

The Castle of Otranto

by Horace Walpole

Chapter 4

The sorrowful troop no sooner arrived at the castle, than they were met by Hippolita and Matilda, whom Isabella had sent one of the domestics before to advertise of their approach. The ladies causing Frederic to be conveyed into the nearest chamber, retired, while the surgeons examined his wounds. Matilda blushed at seeing Theodore and Isabella together; but endeavoured to conceal it by embracing the latter, and condoling with her on her father's mischance. The surgeons soon came to acquaint Hippolita that none of the Marquis's wounds were dangerous; and that he was desirous of seeing his daughter and the Princesses.

Theodore, under pretence of expressing his joy at being freed from his apprehensions of the combat being fatal to Frederic, could not resist the impulse of following Matilda. Her eyes were so often cast down on meeting his, that Isabella, who regarded Theodore as attentively as he gazed on Matilda, soon divined who the object was that he had told her in the cave engaged his affections. While this mute scene passed, Hippolita demanded of Frederic the cause of his having taken that mysterious course for reclaiming his daughter; and threw in various apologies to excuse her Lord for the match contracted between their children.

Frederic, however incensed against Manfred, was not insensible to the courtesy and benevolence of Hippolita: but he was still more struck with the lovely form of Matilda. Wishing to detain them by his bedside, he informed Hippolita of his story. He told her that, while prisoner to the infidels, he had dreamed that his daughter, of whom he had learned no news since his captivity, was detained in a castle, where she was in danger of the most dreadful misfortunes: and that if he obtained his liberty, and repaired to a wood near Joppa, he would learn more. Alarmed at this dream, and incapable of obeying the direction given by it, his chains became more grievous than ever. But while his thoughts were occupied on the means of obtaining his liberty, he received the agreeable news that the confederate Princes who were warring in Palestine had paid his ransom. He instantly set out for the wood that had been marked in his dream.

For three days he and his attendants had wandered in the forest without seeing a human form: but on the evening of the third they came to a cell, in which they found a venerable hermit in the agonies of death. Applying rich cordials, they brought the fainting man to his speech.

"My sons," said he, "I am bounden to your charity—but it is in vain—I am going to my eternal rest—yet I die with the satisfaction of performing the will of heaven. When first I repaired to this solitude, after seeing my country become a prey to unbelievers—it is alas! above fifty years since I



was witness to that dreadful scene! St. Nicholas appeared to me, and revealed a secret, which he bade me never disclose to mortal man, but on my death-bed. This is that tremendous hour, and ye are no doubt the chosen warriors to whom I was ordered to reveal my trust. As soon as ye have done the last offices to this wretched corse, dig under the seventh tree on the left hand of this poor cave, and your pains will—Oh! good heaven receive my soul!” With those words the devout man breathed his last.

“By break of day,” continued Frederic, “when we had committed the holy relics to earth, we dug according to direction. But what was our astonishment when about the depth of six feet we discovered an enormous sabre—the very weapon yonder in the court. On the blade, which was then partly out of the scabbard, though since closed by our efforts in removing it, were written the following lines—no; excuse me, Madam,” added the Marquis, turning to Hippolita; “if I forbear to repeat them: I respect your sex and rank, and would not be guilty of offending your ear with sounds injurious to aught that is dear to you.”

He paused. Hippolita trembled. She did not doubt but Frederic was destined by heaven to accomplish the fate that seemed to threaten her house. Looking with anxious fondness at Matilda, a silent tear stole down her cheek: but recollecting herself, she said —

“Proceed, my Lord; heaven does nothing in vain; mortals must receive its divine behests with lowliness and submission. It is our part to deprecate its wrath, or bow to its decrees. Repeat the sentence, my Lord; we listen resigned.”

Frederic was grieved that he had proceeded so far. The dignity and patient firmness of Hippolita penetrated him with respect, and the tender silent affection with which the Princess and her daughter regarded each other, melted him almost to tears. Yet apprehensive that his forbearance to obey would be more alarming, he repeated in a faltering and low voice the following lines:

“Where’er a casque that suits this sword is found, With perils is thy daughter compass’d round;
ALFONSO’S blood alone can save the maid, And quiet a long restless Prince’s shade.”

“What is there in these lines,” said Theodore impatiently, “that affects these Princesses? Why were they to be shocked by a mysterious delicacy, that has so little foundation?”

“Your words are rude, young man,” said the Marquis; “and though fortune has favoured you once—”

“My honoured Lord,” said Isabella, who resented Theodore’s warmth, which she perceived was dictated by his sentiments for Matilda, “discompose not yourself for the glosing of a peasant’s son: he forgets the reverence he owes you; but he is not accustomed—”

Hippolita, concerned at the heat that had arisen, checked Theodore for his boldness, but with an air acknowledging his zeal; and changing the conversation, demanded of Frederic where he had left her Lord? As the Marquis was going to reply, they heard a noise without, and rising to inquire the cause, Manfred, Jerome, and part of the troop, who had met an imperfect rumour of what had happened, entered the chamber. Manfred advanced hastily towards Frederic’s bed to condole with him on his misfortune, and to learn the circumstances of the combat, when starting in an agony of terror and amazement, he cried —

“Ha! what art thou? thou dreadful spectre! is my hour come?”

“My dearest, gracious Lord,” cried Hippolita, clasping him in her arms, “what is it you see! Why do you fix your eye-balls thus?”



“What!” cried Manfred breathless; “dost thou see nothing, Hippolita? Is this ghastly phantom sent to me alone—to rue, who did not—”

“For mercy’s sweetest self, my Lord,” said Hippolita, “resume your soul, command your reason. There is none here, but us, your friends.”

“What, is not that Alfonso?” cried Manfred. “Dost thou not see him? can it be my brain’s delirium?”

“This! my Lord,” said Hippolita; “this is Theodore, the youth who has been so unfortunate.”

“Theodore!” said Manfred mournfully, and striking his forehead; “Theodore or a phantom, he has unhinged the soul of Manfred. But how comes he here? and how comes he in armour?”

“I believe he went in search of Isabella,” said Hippolita.

“Of Isabella!” said Manfred, relapsing into rage; “yes, yes, that is not doubtful —. But how did he escape from durance in which I left him? Was it Isabella, or this hypocritical old Friar, that procured his enlargement?”

“And would a parent be criminal, my Lord,” said Theodore, “if he meditated the deliverance of his child?”

Jerome, amazed to hear himself in a manner accused by his son, and without foundation, knew not what to think. He could not comprehend how Theodore had escaped, how he came to be armed, and to encounter Frederic. Still he would not venture to ask any questions that might tend to inflame Manfred’s wrath against his son. Jerome’s silence convinced Manfred that he had contrived Theodore’s release.

“And is it thus, thou ungrateful old man,” said the Prince, addressing himself to the Friar, “that thou repayest mine and Hippolita’s bounties? And not content with traversing my heart’s nearest wishes, thou armest thy bastard, and bringest him into my own castle to insult me!”

“My Lord,” said Theodore, “you wrong my father: neither he nor I are capable of harbouring a thought against your peace. Is it insolence thus to surrender myself to your Highness’s pleasure?” added he, laying his sword respectfully at Manfred’s feet. “Behold my bosom; strike, my Lord, if you suspect that a disloyal thought is lodged there. There is not a sentiment engraven on my heart that does not venerate you and yours.”

The grace and fervour with which Theodore uttered these words interested every person present in his favour. Even Manfred was touched—yet still possessed with his resemblance to Alfonso, his admiration was dashed with secret horror.

“Rise,” said he; “thy life is not my present purpose. But tell me thy history, and how thou camest connected with this old traitor here.”

“My Lord,” said Jerome eagerly.

“Peace! impostor!” said Manfred; “I will not have him prompted.”

“My Lord,” said Theodore, “I want no assistance; my story is very brief. I was carried at five years of age to Algiers with my mother, who had been taken by corsairs from the coast of Sicily. She died of grief in less than a twelvemonth;” the tears gushed from Jerome’s eyes, on whose countenance a thousand anxious passions stood expressed. “Before she died,” continued Theodore, “she bound a writing about my arm under my garments, which told me I was the son of the Count Falconara.”



“It is most true,” said Jerome; “I am that wretched father.”

“Again I enjoin thee silence,” said Manfred: “proceed.”

“I remained in slavery,” said Theodore, “until within these two years, when attending on my master in his cruises, I was delivered by a Christian vessel, which overpowered the pirate; and discovering myself to the captain, he generously put me on shore in Sicily; but alas! instead of finding a father, I learned that his estate, which was situated on the coast, had, during his absence, been laid waste by the Rover who had carried my mother and me into captivity: that his castle had been burnt to the ground, and that my father on his return had sold what remained, and was retired into religion in the kingdom of Naples, but where no man could inform me. Destitute and friendless, hopeless almost of attaining the transport of a parent’s embrace, I took the first opportunity of setting sail for Naples, from whence, within these six days, I wandered into this province, still supporting myself by the labour of my hands; nor until yester-morn did I believe that heaven had reserved any lot for me but peace of mind and contented poverty. This, my Lord, is Theodore’s story. I am blessed beyond my hope in finding a father; I am unfortunate beyond my desert in having incurred your Highness’s displeasure.”

He ceased. A murmur of approbation gently arose from the audience.

“This is not all,” said Frederic; “I am bound in honour to add what he suppresses. Though he is modest, I must be generous; he is one of the bravest youths on Christian ground. He is warm too; and from the short knowledge I have of him, I will pledge myself for his veracity: if what he reports of himself were not true, he would not utter it—and for me, youth, I honour a frankness which becomes thy birth; but now, and thou didst offend me: yet the noble blood which flows in thy veins, may well be allowed to boil out, when it has so recently traced itself to its source. Come, my Lord,” (turning to Manfred), “if I can pardon him, surely you may; it is not the youth’s fault, if you took him for a spectre.”

This bitter taunt galled the soul of Manfred.

“If beings from another world,” replied he haughtily, “have power to impress my mind with awe, it is more than living man can do; nor could a stripling’s arm.”

“My Lord,” interrupted Hippolita, “your guest has occasion for repose: shall we not leave him to his rest?” Saying this, and taking Manfred by the hand, she took leave of Frederic, and led the company forth.

The Prince, not sorry to quit a conversation which recalled to mind the discovery he had made of his most secret sensations, suffered himself to be conducted to his own apartment, after permitting Theodore, though under engagement to return to the castle on the morrow (a condition the young man gladly accepted), to retire with his father to the convent. Matilda and Isabella were too much occupied with their own reflections, and too little content with each other, to wish for farther converse that night. They separated each to her chamber, with more expressions of ceremony and fewer of affection than had passed between them since their childhood.

If they parted with small cordiality, they did but meet with greater impatience, as soon as the sun was risen. Their minds were in a situation that excluded sleep, and each recollected a thousand questions which she wished she had put to the other overnight. Matilda reflected that Isabella had been twice delivered by Theodore in very critical situations, which she could not believe accidental.



His eyes, it was true, had been fixed on her in Frederic's chamber; but that might have been to disguise his passion for Isabella from the fathers of both. It were better to clear this up. She wished to know the truth, lest she should wrong her friend by entertaining a passion for Isabella's lover. Thus jealousy prompted, and at the same time borrowed an excuse from friendship to justify its curiosity.

Isabella, not less restless, had better foundation for her suspicions. Both Theodore's tongue and eyes had told her his heart was engaged; it was true—yet, perhaps, Matilda might not correspond to his passion; she had ever appeared insensible to love: all her thoughts were set on heaven.

"Why did I dissuade her?" said Isabella to herself; "I am punished for my generosity; but when did they meet? where? It cannot be; I have deceived myself; perhaps last night was the first time they ever beheld each other; it must be some other object that has prepossessed his affections—if it is, I am not so unhappy as I thought; if it is not my friend Matilda—how! Can I stoop to wish for the affection of a man, who rudely and unnecessarily acquainted me with his indifference? and that at the very moment in which common courtesy demanded at least expressions of civility. I will go to my dear Matilda, who will confirm me in this becoming pride. Man is false—I will advise with her on taking the veil: she will rejoice to find me in this disposition; and I will acquaint her that I no longer oppose her inclination for the cloister."

In this frame of mind, and determined to open her heart entirely to Matilda, she went to that Princess's chamber, whom she found already dressed, and leaning pensively on her arm. This attitude, so correspondent to what she felt herself, revived Isabella's suspicions, and destroyed the confidence she had purposed to place in her friend. They blushed at meeting, and were too much novices to disguise their sensations with address. After some unmeaning questions and replies, Matilda demanded of Isabella the cause of her flight? The latter, who had almost forgotten Manfred's passion, so entirely was she occupied by her own, concluding that Matilda referred to her last escape from the convent, which had occasioned the events of the preceding evening, replied —

"Martelli brought word to the convent that your mother was dead."

"Oh!" said Matilda, interrupting her, "Bianca has explained that mistake to me: on seeing me faint, she cried out, 'The Princess is dead!' and Martelli, who had come for the usual dole to the castle—"

"And what made you faint?" said Isabella, indifferent to the rest. Matilda blushed and stammered —

"My father—he was sitting in judgment on a criminal—"

"What criminal?" said Isabella eagerly.

"A young man," said Matilda; "I believe—"

"I think it was that young man that—"

"What, Theodore?" said Isabella.

"Yes," answered she; "I never saw him before; I do not know how he had offended my father, but as he has been of service to you, I am glad my Lord has pardoned him."

"Served me!" replied Isabella; "do you term it serving me, to wound my father, and almost occasion his death? Though it is but since yesterday that I am blessed with knowing a parent, I hope Matilda does not think I am such a stranger to filial tenderness as not to resent the boldness of that audacious youth, and that it is impossible for me ever to feel any affection for one who dared to lift his arm against the author of my being. No, Matilda, my heart abhors him; and if you still retain the



friendship for me that you have vowed from your infancy, you will detest a man who has been on the point of making me miserable for ever.”

Matilda held down her head and replied: “I hope my dearest Isabella does not doubt her Matilda’s friendship: I never beheld that youth until yesterday; he is almost a stranger to me: but as the surgeons have pronounced your father out of danger, you ought not to harbour uncharitable resentment against one, who I am persuaded did not know the Marquis was related to you.”

“You plead his cause very pathetically,” said Isabella, “considering he is so much a stranger to you! I am mistaken, or he returns your charity.”

“What mean you?” said Matilda.

“Nothing,” said Isabella, repenting that she had given Matilda a hint of Theodore’s inclination for her. Then changing the discourse, she asked Matilda what occasioned Manfred to take Theodore for a spectre?

“Bless me,” said Matilda, “did not you observe his extreme resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso in the gallery? I took notice of it to Bianca even before I saw him in armour; but with the helmet on, he is the very image of that picture.”

“I do not much observe pictures,” said Isabella: “much less have I examined this young man so attentively as you seem to have done. Ah? Matilda, your heart is in danger, but let me warn you as a friend, he has owned to me that he is in love; it cannot be with you, for yesterday was the first time you ever met—was it not?”

“Certainly,” replied Matilda; “but why does my dearest Isabella conclude from anything I have said, that”—she paused—then continuing: “he saw you first, and I am far from having the vanity to think that my little portion of charms could engage a heart devoted to you; may you be happy, Isabella, whatever is the fate of Matilda!”

“My lovely friend,” said Isabella, whose heart was too honest to resist a kind expression, “it is you that Theodore admires; I saw it; I am persuaded of it; nor shall a thought of my own happiness suffer me to interfere with yours.”

This frankness drew tears from the gentle Matilda; and jealousy that for a moment had raised a coolness between these amiable maidens soon gave way to the natural sincerity and candour of their souls. Each confessed to the other the impression that Theodore had made on her; and this confidence was followed by a struggle of generosity, each insisting on yielding her claim to her friend. At length the dignity of Isabella’s virtue reminding her of the preference which Theodore had almost declared for her rival, made her determine to conquer her passion, and cede the beloved object to her friend.

During this contest of amity, Hippolita entered her daughter’s chamber.

“Madam,” said she to Isabella, “you have so much tenderness for Matilda, and interest yourself so kindly in whatever affects our wretched house, that I can have no secrets with my child which are not proper for you to hear.”

The princesses were all attention and anxiety.

“Know then, Madam,” continued Hippolita, “and you my dearest Matilda, that being convinced by all the events of these two last ominous days, that heaven purposes the sceptre of Otranto should pass from Manfred’s hands into those of the Marquis Frederic, I have been perhaps inspired with the



thought of averting our total destruction by the union of our rival houses. With this view I have been proposing to Manfred, my lord, to tender this dear, dear child to Frederic, your father.”

“Me to Lord Frederic!” cried Matilda; “good heavens! my gracious mother—and have you named it to my father?”

“I have,” said Hippolita; “he listened benignly to my proposal, and is gone to break it to the Marquis.”

“Ah! wretched princess!” cried Isabella; “what hast thou done! what ruin has thy inadvertent goodness been preparing for thyself, for me, and for Matilda!”

“Ruin from me to you and to my child!” said Hippolita “what can this mean?”

“Alas!” said Isabella, “the purity of your own heart prevents your seeing the depravity of others. Manfred, your lord, that impious man—”

“Hold,” said Hippolita; “you must not in my presence, young lady, mention Manfred with disrespect: he is my lord and husband, and—”

“Will not long be so,” said Isabella, “if his wicked purposes can be carried into execution.”

“This language amazes me,” said Hippolita. “Your feeling, Isabella, is warm; but until this hour I never knew it betray you into intemperance. What deed of Manfred authorises you to treat him as a murderer, an assassin?”

“Thou virtuous, and too credulous Princess!” replied Isabella; “it is not thy life he aims at—it is to separate himself from thee! to divorce thee! to—”

“To divorce me!” “To divorce my mother!” cried Hippolita and Matilda at once.

“Yes,” said Isabella; “and to complete his crime, he meditates—I cannot speak it!”

“What can surpass what thou hast already uttered?” said Matilda.

Hippolita was silent. Grief choked her speech; and the recollection of Manfred’s late ambiguous discourses confirmed what she heard.

“Excellent, dear lady! madam! mother!” cried Isabella, flinging herself at Hippolita’s feet in a transport of passion; “trust me, believe me, I will die a thousand deaths sooner than consent to injure you, than yield to so odious—oh!—”

“This is too much!” cried Hippolita: “What crimes does one crime suggest! Rise, dear Isabella; I do not doubt your virtue. Oh! Matilda, this stroke is too heavy for thee! weep not, my child; and not a murmur, I charge thee. Remember, he is thy father still!”

“But you are my mother too,” said Matilda fervently; “and you are virtuous, you are guiltless!—Oh! must not I, must not I complain?”

“You must not,” said Hippolita—“come, all will yet be well. Manfred, in the agony for the loss of thy brother, knew not what he said; perhaps Isabella misunderstood him; his heart is good—and, my child, thou knowest not all! There is a destiny hangs over us; the hand of Providence is stretched out; oh! could I but save thee from the wreck! Yes,” continued she in a firmer tone, “perhaps the sacrifice of myself may atone for all; I will go and offer myself to this divorce—it boots not what becomes of me. I will withdraw into the neighbouring monastery, and waste the remainder of life in prayers and tears for my child and—the Prince!”

“Thou art as much too good for this world,” said Isabella, “as Manfred is execrable; but think not, lady, that thy weakness shall determine for me. I swear, hear me all ye angels—”



“Stop, I adjure thee,” cried Hippolita: “remember thou dost not depend on thyself; thou hast a father.”

“My father is too pious, too noble,” interrupted Isabella, “to command an impious deed. But should he command it; can a father enjoin a cursed act? I was contracted to the son, can I wed the father? No, madam, no; force should not drag me to Manfred’s hated bed. I loathe him, I abhor him: divine and human laws forbid—and my friend, my dearest Matilda! would I wound her tender soul by injuring her adored mother? my own mother—I never have known another” —

“Oh! she is the mother of both!” cried Matilda: “can we, can we, Isabella, adore her too much?”

“My lovely children,” said the touched Hippolita, “your tenderness overpowers me—but I must not give way to it. It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands must decide for us. Have patience until you hear what Manfred and Frederic have determined. If the Marquis accepts Matilda’s hand, I know she will readily obey. Heaven may interpose and prevent the rest. What means my child?” continued she, seeing Matilda fall at her feet with a flood of speechless tears—“But no; answer me not, my daughter: I must not hear a word against the pleasure of thy father.”

“Oh! doubt not my obedience, my dreadful obedience to him and to you!” said Matilda. “But can I, most respected of women, can I experience all this tenderness, this world of goodness, and conceal a thought from the best of mothers?”

“What art thou going to utter?” said Isabella trembling. “Recollect thyself, Matilda.”

“No, Isabella,” said the Princess, “I should not deserve this incomparable parent, if the inmost recesses of my soul harboured a thought without her permission—nay, I have offended her; I have suffered a passion to enter my heart without her avowal—but here I disclaim it; here I vow to heaven and her—”

“My child! my child;” said Hippolita, “what words are these! what new calamities has fate in store for us! Thou, a passion? Thou, in this hour of destruction—”

“Oh! I see all my guilt!” said Matilda. “I abhor myself, if I cost my mother a pang. She is the dearest thing I have on earth—Oh! I will never, never behold him more!”

“Isabella,” said Hippolita, “thou art conscious to this unhappy secret, whatever it is. Speak!”

“What!” cried Matilda, “have I so forfeited my mother’s love, that she will not permit me even to speak my own guilt? oh! wretched, wretched Matilda!”

“Thou art too cruel,” said Isabella to Hippolita: “canst thou behold this anguish of a virtuous mind, and not commiserate it?”

“Not pity my child!” said Hippolita, catching Matilda in her arms— “Oh! I know she is good, she is all virtue, all tenderness, and duty. I do forgive thee, my excellent, my only hope!”

The princesses then revealed to Hippolita their mutual inclination for Theodore, and the purpose of Isabella to resign him to Matilda. Hippolita blamed their imprudence, and showed them the improbability that either father would consent to bestow his heiress on so poor a man, though nobly born. Some comfort it gave her to find their passion of so recent a date, and that Theodore had had but little cause to suspect it in either. She strictly enjoined them to avoid all correspondence with him. This Matilda fervently promised: but Isabella, who flattered herself that she meant no more than to promote his union with her friend, could not determine to avoid him; and made no reply.



“I will go to the convent,” said Hippolita, “and order new masses to be said for a deliverance from these calamities.”

“Oh! my mother,” said Matilda, “you mean to quit us: you mean to take sanctuary, and to give my father an opportunity of pursuing his fatal intention. Alas! on my knees I supplicate you to forbear; will you leave me a prey to Frederic? I will follow you to the convent.”

“Be at peace, my child,” said Hippolita: “I will return instantly. I will never abandon thee, until I know it is the will of heaven, and for thy benefit.”

“Do not deceive me,” said Matilda. “I will not marry Frederic until thou commandest it. Alas! what will become of me?”

“Why that exclamation?” said Hippolita. “I have promised thee to return—”

“Ah! my mother,” replied Matilda, “stay and save me from myself. A frown from thee can do more than all my father’s severity. I have given away my heart, and you alone can make me recall it.”

“No more,” said Hippolita; “thou must not relapse, Matilda.”

“I can quit Theodore,” said she, “but must I wed another? let me attend thee to the altar, and shut myself from the world for ever.”

“Thy fate depends on thy father,” said Hippolita; “I have ill-bestowed my tenderness, if it has taught thee to revere aught beyond him. Adieu! my child: I go to pray for thee.”

Hippolita’s real purpose was to demand of Jerome, whether in conscience she might not consent to the divorce. She had oft urged Manfred to resign the principality, which the delicacy of her conscience rendered an hourly burthen to her. These scruples concurred to make the separation from her husband appear less dreadful to her than it would have seemed in any other situation.

Jerome, at quitting the castle overnight, had questioned Theodore severely why he had accused him to Manfred of being privy to his escape. Theodore owned it had been with design to prevent Manfred’s suspicion from alighting on Matilda; and added, the holiness of Jerome’s life and character secured him from the tyrant’s wrath. Jerome was heartily grieved to discover his son’s inclination for that princess; and leaving him to his rest, promised in the morning to acquaint him with important reasons for conquering his passion.

Theodore, like Isabella, was too recently acquainted with parental authority to submit to its decisions against the impulse of his heart. He had little curiosity to learn the Friar’s reasons, and less disposition to obey them. The lovely Matilda had made stronger impressions on him than filial affection. All night he pleased himself with visions of love; and it was not till late after the morning-office, that he recollected the Friar’s commands to attend him at Alfonso’s tomb.

“Young man,” said Jerome, when he saw him, “this tardiness does not please me. Have a father’s commands already so little weight?”

Theodore made awkward excuses, and attributed his delay to having overslept himself.

“And on whom were thy dreams employed?” said the Friar sternly. His son blushed. “Come, come,” resumed the Friar, “inconsiderate youth, this must not be; eradicate this guilty passion from thy breast—”

“Guilty passion!” cried Theodore: “Can guilt dwell with innocent beauty and virtuous modesty?”

“It is sinful,” replied the Friar, “to cherish those whom heaven has doomed to destruction. A tyrant’s race must be swept from the earth to the third and fourth generation.”



“Will heaven visit the innocent for the crimes of the guilty?” said Theodore. “The fair Matilda has virtues enough—”

“To undo thee:” interrupted Jerome. “Hast thou so soon forgotten that twice the savage Manfred has pronounced thy sentence?”

“Nor have I forgotten, sir,” said Theodore, “that the charity of his daughter delivered me from his power. I can forget injuries, but never benefits.”

“The injuries thou hast received from Manfred’s race,” said the Friar, “are beyond what thou canst conceive. Reply not, but view this holy image! Beneath this marble monument rest the ashes of the good Alfonso; a prince adorned with every virtue: the father of his people! the delight of mankind! Kneel, headstrong boy, and list, while a father unfolds a tale of horror that will expel every sentiment from thy soul, but sensations of sacred vengeance— Alfonso! much injured prince! let thy unsatisfied shade sit awful on the troubled air, while these trembling lips—Ha! who comes there?—”

“The most wretched of women!” said Hippolita, entering the choir. “Good Father, art thou at leisure?—but why this kneeling youth? what means the horror imprinted on each countenance? why at this venerable tomb—alas! hast thou seen aught?”

“We were pouring forth our orisons to heaven,” replied the Friar, with some confusion, “to put an end to the woes of this deplorable province. Join with us, Lady! thy spotless soul may obtain an exemption from the judgments which the portents of these days but too speakingly denounce against thy house.”

“I pray fervently to heaven to divert them,” said the pious Princess. “Thou knowest it has been the occupation of my life to wrest a blessing for my Lord and my harmless children.—One alas! is taken from me! would heaven but hear me for my poor Matilda! Father! intercede for her!”

“Every heart will bless her,” cried Theodore with rapture.

“Be dumb, rash youth!” said Jerome. “And thou, fond Princess, contend not with the Powers above! the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away: bless His holy name, and submit to his decrees.”

“I do most devoutly,” said Hippolita; “but will He not spare my only comfort? must Matilda perish too?—ah! Father, I came—but dismiss thy son. No ear but thine must hear what I have to utter.”

“May heaven grant thy every wish, most excellent Princess!” said Theodore retiring. Jerome frowned.

Hippolita then acquainted the Friar with the proposal she had suggested to Manfred, his approbation of it, and the tender of Matilda that he was gone to make to Frederic. Jerome could not conceal his dislike of the notion, which he covered under pretence of the improbability that Frederic, the nearest of blood to Alfonso, and who was come to claim his succession, would yield to an alliance with the usurper of his right. But nothing could equal the perplexity of the Friar, when Hippolita confessed her readiness not to oppose the separation, and demanded his opinion on the legality of her acquiescence. The Friar caught eagerly at her request of his advice, and without explaining his aversion to the proposed marriage of Manfred and Isabella, he painted to Hippolita in the most alarming colours the sinfulness of her consent, denounced judgments against her if she complied, and enjoined her in the severest terms to treat any such proposition with every mark of indignation and refusal.



Manfred, in the meantime, had broken his purpose to Frederic, and proposed the double marriage. That weak Prince, who had been struck with the charms of Matilda, listened but too eagerly to the offer. He forgot his enmity to Manfred, whom he saw but little hope of dispossessing by force; and flattering himself that no issue might succeed from the union of his daughter with the tyrant, he looked upon his own succession to the principality as facilitated by wedding Matilda. He made faint opposition to the proposal; affecting, for form only, not to acquiesce unless Hippolita should consent to the divorce. Manfred took that upon himself.

Transported with his success, and impatient to see himself in a situation to expect sons, he hastened to his wife's apartment, determined to extort her compliance. He learned with indignation that she was absent at the convent. His guilt suggested to him that she had probably been informed by Isabella of his purpose. He doubted whether her retirement to the convent did not import an intention of remaining there, until she could raise obstacles to their divorce; and the suspicions he had already entertained of Jerome, made him apprehend that the Friar would not only traverse his views, but might have inspired Hippolita with the resolution of talking sanctuary. Impatient to unravel this clue, and to defeat its success, Manfred hastened to the convent, and arrived there as the Friar was earnestly exhorting the Princess never to yield to the divorce.

"Madam," said Manfred, "what business drew you hither? why did you not await my return from the Marquis?"

"I came to implore a blessing on your councils," replied Hippolita.

"My councils do not need a Friar's intervention," said Manfred; "and of all men living is that hoary traitor the only one whom you delight to confer with?"

"Profane Prince!" said Jerome; "is it at the altar that thou chooseth to insult the servants of the altar?—but, Manfred, thy impious schemes are known. Heaven and this virtuous lady know them—nay, frown not, Prince. The Church despises thy menaces. Her thunders will be heard above thy wrath. Dare to proceed in thy cursed purpose of a divorce, until her sentence be known, and here I lance her anathema at thy head."

"Audacious rebel!" said Manfred, endeavouring to conceal the awe with which the Friar's words inspired him. "Dost thou presume to threaten thy lawful Prince?"

"Thou art no lawful Prince," said Jerome; "thou art no Prince—go, discuss thy claim with Frederic; and when that is done—"

"It is done," replied Manfred; "Frederic accepts Matilda's hand, and is content to waive his claim, unless I have no male issue"—as he spoke those words three drops of blood fell from the nose of Alfonso's statue. Manfred turned pale, and the Princess sank on her knees.

"Behold!" said the Friar; "mark this miraculous indication that the blood of Alfonso will never mix with that of Manfred!"

"My gracious Lord," said Hippolita, "let us submit ourselves to heaven. Think not thy ever obedient wife rebels against thy authority. I have no will but that of my Lord and the Church. To that revered tribunal let us appeal. It does not depend on us to burst the bonds that unite us. If the Church shall approve the dissolution of our marriage, be it so—I have but few years, and those of sorrow, to pass. Where can they be worn away so well as at the foot of this altar, in prayers for thine and Matilda's safety?"



“But thou shalt not remain here until then,” said Manfred. “Repair with me to the castle, and there I will advise on the proper measures for a divorce;—but this meddling Friar comes not thither; my hospitable roof shall never more harbour a traitor—and for thy Reverence’s offspring,” continued he, “I banish him from my dominions. He, I ween, is no sacred personage, nor under the protection of the Church. Whoever weds Isabella, it shall not be Father Falconara’s started-up son.”

“They start up,” said the Friar, “who are suddenly beheld in the seat of lawful Princes; but they wither away like the grass, and their place knows them no more.”

Manfred, casting a look of scorn at the Friar, led Hippolita forth; but at the door of the church whispered one of his attendants to remain concealed about the convent, and bring him instant notice, if any one from the castle should repair thither.

