy should be made public, He confined his inclinations to his own breast.

It was by no means his nature to be timid: But his education had impressed his mind with fear so strongly, that apprehension was now become part of his character. Had his Youth been passed in the world, He would have shown himself possessed of many brilliant and manly qualities. He was naturally enterprising, firm, and fearless: He had a Warrior's heart, and He might have shone with splendour at the head of an Army. There was no want of generosity in his nature: The Wretched never failed to find in him a compassionate Auditor: His abilities were quick and shining, and his judgment, vast, solid, and decisive. With such qualifications He would have been an ornament to his Country: That He possessed them, He had given proofs in his earliest infancy, and his Parents had beheld his dawning virtues with the fondest delight and admiration. Unfortunately, while yet a Child

He was deprived of those Parents. He fell into the power of a Relation whose only wish about him was never to hear of him more; For that purpose He gave him in charge to his Friend, the former Superior of the Capuchins. The Abbot, a very Monk, used all his endeavours to persuade the Boy that happiness existed not without the walls of a Convent. He succeeded fully. To deserve admittance into the order of St. Francis was Ambrosio's highest ambition. His Instructors carefully repressed those virtues whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill-suited to the Cloister. Instead of universal benevolence, He adopted a selfish partiality for his own particular establishment: He was taught to consider compassion for the errors of Others as a crime of the blackest dye: The noble frankness of his temper was exchanged for servile humility; and in order to break his natural spirit, the Monks terrified his young mind by placing before him all the horrors with which Superstition could furnish them: They painted to him the torments of the Damned in colours the most dark, terrible, and fantastic, and threatened him at the slightest fault with eternal perdition. No wonder that his imagination constantly dwelling upon these fearful objects should have rendered his character timid and apprehensive. Add to this, that his long absence from the great world, and total unacquaintance with the common dangers of life, made him form of

them an idea far more dismal than the reality. While the Monks were busied in rooting out his virtues and narrowing his sentiments, they allowed every vice which had fallen to his share to arrive at full perfection. He was suffered to be proud, vain, ambitious, and disdainful: He was jealous of his Equals, and despised all merit but his own: He was implacable when offended, and cruel in his revenge. Still in spite of the pains taken to pervert them, his natural good qualities would occasionally break through the gloom cast over them so carefully:

At such times the contest for superiority between his real and acquired character was striking and unaccountable to those unacquainted with his original disposition. He pronounced the most severe sentences upon Offenders, which, the moment after, Compassion induced him to mitigate: He undertook the most daring enterprizes, which the fear of their consequences soon obliged him to abandon: His inborn genius darted a brilliant light upon subjects the most obscure; and almost instantaneously his Superstition replunged them in darkness more profound than that from which they had just been rescued. His Brother Monks, regarding him as a Superior Being, remarked not this contradiction in their Idol's conduct. They were persuaded that what He did must be right, and supposed him to have good reasons

for changing his resolutions. The fact was, that the different sentiments with which Education and Nature had inspired him were combating in his bosom: It remained for his passions, which as yet no opportunity had called into play, to decide the victory. Unfortunately his passions were the very worst Judges, to whom He could possibly have applied. His monastic seclusion had till now been in his favour, since it gave him no room for discovering his bad qualities. The superiority of his talents raised him too far above his Companions to permit his being jealous of them: His exemplary piety, persuasive eloquence, and pleasing manners had secured him universal Esteem, and consequently He had no injuries to revenge: His Ambition was justified by his acknowledged merit, and his pride considered as no more than proper confidence. He never saw, much less conversed with, the other sex: He was ignorant of the pleasures in Woman's power to bestow, and if He read in the course of his studies

'That Men were fond, He smiled, and wondered how!'

For a time, spare diet, frequent watching, and severe penance cooled and repress the natural warmth of his constitution: But no sooner did opportunity present itself, no sooner did He catch

a glimpse of joys to which He was still a Stranger, than Religion's barriers were too feeble to resist the overwhelming torrent of his desires. All impediments yielded before the force of his temperament, warm, sanguine, and voluptuous in the excess.

As yet his other passions lay dormant; But they only needed to be once awakened, to display themselves with violence as great and irresistible.

He continued to be the admiration of Madrid. The Enthusiasm created by his eloquence seemed rather to increase than diminish.

Every Thursday, which was the only day when He appeared in public, the Capuchin Cathedral was crowded with Auditors, and his discourse was always received with the same approbation. He was named Confessor to all the chief families in Madrid; and no one was counted fashionable who was enjoined penance by any other than Ambrosio. In his resolution of never stirring out of his Convent, He still persisted. This circumstance created a still greater opinion of his sanctity and self-denial. Above all, the Women sang forth his praises loudly, less influenced by devotion than by his noble countenance, majestic air, and well-turned, graceful figure. The Abbey door was thronged with

Carriages from morning to night; and the noblest and fairest
Dames of Madrid confessed to the Abbot their secret peccadilloes.

The eyes of the luxurious Friar devoured their charms: Had his
Penitents consulted those Interpreters, He would have needed no
other means of expressing his desires. For his misfortune, they
were so strongly persuaded of his continence, that the
possibility of his harbouring indecent thoughts never once
entered their imaginations. The climate's heat, 'tis well known,
operates with no small influence upon the constitutions of the
Spanish Ladies: But the most abandoned would have thought it an
easier task to inspire with passion the marble Statue of St.
Francis than the cold and rigid heart of the immaculate Ambrosio.

On his part, the Friar was little acquainted with the depravity
of the world; He suspected not that but few of his Penitents
would have rejected his addresses. Yet had He been better
instructed on this head, the danger attending such an attempt
would have sealed up his lips in silence. He knew that it would
be difficult for a Woman to keep a secret so strange and so
important as his frailty; and He even trembled lest Matilda
should betray him. Anxious to preserve a reputation which was
infinitely dear to him, He saw all the risque of committing it to

the power of some vain giddy Female; and as the Beauties of Madrid affected only his senses without touching his heart, He forgot them as soon as they were out of his sight. The danger of discovery, the fear of being repulsed, the loss of reputation, all these considerations counselled him to stifle his desires: And though He now felt for it the most perfect indifference, He was necessitated to confine himself to Matilda's person.

One morning, the confluence of Penitents was greater than usual. He was detained in the Confessional Chair till a late hour. At length the crowd was dispatched, and He prepared to quit the Chapel, when two Females entered and drew near him with humility. They threw up their veils, and the youngest entreated him to listen to her for a few moments. The melody of her voice, of that voice to which no Man ever listened without interest, immediately caught Ambrosio's attention. He stopped. The Petitioner seemed bowed down with affliction: Her cheeks were pale, her eyes dimmed with tears, and her hair fell in disorder over her face and bosom. Still her countenance was so sweet, so innocent, so heavenly, as might have charmed an heart less susceptible, than that which panted in the Abbot's breast. With more than usual softness of manner He desired her to proceed, and heard her speak as follows with an emotion which increased every

moment.

'Reverend Father, you see an Unfortunate, threatened with the loss of her dearest, of almost her only Friend! My Mother, my excellent Mother lies upon the bed of sickness. A sudden and dreadful malady seized her last night; and so rapid has been its progress, that the Physicians despair of her life. Human aid fails me; Nothing remains for me but to implore the mercy of Heaven. Father, all Madrid rings with the report of your piety and virtue. Deign to remember my Mother in your prayers: Perhaps they may prevail on the Almighty to spare her; and should that be the case, I engage myself every Thursday in the next three Months to illuminate the Shrine of St. Francis in his honour.'

'So!' thought the Monk; 'Here we have a second Vincentio della Ronda. Rosario's adventure began thus,' and He wished secretly that this might have the same conclusion.

He acceded to the request. The Petitioner returned him thanks with every mark of gratitude, and then continued.

'I have yet another favour to ask. We are Strangers in Madrid;

My Mother needs a Confessor, and knows not to whom She should apply. We understand that you never quit the Abbey, and Alas! my poor Mother is unable to come hither! If you would have the goodness, reverend Father, to name a proper person, whose wise and pious consolations may soften the agonies of my Parent's deathbed, you will confer an everlasting favour upon hearts not ungrateful.'

With this petition also the Monk complied. Indeed, what petition would He have refused, if urged in such enchanting accents? The suppliant was so interesting! Her voice was so sweet, so harmonious! Her very tears became her, and her affliction seemed to add new lustre to her charms. He promised to send to her a Confessor that same Evening, and begged her to leave her address. The Companion presented him with a Card on which it was written, and then withdrew with the fair Petitioner, who pronounced before her departure a thousand benedictions on the Abbot's goodness. His eyes followed her out of the Chapel. It was not till She was out of sight that He examined the Card, on which He read the following words.

'Donna Elvira Dalfa, Strada di San Iago, four doors from the Palace d'Albornos.'

The Suppliant was no other than Antonia, and Leonella was her Companion. The Latter had not consented without difficulty to accompany her Niece to the Abbey: Ambrosio had inspired her with such awe that She trembled at the very sight of him. Her fears had conquered even her natural loquacity, and while in his presence She uttered not a single syllable.

The Monk retired to his Cell, whither He was pursued by Antonia's image. He felt a thousand new emotions springing in his bosom, and He trembled to examine into the cause which gave them birth. They were totally different from those inspired by Matilda, when She first declared her sex and her affection. He felt not the provocation of lust; No voluptuous desires rioted in his bosom; Nor did a burning imagination picture to him the charms which Modesty had veiled from his eyes. On the contrary, what He now felt was a mingled sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect. A soft and delicious melancholy infused itself into his soul, and He would not have exchanged it for the most lively transports of joy. Society now disgusted him: He delighted in solitude, which permitted his indulging the visions of Fancy: His thoughts were all gentle, sad, and soothing, and the whole wide world presented him with no other object than Antonia.

'Happy Man!' He exclaimed in his romantic enthusiasm; 'Happy Man, who is destined to possess the heart of that lovely Girl! What delicacy in her features! What elegance in her form! How enchanting was the timid innocence of her eyes, and how different from the wanton expression, the wild luxurious fire which sparkles in Matilda's! Oh! sweeter must one kiss be snatched from the rosy lips of the First, than all the full and lustful favours bestowed so freely by the Second. Matilda gluts me with enjoyment even to loathing, forces me to her arms, apes the Harlot, and glories in her prostitution. Disgusting! Did She know the inexpressible charm of Modesty, how irresistibly it enthalls the heart of Man, how firmly it chains him to the Throne of Beauty, She never would have thrown it off. What would be too dear a price for this lovely Girl's affections? What would I refuse to sacrifice, could I be released from my vows, and permitted to declare my love in the sight of earth and heaven? While I strove to inspire her with tenderness, with friendship and esteem, how tranquil and undisturbed would the hours roll away! Gracious God! To see her blue downcast eyes beam upon mine with timid fondness! To sit for days, for years listening to that gentle voice! To acquire the right of obliging her, and hear the artless expressions of her gratitude! To watch

the emotions of her spotless heart! To encourage each dawning virtue! To share in her joy when happy, to kiss away her tears when distress, and to see her fly to my arms for comfort and support! Yes; If there is perfect bliss on earth, 'tis his lot alone, who becomes that Angel's Husband.'

While his fancy coined these ideas, He paced his Cell with a disordered air. His eyes were fixed upon vacancy: His head reclined upon his shoulder; A tear rolled down his cheek, while He reflected that the vision of happiness for him could never be realized.

'She is lost to me!' He continued; 'By marriage She cannot be mine: And to seduce such innocence, to use the confidence reposed in me to work her ruin. . . . Oh! it would be a crime, blacker than yet the world ever witnessed! Fear not, lovely Girl! Your virtue runs no risque from me. Not for Indies would I make that gentle bosom know the tortures of remorse.'

Again He paced his chamber hastily. Then stopping, his eye fell upon the picture of his once-admired Madona. He tore it with indignation from the wall: He threw it on the ground, and spurned it from him with his foot.

'The Prostitute!'

Unfortunate Matilda! Her Paramour forgot that for his sake alone
She had forfeited her claim to virtue; and his only reason for
despising her was that She had loved him much too well.

He threw himself into a Chair which stood near the Table. He
saw the card with Elvira's address. He took it up, and it
brought to his recollection his promise respecting a Confessor.
He passed a few minutes in doubt: But Antonia's Empire over him
was already too much decided to permit his making a long
resistance to the idea which struck him. He resolved to be the
Confessor himself. He could leave the Abbey unobserved without
difficulty: By wrapping up his head in his Cowl He hoped to pass
through the Streets without being recognised: By taking these
precautions, and by recommending secrecy to Elvira's family, He
doubted not to keep Madrid in ignorance that He had broken his
vow never to see the outside of the Abbey walls. Matilda was the
only person whose vigilance He dreaded: But by informing her at
the Refectory that during the whole of that day, Business would
confine him to his Cell, He thought himself secure from her
wakeful jealousy. Accordingly, at the hours when the Spaniards

are generally taking their Siesta, He ventured to quit the Abbey by a private door, the Key of which was in his possession. The Cowl of his habit was thrown over his face: From the heat of the weather the Streets were almost totally deserted: The Monk met with few people, found the Strada di San Iago, and arrived without accident at Donna Elvira's door. He rang, was admitted, and immediately ushered into an upper apartment.

It was here that He ran the greatest risque of a discovery. Had Leonella been at home, She would have recognized him directly: Her communicative disposition would never have permitted her to rest till all Madrid was informed that Ambrosio had ventured out of the Abbey, and visited her Sister. Fortune here stood the Monk's Friend. On Leonella's return home, She found a letter instructing her that a Cousin was just dead, who had left what little He possessed between Herself and Elvira. To secure this bequest She was obliged to set out for Cordova without losing a moment. Amidst all her foibles her heart was truly warm and affectionate, and She was unwilling to quit her Sister in so dangerous a state. But Elvira insisted upon her taking the journey, conscious that in her Daughter's forlorn situation no increase of fortune, however trifling, ought to be neglected. Accordingly, Leonella left Madrid, sincerely grieved at her

Sister's illness, and giving some few sighs to the memory of the amiable but inconstant Don Christoval. She was fully persuaded that at first She had made a terrible breach in his heart: But hearing nothing more of him, She supposed that He had quitted the pursuit, disgusted by the lowness of her origin, and knowing upon other terms than marriage He had nothing to hope from such a Dragon of Virtue as She professed herself; Or else, that being naturally capricious and changeable, the remembrance of her charms had been effaced from the Conde's heart by those of some newer Beauty. Whatever was the cause of her losing him, She lamented it sorely. She strove in vain, as She assured every body who was kind enough to listen to her, to tear his image from her too susceptible heart. She affected the airs of a lovesick Virgin, and carried them all to the most ridiculous excess. She heaved lamentable sighs, walked with her arms folded, uttered long soliloquies, and her discourse generally turned upon some forsaken Maid who expired of a broken heart! Her fiery locks were always ornamented with a garland of willow; Every evening She was seen straying upon the Banks of a rivulet by Moonlight; and She declared herself a violent Admirer of murmuring Streams and Nightingales;

'Of lonely haunts, and twilight Groves,

'Places which pale Passion loves!'

Such was the state of Leonella's mind, when obliged to quit Madrid. Elvira was out of patience at all these follies, and endeavoured at persuading her to act like a reasonable Woman. Her advice was thrown away: Leonella assured her at parting that nothing could make her forget the perfidious Don Christoval. In this point She was fortunately mistaken. An honest Youth of Cordova, Journeyman to an Apothecary, found that her fortune would be sufficient to set him up in a genteel Shop of his own: In consequence of this reflection He avowed himself her Admirer. Leonella was not inflexible. The ardour of his sighs melted her heart, and She soon consented to make him the happiest of Mankind. She wrote to inform her Sister of her marriage; But, for reasons which will be explained hereafter, Elvira never answered her letter.

Ambrosio was conducted into the Antichamber to that where Elvira was reposing. The Female Domestic who had admitted him left him alone while She announced his arrival to her Mistress. Antonia, who had been by her Mother's Bedside, immediately came to him.

'Pardon me, Father,' said She, advancing towards him; when recognizing his features, She stopped suddenly, and uttered a cry of joy. 'Is it possible!' She continued;

'Do not my eyes deceive me? Has the worthy Ambrosio broken through his resolution, that He may soften the agonies of the best of Women? What pleasure will this visit give my Mother! Let me not delay for a moment the comfort which your piety and wisdom will afford her.'

Thus saying, She opened the chamber door, presented to her Mother her distinguished Visitor, and having placed an armed-chair by the side of the Bed, withdrew into another department.

Elvira was highly gratified by this visit: Her expectations had been raised high by general report, but She found them far exceeded. Ambrosio, endowed by nature with powers of pleasing, exerted them to the utmost while conversing with Antonia's Mother. With persuasive eloquence He calmed every fear, and dissipated every scruple: He bad her reflect on the infinite mercy of her Judge, despoiled Death of his darts and terrors, and taught her to view without shrinking the abyss of eternity, on whose brink She then stood. Elvira was absorbed in attention and

delight: While She listened to his exhortations, confidence and comfort stole insensibly into her mind. She unbosomed to him without hesitation her cares and apprehensions. The latter respecting a future life He had already quieted: And He now removed the former, which She felt for the concerns of this. She trembled for Antonia. She had none to whose care She could recommend her, save to the Marquis de las Cisternas and her Sister Leonella. The protection of the One was very uncertain; and as to the Other, though fond of her Niece, Leonella was so thoughtless and vain as to make her an improper person to have the sole direction of a Girl so young and ignorant of the World. The Friar no sooner learnt the cause of her alarms than He begged her to make herself easy upon that head. He doubted not being able to secure for Antonia a safe refuge in the House of one of his Penitents, the Marchioness of Villa-Franca: This was a Lady of acknowledged virtue, remarkable for strict principles and extensive charity. Should accident deprive her of this resource, He engaged to procure Antonia a reception in some respectable Convent: That is to say, in quality of boarder; for Elvira had declared herself no Friend to a monastic life, and the Monk was either candid or complaisant enough to allow that her disapprobation was not unfounded.

These proofs of the interest which He felt for her completely won Elvira's heart. In thanking him She exhausted every expression which Gratitude could furnish, and protested that now She should resign herself with tranquillity to the Grave.

Ambrosio rose to take leave: He promised to return the next day at the same hour, but requested that his visits might be kept secret.

'I am unwilling' said He, 'that my breaking through a rule imposed by necessity should be generally known. Had I not resolved never to quit my Convent, except upon circumstances as urgent as that which has conducted me to your door, I should be frequently summoned upon insignificant occasions: That time would be engrossed by the Curious, the Unoccupied, and the fanciful, which I now pass at the Bedside of the Sick, in comforting the expiring Penitent, and clearing the passage to Eternity from Thorns.'

Elvira commended equally his prudence and compassion, promising to conceal carefully the honour of his visits. The Monk then gave her his benediction, and retired from the chamber.

In the Anteroom He found Antonia: He could not refuse himself

the pleasure of passing a few moments in her society. He bad her take comfort, for that her Mother seemed composed and tranquil, and He hoped that She might yet do well. He enquired who attended her, and engaged to send the Physician of his Convent to see her, one of the most skilful in Madrid. He then launched out in Elvira's commendation, praised her purity and fortitude of mind, and declared that She had inspired him with the highest esteem and reverence. Antonia's innocent heart swelled with gratitude: Joy danced in her eyes, where a tear still sparkled. The hopes which He gave her of her Mother's recovery, the lively interest which He seemed to feel for her, and the flattering way in which She was mentioned by him, added to the report of his judgment and virtue, and to the impression made upon her by his eloquence, confirmed the favourable opinion with which his first, appearance had inspired Antonia. She replied with diffidence, but without restraint: She feared not to relate to him all her little sorrows, all her little fears and anxieties; and She thanked him for his goodness with all the genuine warmth which favours kindle in a young and innocent heart. Such alone know how to estimate benefits at their full value. They who are conscious of Mankind's perfidy and selfishness, ever receive an obligation with apprehension and distrust: They suspect that some secret motive must lurk behind it: They express their

thanks with restraint and caution, and fear to praise a kind action to its full extent, aware that some future day a return may be required. Not so Antonia; She thought the world was composed only of those who resembled her, and that vice existed, was to her still a secret. The Monk had been of service to her; He said that He wished her well; She was grateful for his kindness, and thought that no terms were strong enough to be the vehicle of her thanks. With what delight did Ambrosio listen to the declaration of her artless gratitude! The natural grace of her manners, the unequalled sweetness of her voice, her modest vivacity, her unstudied elegance, her expressive countenance, and intelligent eyes united to inspire him with pleasure and admiration, While the solidity and correctness of her remarks received additional beauty from the unaffected simplicity of the language in which they were conveyed.

Ambrosio was at length obliged to tear himself from this conversation which possessed for him but too many charms. He repeated to Antonia his wishes that his visits should not be made known, which desire She promised to observe. He then quitted the House, while his Enchantress hastened to her Mother, ignorant of the mischief which her Beauty had caused. She was eager to know Elvira's opinion of the Man whom She had praised in

such enthusiastic terms, and was delighted to find it equally favourable, if not even more so, than her own.

'Even before He spoke,' said Elvira, 'I was prejudiced in his favour: The fervour of his exhortations, dignity of his manner, and closeness of his reasoning, were very far from inducing me to alter my opinion. His fine and full-toned voice struck me particularly; But surely, Antonia, I have heard it before. It seemed perfectly familiar to my ear. Either I must have known the Abbot in former times, or his voice bears a wonderful resemblance to that of some other, to whom I have often listened.

There were certain tones which touched my very heart, and made me feel sensations so singular, that I strive in vain to account for them.'

'My dearest Mother, it produced the same effect upon me: Yet certainly neither of us ever heard his voice till we came to Madrid. I suspect that what we attribute to his voice, really proceeds from his pleasant manners, which forbid our considering him as a Stranger. I know not why, but I feel more at my ease while conversing with him than I usually do with people who are unknown to me. I feared not to repeat to him all my childish

thoughts; and somehow I felt confident that He would hear my folly with indulgence. Oh! I was not deceived in him! He listened to me with such an air of kindness and attention! He answered me with such gentleness, such condescension! He did not call me an Infant, and treat me with contempt, as our cross old Confessor at the Castle used to do. I verily believe that if I had lived in Murcia a thousand years, I never should have liked that fat old Father Dominic!

'I confess that Father Dominic had not the most pleasing manners in the world; But He was honest, friendly, and well-meaning.'

'Ah! my dear Mother, those qualities are so common!'

'God grant, my Child, that Experience may not teach you to think them rare and precious: I have found them but too much so! But tell me, Antonia; Why is it impossible for me to have seen the Abbot before?'

'Because since the moment when He entered the Abbey, He has never been on the outside of its walls. He told me just now, that from his ignorance of the Streets, He had some difficulty to find the Strada di San Iago, though so near the Abbey.'

'All this is possible, and still I may have seen him BEFORE He entered the Abbey: In order to come out, it was rather necessary that He should first go in.'

'Holy Virgin! As you say, that is very true.--Oh! But might He not have been born in the Abbey?'

Elvira smiled.

'Why, not very easily.'

'Stay, Stay! Now I recollect how it was. He was put into the Abbey quite a Child; The common People say that He fell from heaven, and was sent as a present to the Capuchins by the Virgin.'

'That was very kind of her. And so He fell from heaven, Antonia?'

He must have had a terrible tumble.'

'Many do not credit this, and I fancy, my dear Mother, that I must number you among the Unbelievers. Indeed, as our Landlady

told my Aunt, the general idea is that his Parents, being poor and unable to maintain him, left him just born at the Abbey door. The late Superior from pure charity had him educated in the Convent, and He proved to be a model of virtue, and piety, and learning, and I know not what else besides: In consequence, He was first received as a Brother of the order, and not long ago was chosen Abbot. However, whether this account or the other is the true one, at least all agree that when the Monks took him under their care, He could not speak: Therefore, you could not have heard his voice before He entered the Monastery, because at that time He had no voice at all.'

'Upon my word, Antonia, you argue very closely! Your conclusions are infallible! I did not suspect you of being so able a Logician.'

'Ah! You are mocking me! But so much the better. It delights me to see you in spirits: Besides you seem tranquil and easy, and I hope that you will have no more convulsions. Oh! I was sure the Abbot's visit would do you good!'

'It has indeed done me good, my Child. He has quieted my mind upon some points which agitated me, and I already feel the

effects of his attention. My eyes grow heavy, and I think I can sleep a little. Draw the curtains, my Antonia: But if I should not wake before midnight, do not sit up with me, I charge you.'

Antonia promised to obey her, and having received her blessing drew the curtains of the Bed. She then seated herself in silence at her embroidery frame, and beguiled the hours with building Castles in the air. Her spirits were enlivened by the evident change for the better in Elvira, and her fancy presented her with visions bright and pleasing. In these dreams Ambrosio made no despicable figure. She thought of him with joy and gratitude; But for every idea which fell to the Friar's share, at least two were unconsciously bestowed upon Lorenzo. Thus passed the time, till the Bell in the neighbouring Steeple of the Capuchin Cathedral announced the hour of midnight: Antonia remembered her Mother's injunctions, and obeyed them, though with reluctance. She undrew the curtains with caution. Elvira was enjoying a profound and quiet slumber; Her cheek glowed with health's returning colours: A smile declared that her dreams were pleasant, and as Antonia bent over her, She fancied that She heard her name pronounced. She kissed her Mother's forehead softly, and retired to her chamber. There She knelt before a Statue of St. Rosolia, her Patroness; She recommended herself to

the protection of heaven, and as had been her custom from infancy, concluded her devotions by chaunting the following Stanzas.

MIDNIGHT HYMN

Now all is hushed; The solemn chime
No longer swells the nightly gale:
Thy awful presence, Hour sublime,
With spotless heart once more I hail.

'Tis now the moment still and dread,
When Sorcerers use their baleful power;
When Graves give up their buried dead
To profit by the sanctioned hour:

From guilt and guilty thoughts secure,
To duty and devotion true,
With bosom light and conscience pure,
Repose, thy gentle aid I woo.

Good Angels, take my thanks, that still
The snares of vice I view with scorn;

Thanks, that to-night as free from ill
I sleep, as when I woke at morn.

Yet may not my unconscious breast
Harbour some guilt to me unknown?
Some wish impure, which unrepent
You blush to see, and I to own?

If such there be, in gentle dream
Instruct my feet to shun the snare;
Bid truth upon my errors beam,
And deign to make me still your care.

Chase from my peaceful bed away
The witching Spell, a foe to rest,
The nightly Goblin, wanton Fay,
The Ghost in pain, and Fiend unblest:

Let not the Tempter in mine ear
Pour lessons of unhallowed joy;
Let not the Night-mare, wandering near
My Couch, the calm of sleep destroy;

Let not some horrid dream affright
With strange fantastic forms mine eyes;
But rather bid some vision bright
Display the bliss of yonder skies.

Show me the crystal Domes of Heaven,
The worlds of light where Angels lie;
Shew me the lot to Mortals given,
Who guiltless live, who guiltless die.

Then show me how a seat to gain
Amidst those blissful realms of
Air; Teach me to shun each guilty stain,
And guide me to the good and fair.

So every morn and night, my Voice
To heaven the grateful strain shall raise;
In You as Guardian Powers rejoice,
Good Angels, and exalt your praise:

So will I strive with zealous fire
Each vice to shun, each fault correct;
Will love the lessons you inspire,

And Prize the virtues you protect.

Then when at length by high command
My body seeks the Grave's repose,
When Death draws nigh with friendly hand
My failing Pilgrim eyes to close;

Pleased that my soul has 'scaped the wreck,
Sighless will I my life resign,
And yield to God my Spirit back,
As pure as when it first was mine.

Having finished her usual devotions, Antonia retired to bed.
Sleep soon stole over her senses; and for several hours She
enjoyed that calm repose which innocence alone can know, and for
which many a Monarch with pleasure would exchange his Crown.