

CHAPTER IV

----Ah! how dark

These long-extended realms and rueful wastes;
Where nought but silence reigns, and night, dark night,
Dark as was Chaos ere the Infant Sun
Was rolled together, or had tried its beams
Athwart the gloom profound!
The sickly Taper
By glimmering through thy low-browed misty vaults,
Furred round with mouldy damp, and ropy slime,
Lets fall a supernumerary horror,
And only serves to make
Thy night more irksome!

Blair.

Returned undiscovered to the Abbey, Ambrosio's mind was filled with the most pleasing images. He was wilfully blind to the danger of exposing himself to Antonia's charms: He only remembered the pleasure which her society had afforded him, and rejoiced in the prospect of that pleasure being repeated. He failed not to profit by Elvira's indisposition to obtain a sight of her Daughter every day. At first He bounded his wishes to

inspire Antonia with friendship: But no sooner was He convinced that She felt that sentiment in its fullest extent, than his aim became more decided, and his attentions assumed a warmer colour. The innocent familiarity with which She treated him, encouraged his desires: Grown used to her modesty, it no longer commanded the same respect and awe: He still admired it, but it only made him more anxious to deprive her of that quality which formed her principal charm. Warmth of passion, and natural penetration, of which latter unfortunately both for himself and Antonia He possessed an ample share, supplied a knowledge of the arts of seduction. He easily distinguished the emotions which were favourable to his designs, and seized every means with avidity of infusing corruption into Antonia's bosom. This He found no easy matter. Extreme simplicity prevented her from perceiving the aim to which the Monk's insinuations tended; But the excellent morals which She owed to Elvira's care, the solidity and correctness of her understanding, and a strong sense of what was right implanted in her heart by Nature, made her feel that his precepts must be faulty. By a few simple words She frequently overthrew the whole bulk of his sophistical arguments, and made him conscious how weak they were when opposed to Virtue and Truth. On such occasion He took refuge in his eloquence; He overpowered her with a torrent of Philosophical paradoxes, to which, not

understanding them, it was impossible for her to reply; And thus though He did not convince her that his reasoning was just, He at least prevented her from discovering it to be false. He perceived that her respect for his judgment augmented daily, and doubted not with time to bring her to the point desired.

He was not unconscious that his attempts were highly criminal: He saw clearly the baseness of seducing the innocent Girl: But his passion was too violent to permit his abandoning his design. He resolved to pursue it, let the consequences be what they might. He depended upon finding Antonia in some unguarded moment; And seeing no other Man admitted into her society, nor hearing any mentioned either by her or by Elvira, He imagined that her young heart was still unoccupied. While He waited for the opportunity of satisfying his unwarrantable lust, every day increased his coldness for Matilda. Not a little was this occasioned by the consciousness of his faults to her. To hide them from her He was not sufficiently master of himself: Yet He dreaded lest, in a transport of jealous rage, She should betray the secret on which his character and even his life depended. Matilda could not but remark his indifference: He was conscious that She remarked it, and fearing her reproaches, shunned her studiously. Yet when He could not avoid her, her mildness might

have convinced him that He had nothing to dread from her resentment. She had resumed the character of the gentle interesting Rosario: She taxed him not with ingratitude; But her eyes filled with involuntary tears, and the soft melancholy of her countenance and voice uttered complaints far more touching than words could have conveyed. Ambrosio was not unmoved by her sorrow; But unable to remove its cause, He forbore to show that it affected him. As her conduct convinced him that He needed not fear her vengeance, He continued to neglect her, and avoided her company with care. Matilda saw that She in vain attempted to regain his affections: Yet She stifled the impulse of resentment, and continued to treat her inconstant Lover with her former fondness and attention.

By degrees Elvira's constitution recovered itself. She was no longer troubled with convulsions, and Antonia ceased to tremble for her Mother. Ambrosio beheld this reestablishment with displeasure. He saw that Elvira's knowledge of the world would not be the Dupe of his sanctified demeanour, and that She would easily perceive his views upon her Daughter. He resolved therefore, before She quitted her chamber, to try the extent of his influence over the innocent Antonia.

One evening, when He had found Elvira almost perfectly restored to health, He quitted her earlier than was his usual custom. Not finding Antonia in the Antichamber, He ventured to follow her to her own. It was only separated from her Mother's by a Closet, in which Flora, the Waiting-Woman, generally slept. Antonia sat upon a Sopha with her back towards the door, and read attentively. She heard not his approach, till He had seated himself by her. She started, and welcomed him with a look of pleasure: Then rising, She would have conducted him to the sitting-room; But Ambrosio taking her hand, obliged her by gentle violence to resume her place. She complied without difficulty: She knew not that there was more impropriety in conversing with him in one room than another. She thought herself equally secure of his principles and her own, and having replaced herself upon the Sopha, She began to prattle to him with her usual ease and vivacity.

He examined the Book which She had been reading, and had now placed upon the Table. It was the Bible.

'How!' said the Friar to himself; 'Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant?'

But, upon a further inspection, He found that Elvira had made exactly the same remark. That prudent Mother, while She admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young Woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: Every thing is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a Brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions. Yet this is the Book which young Women are recommended to study; which is put into the hands of Children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant; and which but too frequently inculcates the first rudiments of vice, and gives the first alarm to the still sleeping passions. Of this was Elvira so fully convinced, that She would have preferred putting into her Daughter's hands 'Amadis de Gaul,' or 'The Valiant Champion, Tirante the White;' and would sooner have authorised her studying the lewd exploits of 'Don Galaor,' or the lascivious jokes of the 'Damsel Plazer di mi vida.' She had in consequence made two resolutions respecting the Bible. The first was that Antonia should not read it till She was of an age to feel its beauties, and profit by its morality: The second, that it should be copied out with her own hand, and all improper passages either altered

or omitted. She had adhered to this determination, and such was the Bible which Antonia was reading: It had been lately delivered to her, and She perused it with an avidity, with a delight that was inexpressible. Ambrosio perceived his mistake, and replaced the Book upon the Table.

Antonia spoke of her Mother's health with all the enthusiastic joy of a youthful heart.

'I admire your filial affection,' said the Abbot; 'It proves the excellence and sensibility of your character; It promises a treasure to him whom Heaven has destined to possess your affections. The Breast, so capable of fondness for a Parent, what will it feel for a Lover? Nay, perhaps, what feels it for one even now? Tell me, my lovely Daughter; Have you known what it is to love? Answer me with sincerity: Forget my habit, and consider me only as a Friend.'

'What it is to love?' said She, repeating his question; 'Oh! yes, undoubtedly; I have loved many, many People.'

'That is not what I mean. The love of which I speak can be felt only for one. Have you never seen the Man whom you wished to be

your Husband?'

'Oh! No, indeed!'

This was an untruth, but She was unconscious of its falsehood: She knew not the nature of her sentiments for Lorenzo; and never having seen him since his first visit to Elvira, with every day his Image grew less feebly impressed upon her bosom. Besides, She thought of an Husband with all a Virgin's terror, and negatived the Friar's demand without a moment's hesitation.

'And do you not long to see that Man, Antonia? Do you feel no void in your heart which you fain would have filled up? Do you heave no sighs for the absence of some one dear to you, but who that some one is, you know not? Perceive you not that what formerly could please, has charms for you no longer? That a thousand new wishes, new ideas, new sensations, have sprang in your bosom, only to be felt, never to be described? Or while you fill every other heart with passion, is it possible that your own remains insensible and cold? It cannot be! That melting eye, that blushing cheek, that enchanting voluptuous melancholy which at times overspreads your features, all these marks belye your words. You love, Antonia, and in vain would hide it from me.'

'Father, you amaze me! What is this love of which you speak? I neither know its nature, nor if I felt it, why I should conceal the sentiment.'

'Have you seen no Man, Antonia, whom though never seen before, you seemed long to have sought? Whose form, though a Stranger's, was familiar to your eyes? The sound of whose voice soothed you, pleased you, penetrated to your very soul? In whose presence you rejoiced, for whose absence you lamented? With whom your heart seemed to expand, and in whose bosom with confidence unbounded you reposed the cares of your own? Have you not felt all this, Antonia?'

'Certainly I have: The first time that I saw you, I felt it.'

Ambrosio started. Scarcely dared He credit his hearing.

'Me, Antonia?' He cried, his eyes sparkling with delight and impatience, while He seized her hand, and pressed it rapturously to his lips. 'Me, Antonia? You felt these sentiments for me?'

'Even with more strength than you have described. The very

moment that I beheld you, I felt so pleased, so interested! I waited so eagerly to catch the sound of your voice, and when I heard it, it seemed so sweet! It spoke to me a language till then so unknown! Methought, it told me a thousand things which I wished to hear! It seemed as if I had long known you; as if I had a right to your friendship, your advice, and your protection.

I wept when you departed, and longed for the time which should restore you to my sight.'

'Antonia! my charming Antonia!' exclaimed the Monk, and caught her to his bosom; 'Can I believe my senses? Repeat it to me, my sweet Girl! Tell me again that you love me, that you love me truly and tenderly!'

'Indeed, I do: Let my Mother be excepted, and the world holds no one more dear to me!'

At this frank avowal Ambrosio no longer possessed himself; Wild with desire, He clasped the blushing Trembler in his arms. He fastened his lips greedily upon hers, sucked in her pure delicious breath, violated with his bold hand the treasures of her bosom, and wound around him her soft and yielding limbs.

Startled, alarmed, and confused at his action, surprize at first deprived her of the power of resistance. At length recovering herself, She strove to escape from his embrace.

'Father! Ambrosio!' She cried; 'Release me, for God's sake!'

But the licentious Monk heeded not her prayers: He persisted in his design, and proceeded to take still greater liberties.

Antonia prayed, wept, and struggled: Terrified to the extreme, though at what She knew not, She exerted all her strength to repulse the Friar, and was on the point of shrieking for assistance when the chamber door was suddenly thrown open.

Ambrosio had just sufficient presence of mind to be sensible of his danger. Reluctantly He quitted his prey, and started hastily from the Couch. Antonia uttered an exclamation of joy, flew towards the door, and found herself clasped in the arms of her Mother.

Alarmed at some of the Abbot's speeches, which Antonia had innocently repeated, Elvira resolved to ascertain the truth of her suspicions. She had known enough of Mankind not to be imposed upon by the Monk's reputed virtue. She reflected on

several circumstances, which though trifling, on being put together seemed to authorize her fears. His frequent visits, which as far as She could see, were confined to her family; His evident emotion, whenever She spoke of Antonia; His being in the full prime and heat of Manhood; and above all, his pernicious philosophy communicated to her by Antonia, and which accorded but ill with his conversation in her presence, all these circumstances inspired her with doubts respecting the purity of Ambrosio's friendship. In consequence, She resolved, when He should next be alone with Antonia, to endeavour at surprizing him. Her plan had succeeded. 'Tis true, that when She entered the room, He had already abandoned his prey; But the disorder of her Daughter's dress, and the shame and confusion stamped upon the Friar's countenance, sufficed to prove that her suspicions were but too well-founded. However, She was too prudent to make those suspicions known. She judged that to unmask the Imposter would be no easy matter, the public being so much prejudiced in his favour: and having but few Friends, She thought it dangerous to make herself so powerful an Enemy. She affected therefore not to remark his agitation, seated herself tranquilly upon the Sopha, assigned some trifling reason for having quitted her room unexpectedly, and conversed on various subjects with seeming confidence and ease.

Reassured by her behaviour, the Monk began to recover himself.

He strove to answer Elvira without appearing embarrassed: But He was still too great a novice in dissimulation, and He felt that He must look confused and awkward. He soon broke off the conversation, and rose to depart. What was his vexation, when on taking leave, Elvira told him in polite terms, that being now perfectly reestablished, She thought it an injustice to deprive Others of his company, who might be more in need of it! She assured him of her eternal gratitude, for the benefit which during her illness She had derived from his society and exhortations: And She lamented that her domestic affairs, as well as the multitude of business which his situation must of necessity impose upon him, would in future deprive her of the pleasure of his visits. Though delivered in the mildest language this hint was too plain to be mistaken. Still, He was preparing to put in a remonstrance when an expressive look from Elvira stopped him short. He dared not press her to receive him, for her manner convinced him that He was discovered: He submitted without reply, took an hasty leave, and retired to the Abbey, his heart filled with rage and shame, with bitterness and disappointment.

Antonia's mind felt relieved by his departure; Yet She could not help lamenting that She was never to see him more. Elvira also felt a secret sorrow; She had received too much pleasure from thinking him her Friend, not to regret the necessity of changing her opinion: But her mind was too much accustomed to the fallacy of worldly friendships to permit her present disappointment to weigh upon it long. She now endeavoured to make her Daughter aware of the risque which She had ran: But She was obliged to treat the subject with caution, lest in removing the bandage of ignorance, the veil of innocence should be rent away. She therefore contented herself with warning Antonia to be upon her guard, and ordering her, should the Abbot persist in his visits, never to receive them but in company. With this injunction Antonia promised to comply.

Ambrosio hastened to his Cell. He closed the door after him, and threw himself upon the bed in despair. The impulse of desire, the stings of disappointment, the shame of detection, and the fear of being publicly unmasked, rendered his bosom a scene of the most horrible confusion. He knew not what course to pursue. Debarred the presence of Antonia, He had no hopes of satisfying that passion which was now become a part of his existence. He reflected that his secret was in a Woman's power: He trembled

with apprehension when He beheld the precipice before him, and with rage, when He thought that had it not been for Elvira, He should now have possessed the object of his desires. With the direct imprecations He vowed vengeance against her; He swore that, cost what it would, He still would possess Antonia.

Starting from the Bed, He paced the chamber with disordered steps, howled with impotent fury, dashed himself violently against the walls, and indulged all the transports of rage and madness.

He was still under the influence of this storm of passions when He heard a gentle knock at the door of his Cell. Conscious that his voice must have been heard, He dared not refuse admittance to the Importuner: He strove to compose himself, and to hide his agitation. Having in some degree succeeded, He drew back the bolt: The door opened, and Matilda appeared.

At this precise moment there was no one with whose presence He could better have dispensed. He had not sufficient command over himself to conceal his vexation. He started back, and frowned.

'I am busy,' said He in a stern and hasty tone; 'Leave me!'

Matilda heeded him not: She again fastened the door, and then advanced towards him with an air gentle and supplicating.

'Forgive me, Ambrosio,' said She; 'For your own sake I must not obey you. Fear no complaints from me; I come not to reproach you with your ingratitude. I pardon you from my heart, and since your love can no longer be mine, I request the next best gift, your confidence and friendship. We cannot force our inclinations; The little beauty which you once saw in me has perished with its novelty, and if it can no longer excite desire, mine is the fault, not yours. But why persist in shunning me? Why such anxiety to fly my presence? You have sorrows, but will not permit me to share them; You have disappointments, but will not accept my comfort; You have wishes, but forbid my aiding your pursuits. 'Tis of this which I complain, not of your indifference to my person. I have given up the claims of the Mistress, but nothing shall prevail on me to give up those of the Friend.'

Her mildness had an instantaneous effect upon Ambrosio's feelings.

'Generous Matilda!' He replied, taking her hand, 'How far do you

rise superior to the foibles of your sex! Yes, I accept your offer. I have need of an adviser, and a Confidant: In you I find every needful quality united. But to aid my pursuits . . .
. Ah! Matilda, it lies not in your power!

'It lies in no one's power but mine. Ambrosio, your secret is none to me; Your every step, your every action has been observed by my attentive eye. You love.'

'Matilda!'

'Why conceal it from me? Fear not the little jealousy which taints the generality of Women: My soul disdains so despicable a passion. You love, Ambrosio; Antonia Dalfa is the object of your flame. I know every circumstance respecting your passion: Every conversation has been repeated to me. I have been informed of your attempt to enjoy Antonia's person, your disappointment, and dismissal from Elvira's House. You now despair of possessing your Mistress; But I come to revive your hopes, and point out the road to success.'

'To success? Oh! impossible!'

'To them who dare nothing is impossible. Rely upon me, and you may yet be happy. The time is come, Ambrosio, when regard for your comfort and tranquillity compels me to reveal a part of my History, with which you are still unacquainted. Listen, and do not interrupt me: Should my confession disgust you, remember that in making it my sole aim is to satisfy your wishes, and restore that peace to your heart which at present has abandoned it. I formerly mentioned that my Guardian was a Man of uncommon knowledge: He took pains to instil that knowledge into my infant mind. Among the various sciences which curiosity had induced him to explore, He neglected not that which by most is esteemed impious, and by many chimerical. I speak of those arts which relate to the world of Spirits. His deep researches into causes and effects, his unwearied application to the study of natural philosophy, his profound and unlimited knowledge of the properties and virtues of every gem which enriches the deep, of every herb which the earth produces, at length procured him the distinction which He had sought so long, so earnestly. His curiosity was fully slaked, his ambition amply gratified. He gave laws to the elements; He could reverse the order of nature; His eye read the mandates of futurity, and the infernal Spirits were submissive to his commands. Why shrink you from me? I understand that enquiring look. Your suspicions are right,

though your terrors are unfounded. My Guardian concealed not from me his most precious acquisition. Yet had I never seen YOU, I should never have exerted my power. Like you I shuddered at the thoughts of Magic: Like you I had formed a terrible idea of the consequences of raising a daemon. To preserve that life which your love had taught me to prize, I had recourse to means which I trembled at employing. You remember that night which I past in St. Clare's Sepulchre? Then was it that, surrounded by mouldering bodies, I dared to perform those mystic rites which summoned to my aid a fallen Angel. Judge what must have been my joy at discovering that my terrors were imaginary: I saw the Daemon obedient to my orders, I saw him trembling at my frown, and found that, instead of selling my soul to a Master, my courage had purchased for myself a Slave.'

'Rash Matilda! What have you done? You have doomed yourself to endless perdition; You have bartered for momentary power eternal happiness! If on witchcraft depends the fruition of my desires, I renounce your aid most absolutely. The consequences are too horrible: I doat upon Antonia, but am not so blinded by lust as to sacrifice for her enjoyment my existence both in this world and the next.'

'Ridiculous prejudices! Oh! blush, Ambrosio, blush at being subjected to their dominion. Where is the risque of accepting my offers? What should induce my persuading you to this step, except the wish of restoring you to happiness and quiet. If there is danger, it must fall upon me: It is I who invoke the ministry of the Spirits; Mine therefore will be the crime, and yours the profit. But danger there is none: The Enemy of Mankind is my Slave, not my Sovereign. Is there no difference between giving and receiving laws, between serving and commanding? Awake from your idle dreams, Ambrosio! Throw from you these terrors so ill-suited to a soul like yours; Leave them for common Men, and dare to be happy! Accompany me this night to St. Clare's Sepulchre, witness my incantations, and Antonia is your own.'

'To obtain her by such means I neither can, or will. Cease then to persuade me, for I dare not employ Hell's agency.'

'You DARE not? How have you deceived me! That mind which I esteemed so great and valiant, proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling, a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a Woman's.'

'What? Though conscious of the danger, wilfully shall I expose

myself to the Seducer's arts? Shall I renounce for ever my title to salvation? Shall my eyes seek a sight which I know will blast them? No, no, Matilda; I will not ally myself with God's Enemy.'

'Are you then God's Friend at present? Have you not broken your engagements with him, renounced his service, and abandoned yourself to the impulse of your passions? Are you not planning the destruction of innocence, the ruin of a Creature whom He formed in the mould of Angels? If not of Daemons, whose aid would you invoke to forward this laudable design? Will the Seraphims protect it, conduct Antonia to your arms, and sanction with their ministry your illicit pleasures? Absurd! But I am not deceived, Ambrosio! It is not virtue which makes you reject my offer: You WOULD accept it, but you dare not. 'Tis not the crime which holds your hand, but the punishment; 'Tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of his vengeance! Fain would you offend him in secret, but you tremble to profess yourself his Foe. Now shame on the coward soul, which wants the courage either to be a firm Friend or open Enemy!'

'To look upon guilt with horror, Matilda, is in itself a merit: In this respect I glory to confess myself a Coward. Though my

passions have made me deviate from her laws, I still feel in my heart an innate love of virtue. But it ill becomes you to tax me with my perjury: You, who first seduced me to violate my vows; You, who first roused my sleeping vices, made me feel the weight of Religion's chains, and bad me be convinced that guilt had pleasures. Yet though my principles have yielded to the force of temperament, I still have sufficient grace to shudder at Sorcery, and avoid a crime so monstrous, so unpardonable!

'Unpardonable, say you? Where then is your constant boast of the Almighty's infinite mercy? Has He of late set bounds to it? Receives He no longer a Sinner with joy? You injure him, Ambrosio; You will always have time to repent, and He have goodness to forgive. Afford him a glorious opportunity to exert that goodness: The greater your crime, the greater his merit in pardoning. Away then with these childish scruples: Be persuaded to your good, and follow me to the Sepulchre.'

'Oh! cease, Matilda! That scoffing tone, that bold and impious language, is horrible in every mouth, but most so in a Woman's. Let us drop a conversation which excites no other sentiments than horror and disgust. I will not follow you to the Sepulchre, or accept the services of your infernal Agents. Antonia shall be

mine, but mine by human means.'

'Then yours She will never be! You are banished her presence; Her Mother has opened her eyes to your designs, and She is now upon her guard against them. Nay more, She loves another. A Youth of distinguished merit possesses her heart, and unless you interfere, a few days will make her his Bride. This intelligence was brought me by my invisible Servants, to whom I had recourse on first perceiving your indifference. They watched your every action, related to me all that past at Elvira's, and inspired me with the idea of favouring your designs. Their reports have been my only comfort. Though you shunned my presence, all your proceedings were known to me: Nay, I was constantly with you in some degree, thanks to this precious gift!'

With these words She drew from beneath her habit a mirror of polished steel, the borders of which were marked with various strange and unknown characters.

'Amidst all my sorrows, amidst all my regrets for your coldness, I was sustained from despair by the virtues of this Talisman. On pronouncing certain words, the Person appears in it on whom the Observer's thoughts are bent: thus though I was exiled from

YOUR sight, you, Ambrosio, were ever present to mine.'

The Friar's curiosity was excited strongly.

'What you relate is incredible! Matilda, are you not amusing yourself with my credulity?'

'Be your own eyes the Judge.'

She put the Mirror into his hand. Curiosity induced him to take it, and Love, to wish that Antonia might appear. Matilda pronounced the magic words. Immediately, a thick smoke rose from the characters traced upon the borders, and spread itself over the surface. It dispersed again gradually; A confused mixture of colours and images presented themselves to the Friar's eyes, which at length arranging themselves in their proper places, He beheld in miniature Antonia's lovely form.

The scene was a small closet belonging to her apartment. She was undressing to bathe herself. The long tresses of her hair were already bound up. The amorous Monk had full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry of her person. She threw off her last garment, and advancing to the

Bath prepared for her, She put her foot into the water. It struck cold, and She drew it back again. Though unconscious of being observed, an inbred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and She stood hesitating upon the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play. The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the Bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. Ambrosio could bear no more: His desires were worked up to phrenzy.

'I yield!' He cried, dashing the mirror upon the ground:

'Matilda, I follow you! Do with me what you will!'

She waited not to hear his consent repeated. It was already midnight. She flew to her Cell, and soon returned with her little basket and the Key of the Cemetery, which had remained in her possession since her first visit to the Vaults. She gave the Monk no time for reflection.

'Come!' She said, and took his hand; 'Follow me, and witness the effects of your resolve!'

This said, She drew him hastily along. They passed into the Burying-ground unobserved, opened the door of the Sepulchre, and found themselves at the head of the subterraneous Staircase. As yet the beams of the full Moon had guided their steps, but that resource now failed them. Matilda had neglected to provide herself with a Lamp. Still holding Ambrosio's hand She descended the marble steps; But the profound obscurity with which they were overspread obliged them to walk slow and cautiously.

'You tremble!' said Matilda to her Companion; 'Fear not; The destined spot is near.'

They reached the foot of the Staircase, and continued to proceed, feeling their way along the Walls. On turning a corner suddenly, they descried faint gleams of light which seemed burning at a distance. Thither they bent their steps: The rays proceeded from a small sepulchral Lamp which flamed unceasingly before the Statue of St. Clare. It tinged with dim and cheerless beams the massy Columns which supported the Roof, but was too feeble to dissipate the thick gloom in which the Vaults above were buried.

Matilda took the Lamp.

'Wait for me!' said She to the Friar; 'In a few moments I am here again.'

With these words She hastened into one of the passages which branched in various directions from this spot, and formed a sort of Labyrinth. Ambrosio was now left alone: Darkness the most profound surrounded him, and encouraged the doubts which began to revive in his bosom. He had been hurried away by the delirium of the moment: The shame of betraying his terrors, while in Matilda's presence, had induced him to repress them; But now that he was abandoned to himself, they resumed their former ascendancy. He trembled at the scene which He was soon to witness. He knew not how far the delusions of Magic might operate upon his mind, and possibly might force him to some deed whose commission would make the breach between himself and Heaven irreparable. In this fearful dilemma, He would have implored God's assistance, but was conscious that He had forfeited all claim to such protection. Gladly would He have returned to the Abbey; But as He had past through innumerable Caverns and winding passages, the attempt of regaining the Stairs was hopeless. His fate was determined: No possibility of escape presented itself: He therefore combated his apprehensions, and called every

argument to his succour, which might enable him to support the trying scene with fortitude. He reflected that Antonia would be the reward of his daring: He inflamed his imagination by enumerating her charms. He persuaded himself that (as Matilda had observed), He always should have time sufficient for repentance, and that as He employed HER assistance, not that of the Daemons, the crime of Sorcery could not be laid to his charge. He had read much respecting witchcraft: He understood that unless a formal Act was signed renouncing his claim to salvation, Satan would have no power over him. He was fully determined not to execute any such act, whatever threats might be used, or advantages held out to him.

Such were his meditations while waiting for Matilda. They were interrupted by a low murmur which seemed at no great distance from him. He was startled. He listened. Some minutes past in silence, after which the murmur was repeated. It appeared to be the groaning of one in pain. In any other situation, this circumstance would only have excited his attention and curiosity:

In the present, his predominant sensation was that of terror. His imagination totally engrossed by the ideas of sorcery and Spirits, He fancied that some unquiet Ghost was wandering near

him; or else that Matilda had fallen a Victim to her presumption, and was perishing under the cruel fangs of the Daemons. The noise seemed not to approach, but continued to be heard at intervals. Sometimes it became more audible, doubtless as the sufferings of the person who uttered the groans became more acute and insupportable. Ambrosio now and then thought that He could distinguish accents; and once in particular He was almost convinced that He heard a faint voice exclaim,

'God! Oh! God! No hope! No succour!'

Yet deeper groans followed these words. They died away gradually, and universal silence again prevailed.

'What can this mean?' thought the bewildered Monk.

At that moment an idea which flashed into his mind, almost petrified him with horror. He started, and shuddered at himself.

'Should it be possible!' He groaned involuntarily; 'Should it but be possible, Oh! what a Monster am I!'

He wished to resolve his doubts, and to repair his fault, if it

were not too late already: But these generous and compassionate sentiments were soon put to flight by the return of Matilda. He forgot the groaning Sufferer, and remembered nothing but the danger and embarrassment of his own situation. The light of the returning Lamp gilded the walls, and in a few moments after Matilda stood beside him. She had quitted her religious habit: She was now cloathed in a long sable Robe, on which was traced in gold embroidery a variety of unknown characters: It was fastened by a girdle of precious stones, in which was fixed a poignard. Her neck and arms were uncovered. In her hand She bore a golden wand. Her hair was loose and flowed wildly upon her shoulders; Her eyes sparkled with terrific expression; and her whole Demeanour was calculated to inspire the beholder with awe and admiration.

'Follow me!' She said to the Monk in a low and solemn voice; 'All is ready!'

His limbs trembled, while He obeyed her. She led him through various narrow passages; and on every side as they past along, the beams of the Lamp displayed none but the most revolting objects; Skulls, Bones, Graves, and Images whose eyes seemed to glare on them with horror and surprize. At length they reached a

spacious Cavern, whose lofty roof the eye sought in vain to discover. A profound obscurity hovered through the void. Damp vapours struck cold to the Friar's heart; and He listened sadly to the blast while it howled along the lonely Vaults. Here Matilda stopped. She turned to Ambrosio. His cheeks and lips were pale with apprehension. By a glance of mingled scorn and anger She reprov'd his pusillanimity, but She spoke not. She placed the Lamp upon the ground, near the Basket. She motioned that Ambrosio should be silent, and began the mysterious rites. She drew a circle round him, another round herself, and then taking a small Phial from the Basket, poured a few drops upon the ground before her. She bent over the place, muttered some indistinct sentences, and immediately a pale sulphurous flame arose from the ground. It increased by degrees, and at length spread its waves over the whole surface, the circles alone excepted in which stood Matilda and the Monk. It then ascended the huge Columns of unhewn stone, glided along the roof, and formed the Cavern into an immense chamber totally covered with blue trembling fire. It emitted no heat: On the contrary, the extreme chillness of the place seemed to augment with every moment. Matilda continued her incantations: At intervals She took various articles from the Basket, the nature and name of most of which were unknown to the Friar: But among the few which

He distinguished, He particularly observed three human fingers, and an Agnus Dei which She broke in pieces. She threw them all into the flames which burned before her, and they were instantly consumed.

The Monk beheld her with anxious curiosity. Suddenly She uttered a loud and piercing shriek. She appeared to be seized with an access of delirium; She tore her hair, beat her bosom, used the most frantic gestures, and drawing the poignard from her girdle plunged it into her left arm. The blood gushed out plentifully, and as She stood on the brink of the circle, She took care that it should fall on the outside. The flames retired from the spot on which the blood was pouring. A volume of dark clouds rose slowly from the ensanguined earth, and ascended gradually, till it reached the vault of the Cavern. At the same time a clap of thunder was heard: The echo pealed fearfully along the subterraneous passages, and the ground shook beneath the feet of the Enchantress.

It was now that Ambrosio repented of his rashness. The solemn singularity of the charm had prepared him for something strange and horrible. He waited with fear for the Spirit's appearance, whose coming was announced by thunder and earthquakes. He looked

wildly round him, expecting that some dreadful Apparition would meet his eyes, the sight of which would drive him mad. A cold shivering seized his body, and He sank upon one knee, unable to support himself.

'He comes!' exclaimed Matilda in a joyful accent.

Ambrosio started, and expected the Daemon with terror. What was his surprize, when the Thunder ceasing to roll, a full strain of melodious Music sounded in the air. At the same time the cloud dispersed, and He beheld a Figure more beautiful than Fancy's pencil ever drew. It was a Youth seemingly scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked: A bright Star sparkled upon his forehead; Two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders; and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires, which played round his head, formed themselves into a variety of figures, and shone with a brilliance far surpassing that of precious Stones. Circlets of Diamonds were fastened round his arms and ankles, and in his right hand He bore a silver branch, imitating Myrtle. His form shone with dazzling glory: He was surrounded by clouds of rose-coloured light, and at the moment that He appeared, a refreshing air breathed perfumes through the

Cavern. Enchanted at a vision so contrary to his expectations, Ambrosio gazed upon the Spirit with delight and wonder: Yet however beautiful the Figure, He could not but remark a wildness in the Daemon's eyes, and a mysterious melancholy impressed upon his features, betraying the Fallen Angel, and inspiring the Spectators with secret awe.

The Music ceased. Matilda addressed herself to the Spirit: She spoke in a language unintelligible to the Monk, and was answered in the same. She seemed to insist upon something which the Daemon was unwilling to grant. He frequently darted upon Ambrosio angry glances, and at such times the Friar's heart sank within him. Matilda appeared to grow incensed. She spoke in a loud and commanding tone, and her gestures declared that She was threatening him with her vengeance. Her menaces had the desired effect: The Spirit sank upon his knee, and with a submissive air presented to her the branch of Myrtle. No sooner had She received it, than the Music was again heard; A thick cloud spread itself over the Apparition; The blue flames disappeared, and total obscurity reigned through the Cave. The Abbot moved not from his place: His faculties were all bound up in pleasure, anxiety, and surprize. At length the darkness dispersing, He perceived Matilda standing near him in her religious habit, with

the Myrtle in her hand. No traces of the incantation, and the Vaults were only illuminated by the faint rays of the sepulchral Lamp.

'I have succeeded,' said Matilda, 'though with more difficulty than I expected. Lucifer, whom I summoned to my assistance, was at first unwilling to obey my commands: To enforce his compliance I was constrained to have recourse to my strongest charms. They have produced the desired effect, but I have engaged never more to invoke his agency in your favour. Beware then, how you employ an opportunity which never will return. My magic arts will now be of no use to you: In future you can only hope for supernatural aid by invoking the Daemons yourself, and accepting the conditions of their service. This you will never do: You want strength of mind to force them to obedience, and unless you pay their established price, they will not be your voluntary Servants. In this one instance they consent to obey you: I offer you the means of enjoying your Mistress, and be careful not to lose the opportunity. Receive this constellated Myrtle: While you bear this in your hand, every door will fly open to you. It will procure you access tomorrow night to Antonia's chamber: Then breathe upon it thrice, pronounce her name, and place it upon her pillow. A death-like slumber will immediately seize

upon her, and deprive her of the power of resisting your attempts. Sleep will hold her till break of Morning. In this state you may satisfy your desires without danger of being discovered; since when daylight shall dispel the effects of the enchantment, Antonia will perceive her dishonour, but be ignorant of the Ravisher. Be happy then, my Ambrosio, and let this service convince you that my friendship is disinterested and pure. The night must be near expiring: Let us return to the Abbey, lest our absence should create surprize.'

The Abbot received the talisman with silent gratitude. His ideas were too much bewildered by the adventures of the night to permit his expressing his thanks audibly, or indeed as yet to feel the whole value of her present. Matilda took up her Lamp and Basket, and guided her Companion from the mysterious Cavern. She restored the Lamp to its former place, and continued her route in darkness, till She reached the foot of the Staircase.

The first beams of the rising Sun darting down it facilitated the ascent. Matilda and the Abbot hastened out of the Sepulchre, closed the door after them, and soon regained the Abbey's western Cloister. No one met them, and they retired unobserved to their respective Cells.

The confusion of Ambrosio's mind now began to appease. He rejoiced in the fortunate issue of his adventure, and reflecting upon the virtues of the Myrtle, looked upon Antonia as already in his power. Imagination retraced to him those secret charms betrayed to him by the Enchanted Mirror, and He waited with impatience for the approach of midnight.