

The Castle of Otranto

by Horace Walpole

Chapter 2

Matilda, who by Hippolita's order had retired to her apartment, was ill-disposed to take any rest. The shocking fate of her brother had deeply affected her. She was surprised at not seeing Isabella; but the strange words which had fallen from her father, and his obscure menace to the Princess his wife, accompanied by the most furious behaviour, had filled her gentle mind with terror and alarm. She waited anxiously for the return of Bianca, a young damsel that attended her, whom she had sent to learn what was become of Isabella. Bianca soon appeared, and informed her mistress of what she had gathered from the servants, that Isabella was nowhere to be found. She related the adventure of the young peasant who had been discovered in the vault, though with many simple additions from the incoherent accounts of the domestics; and she dwelt principally on the gigantic leg and foot which had been seen in the gallery-chamber. This last circumstance had terrified Bianca so much, that she was rejoiced when Matilda told her that she would not go to rest, but would watch till the Princess should rise.

The young Princess wearied herself in conjectures on the flight of Isabella, and on the threats of Manfred to her mother. "But what business could he have so urgent with the chaplain?" said Matilda, "Does he intend to have my brother's body interred privately in the chapel?"

"Oh, Madam!" said Bianca, "now I guess. As you are become his heiress, he is impatient to have you married: he has always been raving for more sons; I warrant he is now impatient for grandsons. As sure as I live, Madam, I shall see you a bride at last.—Good madam, you won't cast off your faithful Bianca: you won't put Donna Rosara over me now you are a great Princess."

"My poor Bianca," said Matilda, "how fast your thoughts amble! I a great princess! What hast thou seen in Manfred's behaviour since my brother's death that bespeaks any increase of tenderness to me? No, Bianca; his heart was ever a stranger to me—but he is my father, and I must not complain. Nay, if Heaven shuts my father's heart against me, it overpays my little merit in the tenderness of my mother—O that dear mother! yes, Bianca, 'tis there I feel the rugged temper of Manfred. I can support his harshness to me with patience; but it wounds my soul when I am witness to his causeless severity towards her."

"Oh! Madam," said Bianca, "all men use their wives so, when they are weary of them."

"And yet you congratulated me but now," said Matilda, "when you fancied my father intended to dispose of me!"

"I would have you a great Lady," replied Bianca, "come what will. I do not wish to see you moped in a convent, as you would be if you had your will, and if my Lady, your mother, who knows



that a bad husband is better than no husband at all, did not hinder you.— Bless me! what noise is that! St. Nicholas forgive me! I was but in jest.”

“It is the wind,” said Matilda, “whistling through the battlements in the tower above: you have heard it a thousand times.”

“Nay,” said Bianca, “there was no harm neither in what I said: it is no sin to talk of matrimony—and so, Madam, as I was saying, if my Lord Manfred should offer you a handsome young Prince for a bridegroom, you would drop him a curtsy, and tell him you would rather take the veil?”

“Thank Heaven! I am in no such danger,” said Matilda: “you know how many proposals for me he has rejected—”

“And you thank him, like a dutiful daughter, do you, Madam? But come, Madam; suppose, tomorrow morning, he was to send for you to the great council chamber, and there you should find at his elbow a lovely young Prince, with large black eyes, a smooth white forehead, and manly curling locks like jet; in short, Madam, a young hero resembling the picture of the good Alfonso in the gallery, which you sit and gaze at for hours together—”

“Do not speak lightly of that picture,” interrupted Matilda sighing; “I know the adoration with which I look at that picture is uncommon—but I am not in love with a coloured panel. The character of that virtuous Prince, the veneration with which my mother has inspired me for his memory, the orisons which, I know not why, she has enjoined me to pour forth at his tomb, all have concurred to persuade me that somehow or other my destiny is linked with something relating to him.”

“Lord, Madam! how should that be?” said Bianca; “I have always heard that your family was in no way related to his: and I am sure I cannot conceive why my Lady, the Princess, sends you in a cold morning or a damp evening to pray at his tomb: he is no saint by the almanack. If you must pray, why does she not bid you address yourself to our great St. Nicholas? I am sure he is the saint I pray to for a husband.”

“Perhaps my mind would be less affected,” said Matilda, “if my mother would explain her reasons to me: but it is the mystery she observes, that inspires me with this—I know not what to call it. As she never acts from caprice, I am sure there is some fatal secret at bottom—nay, I know there is: in her agony of grief for my brother’s death she dropped some words that intimated as much.”

“Oh! dear Madam,” cried Bianca, “what were they?”

“No,” said Matilda, “if a parent lets fall a word, and wishes it recalled, it is not for a child to utter it.”

“What! was she sorry for what she had said?” asked Bianca; “I am sure, Madam, you may trust me—”

“With my own little secrets when I have any, I may,” said Matilda; “but never with my mother’s: a child ought to have no ears or eyes but as a parent directs.”

“Well! to be sure, Madam, you were born to be a saint,” said Bianca, “and there is no resisting one’s vocation: you will end in a convent at last. But there is my Lady Isabella would not be so reserved to me: she will let me talk to her of young men: and when a handsome cavalier has come to the castle, she has owned to me that she wished your brother Conrad resembled him.”

“Bianca,” said the Princess, “I do not allow you to mention my friend disrespectfully. Isabella is of a cheerful disposition, but her soul is pure as virtue itself. She knows your idle babbling humour,



and perhaps has now and then encouraged it, to divert melancholy, and enliven the solitude in which my father keeps us—”

“Blessed Mary!” said Bianca, starting, “there it is again! Dear Madam, do you hear nothing? this castle is certainly haunted!”

“Peace!” said Matilda, “and listen! I did think I heard a voice— but it must be fancy: your terrors, I suppose, have infected me.”

“Indeed! indeed! Madam,” said Bianca, half-weeping with agony, “I am sure I heard a voice.”

“Does anybody lie in the chamber beneath?” said the Princess.

“Nobody has dared to lie there,” answered Bianca, “since the great astrologer, that was your brother’s tutor, drowned himself. For certain, Madam, his ghost and the young Prince’s are now met in the chamber below—for Heaven’s sake let us fly to your mother’s apartment!”

“I charge you not to stir,” said Matilda. “If they are spirits in pain, we may ease their sufferings by questioning them. They can mean no hurt to us, for we have not injured them—and if they should, shall we be more safe in one chamber than in another? Reach me my beads; we will say a prayer, and then speak to them.”

“Oh! dear Lady, I would not speak to a ghost for the world!” cried Bianca. As she said those words they heard the casement of the little chamber below Matilda’s open. They listened attentively, and in a few minutes thought they heard a person sing, but could not distinguish the words.

“This can be no evil spirit,” said the Princess, in a low voice; “it is undoubtedly one of the family—open the window, and we shall know the voice.”

“I dare not, indeed, Madam,” said Bianca.

“Thou art a very fool,” said Matilda, opening the window gently herself. The noise the Princess made was, however, heard by the person beneath, who stopped; and they concluded had heard the casement open.

“Is anybody below?” said the Princess; “if there is, speak.”

“Yes,” said an unknown voice.

“Who is it?” said Matilda.

“A stranger,” replied the voice.

“What stranger?” said she; “and how didst thou come there at this unusual hour, when all the gates of the castle are locked?”

“I am not here willingly,” answered the voice. “But pardon me, Lady, if I have disturbed your rest; I knew not that I was overheard. Sleep had forsaken me; I left a restless couch, and came to waste the irksome hours with gazing on the fair approach of morning, impatient to be dismissed from this castle.”

“Thy words and accents,” said Matilda, “are of melancholy cast; if thou art unhappy, I pity thee. If poverty afflicts thee, let me know it; I will mention thee to the Princess, whose beneficent soul ever melts for the distressed, and she will relieve thee.”

“I am indeed unhappy,” said the stranger; “and I know not what wealth is. But I do not complain of the lot which Heaven has cast for me; I am young and healthy, and am not ashamed of owing my support to myself—yet think me not proud, or that I disdain your generous offers. I will remember



you in my orisons, and will pray for blessings on your gracious self and your noble mistress—if I sigh, Lady, it is for others, not for myself.”

“Now I have it, Madam,” said Bianca, whispering the Princess; “this is certainly the young peasant; and, by my conscience, he is in love—Well! this is a charming adventure!—do, Madam, let us sift him. He does not know you, but takes you for one of my Lady Hippolita’s women.”

“Art thou not ashamed, Bianca!” said the Princess. “What right have we to pry into the secrets of this young man’s heart? He seems virtuous and frank, and tells us he is unhappy. Are those circumstances that authorise us to make a property of him? How are we entitled to his confidence?”

“Lord, Madam! how little you know of love!” replied Bianca; “why, lovers have no pleasure equal to talking of their mistress.”

“And would you have ME become a peasant’s confidante?” said the Princess.

“Well, then, let me talk to him,” said Bianca; “though I have the honour of being your Highness’s maid of honour, I was not always so great. Besides, if love levels ranks, it raises them too; I have a respect for any young man in love.”

“Peace, simpleton!” said the Princess. “Though he said he was unhappy, it does not follow that he must be in love. Think of all that has happened today, and tell me if there are no misfortunes but what love causes.—Stranger,” resumed the Princess, “if thy misfortunes have not been occasioned by thy own fault, and are within the compass of the Princess Hippolita’s power to redress, I will take upon me to answer that she will be thy protectress. When thou art dismissed from this castle, repair to holy father Jerome, at the convent adjoining to the church of St. Nicholas, and make thy story known to him, as far as thou thinkest meet. He will not fail to inform the Princess, who is the mother of all that want her assistance. Farewell; it is not seemly for me to hold farther converse with a man at this unwonted hour.”

“May the saints guard thee, gracious Lady!” replied the peasant; “but oh! if a poor and worthless stranger might presume to beg a minute’s audience farther; am I so happy? the casement is not shut; might I venture to ask—”

“Speak quickly,” said Matilda; “the morning dawns apace: should the labourers come into the fields and perceive us—What wouldst thou ask?”

“I know not how, I know not if I dare,” said the Young stranger, faltering; “yet the humanity with which you have spoken to me emboldens—Lady! dare I trust you?”

“Heavens!” said Matilda, “what dost thou mean? With what wouldst thou trust me? Speak boldly, if thy secret is fit to be entrusted to a virtuous breast.”

“I would ask,” said the peasant, recollecting himself, “whether what I have heard from the domestics is true, that the Princess is missing from the castle?”

“What imports it to thee to know?” replied Matilda. “Thy first words bespoke a prudent and becoming gravity. Dost thou come hither to pry into the secrets of Manfred? Adieu. I have been mistaken in thee.” Saying these words she shut the casement hastily, without giving the young man time to reply.

“I had acted more wisely,” said the Princess to Bianca, with some sharpness, “if I had let thee converse with this peasant; his inquisitiveness seems of a piece with thy own.”



“It is not fit for me to argue with your Highness,” replied Bianca; “but perhaps the questions I should have put to him would have been more to the purpose than those you have been pleased to ask him.”

“Oh! no doubt,” said Matilda; “you are a very discreet personage! May I know what YOU would have asked him?”

“A bystander often sees more of the game than those that play,” answered Bianca. “Does your Highness think, Madam, that this question about my Lady Isabella was the result of mere curiosity? No, no, Madam, there is more in it than you great folks are aware of. Lopez told me that all the servants believe this young fellow contrived my Lady Isabella’s escape; now, pray, Madam, observe you and I both know that my Lady Isabella never much fancied the Prince your brother. Well! he is killed just in a critical minute—I accuse nobody. A helmet falls from the moon—so, my Lord, your father says; but Lopez and all the servants say that this young spark is a magician, and stole it from Alfonso’s tomb—”

“Have done with this rhapsody of impertinence,” said Matilda.

“Nay, Madam, as you please,” cried Bianca; “yet it is very particular though, that my Lady Isabella should be missing the very same day, and that this young sorcerer should be found at the mouth of the trap-door. I accuse nobody; but if my young Lord came honestly by his death—”

“Dare not on thy duty,” said Matilda, “to breathe a suspicion on the purity of my dear Isabella’s fame.”

“Purity, or not purity,” said Bianca, “gone she is—a stranger is found that nobody knows; you question him yourself; he tells you he is in love, or unhappy, it is the same thing—nay, he owned he was unhappy about others; and is anybody unhappy about another, unless they are in love with them? and at the very next word, he asks innocently, pour soul! if my Lady Isabella is missing.”

“To be sure,” said Matilda, “thy observations are not totally without foundation—Isabella’s flight amazes me. The curiosity of the stranger is very particular; yet Isabella never concealed a thought from me.”

“So she told you,” said Bianca, “to fish out your secrets; but who knows, Madam, but this stranger may be some Prince in disguise? Do, Madam, let me open the window, and ask him a few questions.”

“No,” replied Matilda, “I will ask him myself, if he knows aught of Isabella; he is not worthy I should converse farther with him.” She was going to open the casement, when they heard the bell ring at the postern-gate of the castle, which is on the right hand of the tower, where Matilda lay. This prevented the Princess from renewing the conversation with the stranger.

After continuing silent for some time, “I am persuaded,” said she to Bianca, “that whatever be the cause of Isabella’s flight it had no unworthy motive. If this stranger was accessory to it, she must be satisfied with his fidelity and worth. I observed, did not you, Bianca? that his words were tinged with an uncommon infusion of piety. It was no ruffian’s speech; his phrases were becoming a man of gentle birth.”

“I told you, Madam,” said Bianca, “that I was sure he was some Prince in disguise.”

“Yet,” said Matilda, “if he was privy to her escape, how will you account for his not accompanying her in her flight? why expose himself unnecessarily and rashly to my father’s resentment?”



“As for that, Madam,” replied she, “if he could get from under the helmet, he will find ways of eluding your father’s anger. I do not doubt but he has some talisman or other about him.”

“You resolve everything into magic,” said Matilda; “but a man who has any intercourse with infernal spirits, does not dare to make use of those tremendous and holy words which he uttered. Didst thou not observe with what fervour he vowed to remember ME to heaven in his prayers? Yes; Isabella was undoubtedly convinced of his piety.”

“Commend me to the piety of a young fellow and a damsel that consult to elope!” said Bianca. “No, no, Madam, my Lady Isabella is of another guess mould than you take her for. She used indeed to sigh and lift up her eyes in your company, because she knows you are a saint; but when your back was turned—”

“You wrong her,” said Matilda; “Isabella is no hypocrite; she has a due sense of devotion, but never affected a call she has not. On the contrary, she always combated my inclination for the cloister; and though I own the mystery she has made to me of her flight confounds me; though it seems inconsistent with the friendship between us; I cannot forget the disinterested warmth with which she always opposed my taking the veil. She wished to see me married, though my dower would have been a loss to her and my brother’s children. For her sake I will believe well of this young peasant.”

“Then you do think there is some liking between them,” said Bianca. While she was speaking, a servant came hastily into the chamber and told the Princess that the Lady Isabella was found.

“Where?” said Matilda.

“She has taken sanctuary in St. Nicholas’s church,” replied the servant; “Father Jerome has brought the news himself; he is below with his Highness.”

“Where is my mother?” said Matilda.

“She is in her own chamber, Madam, and has asked for you.”

Manfred had risen at the first dawn of light, and gone to Hippolita’s apartment, to inquire if she knew aught of Isabella. While he was questioning her, word was brought that Jerome demanded to speak with him. Manfred, little suspecting the cause of the Friar’s arrival, and knowing he was employed by Hippolita in her charities, ordered him to be admitted, intending to leave them together, while he pursued his search after Isabella.

“Is your business with me or the Princess?” said Manfred.

“With both,” replied the holy man. “The Lady Isabella—”

“What of her?” interrupted Manfred, eagerly.

“Is at St. Nicholas’s altar,” replied Jerome.

“That is no business of Hippolita,” said Manfred with confusion; “let us retire to my chamber, Father, and inform me how she came thither.”

“No, my Lord,” replied the good man, with an air of firmness and authority, that daunted even the resolute Manfred, who could not help revering the saint-like virtues of Jerome; “my commission is to both, and with your Highness’s good-liking, in the presence of both I shall deliver it; but first, my Lord, I must interrogate the Princess, whether she is acquainted with the cause of the Lady Isabella’s retirement from your castle.”

“No, on my soul,” said Hippolita; “does Isabella charge me with being privy to it?”



“Father,” interrupted Manfred, “I pay due reverence to your holy profession; but I am sovereign here, and will allow no meddling priest to interfere in the affairs of my domestic. If you have aught to say attend me to my chamber; I do not use to let my wife be acquainted with the secret affairs of my state; they are not within a woman’s province.”

“My Lord,” said the holy man, “I am no intruder into the secrets of families. My office is to promote peace, to heal divisions, to preach repentance, and teach mankind to curb their headstrong passions. I forgive your Highness’s uncharitable apostrophe; I know my duty, and am the minister of a mightier prince than Manfred. Harken to him who speaks through my organs.”

Manfred trembled with rage and shame. Hippolita’s countenance declared her astonishment and impatience to know where this would end. Her silence more strongly spoke her observance of Manfred.

“The Lady Isabella,” resumed Jerome, “commends herself to both your Highnesses; she thanks both for the kindness with which she has been treated in your castle: she deplores the loss of your son, and her own misfortune in not becoming the daughter of such wise and noble Princes, whom she shall always respect as Parents; she prays for uninterrupted union and felicity between you” [Manfred’s colour changed]: “but as it is no longer possible for her to be allied to you, she entreats your consent to remain in sanctuary, till she can learn news of her father, or, by the certainty of his death, be at liberty, with the approbation of her guardians, to dispose of herself in suitable marriage.”

“I shall give no such consent,” said the Prince, “but insist on her return to the castle without delay: I am answerable for her person to her guardians, and will not brook her being in any hands but my own.”

“Your Highness will recollect whether that can any longer be proper,” replied the Friar.

“I want no monitor,” said Manfred, colouring; “Isabella’s conduct leaves room for strange suspicions—and that young villain, who was at least the accomplice of her flight, if not the cause of it—”

“The cause!” interrupted Jerome; “was a YOUNG man the cause?”

“This is not to be borne!” cried Manfred. “Am I to be bearded in my own palace by an insolent Monk? Thou art privy, I guess, to their amours.”

“I would pray to heaven to clear up your uncharitable surmises,” said Jerome, “if your Highness were not satisfied in your conscience how unjustly you accuse me. I do pray to heaven to pardon that uncharitableness: and I implore your Highness to leave the Princess at peace in that holy place, where she is not liable to be disturbed by such vain and worldly fantasies as discourses of love from any man.”

“Cant not to me,” said Manfred, “but return and bring the Princess to her duty.”

“It is my duty to prevent her return hither,” said Jerome. “She is where orphans and virgins are safest from the snares and wiles of this world; and nothing but a parent’s authority shall take her thence.”

“I am her parent,” cried Manfred, “and demand her.”

“She wished to have you for her parent,” said the Friar; “but Heaven that forbid that connection has for ever dissolved all ties betwixt you: and I announce to your Highness—”



“Stop! audacious man,” said Manfred, “and dread my displeasure.”

“Holy father,” said Hippolita, “it is your office to be no respecter of persons: you must speak as your duty prescribes: but it is my duty to hear nothing that it pleases not my Lord I should hear. Attend the Prince to his chamber. I will retire to my oratory, and pray to the blessed Virgin to inspire you with her holy counsels, and to restore the heart of my gracious Lord to its wonted peace and gentleness.”

“Excellent woman!” said the Friar. “My Lord, I attend your pleasure.”

Manfred, accompanied by the Friar, passed to his own apartment, where shutting the door, “I perceive, Father,” said he, “that Isabella has acquainted you with my purpose. Now hear my resolve, and obey. Reasons of state, most urgent reasons, my own and the safety of my people, demand that I should have a son. It is in vain to expect an heir from Hippolita. I have made choice of Isabella. You must bring her back; and you must do more. I know the influence you have with Hippolita: her conscience is in your hands. She is, I allow, a faultless woman: her soul is set on heaven, and scorns the little grandeur of this world: you can withdraw her from it entirely. Persuade her to consent to the dissolution of our marriage, and to retire into a monastery—she shall endow one if she will; and she shall have the means of being as liberal to your order as she or you can wish. Thus you will divert the calamities that are hanging over our heads, and have the merit of saying the principality of Otranto from destruction. You are a prudent man, and though the warmth of my temper betrayed me into some unbecoming expressions, I honour your virtue, and wish to be indebted to you for the repose of my life and the preservation of my family.”

“The will of heaven be done!” said the Friar. “I am but its worthless instrument. It makes use of my tongue to tell thee, Prince, of thy unwarrantable designs. The injuries of the virtuous Hippolita have mounted to the throne of pity. By me thou art reprimanded for thy adulterous intention of repudiating her: by me thou art warned not to pursue the incestuous design on thy contracted daughter. Heaven that delivered her from thy fury, when the judgments so recently fallen on thy house ought to have inspired thee with other thoughts, will continue to watch over her. Even I, a poor and despised Friar, am able to protect her from thy violence—I, sinner as I am, and uncharitably reviled by your Highness as an accomplice of I know not what amours, scorn the allurements with which it has pleased thee to tempt mine honesty. I love my order; I honour devout souls; I respect the piety of thy Princess—but I will not betray the confidence she reposes in me, nor serve even the cause of religion by foul and sinful compliances—but forsooth! the welfare of the state depends on your Highness having a son! Heaven mocks the short-sighted views of man. But yester-morn, whose house was so great, so flourishing as Manfred’s?—where is young Conrad now?—My Lord, I respect your tears—but I mean not to check them—let them flow, Prince! They will weigh more with heaven toward the welfare of thy subjects, than a marriage, which, founded on lust or policy, could never prosper. The sceptre, which passed from the race of Alfonso to thine, cannot be preserved by a match which the church will never allow. If it is the will of the Most High that Manfred’s name must perish, resign yourself, my Lord, to its decrees; and thus deserve a crown that can never pass away. Come, my Lord; I like this sorrow—let us return to the Princess: she is not apprised of your cruel intentions; nor did I mean more than to alarm you. You saw with what gentle patience, with what efforts of love,



she heard, she rejected hearing, the extent of your guilt. I know she longs to fold you in her arms, and assure you of her unalterable affection.”

“Father,” said the Prince, “you mistake my compunction: true, I honour Hippolita’s virtues; I think her a Saint; and wish it were for my soul’s health to tie faster the knot that has united us—but alas! Father, you know not the bitterest of my pangs! it is some time that I have had scruples on the legality of our union: Hippolita is related to me in the fourth degree—it is true, we had a dispensation: but I have been informed that she had also been contracted to another. This it is that sits heavy at my heart: to this state of unlawful wedlock I impute the visitation that has fallen on me in the death of Conrad!—ease my conscience of this burden: dissolve our marriage, and accomplish the work of godliness—which your divine exhortations have commenced in my soul.”

How cutting was the anguish which the good man felt, when he perceived this turn in the wily Prince! He trembled for Hippolita, whose ruin he saw was determined; and he feared if Manfred had no hope of recovering Isabella, that his impatience for a son would direct him to some other object, who might not be equally proof against the temptation of Manfred’s rank. For some time the holy man remained absorbed in thought. At length, conceiving some hopes from delay, he thought the wisest conduct would be to prevent the Prince from despairing of recovering Isabella. Her the Friar knew he could dispose, from her affection to Hippolita, and from the aversion she had expressed to him for Manfred’s addresses, to second his views, till the censures of the church could be fulminated against a divorce. With this intention, as if struck with the Prince’s scruples, he at length said:

“My Lord, I have been pondering on what your Highness has said; and if in truth it is delicacy of conscience that is the real motive of your repugnance to your virtuous Lady, far be it from me to endeavour to harden your heart. The church is an indulgent mother: unfold your griefs to her: she alone can administer comfort to your soul, either by satisfying your conscience, or upon examination of your scruples, by setting you at liberty, and indulging you in the lawful means of continuing your lineage. In the latter case, if the Lady Isabella can be brought to consent—”

Manfred, who concluded that he had either over-reached the good man, or that his first warmth had been but a tribute paid to appearance, was overjoyed at this sudden turn, and repeated the most magnificent promises, if he should succeed by the Friar’s mediation. The well-meaning priest suffered him to deceive himself, fully determined to traverse his views, instead of seconding them.

“Since we now understand one another,” resumed the Prince, “I expect, Father, that you satisfy me in one point. Who is the youth that I found in the vault? He must have been privy to Isabella’s flight: tell me truly, is he her lover? or is he an agent for another’s passion? I have often suspected Isabella’s indifference to my son: a thousand circumstances crowd on my mind that confirm that suspicion. She herself was so conscious of it, that while I discoursed her in the gallery, she outran my suspicious, and endeavoured to justify herself from coolness to Conrad.”

The Friar, who knew nothing of the youth, but what he had learnt occasionally from the Princess, ignorant what was become of him, and not sufficiently reflecting on the impetuosity of Manfred’s temper, conceived that it might not be amiss to sow the seeds of jealousy in his mind: they might be turned to some use hereafter, either by prejudicing the Prince against Isabella, if he persisted in that union or by diverting his attention to a wrong scent, and employing his thoughts on a visionary



intrigue, prevent his engaging in any new pursuit. With this unhappy policy, he answered in a manner to confirm Manfred in the belief of some connection between Isabella and the youth. The Prince, whose passions wanted little fuel to throw them into a blaze, fell into a rage at the idea of what the Friar suggested.

“I will fathom to the bottom of this intrigue,” cried he; and quitting Jerome abruptly, with a command to remain there till his return, he hastened to the great hall of the castle, and ordered the peasant to be brought before him.

“Thou hardened young impostor!” said the Prince, as soon as he saw the youth; “what becomes of thy boasted veracity now? it was Providence, was it, and the light of the moon, that discovered the lock of the trap-door to thee? Tell me, audacious boy, who thou art, and how long thou hast been acquainted with the Princess—and take care to answer with less equivocation than thou didst last night, or tortures shall wring the truth from thee.”

The young man, perceiving that his share in the flight of the Princess was discovered, and concluding that anything he should say could no longer be of any service or detriment to her, replied —

“I am no impostor, my Lord, nor have I deserved opprobrious language. I answered to every question your Highness put to me last night with the same veracity that I shall speak now: and that will not be from fear of your tortures, but because my soul abhors a falsehood. Please to repeat your questions, my Lord; I am ready to give you all the satisfaction in my power.”

“You know my questions,” replied the Prince, “and only want time to prepare an evasion. Speak directly; who art thou? and how long hast thou been known to the Princess?”

“I am a labourer at the next village,” said the peasant; “my name is Theodore. The Princess found me in the vault last night: before that hour I never was in her presence.”

“I may believe as much or as little as I please of this,” said Manfred; “but I will hear thy own story before I examine into the truth of it. Tell me, what reason did the Princess give thee for making her escape? thy life depends on thy answer.”

“She told me,” replied Theodore, “that she was on the brink of destruction, and that if she could not escape from the castle, she was in danger in a few moments of being made miserable for ever.”

“And on this slight foundation, on a silly girl’s report,” said Manfred, “thou didst hazard my displeasure?”

“I fear no man’s displeasure,” said Theodore, “when a woman in distress puts herself under my protection.”

During this examination, Matilda was going to the apartment of Hippolita. At the upper end of the hall, where Manfred sat, was a boarded gallery with latticed windows, through which Matilda and Bianca were to pass. Hearing her father’s voice, and seeing the servants assembled round him, she stopped to learn the occasion. The prisoner soon drew her attention: the steady and composed manner in which he answered, and the gallantry of his last reply, which were the first words she heard distinctly, interested her in his flavour. His person was noble, handsome, and commanding, even in that situation: but his countenance soon engrossed her whole care.

“Heavens! Bianca,” said the Princess softly, “do I dream? or is not that youth the exact resemblance of Alfonso’s picture in the gallery?”



She could say no more, for her father's voice grew louder at every word.

"This bravado," said he, "surpasses all thy former insolence. Thou shalt experience the wrath with which thou darest to trifle. Seize him," continued Manfred, "and 'bind him—the first news the Princess hears of her champion shall be, that he has lost his head for her sake."

"The injustice of which thou art guilty towards me," said Theodore, "convinces me that I have done a good deed in delivering the Princess from thy tyranny. May she be happy, whatever becomes of me!"

"This is a lover!" cried Manfred in a rage: "a peasant within sight of death is not animated by such sentiments. Tell me, tell me, rash boy, who thou art, or the rack shall force thy secret from thee."

"Thou hast threatened me with death already," said the youth, "for the truth I have told thee: if that is all the encouragement I am to expect for sincerity, I am not tempted to indulge thy vain curiosity farther."

"Then thou wilt not speak?" said Manfred.

"I will not," replied he.

"Bear him away into the courtyard," said Manfred; "I will see his head this instant severed from his body."

Matilda fainted at hearing those words. Bianca shrieked, and cried,

"Help! help! the Princess is dead!" Manfred started at this ejaculation, and demanded what was the matter! The young peasant, who heard it too, was struck with horror, and asked eagerly the same question; but Manfred ordered him to be hurried into the court, and kept there for execution, till he had informed himself of the cause of Bianca's shrieks. When he learned the meaning, he treated it as a womanish panic, and ordering Matilda to be carried to her apartment, he rushed into the court, and calling for one of his guards, bade Theodore kneel down, and prepare to receive the fatal blow.

The undaunted youth received the bitter sentence with a resignation that touched every heart but Manfred's. He wished earnestly to know the meaning of the words he had heard relating to the Princess; but fearing to exasperate the tyrant more against her, he desisted. The only boon he deigned to ask was, that he might be permitted to have a confessor, and make his peace with heaven. Manfred, who hoped by the confessor's means to come at the youth's history, readily granted his request; and being convinced that Father Jerome was now in his interest, he ordered him to be called and shrieve the prisoner. The holy man, who had little foreseen the catastrophe that his imprudence occasioned, fell on his knees to the Prince, and adjured him in the most solemn manner not to shed innocent blood. He accused himself in the bitterest terms for his indiscretion, endeavoured to disculpate the youth, and left no method untried to soften the tyrant's rage. Manfred, more incensed than appeased by Jerome's intercession, whose retraction now made him suspect he had been imposed upon by both, commanded the Friar to do his duty, telling him he would not allow the prisoner many minutes for confession.

"Nor do I ask many, my Lord," said the unhappy young man. "My sins, thank heaven, have not been numerous; nor exceed what might be expected at my years. Dry your tears, good Father, and let us despatch. This is a bad world; nor have I had cause to leave it with regret."

"Oh wretched youth!" said Jerome; "how canst thou bear the sight of me with patience? I am thy murderer! it is I have brought this dismal hour upon thee!"



“I forgive thee from my soul,” said the youth, “as I hope heaven will pardon me. Hear my confession, Father; and give me thy blessing.”

“How can I prepare thee for thy passage as I ought?” said Jerome. “Thou canst not be saved without pardoning thy foes—and canst thou forgive that impious man there?”

“I can,” said Theodore; “I do.”

“And does not this touch thee, cruel Prince?” said the Friar.

“I sent for thee to confess him,” said Manfred, sternly; “not to plead for him. Thou didst first incense me against him—his blood be upon thy head!”

“It will! it will!” said the good man, in an agony of sorrow. “Thou and I must never hope to go where this blessed youth is going!”

“Despatch!” said Manfred; “I am no more to be moved by the whining of priests than by the shrieks of women.”

“What!” said the youth; “is it possible that my fate could have occasioned what I heard! Is the Princess then again in thy power?”

“Thou dost but remember me of my wrath,” said Manfred. “Prepare thee, for this moment is thy last.”

The youth, who felt his indignation rise, and who was touched with the sorrow which he saw he had infused into all the spectators, as well as into the Friar, suppressed his emotions, and putting off his doublet, and unbuttoning, his collar, knelt down to his prayers. As he stooped, his shirt slipped down below his shoulder, and discovered the mark of a bloody arrow.

“Gracious heaven!” cried the holy man, starting; “what do I see? It is my child! my Theodore!”

The passions that ensued must be conceived; they cannot be painted. The tears of the assistants were suspended by wonder, rather than stopped by joy. They seemed to inquire in the eyes of their Lord what they ought to feel. Surprise, doubt, tenderness, respect, succeeded each other in the countenance of the youth. He received with modest submission the effusion of the old man’s tears and embraces. Yet afraid of giving a loose to hope, and suspecting from what had passed the inflexibility of Manfred’s temper, he cast a glance towards the Prince, as if to say, canst thou be unmoved at such a scene as this?

Manfred’s heart was capable of being touched. He forgot his anger in his astonishment; yet his pride forbad his owning himself affected. He even doubted whether this discovery was not a contrivance of the Friar to save the youth.

“What may this mean?” said he. “How can he be thy son? Is it consistent with thy profession or reputed sanctity to avow a peasant’s offspring for the fruit of thy irregular amours!”

“Oh, God!” said the holy man, “dost thou question his being mine? Could I feel the anguish I do if I were not his father? Spare him! good Prince! spare him! and revile me as thou pleasest.”

“Spare him! spare him!” cried the attendants; “for this good man’s sake!”

“Peace!” said Manfred, sternly. “I must know more ere I am disposed to pardon. A Saint’s bastard may be no saint himself.”

“Injurious Lord!” said Theodore, “add not insult to cruelty. If I am this venerable man’s son, though no Prince, as thou art, know the blood that flows in my veins—”



“Yes,” said the Friar, interrupting him, “his blood is noble; nor is he that abject thing, my Lord, you speak him. He is my lawful son, and Sicily can boast of few houses more ancient than that of Falconara. But alas! my Lord, what is blood! what is nobility! We are all reptiles, miserable, sinful creatures. It is piety alone that can distinguish us from the dust whence we sprung, and whither we must return.”

“Truce to your sermon,” said Manfred; “you forget you are no longer Friar Jerome, but the Count of Falconara. Let me know your history; you will have time to moralise hereafter, if you should not happen to obtain the grace of that sturdy criminal there.”

“Mother of God!” said the Friar, “is it possible my Lord can refuse a father the life of his only, his long-lost, child! Trample me, my Lord, scorn, afflict me, accept my life for his, but spare my son!”

“Thou canst feel, then,” said Manfred, “what it is to lose an only son! A little hour ago thou didst preach up resignation to me: MY house, if fate so pleased, must perish—but the Count of Falconara—”

“Alas! my Lord,” said Jerome, “I confess I have offended; but aggravate not an old man’s sufferings! I boast not of my family, nor think of such vanities—it is nature, that pleads for this boy; it is the memory of the dear woman that bore him. Is she, Theodore, is she dead?”

“Her soul has long been with the blessed,” said Theodore.

“Oh! how?” cried Jerome, “tell me—no—she is happy! Thou art all my care now!—Most dread Lord! will you—will you grant me my poor boy’s life?”

“Return to thy convent,” answered Manfred; “conduct the Princess hither; obey me in what else thou knowest; and I promise thee the life of thy son.”

“Oh! my Lord,” said Jerome, “is my honesty the price I must pay for this dear youth’s safety?”

“For me!” cried Theodore. “Let me die a thousand deaths, rather than stain thy conscience. What is it the tyrant would exact of thee? Is the Princess still safe from his power? Protect her, thou venerable old man; and let all the weight of his wrath fall on me.”

Jerome endeavoured to check the impetuosity of the youth; and ere Manfred could reply, the trampling of horses was heard, and a brazen trumpet, which hung without the gate of the castle, was suddenly sounded. At the same instant the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet, which still remained at the other end of the court, were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer.

