

The Vindictive Monk *or* The Fatal Ring

By Isaac Crookenden

The young *Calini* was descended of a good family; was heir to great and still-increasing wealth; was the last representative of an honorable house; and the delight and admiration not only of his doting parent, but of every body who knew him. He possessed every grace of mental perfection; for his education had been conducted on so liberal a plan, that a clear, just, and accurate perception had been the happy result of his juvenile studies. His person was every way answerable to the above delineation of his mind. His make exhibited the truest symmetry; and his countenance beamed with masculine dignity, corrected with a gracious condescension.

Although *Calini* was reared up in the principles of the *Romish* church, that did not hinder him from seeing some of its absurdities; and therefore, while some of the votaries placed the essence of their religion in a gaudy exhibition of pompous ceremonies, his consisted in a steady, uniform system of good actions; an undeviating rectitude of conduct, prompted by the motive of his present and everlasting interest, as well as by the intrinsic beauty of benevolence. Such was the youth, whom we have selected for the hero of these memoirs. One day his father (as the youth had ever considered him), took him aside, and spake as follows—

‘The substance of what I am now going to unfold, I once thought I should have buried in oblivion; but, upon mature deliberation, I am come to a determination of entrusting you with it. You have always been thought to be my son. This is the moment to undeceive you. You are *not* my child!’—‘Not your son!’ exclaimed the youth, in the utmost astonishment; ‘whose then can I be?’—‘That you will never probably know,’ replied Signor *Calini*. ‘But you have not many obligations to your parents, who left you to perish in your infancy. My story excites your astonishment. Listen attentively, while I disclose the circumstance which induced me to bring you up as my own offspring. About twenty years ago, as I was landing from a gondola, one dark night, on the northern shores of the Adriatic, after I had returned from visiting one of my estates, my sight was struck with a white bundle within a foot from the waves; on examining which, I found it contained an infant. It was yourself; and I resolved that the direful intentions of those who left you should not only be frustrated, but I would adopt you as my son, two of mine having recently died. When I got home, I examined the bundle more accurately, and was surprised to see this ring. (Here he presented one to the astonished youth) You see, it is of a peculiar make; there is some name underneath. (The young man turned it, and saw the word *Ollorini* engraved on it) I beg, that from this day you would wear it, to remind you of the singular event; and be assured, my dear boy, although you are not the natural issue of my own loins, yet I shall always feel for you a father’s tenderness.’

Here Signor *Calini* concluded his narration, and left his auditor overwhelmed with astonishment. The barbarity of his real parents affected him severely; but the kindness of the signor afforded him a continual source of the most pleasing sensation.

A short time after this wondrous disclosure, young *Calini* (for so we shall still call him) had been to visit a young lads, to whom he was sincerely attached; and was now returning home on horseback. The night was far advanced, and very threatening. His road lay through a dark wood; in the midst of which, he was seized by two men, who dragged him along, ’till they came to the ruins of an old castle, where they halted, ’till one, who had a lamp, sought for a door, and at length told his comrade he had found it. They then led our hero through a long intricate passage;

at the end of which they unbolted a heavy iron door, and entered a gloomy stone dungeon. A strong chain, which was fastened to an enormous staple in the wall, discovered to the youth the horrors which awaited him. 'Here,' said one of the ruffians, 'here is your habitation, 'till you resign all pretensions to lady *Alexa*.' Our young lover now saw through the whole affair. He had been seized by order of a rival; but who this rival was, he had no means of judging. The inhuman monsters chained him to the wall, and, without speaking another word, left the dungeon. This mysterious event we shall now unfold:

There lived, in the neighbourhood of *Calini*, a man called *Sceloni*; of a gloomy character, and who was never seen once to smile; he was dependant on a nobleman, and had, from motives of self-interest, engaged to administer to his lewd propensities. This nobleman was enamoured of the very same lady our hero loved. Seeing no possibility of supplanting him in her affection, he called in the aid of the dark *Sceloni*, to whom he promised great pecuniary rewards, if he would dispatch his rival, and secure to him the possession of *Alexa*. The avaricious *Italian* undertook to perform what he required. For this purpose, he way-laid the youth on his return from *Alexa*'s house, as we have observed. But as he did not wish to embrue his hands in blood, if it could be done without, he had conveyed him to the ruins of the castle, whose intricate windings he well knew. Here he meant to keep him, 'till he should be able to extort an oath from him, that he would for ever resign all pretensions to *Alexa*. When he left the dungeon, he went directly to his employer, and told him the rival of his love was removed beyond the possibility of again being formidable. Signor *Holbruzi* took these words to mean no less than the death of the youth; and therefore he reaped the golden reward he aimed at.

But, notwithstanding this, *Alexa* was decidedly against his suit; and as she could not but be surprised at *Calini*'s unaccountable absence, as well as very much affected at it; she not only conceived additional disgust at *Holbruzi*'s addresses, but began to be suspicious of some base design having been executed against *Calini*. In the mean time, that unfortunate youth was suffering the severest extremities of imprisonment, and calling in vain on his dear *Alexa*. He was visited in the dungeon frequently by *Sceloni*, who endeavoured, by every means in his power, to make him resign all pretensions to *Alexa*; but he was steady in his refusal; nor did he yield, even when he was threatened with assassination. *Calini* was as unsuccessful in trying to discover the name and quality of his rival, as *Sceloni* was in extorting a resignation of *Alexa*.

After *Sceloni* had quitted the dungeon, the miserable youth began to reflect anew on his unhappy situation. He saw no probability of being united to the beloved object of his soul; why then not resign her? There was something in this word which seemed to imply cowardice, and he pertinaciously objected it. *Holbruzi* finding *Alexa* so little disposed to favor his passion, was resolved to possess her at all events. He ordered *Sceloni* to force her from her home, and bring her to his palace; which, under cover of a dark night, he effected.

Alexa was left an orphan at an early age; and, after her parents' death, she was reared up by a tender aunt, who loved her as her own child; but having a very slender income, necessity had obliged her to part with an estate in *Piedmont*, and she had purchased a small but neat villa in the neighborhood of *Naples*, where she resided with her beloved niece. The young *Calini* had found them out in their retirement, and had made his addresses to the fair *Alexa*; which at first was discouraged by the aunt, not as she had any objection to the youth; on the contrary, she was convinced he was worthy of her niece; but she knew the girl was his inferior in point of fortune. Yet when she found how firm he had taken hold of *Alexa*'s heart, and likewise heard of the liberal sentiments of signor *Calini*, she no longer opposed the mutual bias of their young and innocent hearts.

Things were in this situation, when *Calini* discontinued so unaccountably (to them at least) his visits. This circumstance, severe as it was to the young lady, was also felt by the aunt, who had conceived the greatest friendship for him. But her sorrows were unspeakably acute, when one night several ruffians broke into the house, and tore away her beloved *Alexa*. These were the cruel *Sceloni* and his emissaries, who conveyed her to the monster *Holbruzi*, as already related. But that lascivious wretch did not yet find his end answered. The persecuted maid was enabled to make a vigorous resistance to his meretricious wishes. Force he could have employed; but this he determined to delay, 'till every other method had been tried. He thought no way so likely to weaken her virtuous resolutions, as to let her know that her union with *Calini* was impossible, as that being was no longer an inhabitant of earth. This fatal intelligence overwhelmed her unfortunate breast with fresh despair, and rendered *Holbruzi* more than ever an object of disgust and abhorrence. His pride was severely mortified by her fixed dislike and undisguised contempt. In this unseasonable moment, *Sceloni* solicited a new supply for his late services in bringing *Alexa* to his palace. *Holbruzi*, smarting with the indifference of that female, answered sternly, that his trifling services had already been more than sufficiently rewarded; and, after rebuking him sharply for his avarice, absolutely refused to give him another *carlin* (fourpence of our money).

Sceloni seemed all humility, but he quitted the palace with a soul full of revenge; to accomplish which, he concerted a deep-laid scheme. He retired to the outskirts of the city, wrote to *Holbruzi* that he was leaving for his monastery (for this wretch was of an holy order), and going to a different part of the world; but conjured him to release the young *Calini* (who he confessed was alive, but imprisoned), and he described a dungeon where the youth was *not*. After he had sent this letter, he provided himself with a brace of pistols, and repaired to that very dungeon which he had mentioned in his letter as the prison of *Calini*. Here he threw himself on the ground, and personating the distress of that unfortunate youth, waited deliberately for *Holbruzi's* arrival; for he never doubted but that vindictive tyrant would come to sacrifice *Calini* with his own hand. He was not deceived in his conjecture. When that monster received the monk's letter, his countenance bespoke the savage passions it inspired. 'What!' said he, 'my detested rival living! This night he breathes his last.' He accordingly stole away that very evening, muffled up in a disguise, with a lamp in one hand, and a dagger in the other, through the dark passages of the ruins. *Sceloni* heard him coming, and uttered a groan, on purpose to direct his steps to the dungeon where he was. *Sceloni* soon heard the door unfastened, and he kept his finger close to the trigger. *Holbruzi* cautiously advanced the light, and then entered. The subtle *Sceloni* lay as if he was in a disturbed sleep. *Holbruzi* drew near; and as he bent over him, exclaimed, 'favored minion! Wilt thou ever more rival me in love? Thou sleepest. Awake in—' he would have said *death*; but at this moment the pseudo- *Calini* pressed the trigger, and dismissed his soul from this world.

But *Sceloni* was not yet satisfied; his revengeful soul thirsted for more blood. He considered, that if *Calini* had resigned *Alexa*, that maid, out of revenge, might have yielded to *Holbruzi*; and consequently he should not have met with that mortifying refusal from him, which had stimulated him to take the bloody means that he had just executed. His vindictive spirit resolving upon a double revenge, marked *Calini* for a second victim. No sooner had he made this horrible determination, but, snatching up the lamp (which had not been extinguished in falling), and the yet bloodless dagger, he rushed out of the dungeon into that of the destined youth, fully resolved to accomplish his dreadful purpose. The report of the pistol, as it was at a considerable distance from him, and vented in a close-pent dungeon, did not reach his auditory nerves; and he was yet

in a deep slumber, with his right hand on his breast. *Sceloni* drew near to strike; but, on observing the position of his hand, stooped down to remove it. The rays of the light discovered the ring, which his supposed father desired him to wear. It excited *Sceloni's* curiosity. He gently drew it off, and examined it by the lamp. Each moment furnished new alarm to his terrified mind. His face assumed an ashy paleness; his joints trembled with amazement and horror; but when he turned it up, and saw the engraved name of 'Ollorini' upon it, his horror and astonishment was complete. He hastily threw away the dagger; and awaking the youth, interrogated him about the mysterious ring. He could only relate what his supposed father had told him. This was enough. *Sceloni*, while convulsive sobs burst from his torn bosom, could only exclaim, 'I am your father.' The astonished youth looked up, and thought his reason was unsettled; but seeing his tears and groans, he knew not what to think. At length, he desired him to give some indubitable proof that he was his father. 'I will, my son, I will do it,' answered *Sceloni*; 'but this is not a proper place for conversation; let me unbind you from these ignominious chains!' He then freed the youth from his fetters; and they left the dungeon together, and retired to a small house, where, after they had entered a private room, he addressed the wondering impatient youth as follows:—

'Although, in reciting those circumstances which prove you to be my son, I must criminate myself; yet I shall not hesitate to do it, as I am sensible that you have more virtue than to conspire against the life of your father.' Here he paused a moment; for he recollected, that he himself had conspired against the life of his son. At length, he proceeded. 'My real name is *Dictori*. I was brought up under very indulgent parents. My natural temper, which was violent in the extreme, was put into a hot-bed, by the unreasonable and fatal indulgence of those parents. 'Tis that indulgence which has caused my ruin. If they had done their duty, and restrained, by due correction, the impetuosity of my natural temper, I should not have been a prey to those destructive passions of my nature, which have since acted as gourds to prick me forward down the slippery path of vice. I was early attached to a lady, whose name was *Mariana Vicenza*; but my native pride was severely wounded, when I discovered that she not only beheld me with indifference, but with a fixed dislike. I now, through obstinacy, advanced my suit with more eagerness than ever; when it would have been more honorable silently to withdraw it. However, her parents obliged her to accept of my hand at the altar. As I never could forgive the little affection she had shown for me, I soon began to retaliate upon her after marriage. Among other passions which I vented upon her without mercy, the demon of jealousy began to agitate my restless breast with its hydra horrors. I thought it very probable that she, who was forced to marry a man whom she did not like, should entertain in his absence one she did. My suspicions were strengthened by seeing this very ring upon her finger, which I apprehended was given her by her gallant. I went so far as to believe you was his child. In a frenzy of rage, I murdered my wife, and committed you to the waves, together with the detested and fatal ring. I have had proof since, that that very ring was given her before marriage by an uncle who had gone beyond sea; that he had his name engraved on it, which was *Ollorini*. As I was afraid to stay in that part, I came to *Naples*, and became a monk of the order of *St Francis*. Spare me the rest!'

This truly wonderful relation affected the astonished youth a great deal.

But we must take leave of *Calini* a little while to look after the lovely persecuted *Alexa*. That unfortunate maid was ready to abandon herself to despair. Torn away from her peaceful retreat by ruffians, at the dreadful, the horror-working hour of midnight, to fall a prey to the unbridled lust of a lewd barbarian! Separated from her dear aunt! Torn too from the fond, the protecting arms of the youth she sighed for! what can exceed her misery, wretched captive as she then was

in the most hated mansion of the nefarious monster *Holbruzi*? for she as yet knew nothing of the sanguinary scenes which had been exhibited in the castle-ruins. The savage *Holbruzi*, when he left his house at midnight, had consigned the wretched maid to one of his trusted servants, who executed with relentless rigor the confidence reposed in him. We now, for a short time, turn from the unhappy beauty, to see the mournful effect which her loss had upon her disconsolate aunt. That distressed matron, now separated by cruel fate from a beloved niece, in whom her very existence seemed to be wrapt up, experienced the most poignant anguish that can possibly be imagined. She wrung her aged hands in wild despair, and in frantic accents called on her far-off niece, her dear *Alexa*. While she was in the height of her lamentation, a knocking at the door was heard. For a considerable time she was afraid to open it, least, in so doing, she should let in those who ravished from her embraces her beloved niece, and thereby become herself a victim of their savage fury. But while she hesitated what to do, she heard a voice at the door requesting admission; the cadence of which she thought she remembered, though her distress would not permit her to be certain to whom it belonged. She however assumed courage sufficient to open it, when *Calini* directly rushed in. As he knew nothing of *Alexa* being at *Holbruzi's* detested mansion, he, as soon as he left the monk, repaired to her residence, though not without dreadful apprehensions for her safety, occasioned by the silence of *Sceloni*, on his asking after her.

It may perhaps be thought strange, that the monk should not have told his son where she was; seeing he knew she was at *Holbruzi's* palace. But, if we consider that he had been some time absent from *Naples*, and that he knew so much of that villain as to think it probable that he had murdered that maid, before he intended to assassinate her lover, we shall cease to wonder at his conduct. Add to this, that if he had discovered to *Calini* that *Alexa* was at *Holbruzi's* mansion, it would naturally have introduced an inquiry into that monster's mysterious absence—an inquiry which would doubtless have directed the finger of suspicion to himself. This was what the monk dreaded should transpire. He had already dipped his hands so deep in blood, that his conscience was always pointing to the gibbet, or the inquisitorial torture. He had therefore preserved an obstinate silence respecting *Alexa*; and our hero, unable to endure the tortures of suspense, flew upon the pinions of indescribable anxiety to her aunt's, as already mentioned.

When *Calini* asked for *Alexa*, all her grief was renewed; and she told the distracted lover the real truth. 'Dragged away at midnight!' exclaimed our frantic hero. 'I am the football of destiny. Why did I not die in my prison?' In a little time, however, he became more calm; and he vowed to discover her, if it was within the verge of possibility.

The reputed father of our hero received his foster son with the greatest joy imaginable, and heard with astonishment and horror the circumstances which had happened to him. He was, however, severely afflicted at the loss of the amiable *Alexa*; for that lovely maid stood very high both in his esteem and affection; and he had beheld the growing love which the youth evinced for her with cheerful approbation. It excited his utmost surprise to think who could possibly have stolen her from her peaceful home. He little thought that it was the machinations of one who often partook of his hospitality, and had been a frequent visitor at his festive board. But this very consideration enabled our hero to trace out her persecutor, and her present prison. He recollected *Holbruzi* being at his father's, as he then thought him; as likewise, that he was always exceedingly discourteous to himself; the occasion of which he had in vain attempted to unravel; but now it appeared plain enough. *Calini* considered also, that he knew perfectly well of his love for *Alexa*, as also the place of that young lady's residence. When therefore he, in his cooler moments, put all these circumstances together, the suspicions they excited were so strong, that our unfortunate youth found it impossible to think otherways than that he must be certainly

somehow concerned, if not a principal agent in the removal of the unfortunate girl.

Influenced by this supposition, he determined to go directly to the palace of *Holbruzi*, to see if the beloved of his soul was really there. But, upon second thoughts, he resolved to await all night; and set spies in the mean time about the house, to discover, if possible, the secret transactions going forward in it. The spies brought him intelligence, that they saw a young lady superficially through one of the windows, leaning upon her arm in a melancholy posture, and that she appeared to be in extreme distress. This was sufficient to stimulate our hero to instant exertion. He directly went, with a desperate determination, well armed; resolving, if they denied him admission, to force the door. But the servant admitted him upon the first summons, expecting it was his master. Our hero instantly rushed up stairs; and hearing a female scream, he broke into the room, and beheld his beloved *Alexa*, struggling in the embraces of a ruffian; whom he severely wounded, and rescued the lovely maid.

How was she rejoiced to see her dear, her loved *Calini*!

Sceloni had the satisfaction of seeing them happy before he retired for life to his monastery.

He now found no difficulty in being united to his dear *Alexa*; whose marriage was celebrated amid an amazing multitude of admiring spectators.

The monk, after this, was never seen beyond the walls of his convent; but passed his life in the most rigorous penance.