

The Spectre Mother

Or, the Haunted Tower

By Anonymous

CHAPTER I

The heavy clock of Rovido castle had just sounded the last and fearful hour of night; when a man (whose form seemed more than of human stature) stole from the concealment of a dark recess, and with slow and cautious steps, paced towards the more inhabited part of the castle—a long dark cloak shrouded his gigantic figure, and the sable plume of feathers that waved in his hat, shaded a face on which villainy had stamped her pale and terrific image; one hand held a small dark lantern, and the other was raised to his breast, to be assured the murderous weapon it concealed remained in safety.

The assassin frequently paused, for the uninterrupted stillness which pervaded the building, struck to his guilty soul with a sensation infinitely more appalling than the warring of tempestuous elements. He approached a Gothic casement, the sky seemed overspread with one dark cloud, and presented an appearance so gloomy, that even Moresco shuddered as he gazed. Starting from the momentary weakness with which conspiring circumstances had affected his mind, he quickened his pace; and crossing the hall, raised his light to discover the secret door, which led by an indirect way to that part of the building which his dreadful mission called him.

Moresco soon found the object of his search, and ascended a narrow flight of stone steps, leading to a suite of deserted apartments—as he passed through the last of these, he looked cautiously round him, and entered the long and gloomy gallery on which they opened—he stopped to listen—unbroken silence still reigned; and drawing the poignard from his bosom, he gazed on the point, as though to ascertain its sharpness; a convulsive smile distorting his features, as his mind dwelt on the deed he meditated, and its purposed reward.

The murderer proceeded down the gallery, and gaining its extremity, with some difficulty removed one of the marble statues with which it was ornamented; and applying his hand to a panel concealed behind the figure, it yielded without noise, and he entered the antechamber of his intended victims. He replaced the statue, and secured the panel; then approaching a door on the opposite side, bent his ear to the key-hole, and satisfied that all was quiet, he unclosed the door, which led him into a spacious and magnificent bed-chamber. Moresco extinguished the light that burnt in the apartment; and turning his lamp so as to conceal his own figure, with a cautious step he approached the bed, and gently undrew the curtain.

The young and beautiful object of his fatal purpose reclined in the slumber of innocence, unconscious that the poignard of the assassin was, at that moment, aimed at her guiltless life. A lovely babe reposed upon her arm, its sleepless eyes were turned to the features of its devoted mother, and its little fingers playfully entwined in a stray ringlet of her hair. The dark spirit of Moresco shrank from the presence of innocence thus forcibly delineated, and wanted courage to perpetrate a deed so horrible; but at the moment, the mother moved in her sleep, and with instinctive fondness pressed the babe closer to her bosom, as though to save it from the blow that hovered over it—the transient beam of goodness that had broken on the guilty soul of Moresco, vanished before his apprehensions of personal safety, and his thirst for gold; and with a nerved and well-aimed blow, he pierced her virtuous heart, who had never known even a thought

injurious to his welfare or his happiness. One faint and quivering sigh alone told the departure of the pure spirit from its mortal habitation.

With trembling eagerness, Moresco drew the bloody weapon from the bosom of the murdered Julia, pointing it (still reeking with the vital current that had so lately warmed the heart of the mother) at the breast of her innocent babe; the infant, unconscious of its danger, smiled in the face of Moresco at the very moment he was about to deprive it of existence, and he paused; the wind arising in a sudden blast, echoed dismally through the chamber, and sounded to the alarmed imagination of Moresco, as a repetition of that appalling sigh, breathed from the lips of his departed victim. He raised his lamp, and gazed fearfully around; the immense size of the room, aided by the dark shade of the hangings and furniture, rendered it impossible for him to discern its extremity by the faint light he bore in his hand; and anxious to hasten from a spot so terrible to his conscience, he snatched the babe from the bed, and had aimed the crimsoned steel, when a vivid blue light flashed on his countenance, and instinctively raised his eyes to ascertain from whence it proceeded, and he beheld the pale shade of the early-fated mother standing before him, her shadowy hand pointing to the corpse, over whose head he traced in characters of blood, and encircled by a lambent flame—"Let the life of the innocent be spared, to plead for the guilty soul of the murderer."

The dagger fell from the powerless hand of the too conscious Moresco, and his whole frame shuddered so convulsively, that he could scarcely support the infant; who, as though infected by the terrors that possessed his mind, clung round his neck for protection. Moresco sank on his knees before the spectre, and pressing one hand to his heart, while the other held the child, without daring to raise his eyes to the phantom, in broken accents articulated a vow to save and protect the infant; and in the next moment, the whole appearance vanished. Soon as his spirits became sufficiently composed, folding the child up in his cloak, he left the chamber; and retracing his steps, quitted the castle without being observed.

Not daring to inform his employer that he had spared the child, he felt the necessity of giving the appearance of its having been destroyed; and consequently taking off its clothes (which were stained with blood), he left them on the banks of a river that was situated within a mile of Rovido; intending to impress the idea of its having been murdered, and the body thrown into the water. He was aware, that it might seem strange, that the child should be destroyed there, instead of in the fatal chamber; but he trusted that its death would nevertheless obtain belief. Having performed this task, and carefully covering the now slumbering child with part of his own garments, he proceeded, and some time before daybreak reached the dreary and retired spot, which, for many months, had been his home.

The well-known rap of Moresco was answered by an enquiry of who sought admittance; and his voice confirming the signal, he was admitted to the lonely habitation.

"Angela!" said Moresco, addressing his wife, "take this infant, and cherish it as thine own: the manner in which we live, since we hold no intercourse with anyone, will make the task of deception easy; and be mindful, as you value the life of your husband, that you keep the secret."

"But may I not know whom the secret babe belongs to?" timidly enquired Angela, "who is its mother?"—"No!" thundered Moresco, "dare again to ring the name of mother in my ear, and thou mayest shudder for thy temerity."—"It is enough, spare this violence, I am satisfied," said the trembling Angela.

"Forgive me," said Moresco in a softer tone, "and if my peace and life is dear to you, swear by the most solemn protestations, never to let it appear that this is not our child; for no one as yet (if you have obeyed me in confining yourself to the seclusion I prescribed you) knows whether we

are childless or not; and mark me, should any observation be made on the sudden appearance of the infant, the tale must be, that I have fetched it from a relation afar off, no matter where.”—“I have in every thing obeyed you,” replied the meek Angela, “and still promise to fulfill your commands.”

“’Tis enough,” said Moresco smiling horribly, “we will think no more of it: bring me some spirits, for I would teach my soul forgetfulness of—of—and drink thy health, Angela,” he added, rubbing his hand over his forehead, as though to collect his confused ideas.—Moresco filled a small goblet with brandy, which he eagerly swallowed, and replenishing the empty vessel, turned towards the fire, and stirred it into a vivid blaze.

“What a melancholy stillness has pervaded the air tonight,” said Angela, looking timidly around her; “methinks it has impressed my fancy with a more than usual terror of this gloomy tower; for I seemed to hear—” “What?” eagerly demanded Moresco. “Nothing,” replied his wife, terrified at the severity of his manner, “’twas but the conjuring of a disturbed imagination.” “I would know the idle fancy that disturbed thee,” said Moresco, “I pray thee, tell it to me.” “As near as I can judge,” replied Angela, “it was about half an hour past midnight, when, sitting on the chair which you now occupy, I heard”—“What did you hear?” hastily interrupted Moresco. “At half an hour past midnight!” he added in a muttering tone.—“Yes, my lord,” replied Angela, “it was at that time. I sat meditating on what could have so long detained you; when, on a sudden, both my lamp and fire burnt with such dimness, that I could scarcely discern the furniture that was near, and a sigh so soft, and yet so dismal, sounded on my ear, that it sunk on my heart with a sensation of extreme terror.”

Moresco struck his hand on his forehead, his whole frame trembling with the agitation of his mind. Angela was terrified at the emotion he betrayed, and felt an apprehension and horror, to which she could assign no name. “We will to rest!” said Moresco, rising from his seat, and emptying the flask that stood before him. “Methinks you have infected me with these fancies; another time, and I will laugh thee out of them, but now I would sleep,” he added.

Angela lit a taper, and in silence preceding her husband, entered their chamber. Moresco approached the bed, but his eyes resting on the babe who reposed in quietness upon it, he shrunk back. “Why do you start so?” asked Angela, observing his agitation. “Saw you nothing?” demanded Moresco, looking wildly at her.—“No, my lord, nothing; do not gaze so fearfully; you terrify me: I pray you retire to bed.”—“I cannot sleep by that child,” said Moresco; “take it away.”—“Let it remain tonight,” returned Angela, “there is no other couch prepared.” “Well, be it so; tomorrow, you must provide for it”: and recollecting himself, fearful of more alarming the mind of Angela, he conquered his repugnance, and went to bed.

The mystery that attended the child, Moresco’s seeming horror on beholding it, and the extreme agitation of his mind, were subjects too harassing to the feelings of Angela to allow her to sleep; and pressing the babe in her arms, who had instinctively crept towards her, she mused with terror and curiosity on the incidents of the night; from the contemplation of these images, her distressed mind wandered to a no less painful, though a far different subject of meditation. She dwelt on the vicissitudes of her own destiny, and tears fast flowed down her cheeks as her fond heart throbbled with tender recollections of the friends who had cherished her infancy, and the lover, whose faithful affection had blest her maturer youth; the first had long slumbered in the grave, but di Montmorenci might yet exist, though not for her: the unfortunate Angela might never again listen to the soothing of his voice, or dwell again in reality on that countenance, memory delighted to recall.

CHAPTER II

Angela Modeni was the daughter of humble, though respectable parents, left an orphan and destitute at an early age; the Marchioness di Montmorenci (a Venetian lady, who had known and esteemed the Signora Modeni) took her under her protection³ and bestowed on her an education that rendered her a suitable companion for her patroness. Happy in the kindness and affection of the marchioness, she reached her twentieth year; at this time, the young Marquis di Montmorenci returned from abroad, whither he had spent the last three years; Angela had seen him before, but for so short a period, that the charms of his mind and disposition had not had sufficient opportunity to display themselves; but now that Venice had become his residence, she could not long remain blind or insensible to the singular merit and interest of his character. Alarmed at the growth of an attachment she could not hope would terminate happily, she sought to avoid the society she loved. Di Montmorenci felt in his own heart sensations that immediately explained the conduct of Angela, and his love kept pace with the esteem the virtue of that conduct excited.

The marquis, despising the advantages of rank, when placed in competition with worth and happiness, declared his affection to its fair object; and, in defiance of the resolution of Angela to conceal its reciprocity, drew from her the acknowledgement he wished; but though he had so far succeeded, no entreaties could induce her to forget the debt of gratitude and duty she had incurred towards her benefactress; and she steadily refused to comply with the pleadings of affection, since she could not hope to obtain the sanction of the marchioness, who depended on seeing her son form an alliance of equal birth. Yet, though she felt assured, she would never be the wife of di Montmorenci, there was something so soothing to the mind of Angela, in the certainty of being beloved where she was herself so strongly attached, that her own affection rather increased than diminished; perhaps, the consciousness of having made a sacrifice to virtue of its dearest wishes, acts as a stimulus to a pure and exalted love; at least, it seemed so in Angela, for, from the moment she relinquished her lover, the sentiment became imbued with every feeling and every thought of her soul.

Di Montmorenci, less capable of bearing the disappointment, soon discovered to the quick eye of the marchioness the secret that corroded his heart, and inexpressibly alarmed for the happiness and future establishment of her son, she immediately determined to remove Angela from his society. The marchioness was at a loss to conjecture whether his affection was returned, and judging it best for her own views to suppose it was not, since she could not well dispose of Angela without assigning some motive, she determined to impart to her, her suspicion of the cause of di Montmorenci's evident uneasiness; and by appealing to her gratitude and affection, to induce her to retire without his knowledge for some time to a distant convent, the name of which was to be kept concealed.

The attempt succeeded to the entire satisfaction of the marchioness. Angela, struggling to conceal the tenderness of her own heart, consented; and everything being arranged, she left the castle a few mornings afterwards before daybreak, accompanied by a male and female domestic—the lady di Montmorenci, intending to acquaint her son in the course of the day of her motive, and the steps she had taken.

Meantime, Angela, with a heavy heart, proceeded on her journey; towards the conclusion of the second day, they entered on a large and gloomy forest, night closed around them, and the sound of a banditti's horn echoed amidst the trees; in a short time, the travellers were surrounded, and Angela and her attendants taken prisoners to the caverns they inhabited. The loveliness of Angela's person attracted the attention of Ludorico, the chief bandit, and he ordered

that every attention should be paid her; Moresco, the second in command, surmised the motive of his captain's urbanity, and equally charmed himself, determined to defeat his purpose.

Moresco was the youngest son of a Neapolitan nobleman, from whom he had inherited an estate; incapable of supporting the claim of his extravagant and dissipated conduct, he endeavoured by gaming to retrieve what he had lost, but in the attempt, deprived himself of the small portion which remained: grown desperate from the ruin that involved him, he had recourse to fraud and artifice to support himself; and at length being detected in one of his dishonourable actions, a duel ensued, in which he killed his adversary. Obligated to leave Naples, he met on his journey a party of Ludorico's men, and was conveyed to their chief, by whom he was soon persuaded to join the association; and distinguishing himself in many enterprises, he ascended step by step, till he became second in command.

Desirous of avenging himself against Ludorico, who had openly disapproved his conduct in a late expedition, he resolved at once to disappoint the wishes of his chief, and secure the person of Angela for himself. For this purpose, he warned his intended victim of her danger with regard to Ludorico; and urging her, by the most plausible entreaties, arguments, and protestations, to depend upon him to save her from the fate her own prior observations had taught her to dread, she confided in his honour, and suffered him to remove her from the cave. He protested, that had it been in his power, her female attendant should have been the companion of her flight; but this (he added) was useless to attempt. Fearful of trusting to Moresco, yet still more terrified at remaining with Ludorico, Angela was obliged to make choice of the evil that appeared the lightest, and trusting in heaven, that all its decrees (whether happy or afflicting in their present appearance) tended towards some wise and good purpose, she accepted the protection of Moresco to lead her from captivity.

Her companion was not long in revealing the reality of his motives and intention; and the unhappy Angela found that she must either consent to unite her fate to his, or submit to an alternative she should not fail to reject.

Moresco had really imbibed a passion that made him desirous of entirely securing its object, and believing that such a mind as Angela's would consider a consecrated vow binding, however repugnant to her feelings; and that he should, by allowing her a choice, make himself appear in a light somewhat more deserving of her favour, he offered her marriage. Despairing of succour, she was obliged to comply; and Moresco procured a priest, whom the power of gold easily influenced to perform the ceremony; and the nearly insensible Angela, scarcely able to articulate what was requested of her, was borne in triumph from the altar by the unprincipled Moresco. Fearful of the consequences to himself, should he be discovered, he removed to a considerable distance from the haunts of the banditti; and assuming a different name to that he had borne while with them, he fixed his residence in one of the most desolate parts of Italy, in a deserted and ruined tower. This habitation well suited the purpose of Moresco; for the many and fearful tales that were related of it, secured him from the danger of intrusion on his solitude, and he had strictly enjoined Angela to abstain from any intercourse whatever.

The next care of Moresco was to provide for the support of himself and wife; and this he effected by private depredations at night, in the environs of a town, situated a few leagues distant: in one of these excursions, chance introduced him to the Count Ruvello, who soon understanding his character, gave him a mission, which promised him too large a reward to be withstood. The husband of the ill-fated Julia had lately fallen in the field of warfare; and by his will, he decreed his immense possessions to his wife and child; but in case of the decease of the mother and the daughter unmarried, the whole of his fortune was to revert to his kinsman, Count

Ruvello. This intelligence no sooner reached the ears of the count, than he felt a restlessness and inquietude that continually tormented him, and by degrees, the horrible idea of murder stole into his mind; and Moresco was fixed on, and agreed to perpetrate the deed—how he performed that agreement is already known.

CHAPTER III

Moresco, soon as it was daybreak, awoke from an uneasy sleep, and immediately equipped himself in the garb of a friar (telling Angela he should not return till two days after the ensuing), and set out for the dwelling of Count Ruvello; it was night before he reached the palace of the count, and being informed he had retired, oppressed with the mournful intelligence of his kinsman's death, he, with seeming devotion, crossed himself.

"Perhaps, holy father," said the porter, "my lord may find comfort in your pious consolation; tarry a moment here, I will communicate thy wish to see him." The man shortly returned, and desiring Moresco to follow him, ushered him into the antechamber of the count.

Ruvello, as his eye rested on the gigantic figure and stern visage of Moresco, retreated a few paces from him; the varied hue of his countenance, imparting the feelings of his mind.—"Why do you shrink from me, my lord?" asked the assassin contemptuously, "do you repent?"—"Repent!" said the count in the same tone, "no, signor, methinks my courage is scarcely less dauntless than thine; but this is idle, hast thou done the deed?"—"I have!" replied Moresco. "But wherefore," demanded Ruvello, "didst thou destroy the child out of the castle?"—"Because," said Moresco, "as I was about to stab it—but, hark! what was that? was it you, my lord?" he asked in accents of terror.—"Me!—what?" demanded Ruvello, even more alarmed. "Did you not sigh, my lord, just as I spoke of the child?"—"In truth, I know not," said Ruvello; "but it is possible—I have a habit of it." "Well, my lord, to be brief," rejoined Moresco, speaking hastily; "just at the moment that I would have destroyed it, a sudden noise in the extremity of the chamber alarmed me; and in the first impulse, I retreated with the child in my arms, and making towards the river, I took from it its clothes, fearing they might entangle with something so as to save its life, and plunged it into the water."

"'Tis well, signor," replied Ruvello, "thou hast done the business to my satisfaction, and wilt find the promised sum in this bag; but, for the sake of appearances, you will, as before agreed upon, remain a day or two in my palace, under the semblance of soothing my mind in its affliction." Moresco bowed, and the count intimating to his servant, his wish of retaining the friar for some short period, apartments were prepared for his reception.

CHAPTER IV

Angela, unable to sleep, arose soon after the departure of Moresco, and kindling a fire in the chamber, sought to enliven by its blaze the dreariness of a November morning. Though the society of the man, circumstances had compelled her to marry, could never be otherwise than repugnant to her feelings; yet the prospect of spending so many hours alone, in the gloomy ruin they inhabited, cast a painful depression on her spirits. She endeavoured to find in the cherub smiles and sportive fondness of the babe towards its new protector, a relief from the heaviness that oppressed her; but there were ideas of such painful incertitude connected with every thought of the child, that it rather added to, than relieved the weight she endeavoured to lighten. At length the weary day closed, and the heavy clouds that had obscured the sun, seemed gathering

together, intimating an approaching storm. Angela had early put the babe to rest; but a terror for which she could scarcely account, so impressed her mind, that sleep seemed banished from her eyes; and she continued to sit by the fire in her chamber.

'Twas now past midnight, and the storm that had been long threatening, burst over the ruin with sudden violence. Angela started from her seat, and gazed with horror around her; the vivid lightning that flashed almost incessantly through the casement, revealed with terrible effect the awful sublimity of the scene without.

Angela turned, shuddering from the view, and scarcely daring to either breathe or raise her eyes, approached the bed, believing, that even to be near the infant would cheer the dismal solitude of all around; but scarcely had she gained that part of the chamber in which the little innocent reposed, than a sudden effulgence burst upon her sight, and a pallid and bleeding form, encircled by a pale blue vapour, stood before her. Angela, petrified to the spot, stood gazing in wild amaze upon the awful being, as it slowly glided before her; it reached the bed, and the curtains, as influenced by a supernatural cause unclosed—~and the phantom, with a look of the most mournful tenderness, bent over the slumbering babe; then turning towards the still motionless Angela, with one hand raised towards heaven, and the other pointing to the wound, it motioned her to follow. Angela, not daring to obey, still remained in the same attitude; the object she dreaded, and yet revered, looked beseechingly at her, and by the most impressive and solemn manner, silently implored her compliance: by degrees, the terrors that pervaded the mind of Angela subsided, a pious enthusiasm elevated her feelings, and revived her courage, and believing that she was selected as the humble agent of some important event, she resolved to obey and comply with the silent direction of the spirit, to take the slumbering babe in her arms; with trembling and slow steps she followed. As the spectre reached the extremity of the apartment, a concealed door flew open, and the startled Angela perceived a narrow and dark passage, the length of which her eye could not discover—the phantom glided through the aperture, and in awful silence proceeded—a pale stream of supernatural light revealing the part of the building they were thus traversing. The passage they had entered, wound for a considerable way—at length the spectre paused, and raising both her arms upwards, looked impressively at Angela; a sigh, such as she had heard on the night preceding, now burst on her ear, and ere her harrowed senses had recovered the shock it gave them, the phantom sunk in a moment from her sight: and in place of the spot on which it had stood, she beheld a dark and apparently immeasurable chasm.

Angela, with sudden and resistless force, felt impelled to descend the half-ruined steps, leading through the dreadful abyss; many times she paused ere she gained the bottom to ascertain its depth, but in vain, so faint was the light, and so black the gloomy vault in which it ended. Shuddering with terror and dismay, on finding herself in a place of such silent horror, she wanted courage to look towards the immense height from which she had descended; but a low rumbling sound breaking over her head, in a moment urged her to raise her eyes, and with horror too poignant for description, she beheld the chasm closing over her, so as to preclude the possibility of her return. Scarcely able to support the child, she leaned against the damp wall of the dungeon—her blood seemed congealed in her veins, and her nerveless limbs shook with convulsive motion.

For several minutes Angela had remained in this situation, when her name, thrice pronounced in solemn sepulchral accents, broke on the profound stillness that pervaded the spot; and the shadowy hands of several scarcely visible forms gliding through a thick and dusky vapour, beckoned her forward. With desperate courage, she obeyed the mystic summons and proceeding

through a long range of subterraneous chambers, at length found herself at the entrance of a vault of an immense size and irregular form; as she passed into this dreary receptacle (for she found that it had served the purpose of a common sepulchre), her supernatural guides became gradually more indistinct, and soon entirely faded from her view. Angela perceived a ray of light beaming through this melancholy spot, but a projection of a wall, which had been designed as a partition, prevented her discovering whence it arose; urged by the mixed sensations of hope and fear, she advanced towards it, and turning the half-ruined partition, her eager eyes rested on a scene that seemed to transfix their gaze.

The phantom that had urged her visit to this abode of horror, stood by an altar of black marble, on which the flame of a lamp cast an imperfect and melancholy light; large spots of crimson blood stained the sable stone, and fragments of human bones lay strewn upon the ground. The phantom motioned Angela to approach, and with desperate resolution, she obeyed the summons; as she reached the altar, the death-cold hand of the spectre pointed to a small recess in the marble; Angela, comprehending the meaning, bent her eye to the spot, and observing that it concealed something of uncertain form, she drew it forward, and in a moment discovered it to be a dagger steeped to the hilt in blood. A more ghastly and livid hue diffused itself over the deathly features of the spectre, still pointing one hand to her bosom, with the other she directed the eye of Angela to the fatal weapon, who, with horror too strong for language, traced the name of Moresco carved rudely on the hilt.

“Angela! Angela!” pronounced the spectre in solemn accents, “thou art called upon to save the innocent from the snares of the guilty; bear her, even this instant, from the power of her mother’s murderer. It is the Count Ruvello authorised the deed, and thou must restore to her the inheritance he has usurped. Fear not to act with firmness, thy virtue shall produce thy happiness.”

A sudden stupor pressed on the senses of Angela, and without being conscious of the means by which she had been conducted, she found herself, on reviving, in the open air; and looking round, saw that she reclined on a small bank, a few paces distant from her house. Every incident of the last two hours was fresh in her memory; and animated by the awful solemnity of the whole, she resolved to obey the sacred injunction of her midnight visitor; and gazing on the child, which still slumbered in her arms, with a mother’s interest and fondness, she proceeded down the road, to which she had been unconsciously conducted.

The storm had ceased to rage, but the black clouds still hovered in the air, bespeaking a renewal of its violence. Angela exerted herself to the utmost, and had pursued the path for more than a league, when the rain began again to descend, and faint flashes of lightning crossed her path; she redoubled her speed, and discovering a large building at a short distance, she hastened towards it, trusting its inhabitants would afford a temporary shelter for herself, and her precious charge.

The drawbridge was down, and Angela entering the courtyard, crossed to the grand door or entrance, and raised the bugle to her lips, but her faint breath was insufficient to produce a sound by which she might hope to be heard, and after many successful efforts, she left the spot, trusting to find a postern, through which she might gain admittance. Angela was not deceived in this expectation; at a short distance from the principal door, she found a smaller one half unclosed, through which she passed into a passage; here she would have remained (fearing to proceed), but the current of air was so strong, that she had too powerful apprehensions for the comfort and health of the child, to allow her to continue; and cautiously proceeding to the end (for it was still too dark to see her way), she found herself at the foot of a staircase. Angela ascended the first flight, and feeling that there was yet another, she determined to go no further;

but seating herself on the bottom of the second, she wrapped the infant in the foldings of her robe, determined to await there till daybreak.

An hour elapsed, and the harassed fugitive, wearied by the fatigue and agitation she had suffered, had nearly fallen asleep, when the sound of a slow step upon the stairs, roused her from the momentary forgetfulness that had stolen over her, and hastily rising, she endeavoured, without noise, to ascend the remainder of the steps; but for want of light to guide her, she had nearly fallen over a loose fragment of stone that had been dislodged from the wall, and the shock it occasioned awakened the child, who immediately began to cry.

The person who was behind quickened his pace, and Angela, who had now gained the top, with one hand extended, to observe if anything impeded her progress, ran down a long gallery; unable to proceed further, and hearing no sound of pursuit, she seated herself on the floor, and gently laid the babe, who was now quiet, in her lap; endeavouring, by rubbing her hands and temples, to dissipate the faintness that every instant increased upon her; but the effort was vain, and in a few moments she sank to the ground wholly insensible.

The child, who was still awake, stole from her lap, and creeping on its hands and knees to some little distance, renewed its cries; the sound directed the man who had before heard it to the spot; though still in the dark, he found the child without discovering the unconscious Angela; and taking the little innocent in his arms, he left the gallery in order to relight his taper, which a draught of air had extinguished on his way back to that part of the building which he inhabited, intending to return to look for the man, or woman, whom he supposed had dropped the child. Angela, before this could be effected, had recovered; and missing the infant whom she fruitlessly endeavoured to find in the gallery, resolved to hazard every consideration of self to secure its safety. In a state of mind bordering on frenzy, she entered a suite of apartments leading from the gallery, which in vain she searched for the treasure she had lost; at length the reflection of a lamp shining through a half-opened door, struck on her gladdened sight, and she eagerly rushed forward, believing, though a savage should inhabit it, he could not refuse her the boon of a taper and assistance in her anxious pursuit; but what could equal her joy when, on entering the chamber, she beheld the sweet object of her distress reclining on the couch, on which the blaze of a good fire shed an enlivening glow; she sprung towards it, and the babe, as though it knew her, smiled through its tears, and stretched out its little hands to meet her embrace. Angela folded it to her bosom, and her agitated spirits relieved themselves in tears.

Ere Angela has ceased to weep on the bosom of the child, the being whom she dreaded, entered the chamber, and fearful of raising her eyes to a countenance, in which she might possibly trace a character of villainy, she remained trembling, and kneeling by the couch.

“Fear not, lady!” said a voice, that every nerve acknowledged.—She could not answer; she could not speak; but almost convulsed with dread and expectation, she started from the couch, and in the next moment, sank in the faithful bosom of di Montmorenci. Many, many minutes elapsed, before the impassioned exclamations of di Montmorenci recalled the fleeting senses of the beloved Angela; though scarcely able to support the idolised being he held to his bosom, the lover had not resolution to resign, in a moment of such happiness, the treasure he had so long and fruitlessly sought; and when Angela revived, she unclosed her eyes on the dearest object that had ever greeted their sight, and felt the warm beat of that heart, whose affection had entailed on her so much happiness, and so much of misery. Beloved Angela! —Ever-remembered di Montmorenci! was all that for some time they could articulate, till Angela withdrew the arm, that, with the instinct of affection, had encircled the neck of her lover; the action presented both

to her own and his eyes, the fatal token on her finger, that told him his hopes were blasted, and reminded her of her duty to another.

“Angela! Angela!” exclaimed di Montmorenci, impetuously grasping her hand. She understood the question, and with faltering accents confirmed the dreaded information. Di Montmorenci burst from her, and throwing himself on the floor, endeavoured to stifle the agony that unnerved his mind. Angela approached him, and alarmed by the violence of his affliction, endeavoured to soothe him; her voice, her language, was too powerful to be withstood; and though he felt the fatal wound he had received, sink every moment deeper into his soul, yet the violence of his emotions decreased, and he listened with as much calmness as it was possible for a lover to do (who was so ardent and so devoted) to the painful narrative of the unfortunate Angela. As she came to that part of her history where the child was committed to her care, she hesitated to proceed; she knew that she could not accuse Ruvello without endangering the life of Moresco, and this, though resolved never again to see him, she would not determine upon; yet in what way could she fulfil the mission that heaven seemed to have entrusted to her, without bringing to light the villainy of the count. And surely the welfare of an injured innocent, so solemnly given to her care, ought to supersede every other consideration. But to reveal to di Montmorenci these circumstances, was to ensure certain punishment to Moresco, should Ruvello confess him an accomplice; therefore, after much mental deliberation, she imparted her wish to the marquis to confer with some holy monk on a subject of much importance; and for herself, that she should wish, if practicable, to remove with the child to a convent, in the morning, for at least some time.

“There is a pious father, resides in the monastery near this ruin,” returned di Montmorenci; “in the chapel belonging to this castle is deposited the remains of his beloved brother; and on the night in which I sought rest within its walls, he was visiting the tomb; chance directed me to the same spot, the sympathy of sorrow drew us towards each other, and we mutually revealed our griefs. The good man saw that I was weary from exertion, and would not suffer me to quit this place, till he should give me permission: he has spent much of his time with me, endeavouring to soothe my broken spirit, and to urge me from a pursuit he was convinced was useless in itself, and highly injurious to my health and peace of mind. Gratitude for his kind intent, and the consolation I derived from his pious precepts, urged me from the present to comply; and never can I be sufficiently thankful (added di Montmorenci, raising his fine eyes to heaven) for a detention so providential in the event.”

At the request of Angela, he now related all that had occurred since they last parted; with cautious tenderness, he broke to her the death of his mother, and then proceeded to recount the many different methods he had pursued, and the journey he had himself undertaken, attended only by one faithful domestic, to discover the fate of the beloved Angela; for the female who had suffered imprisonment with herself, had afterwards escaped, bringing intelligence of Angela’s migration from the cavern in the company of Moresco, who had been known to the robbers by a different name.

Di Montmorenci had scarcely ceased speaking, before his attendant announced to him the approach of Father Bernada; the good man soon after entered the room, and with a heart-felt delight, welcomed Angela, to whom di Montmorenci introduced him. Anxious to make the communication she meditated, she requested an audience of the monk, and di Montmorenci leaving the room, she made an undisguised confession of all that had occurred; the father listened to her with astonishment and awe, and urging the necessity of bringing the Count Ruvello to justice, as a duty not only of moral obligation, but enjoined by heaven, promised to take its management upon himself; at the same time acceding to the wish of Angela, should the count

forbear to implicate his confederate, that the guilt of Moresco should be screened, unless absolutely necessary to reveal it. Relieved from the burden that oppressed her, she gratefully thanked the good man for his advice and services, and gladly accepted his recommendation to a convent in the neighbourhood, whither, on leaving her, he immediately went to secure her a reception.

Di Montmorenci, satisfied by the assurances of the monk, that the confession of Angela revealed no error of himself, endeavoured to calm his mind under the heavy disappointment it had suffered, by the assurances of her unalterable friendship; and by the consciousness, that if not raised to happiness, she was at least removed from misery. In the course of the morning, Angela, with the little orphan, repaired to the convent; whither she bade the sad di Montmorenci not to seek admission to her, until they had both learnt to meet without a painful regret obtruding on their minds. Di Montmorenci promised with a sigh, that seemed to express, if he must cease to love her, they would never meet again.

The lady, mother of Santa Maria, received her guests (of whose story she had heard sufficient to deeply interest her) with true kindness; and long unused to society of such amiable characters as those of the abbess and sisters of the convent, the mind of the grateful Angela acquired a serenity, to which she had been long estranged; and the many days that elapsed between her parting with, and hearing from father Bernada, were far from heavy. The child of the ill-fated Julia acquired every hour a stronger hold on her affections: and the delight to which she looked forward in the conscious purity of her own mind, in the enjoyment of di Montmorenci's occasional society, when he should have learnt to consider her only as the sister his heart had selected, imparted a sunshine that gave brightness to the future. Thus had Angela passed a fortnight at the convent, when the following letter was delivered her from Father Bernado:

To Angela Moresco,

Prepare your mind, my good child, before you peruse what I am about to write, for the relation of an event at which your virtuous spirit will shrink: and be not shocked at learning, that by that event, you are released from those ties, so repugnant to your feelings, by the last act of guilt a sinner can commit. Moresco can no longer call on your obedience, his own hand, urged by a fear of mortal judgement, has precipitated him before the more awful tribunal of his offended creator. After leaving you, I applied to the Holy Inquisition, and accompanied by a party of officials, repaired to the Count Ruvello's: on enquiring for the count, we were shown into the saloon, where he was seated with the Signior Moresco, who wore the garb of a religious order; on our showing the order bearing the stamp of the holy office, the count turned deadly pale, and terrified by the acute enquiries of one of the officers, he endeavoured to screen himself by incriminating his companion; and in order to save his life, made an ample confession, by which means he made it clear by the evidence of his domestics, that he was at his own palace on the night the deed was committed. This confession, which I fear his cowardice more than his integrity induced him to make, was noted down by one of the officials, and signed by his own hand.

Moresco, surprised by the suddenness of the event, and struck with conscious guilt, was not prepared to defend the charge; and they were both confined in separate apartments under a strict guard. Their persons were searched, and everything of a suspicious nature taken from them; but Moresco, as it afterwards proved, carried a small and curiously constructed instrument so concealed, that it escaped detection, in case of his falling into the hands of justice, to rescue him from a more ignominious death; and finding an opportunity, he, unperceived, plunged it into his breast; after which, only signing the paper that spoke to the identity of the child, he refused to confess; and in a few hours expired. The Count Ruvello has since been conducted to the inquisition, where he was soon after brought to trial, and being found guilty on his own confession, his property was confiscated to the state, and himself banished.

I have only, my daughter, delayed sending you accounts before, because foreseeing the speedy termination of this important business, I was unwilling to disturb your quiet by unnecessarily sending you statements of its progress. It will be requisite that the child should be immediately returned to the seat of her ancestors, that her existence may be universally acknowledged; after which, as no guardian is provided

for her infancy, you, who have so truly protected her, will be well entitled to the trust, provided it should be your wish to undertake the charge; and now, my virtuous daughter, I have only to communicate to you intelligence of a nature, that gives me great pleasure, presuming on your permission, to do what I thought best. I have revealed to his holiness the Pope, every circumstance relating to yourself since you quitted the Marchioness di Montmorenci's; not even concealing the cause of your departure, for it reflects great honour to your character. And the great and good man, in token of his approbation of your conduct, and his pity for your misfortunes, has bestowed on you the sum of two thousand crowns; causing at the same time so much of your tale to be made known, that your long absence may be accounted for, and that you may receive the esteem and respect of all, for the firmness and integrity of your conduct. I have nothing further to add than to assure you of my prayers to that Being, whose mercy is ever extended for the welfare of his creatures.

FATHER BERNADA

This important letter was followed by a mission from the Pope, entrusted with the deeds that secured to her the property he had awarded, and imparted his wish that she should accompany the child to the castle of its late parents, that she might be received and acknowledged by the vassals and domestics as their future mistress.

Angela immediately prepared for her departure, and accompanied by a suitable number of male and female attendants, who were sent to conduct her, she reached in safety the place of destination, from which in a few days she returned with her little charge to Santa Maria.

Di Montmorenci in the meanwhile, revering the delicacy of his Angela's mind, forbore for the present urging his claims on her heart; contenting himself with writing a congratulation on the honours she had received, and adding a hope, that she would allow him, at no very distant period, the happiness of seeing her. To this letter, Angela replied that her spirits had been so much agitated by the late events, that she felt it necessary to her health for some time to debar herself the gratification of seeing her friends; but she trusted in a few weeks to have the satisfaction which she had so long and anxiously desired. She found occasion to send a similar answer to many others who had taken a warm interest in her fate, and truly rejoiced in her restoration.

Di Montmorenci well understood the meaning of her reply, and feeling certain he had no cause to fear the duration of love in a mind like hers, he endeavoured to stifle his impatience. At length the happiness he sought was permitted him, and Angela received his occasional visits in the parlour of the convent. It was impossible for di Montmorenci to repeat these interviews, and to remain silent on a subject that so entirely filled his mind; and he at length ventured, after many indirect expressions, to decisively declare his wishes, and solicit a promised period for his happiness. Angela felt too sincere a love, and possessed too little affectation, to allow her to refuse an assurance there could be no impropriety in granting; and she consented to give her hand, when the twelve-months of her widowhood should have expired. And di Montmorenci, happy in the permission he had obtained, to see her once a week during the period of his probation, forbore to urge her for a nearer day.

Angela passed the year that intervened between the death of Moresco and her marriage with di Montmorenci at Santa Maria, to which she was doubly urged, by the pleasure she derived in the society of the sisterhood, and her wish to seclude herself from the world, till the singular incidents of the preceding year should become less the subject of conversation, and herself in consequence less an object of curiosity.

In the safe and happy asylum she had found, time glided cheerfully away, and her health and spirits recovered the injury they had experienced from the painful incidents she had encountered. At length the morning arrived in which di Montmorenci received the promised hand of his

beloved Angela; the good Father Bernada officiated at the marriage, and truly did his heart participate in the happiness. The marquis and his fair bride, soon after the ceremony, set out with a splendid retinue for Venice, where the amiable Angela was received with the respect and esteem due to her rank as the Marchioness di Montmorenci, and to the virtues that had ever claimed affection in the humble and modest Angela Modeni.