

The Italian
or
The Confessional of the Black
Penitents
vol. 1

Ann Radcliffe

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Penitents*
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VOLUME 1 (OF 3) ***

THE *ITALIAN*,

OR THE

CONFESSIONAL of the BLACK PENITENTS.

A ROMANCE.

BY

ANN RADCLIFFE,

AUTHOR OF THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO, &c. &c.

He, wrapt in clouds of mystery and silence,
Broods o'er his passions, bodies them in deeds,
And sends them forth on wings of Fate to others:
Like the invisible Will, that guides us,
Unheard, unknown, unsearchable!

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE *ITALIAN*,

OR THE

CONFESSIONAL of the BLACK PENITENTS.

About the year 1764, some English travellers in Italy, during one of their excursions in the environs of Naples, happened to stop before the portico of the *Santa Maria del Pianto*, a church belonging to a very ancient convent of the order of the *Black Penitents*. The magnificence of this portico, though impaired by time, excited so much admiration, that the travellers were curious to survey the structure to which it belonged, and with this intention they ascended the marble steps that led to it.

Within the shade of the portico, a person with folded arms, and eyes directed towards the ground, was pacing behind the pillars the whole extent of the pavement, and was apparently so engaged by his own thoughts, as not to observe that strangers were approaching. He turned, however, suddenly, as if startled by the sound of steps, and then, without further pausing, glided to a door that opened into the church and disappeared.

There was something too extraordinary in the figure of this man, and too singular in his conduct, to pass unnoticed by the visitors. He was of a tall thin figure, bending forward from the shoulders; of a sallow complexion, and harsh features, and had an eye, which, as it looked up from the cloke that muffled the lower part of his countenance, seemed expressive of uncommon ferocity.

The travellers, on entering the church, looked round for the stranger, who had passed thither before them, but he was no where to be seen, and, through all the shade of the long aisles, only one other person appeared. This was a friar of the adjoining convent, who sometimes pointed out to

strangers the objects in the church, which were most worthy of attention, and who now, with this design, approached the party that had just entered.

The interior of this edifice had nothing of the shewy ornament and general splendor, which distinguish the churches of Italy, and particularly those of Naples; but it exhibited a simplicity and grandeur of design, considerably more interesting to persons of taste, and a solemnity of light and shade much more suitable to promote the sublime elevation of devotion.

When the party had viewed the different shrines and whatever had been judged worthy of observation, and were returning through an obscure aisle towards the portico, they perceived the person who had appeared upon the steps, passing towards a confessional on the left, and, as he entered it, one of the party pointed him out to the friar, and enquired who he was; the friar turning to look after him, did not immediately reply, but, on the question being repeated, he inclined his head, as in a kind of obeisance, and calmly replied, "He is an assassin."

"An assassin!" exclaimed one of the Englishmen; "an assassin and at liberty!"

An Italian gentleman, who was of the party, smiled at the astonishment of his friend.

"He has sought sanctuary here," replied the friar; "within these walls he may not be hurt."

"Do your altars, then, protect the murderer?" said the Englishman.

"He could find shelter no where else," answered the friar meekly.

"This is astonishing!" said the Englishman; "of what avail are your laws, if the most atrocious criminal may thus find shelter from them? But how does he contrive to exist here! He is, at least, in danger of being starved?"

"Pardon me," replied the friar; "there are always people willing to assist those, who cannot assist themselves; and as the criminal may not leave the

church in search of food, they bring it to him here."

"Is this possible!" said the Englishman, turning to his Italian friend.

"Why, the poor wretch must not starve," replied the friend; "which he inevitably would do, if food were not brought to him! But have you never, since your arrival in Italy, happened to see a person in the situation of this man? It is by no means an uncommon one."

"Never!" answered the Englishman, "and I can scarcely credit what I see now!"

"Why, my friend," observed the Italian, "if we were to shew no mercy to such unfortunate persons, assassinations are so frequent, that our cities would be half depopulated."

In notice of this profound remark, the Englishman could only gravely bow.

"But observe yonder confessional," added the Italian, "that beyond the pillars on the left of the aisle, below a painted window. Have you discovered it? The colours of the glass throw, instead of light, a shade over that part of the church, which, perhaps, prevents your distinguishing what I mean!"

The Englishman looked whither his friend pointed, and observed a confessional of oak, or some very dark wood, adjoining the wall, and remarked also, that it was the same, which the assassin had just entered. It consisted of three compartments, covered with a black canopy. In the central division was the chair of the confessor, elevated by several steps above the pavement of the church; and on either hand was a small closet, or box, with steps leading up to a grated partition, at which the penitent might kneel, and, concealed from observation, pour into the ear of the confessor, the consciousness of crimes that lay heavy on his heart.

"You observe it?" said the Italian.

"I do," replied the Englishman; "it is the same, which the assassin has passed into; and I think it one of the most gloomy spots I ever beheld; the view of it is enough to strike a criminal with despair!"

"We, in Italy, are not so apt to despair," replied the Italian smilingly.

"Well, but what of this confessional?" enquired the Englishman. "The assassin entered it!"

"He has no relation, with what I am about to mention," said the Italian; "but I wish you to mark the place, because some very extraordinary circumstances belong to it."

"What are they?" said the Englishman.

"It is now several years since the confession, which is connected with them, was made at that very confessional," added the Italian; "the view of it, and the sight of this assassin, with your surprize at the liberty which is allowed him, led me to a recollection of the story. When you return to the hotel, I will communicate it to you, if you have no pleasanter way of engaging your time."

"I have a curiosity to hear it," replied the Englishman, "cannot you relate it now?"

"It is much too long to be related now; that would occupy a week; I have it in writing, and will send you the volume. A young student of Padua, who happened to be at Naples soon after this horrible confession became public"——

"Pardon me," interrupted the Englishman, "that is surely very extraordinary? I thought confessions were always held sacred by the priest, to whom they were made."

"Your observation is reasonable," rejoined the Italian; "the faith of the priest is never broken, except by an especial command from an higher power; and the circumstances must even then be very extraordinary to justify such a departure from the law. But, when you read the narrative,

your surprise on this head will cease. I was going to tell you, that it was written by a student of Padua, who, happening to be here soon after the affair became public, was so much struck with the facts, that, partly as an exercise, and partly in return for some trifling services I had rendered him, he committed them to paper for me. You will perceive from the work, that this student was very young, as to the arts of composition, but the facts are what you require, and from these he has not deviated. But come, let us leave the church."

"After I have taken another view of this solemn edifice," replied the Englishman, "and particularly of the confessional you have pointed to my notice!"

While the Englishman glanced his eye over the high roofs, and along the solemn perspectives of the Santa del Pianto, he perceived the figure of the assassin stealing from the confessional across the choir, and, shocked on again beholding him, he turned his eyes and hastily quitted the church.

The friends then separated, and the Englishman, soon after returning to his hotel, received the volume. He read as follows:

THE *ITALIAN*.

CHAPTER I.

"What is this secret sin; this untold tale,
That art cannot extract, nor penance cleanse?"

MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

It was in the church of San Lorenzo at Naples, in the year 1758, that Vincentio di Vivaldi first saw Ellena Rosalba. The sweetness and fine expression of her voice attracted his attention to her figure, which had a distinguished air of delicacy and grace; but her face was concealed in her veil. So much indeed was he fascinated by the voice, that a most painful curiosity was excited as to her countenance, which he fancied must express all the sensibility of character that the modulation of her tones indicated. He listened to their exquisite expression with a rapt attention, and hardly withdrew his eyes from her person till the matin service had concluded; when he observed her leave the church with an aged lady, who leaned upon her arm, and who appeared to be her mother.

Vivaldi immediately followed their steps, determined to obtain, if possible, a view of Ellena's face, and to discover the home to which she should retire. They walked quickly, looking neither to the right or left, and as they turned into the Strada di Toledo he had nearly lost them; but quickening his pace, and relinquishing the cautious distance he had hitherto kept, he overtook them as they entered on the Terrazzo Nuovo, which runs along the bay of Naples, and leads towards the Gran Corso. He overtook them; but the fair unknown still held her veil close, and he knew not how to introduce himself to her notice, or to obtain a view of the features, which excited his curiosity. He was embarrassed by a respectful timidity, that mingled with his admiration, and which kept him silent, notwithstanding his wish to speak.

In descending the last steps of the *Terrazzo*, however, the foot of the elder lady faltered, and, while Vivaldi hastened to assist her, the breeze from the water caught the veil, which Ellena had no longer a hand sufficiently disengaged to confine, and, wafting it partially aside, disclosed to him a countenance more touchingly beautiful than he had dared to image. Her features were of the Grecian outline, and, though they expressed the tranquillity of an elegant mind, her dark blue eyes sparkled with intelligence. She was assisting her companion so anxiously, that she did not immediately observe the admiration she had inspired; but the moment her eyes met those of Vivaldi, she became conscious of their effect, and she hastily drew her veil.

The old lady was not materially hurt by her fall, but, as she walked difficultly, Vivaldi seized the opportunity thus offered, and insisted that she should accept his arm. She refused this with many acknowledgments; but he pressed the offer so repeatedly and respectfully, that, at length, she accepted it, and they walked towards her residence together.

On the way thither, he attempted to converse with Ellena, but her replies were concise, and he arrived at the end of the walk while he was yet considering what he could say, that might interest and withdraw her from this severe reserve. From the style of their residence, he imagined that they were persons of honourable, but moderate independence. The house was small, but exhibited an air of comfort, and even of taste. It stood on an eminence, surrounded by a garden and vineyards, which commanded the city and bay of Naples, an ever-moving picture, and was canopied by a thick grove of pines and majestic date-trees; and, though the little portico and collonade in front were of common marble, the style of architecture was elegant. While they afforded a shelter from the sun, they admitted the cooling breezes that rose from the bay below, and a prospect of the whole scope of its enchanting shores.

Vivaldi stopped at the little gate, which led into the garden, where the elder lady repeated her acknowledgments for his care, but did not invite him to enter; and he, trembling with anxiety and sinking with disappointment, remained for a moment gazing upon Ellena, unable to take leave, yet irresolute what to say that might prolong the interview, till the old lady

again bade him good-day. He then summoned courage enough to request he might be allowed to enquire after her health, and, having obtained her permission, his eyes bade adieu to Ellena, who, as they were parting, ventured to thank him for the care he had taken of her aunt. The sound of her voice, and this acknowledgment of obligation, made him less willing to go than before, but at length he tore himself away. The beauty of her countenance haunting his imagination, and the touching accents of her voice still vibrating on his heart, he descended to the shore below her residence, pleasing himself with the consciousness of being near her, though he could no longer behold her; and sometimes hoping that he might again see her, however distantly, in a balcony of the house, where the silk awning seemed to invite the breeze from the sea. He lingered hour after hour, stretched beneath the umbrageous pines that waved over the shore, or traversing, regardless of the heat, the base of the cliffs that crowned it; recalling to his fancy the enchantment of her smile, and seeming still to listen to the sweetness of her accents.

In the evening he returned to his father's palace at Naples, thoughtful yet pleased, anxious yet happy; dwelling with delightful hope on the remembrance of the thanks he had received from Ellena, yet not daring to form any plan as to his future conduct. He returned time enough to attend his mother in her evening ride on the Corso, where, in every gay carriage that passed, he hoped to see the object of his constant thought; but she did not appear. His mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi, observed his anxiety and unusual silence, and asked him some questions, which she meant should lead to an explanation of the change in his manners; but his replies only excited a stronger curiosity, and, though she forbore to press her enquiries, it was probable that she might employ a more artful means of renewing them.

Vincentio di Vivaldi was the only son of the Marchese di Vivaldi, a nobleman of one of the most ancient families of the kingdom of Naples, a favourite possessing an uncommon share of influence at Court, and a man still higher in power than in rank. His pride of birth was equal to either, but it was mingled with the justifiable pride of a principled mind; it governed his conduct in morals as well as in the jealousy of ceremonial distinctions,

and elevated his practice as well as his claims. His pride was at once his vice and his virtue, his safeguard and his weakness.

The mother of Vivaldi, descended from a family as ancient as that of his father, was equally jealous of her importance; but her pride was that of birth and distinction, without extending to morals. She was of violent passions, haughty, vindictive, yet crafty and deceitful; patient in stratagem, and indefatigable in pursuit of vengeance, on the unhappy objects who provoked her resentment. She loved her son, rather as being the last of two illustrious houses, who was to re-unite and support the honour of both, than with the fondness of a mother.

Vincentio inherited much of the character of his father, and very little of that of his mother. His pride was as noble and generous as that of the Marchese; but he had somewhat of the fiery passions of the Marchesa, without any of her craft, her duplicity, or vindictive thirst of revenge. Frank in his temper, ingenuous in his sentiments, quickly offended, but easily appeased; irritated by any appearance of disrespect, but melted by a concession, a high sense of honor rendered him no more jealous of offence, than a delicate humanity made him ready for reconciliation, and anxious to spare the feelings of others.

On the day following that, on which he had seen Ellena, he returned to the villa Altieri, to use the permission granted him of enquiring after the health of Signora Bianchi. The expectation of seeing Ellena agitated him with impatient joy and trembling hope, which still increased as he approached her residence, till, having reached the garden-gate, he was obliged to rest for a few moments to recover breath and composure.

Having announced himself to an old female servant, who came to the gate, he was soon after admitted to a small vestibule, where he found Signora Bianchi winding balls of silk, and alone; though from the position of a chair which stood near a frame for embroidery, he judged that Ellena had but just quitted the apartment. Signora Bianchi received him with a reserved politeness, and seemed very cautious in her replies to his enquiries after her niece, who, he hoped, every moment, would appear. He lengthened his visit till there was no longer an excuse for doing so; till he had exhausted every topic of conversation, and till the silence of Signora

Bianchi seemed to hint, that his departure was expected. With a heart saddened by disappointment, and having obtained only a reluctant permission to enquire after the health of that lady on some future day, he then took leave.

On his way through the garden he often paused to look back upon the house, hoping to obtain a glimpse of Ellena at a lattice; and threw a glance around him, almost expecting to see her seated beneath the shade of the luxuriant plantains; but his search was every where vain, and he quitted the place with the slow and heavy step of despondency.

The day was employed in endeavours to obtain intelligence concerning the family of Ellena, but of this he procured little that was satisfactory. He was told, that she was an orphan, living under the care of her aunt, Signora Bianchi; that her family, which had never been illustrious, was decayed in fortune, and that her only dependence was upon this aunt. But he was ignorant of what was very true, though very secret, that she assisted to support this aged relative, whose sole property was the small estate on which they lived, and that she passed whole days in embroidering silks, which were disposed of to the nuns of a neighbouring convent, who sold them to the Neapolitan ladies, that visited their grate, at a very high advantage. He little thought, that a beautiful robe, which he had often seen his mother wear, was worked by Ellena; nor that some copies from the antique, which ornamented a cabinet of the Vivaldi palace, were drawn by her hand. If he had known these circumstances, they would only have served to encrease the passion, which, since they were proofs of a disparity of fortune, that would certainly render his family repugnant to a connection with hers, it would have been prudent to discourage.

Ellena could have endured poverty, but not contempt; and it was to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her, that she had so cautiously concealed from it a knowledge of the industry, which did honor to her character. She was not ashamed of poverty, or of the industry which overcame it, but her spirit shrank from the senseless smile and humiliating condescension, which prosperity sometimes gives to indigence. Her mind was not yet strong enough, or her views sufficiently enlarged, to teach her a contempt of the sneer of vicious folly,

and to glory in the dignity of virtuous independence. Ellena was the sole support of her aunt's declining years; was patient to her infirmities, and consoling to her sufferings; and repaid the fondness of a mother with the affection of a daughter. Her mother she had never known, having lost her while she was an infant; and from that period Signora Bianchi had performed the duties of one for her.

Thus innocent and happy in the silent performance of her duties and in the veil of retirement, lived Ellena Rosalba, when she first saw Vincentio di Vivaldi. He was not of a figure to pass unobserved when seen, and Ellena had been struck by the spirit and dignity of his air, and by his countenance, so frank, noble, and full of that kind of expression, which announces the energies of the soul. But she was cautious of admitting a sentiment more tender than admiration, and endeavoured to dismiss his image from her mind, and by engaging in her usual occupations, to recover the state of tranquillity, which his appearance had somewhat interrupted.

Vivaldi, mean while, restless from disappointment, and impatient from anxiety, having passed the greater part of the day in enquiries, which repaid him only with doubt and apprehension, determined to return to the villa Altieri, when evening should conceal his steps, consoled by the certainty of being near the object of his thoughts, and hoping, that chance might favour him once more with a view, however transient, of Ellena.

The Marchesa Vivaldi held an assembly this evening; and a suspicion concerning the impatience he betrayed, induced her to detain him about her person to a late hour, engaging him to select the music for her orchestra, and to superintend the performance of a new piece, the work of a composer whom she had brought into fashion. Her assemblies were among the most brilliant and crowded in Naples, and the nobility, who were to be at the palace this evening, were divided into two parties as to the merits of the musical genius, whom she patronised, and those of another candidate for fame. The performance of the evening, it was expected, would finally decide the victory. This, therefore, was a night of great importance and anxiety to the Marchesa, for she was as jealous of the reputation of her favourite composer as of her own, and the welfare of her son did but slightly divide her cares.

The moment he could depart unobserved, he quitted the assembly, and, muffling himself in his cloak, hastened to the villa Altieri, which lay at a short distance to the west of the city. He reached it unobserved, and, breathless with impatience, traversed the boundary of the garden; where, free from ceremonial restraint, and near the object of his affection, he experienced for the few first moments a joy as exquisite as her presence could have inspired. But this delight faded with its novelty, and in a short time he felt as forlorn as if he was separated for ever from Ellena, in whose presence he but lately almost believed himself.

The night was far advanced, and, no light appearing from the house, he concluded the inhabitants had retired to rest, and all hope of seeing her vanished from his mind. Still, however, it was sweet to be near her, and he anxiously sought to gain admittance to the gardens, that he might approach the window where it was possible she reposed. The boundary, formed of trees and thick shrubs, was not difficult to be passed, and he found himself once more in the portico of the villa.

It was nearly midnight, and the stillness that reigned was rather soothed than interrupted by the gentle dashing of the waters of the bay below, and by the hollow murmurs of Vesuvius, which threw up, at intervals its sudden flame on the horizon, and then left it to darkness. The solemnity of the scene accorded with the temper of his mind, and he listened in deep attention for the returning sounds, which broke upon the ear like distant thunder muttering imperfectly from the clouds. The pauses of silence, that succeeded each groan of the mountain, when expectation listened for the rising sound, affected the imagination of Vivaldi at this time with particular awe, and, rapt in thought, he continued to gaze upon the sublime and shadowy outline of the shores, and on the sea, just discerned beneath the twilight of a cloudless sky. Along its grey surface many vessels were pursuing their silent course, guided over the deep waters only by the polar star, which burned with steady lustre. The air was calm, and rose from the bay with most balmy and refreshing coolness; it scarcely stirred the heads of the broad pines that overspread the villa; and bore no sounds but of the waves and the groans of the far-off mountain,—till a chaunting of deep voices swelled from a distance. The solemn character of the strain engaged his attention; he perceived that it was a requiem, and he endeavoured to

discover from what quarter it came. It advanced, though distantly, and then passed away on the air. The circumstance struck him; he knew it was usual in some parts of Italy to chaunt this strain over the bed of the dying; but here the mourners seemed to walk the earth, or the air. He was not doubtful as to the strain itself;—once before he had heard it, and attended with circumstances which made it impossible that he should ever forget it. As he now listened to the choral voices softening in distance, a few pathetic notes brought full upon his remembrance the divine melody he had heard Ellena utter in the church of San Lorenzo. Overcome by the recollection, he started away, and, wandering over the garden, reached another side of the villa, where he soon heard the voice of Ellena herself, performing the midnight hymn to the Virgin, and accompanied by a lute, which she touched with most affecting and delicate expression. He stood for a moment entranced; and scarcely daring to breathe, lest he should lose any note of that meek and holy strain, which seemed to flow from a devotion almost saintly. Then, looking round to discover the object of his admiration, a light issuing from among the bowery foliage of a clematis led him to a lattice, and shewed him Ellena. The lattice had been thrown open to admit the cool air, and he had a full view of her and the apartment. She was rising from a small altar where she had concluded the service; the glow of devotion was still upon her countenance as she raised her eyes, and with a rapt earnestness fixed them on the heavens. She still held the lute, but no longer awakened it, and seemed lost to every surrounding object. Her fine hair was negligently bound up in a silk net, and some tresses that had escaped it, played on her neck, and round her beautiful countenance, which now was not even partially concealed by a veil. The light drapery of her dress, her whole figure, air, and attitude, were such as might have been copied for a Grecian nymph.

Vivaldi was perplexed and agitated between the wish of seizing an opportunity, which might never again occur, of pleading his love, and the fear of offending, by intruding upon her retirement at so sacred an hour; but while he thus hesitated, he heard her sigh, and then with a sweetness peculiar to her accent, pronounce his name. During the trembling anxiety, with which he listened to what might follow this mention of his name, he disturbed the clematis that surrounded the lattice, and she turned her eyes towards the window; but Vivaldi was entirely concealed by the foliage. She,

however, rose to close the lattice; as she approached which, Vivaldi, unable any longer to command himself, appeared before her. She stood fixed for an instant, while her countenance changed to an ashy paleness; and then, with trembling haste closing the lattice, quitted the apartment. Vivaldi felt as if all his hopes had vanished with her.

After lingering in the garden for some time without perceiving a light in any other part of the building, or hearing a sound proceed from it, he took his melancholy way to Naples. He now began to ask himself some questions, which he ought to have urged before, and to enquire wherefore he sought the dangerous pleasure of seeing Ellena, since her family was of such a condition as rendered the consent of his parents to a marriage with her unattainable.

He was lost in revery on this subject, sometimes half resolved to seek her no more, and then shrinking from a conduct, which seemed to strike him with the force of despair, when, as he emerged from the dark arch of a ruin, that extended over the road, his steps were crossed by a person in the habit of a monk, whose face was shrouded by his cowl still more than by the twilight. The stranger, addressing him by his name, said, "Signor! your steps are watched; beware how you revisit Altieri!" Having uttered this, he disappeared, before Vivaldi could return the sword he had half drawn into the scabbard, or demand an explanation of the words he had heard. He called loudly and repeatedly, conjuring the unknown person to appear, and lingered near the spot for a considerable time; but the vision came no more.

Vivaldi arrived at home with a mind occupied by this incident, and tormented by the jealousy to which it gave rise; for, after indulging various conjectures, he concluded with believing the notice, of which he had been warned, to be that of a rival, and that the danger which menaced him, was from the poniard of jealousy. This belief discovered to him at once the extent of his passion, and of the imprudence, which had thus readily admitted it; yet so far was this new prudence from overcoming his error, that, stung with a torture more exquisite than he had ever known, he resolved, at every event, to declare his love, and sue for the hand of Ellena. Unhappy young man, he knew not the fatal error, into which passion was precipitating him!

On his arrival at the Vivaldi palace, he learned, that the Marchesa had observed his absence, had repeatedly enquired for him, and had given orders that the time of his return should be mentioned to her. She had, however, retired to rest; but the Marchese, who had attended the King on an excursion to one of the royal villas on the bay, returned home soon after Vincentio; and, before he had withdrawn to his apartment, he met his son with looks of unusual displeasure, but avoided saying any thing, which either explained or alluded to the subject of it; and, after a short conversation, they separated.

Vivaldi shut himself in his apartment to deliberate, if that may deserve the name of deliberation, in which a conflict of passions, rather than an exertion of judgment, prevailed. For several hours he traversed his suite of rooms, alternately tortured by the remembrance of Ellena, fired with jealousy, and alarmed for the consequence of the imprudent step, which he was about to take. He knew the temper of his father, and some traits of the character of his mother, sufficiently to fear that their displeasure would be irreconcilable concerning the marriage he meditated; yet, when he considered that he was their only son, he was inclined to admit a hope of forgiveness, notwithstanding the weight which the circumstance must add to their disappointment. These reflexions were frequently interrupted by fears lest Ellena had already disposed of her affections to this imaginary rival. He was, however, somewhat consoled by remembering the sigh she had uttered, and the tenderness, with which she had immediately pronounced his name. Yet, even if she were not averse to his suit, how could he solicit her hand, and hope it would be given him, when he should declare that this must be in secret? He scarcely dared to believe that she would condescend to enter a family who disdained to receive her; and again despondency overcame him.

The morning found him as distracted as the night had left him; his determination, however, was fixed; and this was, to sacrifice what he now considered as a delusive pride of birth, to a choice which he believed would ensure the happiness of his life. But, before he ventured to declare himself to Ellena, it appeared necessary to ascertain whether he held an interest in her heart, or whether she had devoted it to the rival of his love, and who this rival really was. It was so much easier to wish for such information than to

obtain it, that, after forming a thousand projects, either the delicacy of his respect for Ellena, or his fear of offending her, or an apprehension of discovery from his family before he had secured an interest in her affections, constantly opposed his views of an enquiry.

In this difficulty he opened his heart to a friend, who had long possessed his confidence, and whose advice he solicited with somewhat more anxiety and sincerity than is usual on such occasions. It was not a sanction of his own opinion that he required, but the impartial judgment of another mind. Bonarmo, however little he might be qualified for the office of an adviser, did not scruple to give his advice. As a means of judging whether Ellena was disposed to favour Vivaldi's addresses, he proposed that, according to the custom of the country, a serenade should be given; he maintained, that, if she was not disinclined towards him, some sign of approbation would appear; and if otherwise, that she would remain silent and invisible. Vivaldi objected to this coarse and inadequate mode of expressing a love so sacred as his, and he had too lofty an opinion of Ellena's mind and delicacy, to believe, that the trifling homage of a serenade would either flatter her self-love, or interest her in his favour; nor, if it did, could he venture to believe, that she would display any sign of approbation.

His friend laughed at his scruples and at his opinion of what he called such romantic delicacy, that his ignorance of the world was his only excuse for having cherished them. But Vivaldi interrupted this raillery, and would neither suffer him for a moment to speak thus of Ellena, or to call such delicacy romantic. Bonarmo, however, still urged the serenade as at least a possible means of discovering her disposition towards him before he made a formal avowal of his suit; and Vivaldi, perplexed and distracted with apprehension and impatience to terminate his present state of suspense, was at length so far overcome by his own difficulties, rather than by his friend's persuasion, that he consented to make the adventure of a serenade on the approaching night. This was adopted rather as a refuge from despondency, than with any hope of success; for he still believed that Ellena would not give any hint, that might terminate his uncertainty.

Beneath their cloaks they carried musical instruments, and, muffling up their faces, so that they could not be known, they proceeded in thoughtful

silence on the way to the villa Altieri. Already they had passed the arch, in which Vivaldi was stopped by the stranger on the preceding night, when he heard a sudden sound near him, and, raising his head from the cloak, he perceived the same figure! Before he had time for exclamation, the stranger crossed him again. "Go not to the villa Altieri," said he in a solemn voice, "lest you meet the fate you ought to dread."

"What fate?" demanded Vivaldi, stepping back; "speak, I conjure you!"

But the monk was gone, and the darkness of the hour baffled observation as to the way of his departure.

"*Dio mi guardi!*" exclaimed Bonarmo, "this is almost beyond belief! but let us return to Naples; this second warning ought to be obeyed."

"It is almost beyond endurance," exclaimed Vivaldi; "which way did he pass?"

"He glided by me," replied Bonarmo, "and he was gone before I could cross him!"

"I will tempt the worst at once," said Vivaldi; "if I have a rival, it is best to meet him. Let us go on."

Bonarmo remonstrated, and represented the serious danger that threatened from so rash a proceeding. "It is evident that you have a rival," said he; "and your courage cannot avail you against hired bravos." Vivaldi's heart swelled at the mention of a rival. "If you think it dangerous to proceed, I will go alone," said he.

Hurt by this reproof, Bonarmo accompanied his friend in silence, and they reached without interruption the boundary of the villa. Vivaldi led to the place by which he had entered on the preceding night, and they passed unmolested into the garden.

"Where are these terrible bravos of whom you warned me?" said Vivaldi, with taunting exultation.

"Speak cautiously," replied his friend; "we may, even now, be within their reach."

"They also may be within ours," observed Vivaldi.

At length, these adventurous friends came to the orangery, which was near the house, when, tired by the ascent, they rested to recover breath, and to prepare their instruments for the serenade. The night was still, and they now heard, for the first time, murmurs as of a distant multitude; and then the sudden splendor of fireworks broke upon the sky. These arose from a villa on the western margin of the bay, and were given in honour of the birth of one of the royal princes. They soared to an immense height, and, as their lustre broke silently upon the night, it lightened on the thousand up-turned faces of the gazing crowd, illumined the waters of the bay, with every little boat that skimmed its surface, and shewed distinctly the whole sweep of its rising shores, the stately city of Naples on the strand below, and, spreading far among the hills, its terraced roofs crowded with spectators, and the Corso tumultuous with carriages and blazing with torches.

While Bonarmo surveyed this magnificent scene, Vivaldi turned his eyes to the residence of Ellena, part of which looked out from among the trees, with a hope that the spectacle would draw her to a balcony; but she did not appear, nor was there any light, that might indicate her approach.

While they still rested on the turf of the orangery, they heard a sudden rustling of the leaves, as if the branches were disturbed by some person who endeavoured to make his way between them, when Vivaldi demanded who passed. No answer was returned, and a long silence followed.

"We are observed," said Bonarmo, at length, "and are even now, perhaps, almost beneath the poniard of the assassin: let us be gone."

"O that my heart were as secure from the darts of love, the assassin of my peace," exclaimed Vivaldi, "as yours is from those of bravos! My friend, you have little to interest you, since your thoughts have so much leisure for apprehension."

"My fear is that of prudence, not of weakness," retorted Bonarmo, with acrimony; "you will find, perhaps, that I have none, when you most wish me to possess it."

"I understand you," replied Vivaldi; "let us finish this business, and you shall receive reparation, since you believe yourself injured: I am as anxious to repair an offence, as jealous of receiving one."

"Yes," replied Bonarmo, "you would repair the injury you have done your friend with his blood."

"Oh! never, never!" said Vivaldi, falling on his neck. "Forgive my hasty violence; allow for the distraction of my mind."

Bonarmo returned the embrace. "It is enough," said he; "no more, no more! I hold again my friend to my heart."

While this conversation passed, they had quitted the orangery, and reached the walls of the villa, where they took their station under a balcony that overhung the lattice, through which Vivaldi had seen Ellena on the preceding night. They tuned their instruments, and opened the serenade with a duet.

Vivaldi's voice was a fine tenor, and the same susceptibility, which made him passionately fond of music, taught him to modulate its cadence with exquisite delicacy, and to give his emphasis with the most simple and pathetic expression. His soul seemed to breathe in the sounds,—so tender, so imploring, yet so energetic. On this night, enthusiasm inspired him with the highest eloquence, perhaps, which music is capable of attaining; what might be its effect on Ellena he had no means of judging, for she did not appear either at the balcony or the lattice, nor gave any hint of applause. No sounds stole on the stillness of the night, except those of the serenade, nor did any light from within the villa break upon the obscurity without; once, indeed, in a pause of the instruments, Bonarmo fancied he distinguished voices near him, as of persons who feared to be heard, and he listened attentively, but without ascertaining the truth. Sometimes they seemed to sound heavily in his ear, and then a death-like silence prevailed. Vivaldi

affirmed the sound to be nothing more than the confused murmur of the distant multitude on the shore, but Bonarmo was not thus easily convinced.

The musicians, unsuccessful in their first endeavour to attract attention, removed to the opposite side of the building, and placed themselves in front of the portico, but with as little success; and, after having exercised their powers of harmony and of patience for above an hour, they resigned all further effort to win upon the obdurate Ellena. Vivaldi, notwithstanding the feebleness of his first hope of seeing her, now suffered an agony of disappointment; and Bonarmo, alarmed for the consequence of his despair, was as anxious to persuade him that he had no rival, as he had lately been pertinacious in affirming that he had one.

At length, they left the gardens, Vivaldi protesting that he would not rest till he had discovered the stranger, who so wantonly destroyed his peace, and had compelled him to explain his ambiguous warnings; and Bonarmo remonstrating on the imprudence and difficulty of the search, and representing that such conduct would probably be the means of spreading a report of his attachment, where most he dreaded it should be known.

Vivaldi refused to yield to remonstrance or considerations of any kind. "We shall see," said he, "whether this demon in the garb of a monk, will haunt me again at the accustomed place; if he does, he shall not escape my grasp; and if he does not, I will watch as vigilantly for his return, as he seems to have done for mine. I will lurk in the shade of the ruin, and wait for him, though it be till death!"

Bonarmo was particularly struck by the vehemence with which he pronounced the last words, but he no longer opposed his purpose, and only bade him consider whether he was well armed, "For," he added, "you may have need of arms there, though you had no use for them at the villa Altieri. Remember that the stranger told you that your steps were watched."

"I have my sword," replied Vivaldi, "and the dagger which I usually wear; but I ought to enquire what are your weapons of defence."

"Hush!" said Bonarmo, as they turned the foot of a rock that overhung the road, "we are approaching the spot; yonder is the arch!" It appeared duskily

in the perspective, suspended between two cliffs, where the road wound from sight, on one of which were the ruins of the Roman fort it belonged to, and on the other, shadowing pines, and thickets of oak that tufted the rock to its base.

They proceeded in silence, treading lightly, and often throwing a suspicious glance around, expecting every instant that the monk would steal out upon them from some recess of the cliffs. But they passed on unmolested to the arch-way. "We are here before him, however," said Vivaldi as they entered the darkness. "Speak low, my friend," said Bonarmo, "others besides ourselves may be shrouded in this obscurity. I like not the place."

"Who but ourselves would chuse so dismal a retreat?" whispered Vivaldi, "unless indeed, it were banditti; the savageness of the spot would, in truth, suit their humour, and it suits well also with my own."

"It would suit their purpose too, as well as their humour," observed Bonarmo. "Let us remove from this deep shade, into the more open road, where we can as closely observe who passes."

Vivaldi objected that in the road they might themselves be observed, "and if we are seen by my unknown tormentor, our design is defeated, for he comes upon us suddenly, or not at all, lest we should be prepared to detain him."

Vivaldi, as he said this, took his station within the thickest gloom of the arch, which was of considerable depth, and near a flight of steps that was cut in the rock, and ascended to the fortress. His friend stepped close to his side. After a pause of silence, during which Bonarmo was meditating, and Vivaldi was impatiently watching, "Do you really believe," said the former, "that any effort to detain him would be effectual? He glided past me with a strange facility, it was surely more than human!"

"What is it you mean?" enquired Vivaldi.

"Why, I mean that I could be superstitious. This place, perhaps, infests my mind with congenial gloom, for I find that, at this moment, there is

scarcely a superstition too dark for my credulity."

Vivaldi smiled. "And you must allow," added Bonarmo, "that he has appeared under circumstances somewhat extraordinary. How should he know your name, by which, you say, he addressed you at the first meeting? How should he know from whence you came, or whether you designed to return? By what magic could he become acquainted with your plans?"

"Nor am I certain that he is acquainted with them," observed Vivaldi; "but if he is, there was no necessity for superhuman means to obtain such knowledge."

"The result of this evening surely ought to convince you that he is acquainted with your designs," said Bonarmo. "Do you believe it possible that Ellena could have been insensible to your attentions, if her heart had not been pre-engaged, and that she would not have shewn herself at a lattice?"

"You do not know Ellena," replied Vivaldi, "and therefore I once more pardon you the question. Yet had she been disposed to accept my addresses, surely some sign of approbation,"—he checked himself.

"The stranger warned you not to go to the villa Altieri," resumed Bonarmo, "he seemed to anticipate the reception, which awaited you, and to know a danger, which hitherto you have happily escaped."

"Yes, he anticipated too well that reception," said Vivaldi, losing his prudence in passionate exclamation; "and he is himself, perhaps, the rival, whom he has taught me to suspect. He has assumed a disguise only the more effectually to impose upon my credulity, and to deter me from addressing Ellena. And shall I tamely lie in wait for his approach? Shall I lurk like a guilty assassin for this rival?"

"For heaven's sake!" said Bonarmo, "moderate these transports; consider where you are. This surmise of yours is in the highest degree improbable." He gave his reasons for thinking so, and these convinced Vivaldi, who was prevailed upon to be once more patient.

They had remained watchful and still for a considerable time, when Bonarmo saw a person approach the end of the arch-way nearest to Altieri. He heard no step, but he perceived a shadowy figure station itself at the entrance of the arch, where the twilight of this brilliant climate was, for a few paces, admitted. Vivaldi's eyes were fixed on the road leading towards Naples, and he, therefore, did not perceive the object of Bonarmo's attention, who, fearful of his friend's precipitancy, forbore to point out immediately what he observed, judging it more prudent to watch the motions of this unknown person, that he might ascertain whether it really were the monk. The size of the figure, and the dark drapery in which it seemed wrapt, induced him, at length, to believe that this was the expected stranger; and he seized Vivaldi's arm to direct his attention to him, when the form gliding forward disappeared in the gloom, but not before Vivaldi had understood the occasion of his friend's gesture and significant silence. They heard no footstep pass them, and, being convinced that this person, whatever he was, had not left the arch-way, they kept their station in watchful stillness. Presently they heard a rustling, as of garments, near them, and Vivaldi, unable longer to command his patience, started from his concealment, and with arms extended to prevent any one from escaping, demanded who was there.

The sound ceased, and no reply was made. Bonarmo drew his sword, protesting he would stab the air till he found the person who lurked there; but that if the latter would discover himself, he should receive no injury. This assurance Vivaldi confirmed by his promise. Still no answer was returned; but as they listened for a voice, they thought something passed them, and the avenue was not narrow enough to have prevented such a circumstance. Vivaldi rushed forward, but did not perceive any person issue from the arch into the highway, where the stronger twilight must have discovered him.

"Somebody certainly passed," whispered Bonarmo, "and I think I hear a sound from yonder steps, that lead to the fortress."

"Let us follow," cried Vivaldi, and he began to ascend.

"Stop, for heaven's sake stop!" said Bonarmo; "consider what you are about! Do not brave the utter darkness of these ruins; do not pursue the

assassin to his den!"

"It is the monk himself!" exclaimed Vivaldi, still ascending; "he shall not escape me!"

Bonarmo paused a moment at the foot of the steps, and his friend disappeared; he hesitated what to do, till ashamed of suffering him to encounter danger alone, he sprang to the flight, and not without difficulty surmounted the rugged steps.

Having reached the summit of the rock, he found himself on a terrace, that ran along the top of the arch-way and had once been fortified; this, crossing the road, commanded the defile each way. Some remains of massy walls, that still exhibited loops for archers, were all that now hinted of its former use. It led to a watch-tower almost concealed in thick pines, that crowned the opposite cliff, and had thus served not only for a strong battery over the road, but, connecting the opposite sides of the defile, had formed a line of communication between the fort and this out-post.

Bonarmo looked round in vain for his friend, and the echoes of his own voice only, among the rocks, replied to his repeated calls. After some hesitation whether to enter the walls of the main building, or to cross to the watch-tower, he determined on the former, and entered a rugged area, the walls of which, following the declivities of the precipice, could scarcely now be traced. The citadel, a round tower, of majestic strength, with some Roman arches scattered near, was all that remained of this once important fortress; except, indeed, a mass of ruins near the edge of the cliff, the construction of which made it difficult to guess for what purpose it had been designed.

Bonarmo entered the immense walls of the citadel, but the utter darkness within checked his progress, and, contenting himself with calling loudly on Vivaldi, he returned to the open air.

As he approached the mass of ruins, whose singular form had interested his curiosity, he thought he distinguished the low accents of a human voice, and while he listened in anxiety, a person rushed forth from a door-way of the ruin, carrying a drawn sword. It was Vivaldi himself. Bonarmo sprang

to meet him; he was pale and breathless, and some moments elapsed before he could speak, or appeared to hear the repeated enquiries of his friend.

"Let us go," said Vivaldi, "let us leave this place!"

"Most willingly," replied Bonarmo, "but where have you been, and who have you seen, that you are thus affected?"

"Ask me no more questions, let us go," repeated Vivaldi.

They descended the rock together, and when, having reached the archway, Bonarmo enquired, half sportively, whether they should remain any longer on the watch, his friend answered, "No!" with an emphasis that startled him. They passed hastily on the way to Naples, Bonarmo repeating enquiries which Vivaldi seemed reluctant to satisfy, and wondering no less at the cause of this sudden reserve, than anxious to know whom he had seen.

"It was the monk, then," said Bonarmo; "you secured him at last?"

"I know not what to think," replied Vivaldi, "I am more perplexed than ever."

"He escaped you then?"

"We will speak of this in future," said Vivaldi; "but be it as it may, the business rests not here. I will return in the night of to-morrow with a torch; dare you venture yourself with me?"

"I know not," replied Bonarmo, "whether I ought to do so, since I am not informed for what purpose."

"I will not press you to go," said Vivaldi; "my purpose is already known to you."

"Have you really failed to discover the stranger—have you still doubts concerning the person you pursued?"

"I have doubts, which to-morrow night, I hope, will dissipate."

"This is very strange!" said Bonarmo, "It was but now that I witnessed the horror, with which you left the fortress of Paluzzi, and already you speak of returning to it! And why at night—why not in the day, when less danger would beset you?"

"I know not as to that," replied Vivaldi, "you are to observe that day-light never pierces within the recess, to which I penetrated; we must search the place with torches at whatsoever hour we would examine it."

"Since this is necessary," said Bonarmo, "how happens it that you found your way in total darkness?"

"I was too much engaged to know how; I was led on, as by an invisible hand."

"We must, notwithstanding," observed Bonarmo, "go in day-time, if not by day-light, provided I accompany you. It would be little less than insanity to go twice to a place, which is probably infested with robbers, and at their own hour of midnight."

"I shall watch again in the accustomed place," replied Vivaldi, "before I use my last resource, and this cannot be done during the day. Besides, it is necessary that I should go at a particular hour, the hour when the monk has usually appeared."

"He did escape you, then?" said Bonarmo, "and you are still ignorant concerning who he is?"

Vivaldi rejoined only with an enquiry whether his friend would accompany him. "If not," he added, "I must hope to find another companion."

Bonarmo said, that he must consider of the proposal, and would acquaint him with his determination before the following evening.

While this conversation concluded, they were in Naples, and at the gates of the Vivaldi palace, where they separated for the remainder of the night.

CHAPTER II.

OLIVIA. "Why what would you?"

VIOLA. "Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantos of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night:
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out, Olivia! O! you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

Since Vivaldi had failed to procure an explanation of the words of the monk, he determined to relieve himself from the tortures of suspense, respecting a rival, by going to the villa Altieri, and declaring his pretensions. On the morning immediately following his late adventure, he went thither, and on enquiring for Signora Bianchi, was told that she could not be seen. With much difficulty he prevailed upon the old house-keeper to deliver a request that he might be permitted to wait upon her for a few moments. Permission was granted him, when he was conducted into the very apartment where he had formerly seen Ellena. It was unoccupied and he was told that Signora Bianchi would be there presently.

During this interval, he was agitated at one moment with quick impatience, and at another with enthusiastic pleasure, while he gazed on the altar whence he had seen Ellena rise, and where, to his fancy, she still appeared; and on every object, on which he knew her eyes had lately dwelt. These objects, so familiar to her, had in the imagination of Vivaldi acquired somewhat of the sacred character she had impressed upon his heart, and affected him in some degree as her presence would have done. He trembled as he took up the lute she had been accustomed to touch, and, when he awakened the chords, her own voice seemed to speak. A drawing, half-

finished, of a dancing nymph remained on a stand, and he immediately understood that her hand had traced the lines. It was a copy from Herculaneum, and, though a copy, was touched with the spirit of original genius. The light steps appeared almost to move, and the whole figure displayed the airy lightness of exquisite grace. Vivaldi perceived this to be one of a set that ornamented the apartment, and observed with surprise, that they were the particular subjects, which adorned his father's cabinet, and which he had understood to be the only copies permitted from the originals in the royal museum.

Every object, on which his eyes rested, seemed to announce the presence of Ellena; and the very flowers that so gaily embellished the apartment, breathed forth a perfume, which fascinated his senses and affected his imagination. Before Signora Bianchi appeared, his anxiety and apprehension had increased so much, that, believing he should be unable to support himself in her presence, he was more than once upon the point of leaving the house. At length, he heard her approaching step from the hall, and his breath almost forsook him. The figure of Signora Bianchi was not of an order to inspire admiration, and a spectator might have smiled to see the perturbation of Vivaldi, his faltering step and anxious eye, as he advanced to meet the venerable Bianchi, as he bowed upon her faded hand, and listened to her querulous voice. She received him with an air of reserve, and some moments passed before he could recollect himself sufficiently to explain the purpose of his visit; yet this, when he discovered it, did not apparently surprise her. She listened with composure, though with somewhat of a severe countenance, to his protestations of regard for her niece, and when he implored her to intercede for him in obtaining the hand of Ellena, she said, "I cannot be ignorant that a family of your rank must be averse to a union with one of mine; nor am I unacquainted that a full sense of the value of birth is a marking feature in the characters of the Marchese and Marchesa di Vivaldi. This proposal must be disagreeable or, at least, unknown to them; and I am to inform you, Signor, that, though Signora di Rosalba is their inferior in rank, she is their equal in pride."

Vivaldi disdained to prevaricate, yet was shocked to own the truth thus abruptly. The ingenuous manner, however, with which he at length did this, and the energy of a passion too eloquent to be misunderstood, somewhat

soothed the anxiety of Signora Bianchi, with whom other considerations began to arise. She considered that from her own age and infirmities she must very soon, in the course of nature, leave Ellena a young and friendless orphan; still somewhat dependent upon her own industry, and entirely so on her discretion. With much beauty and little knowledge of the world, the dangers of her future situation appeared in vivid colours to the affectionate mind of Signora Bianchi; and she sometimes thought that it might be right to sacrifice considerations, which in other circumstances would be laudable, to the obtaining for her niece the protection of a husband and a man of honour. If in this instance she descended from the lofty integrity, which ought to have opposed her consent that Ellena should clandestinely enter any family, her parental anxiety may soften the censure she deserved.

But, before she determined upon this subject, it was necessary to ascertain that Vivaldi was worthy of the confidence she might repose in him. To try, also, the constancy of his affection, she gave little present encouragement to his hopes. His request to see Ellena she absolutely refused, till she should have considered further of his proposals; and his enquiry whether he had a rival, and, if he had, whether Ellena was disposed to favour him, she evaded, since she knew that a reply would give more encouragement to his hopes, than it might hereafter be proper to confirm.

Vivaldi, at length, took his leave, released, indeed, from absolute despair, but scarcely encouraged to hope; ignorant that he had a rival, yet doubtful whether Ellena honoured himself with any share of her esteem.

He had received permission to wait upon Signora Bianchi on a future day, but till that day should arrive, time appeared motionless; and, since it seemed utterly impossible to endure this interval of suspense, his thoughts on the way to Naples were wholly engaged in contriving the means of concluding it, till he reached the well-known arch, and looked round, though hopelessly, for his mysterious tormentor. The stranger did not appear; and Vivaldi pursued the road, determined to re-visit the spot at night, and also to return privately to villa Altieri, where he hoped a second visit might procure for him some relief from his present anxiety.

When he reached home he found that the Marchese, his father, had left an order for him to await his arrival; which he obeyed; but the day passed

without his return. The Marchesa, when she saw him, enquired, with a look that expressed much, how he had engaged himself of late, and completely frustrated his plans for the evening, by requiring him to attend her to Portici. Thus he was prevented from receiving Bonarmo's determination, from watching at Paluzzi, and from revisiting Ellena's residence.

He remained at Portici the following evening, and, on his return to Naples, the Marchese being again absent, he continued ignorant of the intended subject of the interview. A note from Bonarmo brought a refusal to accompany him to the fortress, and urged him to forbear so dangerous a visit. Being for this night unprovided with a companion for the adventure, and unwilling to go alone, Vivaldi deferred it to another evening; but no consideration could deter him from visiting the villa Altieri. Not chusing to solicit his friend to accompany him thither, since he had refused his first request, he took his solitary lute, and reached the garden at an earlier hour than usual.

The sun had been set above an hour, but the horizon still retained somewhat of a saffron brilliancy, and the whole dome of the sky had an appearance of transparency, peculiar to this enchanting climate, which seemed to diffuse a more soothing twilight over the reposing world. In the south-east the outline of Vesuvius appeared distinctly, but the mountain itself was dark and silent.

Vivaldi heard only the quick and eager voices of some Lazzaroni at a distance on the shore, as they contended at the simple game of maro. From the bowery lattices of a small pavilion within the orangery, he perceived a light, and the sudden hope, which it occasioned, of seeing Ellena, almost overcame him. It was impossible to resist the opportunity of beholding her, yet he checked the impatient step he was taking, to ask himself, whether it was honorable thus to steal upon her retirement, and become an unsuspected observer of her secret thoughts. But the temptation was too powerful for this honorable hesitation; the pause was momentary; and, stepping lightly towards the pavilion, he placed himself near an open lattice, so as to be shrouded from observation by the branches of an orange-tree, while he obtained a full view of the apartment. Ellena was alone, sitting in a thoughtful attitude and holding her lute, which she did not play. She

appeared lost to a consciousness of surrounding objects, and a tenderness was on her countenance, which seemed to tell him that her thoughts were engaged by some interesting subject. Recollecting that, when last he had seen her thus, she pronounced his name, his hope revived, and he was going to discover himself and appear at her feet, when she spoke, and he paused.

"Why this unreasonable pride of birth!" said she; "A visionary prejudice destroys our peace. Never would I submit to enter a family averse to receive me; they shall learn, at least, that I inherit nobility of soul. O! Vivaldi! but for this unhappy prejudice!"—

Vivaldi, while he listened to this, was immovable; he seemed as if entranced; the sound of her lute and voice recalled him, and he heard her sing the first stanza of the very air, with which he had opened the serenade on a former night, and with such sweet pathos as the composer must have felt when he was inspired with the idea.

She paused at the conclusion of the first stanza, when Vivaldi, overcome by the temptation of such an opportunity for expressing his passion, suddenly struck the chords of the lute, and replied to her in the second. The tremor of his voice, though it restrained his tones, heightened its eloquence. Ellena instantly recollected it; her colour alternately faded and returned; and, before the verse concluded, she seemed to have lost all consciousness. Vivaldi was now advancing into the pavilion, when his approach recalled her; she waved him to retire, and before he could spring to her support, she rose and would have left the place, had he not interrupted her and implored a few moments attention.

"It is impossible," said Ellena.

"Let me only hear you say that I am not hateful to you," rejoined Vivaldi; "that this intrusion has not deprived me of the regard, with which but now you acknowledged you honoured me."—

"Oh, never, never!" interrupted Ellena, impatiently; "forget that I ever made such acknowledgment; forget that you ever heard it; I know not what I said."

"Ah, beautiful Ellena! do you think it possible I ever can forget it? It will be the solace of my solitary hours, the hope that shall sustain me."—

"I cannot be detained Signor," interrupted Ellena, still more embarrassed, "or forgive myself for having permitted such a conversation;" but as she spoke the last words, an involuntary smile seemed to contradict their meaning. Vivaldi believed the smile in spite of the words; but, before he could express the lightning joy of conviction, she had left the pavilion; he followed through the garden—but she was gone.

From this moment Vivaldi seemed to have arisen into a new existence; the whole world to him was Paradise; that smile seemed impressed upon his heart for ever. In the fulness of present joy, he believed it impossible that he could ever be unhappy again, and defied the utmost malice of future fortune. With footsteps light as air, he returned to Naples, nor once remembered to look for his old monitor on the way.

The Marchese and his mother being from home, he was left at his leisure to indulge the rapturous recollection, that pressed upon his mind, and of which he was impatient of a moment's interruption. All night he either traversed his apartment with an agitation equal to that, which anxiety had so lately inflicted, or composed and destroyed letters to Ellena; sometimes fearing that he had written too much, and at others feeling that he had written too little; recollecting circumstances which he ought to have mentioned, and lamenting the cold expression of a passion, to which it appeared that no language could do justice.

By the hour when domestics had risen, he had, however, completed a letter somewhat more to his satisfaction, and he dispatched it to the villa Altieri by a confidential person; but the servant had scarcely quitted the gates, when he recollected new arguments, which he wished to urge, and expressions to change of the utmost importance to enforce his meaning, and he would have given half the world to have recalled the messenger.

In this state of agitation he was summoned to attend the Marchese, who had been too much engaged of late to keep his own appointment. Vivaldi was not long in doubt as to the subject of this interview.

"I have wished to speak with you," said the Marchese, assuming an air of haughty severity, "upon a subject of the utmost importance to your honour and happiness; and I wished, also, to give you an opportunity of contradicting a report, which would have occasioned me considerable uneasiness, if I could have believed it. Happily I had too much confidence in my son to credit this; and I affirmed that he understood too well what was due both to his family and himself, to take any step derogatory from the dignity of either. My motive for this conversation, therefore, is merely to afford you a moment for refuting the calumny I shall mention, and to obtain for myself authority for contradicting it to the persons who have communicated it to me."

Vivaldi waited impatiently for the conclusion of this exordium, and then begged to be informed of the subject of the report.

"It is said," returned the Marchese, "that there is a young woman, who is called Ellena Rosalba,—I think that is the name;—do you know any person of the name?"

"Do I know!" exclaimed Vivaldi, "but pardon me, pray proceed, my Lord."

The Marchese paused, and regarded his son with sternness, but without surprize. "It is said, that a young person of this name has contrived to fascinate your affections, and"——

"It is most true, my Lord, that Signora Rosalba has won my affections," interrupted Vivaldi with honest impatience, "but without contrivance."

"I will not be interrupted," said the Marchese, interrupting in his turn. "It is said that she has so artfully adapted her temper to yours, that, with the assistance of a relation who lives with her, she has reduced you to the degrading situation of her devoted suitor."

"Signora Rosalba has, my Lord, exalted me to the honour of being her suitor," said Vivaldi, unable longer to command his feelings. He was proceeding, when the Marchese abruptly checked him, "You avow your folly then!"

"My Lord, I glory in my choice."

"Young man," rejoined his father, "as this is the arrogance and romantic enthusiasm of a boy, I am willing to forgive it for once, and observe me, only for once. If you will acknowledge your error, instantly dismiss this new favourite."—

"My Lord!"

"You must instantly dismiss her," repeated the Marchese with sterner emphasis; "and, to prove that I am more merciful than just, I am willing, on this condition, to allow her a small annuity as some reparation for the depravity, into which you have assisted to sink her."

"My Lord!" exclaimed Vivaldi aghast, and scarcely daring to trust his voice, "my Lord!—depravity?" struggling for breath. "Who has dared to pollute her spotless fame by insulting your ears with such infamous falsehood? Tell me, I conjure you, instantly tell me, that I may hasten to give him his reward. Depravity!—an annuity—an annuity! O Ellena! Ellena!" As he pronounced her name tears of tenderness mingled with those of indignation.

"Young man," said the Marchese, who had observed the violence of his emotion with strong displeasure and alarm, "I do not lightly give faith to report, and I cannot suffer myself to doubt the truth of what I have advanced. You are deceived, and your vanity will continue the delusion, unless I condescend to exert my authority, and tear the veil from your eyes. Dismiss her instantly, and I will adduce proof of her former character which will stagger even your faith, enthusiastic as it is."

"Dismiss her!" repeated Vivaldi with calm yet stern energy, such as his father had never seen him assume; "My Lord, you have never yet doubted my word, and I now pledge you that honourable word, that Ellena is innocent. Innocent! O heavens, that it should ever be necessary to affirm so, and, above all, that it should ever be necessary for me to vindicate her!"

"I must indeed lament that it ever should," replied the Marchese coldly. "You have pledged your word, which I cannot question. I believe, therefore,

that you are deceived; that you think her virtuous, notwithstanding your midnight visits to her house. And grant she is, unhappy boy! what reparation can you make her for the infatuated folly, which has thus stained her character? What"——

"By proclaiming to the world, my Lord, that she is worthy of becoming my wife," replied Vivaldi, with a glow of countenance, which announced the courage and the exultation of a virtuous mind.

"Your wife!" said the Marchese, with a look of ineffable disdain, which was instantly succeeded by one of angry alarm.—"If I believed you could so far forget what is due to the honour of your house, I would for ever disclaim you as my son."

"O! why," exclaimed Vivaldi, in an agony of conflicting passions, "why should I be in danger of forgetting what is due to a father, when I am only asserting what is due to innocence; when I am only defending her, who has no other to defend her! Why may not I be permitted to reconcile duties so congenial! But, be the event what it may, I will defend the oppressed, and glory in the virtue, which teaches me, that it is the first duty of humanity to do so. Yes, my Lord, if it must be so, I am ready to sacrifice inferior duties to the grandeur of a principle, which ought to expand all hearts and impel all actions. I shall best support the honour of my house by adhering to its dictates."

"Where is the principle," said the Marchese, impatiently, "which shall teach you to disobey a father; where is the virtue which shall instruct you to degrade your family?"

"There can be no degradation, my Lord, where there is no vice," replied Vivaldi; "and there are instances, pardon me, my Lord, there are some few instances in which it is virtuous to disobey."

"This paradoxical morality," said the Marchese, with passionate displeasure, "and this romantic language, sufficiently explain to me the character of your associates, and the innocence of her, whom you defend with so chivalric an air. Are you to learn, Signor, that you belong to your

family, not your family to you; that you are only a guardian of its honour, and not at liberty to dispose of yourself? My patience will endure no more!"

Nor could the patience of Vivaldi endure this repeated attack on the honor of Ellena. But, while he yet asserted her innocence, he endeavoured to do so with the temper, which was due to the presence of a father; and, though he maintained the independence of a man, he was equally anxious to preserve inviolate the duties of a son. But unfortunately the Marchese and Vivaldi differed in opinion concerning the limits of these duties; the first extending them to passive obedience, and the latter conceiving them to conclude at a point, wherein the happiness of an individual is so deeply concerned as in marriage. They parted mutually inflamed; Vivaldi unable to prevail with his father to mention the name of his infamous informant, or to acknowledge himself convinced of Ellena's innocence; and the Marchese equally unsuccessful in his endeavours to obtain from his son a promise that he would see her no more.

Here then was Vivaldi, who only a few short hours before had experienced a happiness so supreme as to efface all impressions of the past, and to annihilate every consideration of the future; a joy so full that it permitted him not to believe it possible that he could ever again taste of misery; he, who had felt as if that moment was as an eternity, rendering him independent of all others,—even he was thus soon fallen into the region of time and of suffering.

The present conflict of passion appeared endless; he loved his father, and would have been more shocked to consider the vexation he was preparing for him, had he not been resentful of the contempt he expressed for Ellena. He adored Ellena; and, while he felt the impractability of resigning his hopes, was equally indignant of the slander, which affected her name, and impatient to avenge the insult upon the original defamer.

Though the displeasure of his father concerning a marriage with Ellena had been already foreseen, the experience of it was severer and more painful than he had imagined; while the indignity offered to Ellena was as unexpected as intolerable. But this circumstance furnished him with an additional argument for addressing her; for, if it had been possible that his love could have paused, his honour seemed now engaged in her behalf; and,

since he had been a means of sullyng her fame, it became his duty to restore it. Willingly listening to the dictates of a duty so plausible, he determined to persevere in his original design. But his first efforts were directed to discover her slanderer, and recollecting, with surprize, those words of the Marchese, which had confessed a knowledge of his evening visits to the villa Altieri, the doubtful warnings of the monk seemed explained. He believed that this man was at once the spy of his steps, and the defamer of his love, till the inconsistency of such conduct with the seeming friendliness of his admonitions, struck Vivaldi and compelled him to believe the contrary.

Meanwhile, the heart of Ellena had been little less tranquil. It was divided by love and pride; but had she been acquainted with the circumstances of the late interview between the Marchese and Vivaldi, it would have been divided no longer, and a just regard for her own dignity would instantly have taught her to subdue, without difficulty, this infant affection.

Signora Bianchi had informed her niece of the subject of Vivaldi's visit; but she had softened the objectionable circumstances that attended his proposal, and had, at first, merely hinted that it was not to be supposed his family would approve a connection with any person so much their inferior in rank as herself. Ellena, alarmed by this suggestion, replied, that, since she believed so, she had done right to reject Vivaldi's suit; but her sigh, as she said this, did not escape the observation of Signora Bianchi, who ventured to add, that she had not *absolutely* rejected his offers.

While in this and future conversations, Ellena was pleased to perceive her secret admiration thus justified by an approbation so indisputable as that of her aunt, and was willing to believe that the circumstance, which had alarmed her just pride, was not so humiliating as she at first imagined, Bianchi was careful to conceal the real considerations, which had induced her to listen to Vivaldi, being well assured that they would have no weight with Ellena, whose generous heart and inexperienced mind would have revolted from mingling any motives of interest with an engagement so sacred as that of marriage. When, however, from further deliberation upon the advantages, which such an alliance must secure for her niece, Signora Bianchi determined to encourage his views, and to direct the mind of

Ellena, whose affections were already engaged on her side, the opinions of the latter were found less ductile than had been expected. She was shocked at the idea of entering clandestinely the family of Vivaldi. But Bianchi, whose infirmities urged her wishes, was now so strongly convinced of the prudence of such an engagement for her niece, that she determined to prevail over her reluctance, though she perceived that this must be by means more gradual and persuasive than she had believed necessary. On the evening, when Vivaldi had surprised from Ellena an acknowledgment of her sentiments, her embarrassment and vexation, on her returning to the house, and relating what had occurred, sufficiently expressed to Signora Bianchi the exact situation of her heart. And when, on the following morning, his letter arrived, written with the simplicity and energy of truth, the aunt neglected not to adapt her remarks upon it, to the character of Ellena, with her usual address.

Vivaldi, after the late interview with the Marchese, passed the remainder of the day in considering various plans, which might discover to him the person, who had abused the credulity of his father; and in the evening he returned once more to the villa Altieri, not in secret, to serenade the dark balcony of his mistress, but openly, and to converse with Signora Bianchi, who now received him more courteously than on his former visit. Attributing the anxiety in his countenance to the uncertainty, concerning the disposition of her niece, she was neither surprised or offended, but ventured to relieve him from a part of it, by encouraging his hopes. Vivaldi dreaded lest she should enquire further respecting the sentiments of his family, but she spared both his delicacy and her own on this point; and, after a conversation of considerable length, he left the villa Altieri with a heart somewhat soothed by approbation, and lightened by hope, although he had not obtained a sight of Ellena. The disclosure she had made of her sentiments on the preceding evening, and the hints she had received as to those of his family, still wrought upon her mind with too much effect to permit an interview.

Soon after his return to Naples, the Marchesa, whom he was surprised to find disengaged, sent for him to her closet, where a scene passed similar to that which had occurred with his father, except that the Marchesa was more dexterous in her questions, and more subtle in her whole conduct; and that

Vivaldi, never for a moment, forgot the decorum which was due to a mother. Managing his passions, rather than exasperating them, and deceiving him with respect to the degree of resentment she felt from his choice, she was less passionate than the Marchese in her observations and menaces, perhaps, only because she entertained more hope than he did of preventing the evil she contemplated.

Vivaldi quitted her, unconvinced by her arguments, unsubdued by her prophecies, and unmoved in his designs. He was not alarmed, because he did not sufficiently understand her character to apprehend her purposes. Despairing to effect these by open violence, she called in an auxiliary of no mean talents, and whose character and views well adapted him to be an instrument in her hands. It was, perhaps, the baseness of her own heart, not either depth of reflexion or keenness of penetration, which enabled her to understand the nature of his; and she determined to modulate that nature to her own views.

There lived in the Dominican convent of the Spirito Santo, at Naples, a man called father Schedoni; an Italian, as his name imported, but whose family was unknown, and from some circumstances, it appeared, that he wished to throw an impenetrable veil over his origin. For whatever reason, he was never heard to mention a relative, or the place of his nativity, and he had artfully eluded every enquiry that approached the subject, which the curiosity of his associates had occasionally prompted. There were circumstances, however, which appeared to indicate him to be a man of birth, and of fallen fortune; his spirit, as it had sometimes looked forth from under the disguise of his manners, seemed lofty; it shewed not, however, the aspirings of a generous mind, but rather the gloomy pride of a disappointed one. Some few persons in the convent, who had been interested by his appearance, believed that the peculiarities of his manners, his severe reserve and unconquerable silence, his solitary habits and frequent penances, were the effect of misfortunes preying upon a haughty and disordered spirit; while others conjectured them the consequence of some hideous crime gnawing upon an awakened conscience.

He would sometimes abstract himself from the society for whole days together, or when with such a disposition he was compelled to mingle with

it, he seemed unconscious where he was, and continued shrouded in meditation and silence till he was again alone. There were times when it was unknown whither he had retired, notwithstanding that his steps had been watched, and his customary haunts examined. No one ever heard him complain. The elder brothers of the convent said that he had talents, but denied him learning; they applauded him for the profound subtlety which he occasionally discovered in argument, but observed that he seldom perceived truth when it lay on the surface; he could follow it through all the labyrinths of disquisition, but overlooked it, when it was undisguised before him. In fact he cared not for truth, nor sought it by bold and broad argument, but loved to exert the wily cunning of his nature in hunting it through artificial perplexities. At length, from a habit of intricacy and suspicion, his vitiated mind could receive nothing for truth, which was simple and easily comprehended.

Among his associates no one loved him, many disliked him, and more feared him. His figure was striking, but not so from grace; it was tall, and, though extremely thin, his limbs were large and uncouth, and as he stalked along, wrapt in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in its air; something almost superhuman. His cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, encreased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye, which approached to horror. His was not the melancholy of a sensible and wounded heart, but apparently that of a gloomy and ferocious disposition. There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that can not easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance; and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts; few persons could support their scrutiny, or even endure to meet them twice. Yet, notwithstanding all this gloom and austerity, some rare occasions of interest had called forth a character upon his countenance entirely different; and he could adapt himself to the tempers and passions of persons, whom he wished to conciliate, with astonishing facility, and generally with complete triumph. This monk, this Schedoni, was the confessor and secret adviser of the Marchesa di Vivaldi. In the first effervescence of pride and indignation, which the discovery of her son's

intended marriage occasioned, she consulted him on the means of preventing it, and she soon perceived that his talents promised to equal her wishes. Each possessed, in a considerable degree, the power of assisting the other; Schedoni had subtlety with ambition to urge it; and the Marchesa had inexorable pride, and courtly influence; the one hoped to obtain a high benefice for his services, and the other to secure the imaginary dignity of her house, by her gifts. Prompted by such passions, and allured by such views, they concerted in private, and unknown even to the Marchese, the means of accomplishing their general end.

Vivaldi, as he quitted his mother's closet, had met Schedoni in the corridor leading thither. He knew him to be her confessor, and was not much surprised to see him, though the hour was an unusual one. Schedoni bowed his head, as he passed, and assumed a meek and holy countenance; but Vivaldi, as he eyed him with a penetrating glance, now recoiled with involuntary emotion; and it seemed as if a shuddering presentiment of what this monk was preparing for him, had crossed his mind.

CHAPTER III.

—"Art thou any thing?
Art thou some God, some Angel, or some Devil
That mak'st my blood cold, and my hair to stand?
Speak to me, what thou art."

JULIUS CÆSAR.

Vivaldi, from the period of his last visit to Altieri, was admitted a frequent visitor to Signora Bianchi, and Ellena was, at length, prevailed upon to join the party, when the conversation was always on indifferent topics. Bianchi, understanding the disposition of her niece's affections, and the accomplished mind and manners of Vivaldi, judged that he was more likely to succeed by silent attentions than by a formal declaration of his sentiments. By such declaration, Ellena, till her heart was more engaged in his cause, would, perhaps, have been alarmed into an absolute rejection of his addresses, and this was every day less likely to happen, so long as he had an opportunity of conversing with her.

Signora Bianchi had acknowledged to Vivaldi that he had no rival to apprehend; that Ellena had uniformly rejected every admirer who had hitherto discovered her within the shade of her retirement, and that her present reserve proceeded more from considerations of the sentiments of his family than from disapprobation of himself. He forbore, therefore, to press his suit, till he should have secured a stronger interest in her heart, and in this hope he was encouraged by Signora Bianchi, whose gentle remonstrances in his favour became every day more pleasing and more convincing.

Several weeks passed away in this kind of intercourse, till Ellena, yielding to the representations of Signora Bianchi, and to the pleadings of her own heart, received Vivaldi as an acknowledged admirer, and the sentiments of his family were no longer remembered, or, if remembered, it

was with a hope that they might be overcome by considerations more powerful.

The lovers, with Signora Bianchi and a Signor Giotto, a distant relation of the latter, frequently made excursions in the delightful environs of Naples; for Vivaldi was no longer anxious to conceal his attachment, but wished to contradict any report injurious to his love, by the publicity of his conduct; while the consideration, that Ellena's name had suffered by his late imprudence, contributed, with the unsuspecting innocence and sweetness of her manners towards him, who had been the occasion of her injuries, to mingle a sacred pity with his love, which obliterated all family politics from his mind, and bound her irrecoverably to his heart.

These excursions sometimes led them to Puzzuoli, Baia, or the woody cliffs of Pausilippo, and as, on their return, they glided along the moon-light bay, the melodies of Italian strains seemed to give enchantment to the scenery of its shore. At this cool hour the voices of the vine-dressers were frequently heard in trio, as they reposed, after the labour of the day, on some pleasant promontory, under the shade of poplars; or the brisk music of the dance from fishermen, on the margin of the waves below. The boatmen rested on their oars, while their company listened to voices modulated by sensibility to finer eloquence, than is in the power of art alone to display; and at others, while they observed the airy natural grace, which distinguishes the dance of the fishermen and peasants of Naples. Frequently as they glided round a promontory, whose shaggy masses impended far over the sea, such magic scenes of beauty unfolded, adorned by these dancing groups on the bay beyond, as no pencil could do justice to. The deep clear waters reflected every image of the landscape, the cliffs, branching into wild forms, crowned with groves, whose rough foliage often spread down their steeps in picturesque luxuriance; the ruined villa on some bold point, peeping through the trees; peasants' cabins hanging on the precipices, and the dancing figures on the strand—all touched with the silvery tint and soft shadows of moon-light. On the other hand, the sea trembling with a long line of radiance, and shewing in the clear distance the sails of vessels stealing in every direction along its surface, presented a prospect as grand as the landscape was beautiful.

One evening that Vivaldi sat with Ellena and Signora Bianchi, in the very pavilion where he had overheard that short but interesting soliloquy, which assured him of her regard, he pleaded with more than his usual earnestness for a speedy marriage. Bianchi did not oppose his arguments; she had been unwell for some time, and, believing herself to be declining fast, was anxious to have their nuptials concluded. She surveyed with languid eyes, the scene that spread before the pavilion. The strong effulgence which a setting-sun threw over the sea, shewing innumerable gaily painted ships, and fishing-boats returning from Santa Lucia into the port of Naples, had no longer power to cheer her. Even the Roman tower that terminated the mole below, touched as it was with the slanting rays; and the various figures of fishermen, who lay smoking beneath its walls, in the long shadow, or stood in the sunshine on the beach, watching the approaching boats of their comrades, combined a picture which was no longer interesting. "Alas!" said she, breaking from meditative silence, "this sun so glorious, which lights up all the various colouring of these shores, and the glow of those majestic mountains; alas! I feel that it will not long shine for me—my eyes must soon close upon the prospect for ever!"

To Ellena's tender reproach for this melancholy suggestion Bianchi replied only by expressing an earnest wish to witness the certainty of her being protected; adding, that this must be soon, or she should not live to see it. Ellena, extremely shocked both by this presage of her aunt's fate, and by the direct reference made to her own condition in the presence of Vivaldi, burst into tears, while he, supported by the wishes of Signora Bianchi, urged his suit with increased interest.

"This is not a time for fastidious scruples," said Bianchi, "now that a solemn truth calls out to us. My dear girl, I will not disguise my feelings; they assure me I have not long to live. Grant me then the only request I have to make, and my last hours will be comforted."

After a pause she added, as she took the hand of her niece, "This will, no doubt, be an awful separation to us both; and it must also be a mournful one, Signor," turning to Vivaldi, "for she has been as a daughter to me, and I have, I trust, fulfilled to her the duties of a mother. Judge then, what will be her feelings when I am no more. But it will be your care to sooth them."

Vivaldi looked at Ellena, and would have spoken; her aunt, however, proceeded. "My own feelings would now be little less poignant, if I did not believe that I was confiding her to a tenderness, which cannot diminish; that I should prevail with her to accept the protection of a husband. To you, Signor, I commit the legacy of my child. Watch over her future moments, guard her from inquietude as vigilantly as I have done, and, if possible, from misfortune! I have yet much to say, but my spirits are exhausted."

While he listened to this sacred charge, and recollected the injury Ellena had already sustained for his sake, by the cruel obliquy which the Marchese had thrown upon her character, he suffered a degree of generous indignation, of which he scarcely could conceal the cause, and a succeeding tenderness that almost melted him to tears; and he secretly vowed to defend her fame and protect her peace, at the sacrifice of every other consideration.

Bianchi, as she concluded her exhortation, gave Ellena's hand to Vivaldi, who received it with emotion such as his countenance, only, could express, and with solemn fervour raising his eyes to heaven, vowed that he never would betray the confidence thus reposed in him, but would watch over the happiness of Ellena with a care as tender, as anxious, and as unceasing as her own; that from this moment he considered himself bound by ties not less sacred than those which the church confers, to defend her as his wife, and would do so, to the latest moment of his existence. As he said this, the truth of his feelings appeared in the energy of his manner.

Ellena, still weeping, and agitated by various considerations, spoke not, but withdrawing the handkerchief from her face, she looked at him through her tears, with a smile so meek, so affectionate, so timid, yet so confiding, as expressed all the mingled emotions of her heart, and appealed more eloquently to his, than the most energetic language could have done.

Before Vivaldi left the villa, he had some further conversation with Signora Bianchi, when it was agreed that the nuptials should be solemnized on the following week, if Ellena could be prevailed on to confirm her consent so soon; and that when he returned the next day, her determination would probably be made known to him.

He departed for Naples once more with the lightly-bounding steps of joy, which, however, when he arrived there, was somewhat alloyed by a message from the Marchese, demanding to see him in his cabinet. Vivaldi anticipated the subject of the interview, and obeyed the summons with reluctance.

He found his father so absorbed in thought, that he did not immediately perceive him. On raising his eyes from the floor, where discontent and perplexity seemed to have held them, he fixed a stern regard on Vivaldi. "I understand," said he, "that you persist in the unworthy pursuit against which I warned you. I have left you thus long to your own discretion, because I was willing to afford you an opportunity of retracting with grace the declaration, which you have dared to make me of your principles and intentions; but your conduct has not therefore been the less observed. I am informed that your visits have been as frequent at the residence of the unhappy young woman, who was the subject of our former conversation, as formerly, and that you are as much infatuated."

"If it is Signora Rosalba, whom your lordship means," said Vivaldi, "she is not unhappy; and I do not scruple to own, that I am as sincerely attached to her as ever. Why, my dear father," continued he, subduing the feelings which this degrading mention of Ellena had aroused, "why will you persist in opposing the happiness of your son; and above all, why will you continue to think unjustly of her, who deserves your admiration, as much as my love?"

"As I am not a lover," replied the Marchese, "and that the age of boyish credulity is past with me, I do not wilfully close my mind against examination, but am directed by proof and yield to conviction."

"What proof is it, my Lord, that has thus easily convinced you?" said Vivaldi; "who is it that persists in abusing your confidence, and in destroying my peace?"

The Marchese haughtily reproved his son for such doubts and questions, and a long conversation ensued, which seemed neither to reconcile the interests or the opinions of either party. The Marchese persisted in

accusation and menace; and Vivaldi in defending Ellena, and in affirming, that his affections and intentions were irrecoverable.

Not any art of persuasion could prevail with the Marchese to adduce his proofs, or deliver up the name of his informer; nor any menace awe Vivaldi into a renunciation of Ellena; and they parted mutually dissatisfied. The Marchese had failed on this occasion to act with his usual policy, for his menaces and accusations had aroused spirit and indignation, when kindness and gentle remonstrance would certainly have awakened filial affection, and might have occasioned a contest in the breast of Vivaldi. Now, no struggle of opposing duties divided his resolution. He had no hesitation on the subject of their dispute; but, regarding his father as a haughty oppressor who would rob him of his most sacred right; and as one who did not scruple to stain the name of the innocent and the defenceless, when his interest required it, upon the doubtful authority of a base informer, he suffered neither pity or remorse to mingle with the resolution of asserting the freedom of his nature; and was even more anxious than before, to conclude a marriage which he believed would secure his own happiness, and the reputation of Ellena.

He returned, therefore, on the following day to the villa Altieri, with increased impatience to learn the result of Signora Bianchi's further conversation with her niece, and the day on which the nuptials might be solemnized. On the way thither, his thoughts were wholly occupied by Ellena, and he proceeded mechanically, and without observing where he was, till the shade which the well-known arch threw over the road recalled him to local circumstances, and a voice instantly arrested his attention. It was the voice of the monk, whose figure again passed before him. "Go not to the villa Altieri," it said solemnly, "for death is in the house!"

Before Vivaldi could recover from the dismay into which this abrupt assertion and sudden appearance had thrown him, the stranger was gone. He had escaped in the gloom of the place, and seemed to have retired into the obscurity, from which he had so suddenly emerged, for he was not seen to depart from under the arch-way. Vivaldi pursued him with his voice, conjuring him to appear, and demanding who was dead; but no voice replied.

Believing that the stranger could not have escaped unseen from the arch by any way, but that leading to the fortress above, Vivaldi began to ascend the steps, when, considering that the more certain means of understanding this awful assertion would be, to go immediately to the villa Altieri, he left this portentous ruin, and hastened thither.

An indifferent person would probably have understood the words of the monk to allude to Signora Bianchi, whose infirm state of health rendered her death, though sudden, not improbable; but to the affrighted fancy of Vivaldi, the dying Ellena only appeared. His fears, however probabilities might sanction, or the event justify them, were natural to ardent affection; but they were accompanied by a presentiment as extraordinary as it was horrible;—it occurred to him more than once, that Ellena was murdered. He saw her wounded, and bleeding to death; saw her ashy countenance, and her wasting eyes, from which the spirit of life was fast departing, turned piteously on himself, as if imploring him to save her from the fate that was dragging her to the grave. And, when he reached the boundary of the garden, his whole frame trembled so, with horrible apprehension, that he rested a while, unable to venture further towards the truth. At length, he summoned courage to dare it, and, unlocking a private gate, of which he had lately received the key, because it spared him a considerable distance of the road to Naples, he approached the house. Every place around it was silent and forsaken; many of the lattices were closed, and, as he endeavoured to collect from every trivial circumstance some conjecture, his spirits still sunk as he advanced, till, having arrived within a few paces of the portico, all his fears were confirmed. He heard from within a feeble sound of lamentation, and then some notes of that solemn and peculiar kind of recitative, which is in some parts of Italy the requiem of the dying. The sounds were so low and distant that they only murmured on his ear; but, without pausing for information, he rushed into the portico, and knocked loudly at the folding doors, now closed against him.

After repeated summonses, Beatrice, the old house-keeper, appeared. She did not wait for Vivaldi's enquiries. "Alas! Signor," said she, "alas-a-day! who would have thought it; who would have expected such a change as this! It was only yester-evening that you was here,—she was then as well as I am; who would have thought that she would be dead to-day?"

"She *is* dead, then!" exclaimed Vivaldi, struck to the heart; "she *is* dead!" staggering towards a pillar of the hall, and endeavouring to support himself against it. Beatrice, shocked at his condition, would have gone for assistance, but he waved her to stay. "When did she die," said he, drawing breath with difficulty, "how and where?"

"Alas! here in the villa, Signor," replied Beatrice, weeping; "who would have thought that I should live to see this day! I hoped to have laid down my old bones in peace."

"What has caused her death?" interrupted Vivaldi impatiently, "and when did she die?"

"About two of the clock this morning, Signor; about two o'clock. O miserable day, that I should live to see it!"

"I am better," said Vivaldi, raising himself; "lead me to her apartment,—I must see her. Do not hesitate, lead me on."

"Alas! Signor, it is a dismal sight; why should you wish to see her? Be persuaded; do not go, Signor; it is a woeful sight!"

"Lead me on," repeated Vivaldi sternly; "or if you refuse, I will find the way myself."

Beatrice, terrified by his look and gesture, no longer opposed him, begging only that he would wait till she had informed her lady of his arrival; but he followed her closely up the staircase and along a corridor that led round the west side of the house, which brought him to a suite of chambers darkened by the closed lattices, through which he passed towards the one where the body lay. The requiem had ceased, and no sound disturbed the awful stillness that prevailed in these deserted rooms. At the door of the last apartment, where he was compelled to stop, his agitation was such, that Beatrice, expecting every instant to see him sink to the floor, made an effort to support him with her feeble aid, but he gave a signal for her to retire. He soon recovered himself and passed into the chamber of death, the solemnity of which might have affected him in any other state of his spirits; but these were now too severely pressed upon by real suffering

to feel the influence of local circumstances. Approaching the bed on which the corpse was laid, he raised his eyes to the mourner who hung weeping over it, and beheld—Ellena! who, surprized by this sudden intrusion, and still more by the agitation of Vivaldi, repeatedly demanded the occasion of it. But he had neither power or inclination to explain a circumstance, which must deeply wound the heart of Ellena, since it would have told that the same event, which excited her grief, accidentally inspired his joy.

He did not long intrude upon the sacredness of sorrow, and the short time he remained was employed in endeavours to command his own emotion and to soothe her's.

When he left Ellena, he had some conciliation with Beatrice, as to the death of Signora Bianchi, and understood that she had retired to rest on the preceding night apparently in her usual state of health. "It was about one in the morning, Signor," continued Beatrice, "I was waked out of my first sleep by a noise in my lady's chamber. It is a grievous thing to me, Signor, to be waked from my first sleep, and I, Santa Maria forgive me! was angry at being disturbed! So I would not get up, but laid my head upon the pillow again, and tried to sleep; but presently I heard the noise again; nay now, says I, somebody must be up in the house, that's certain. I had scarcely said so, Signor, when I heard my young lady's voice calling 'Beatrice! Beatrice!' Ah! poor young lady! she was indeed in a sad fright, as well she might. She was at my door in an instant, and looked as pale as death, and trembled so! 'Beatrice,' said she, 'rise this moment; my aunt is dying.' She did not stay for my answer, but was gone directly. Santa Maria protect me! I thought I should have swooned outright."

"Well, but your lady?" said Vivaldi, whose patience the tedious circumlocution of old Beatrice had exhausted.

"Ah! my poor lady! Signor, I thought I never should have been able to reach her room; and when I got there, I was scarcely more alive than herself.—There she lay on her bed! O it was a grievous sight to see! there she lay, looking so piteously; I saw she was dying. She could not speak, though she tried often, but she was sensible, for she would look so at Signora Ellena, and then try again to speak; it almost broke one's heart to see her. Something seemed to lie upon her mind, and she tried almost to the

last to tell it; and as she grasped Signora Ellena's hand, she would still look up in her face with such doleful expression as no one who had not a heart of stone could bear. My poor young mistress was quite overcome by it, and cried as if her heart would break. Poor young lady! she has lost a friend indeed, such a one as she must never hope to see again."

"But she shall find one as firm and affectionate as the last!" exclaimed Vivaldi fervently.

"The good Saint grant it may prove so!" replied Beatrice, doubtingly. "All that could be done for our dear lady," she continued, "was tried, but with no avail. She could not swallow what the Doctor offered her. She grew fainter and fainter, yet would often utter such deep sighs, and then would grasp my hand so hard! At last she turned her eyes from Signora Ellena, and they grew duller and fixed, and she seemed not to see what was before her. Alas! I knew then she was going; her hand did not press mine as it had done a minute or two before, and a deadly coldness was upon it. Her face changed so too in a few minutes! This was about two o'clock, and she died before her confessor could administer."

Beatrice ceased to speak, and wept; Vivaldi almost wept with her, and it was some time before he could command his voice sufficiently to enquire, what were the symptoms of Signora Bianchi's disorder, and whether she had ever been thus suddenly attacked before.

"Never, Signor!" replied the old house-keeper; "and though, to be sure, she has long been very infirm, and going down, as one may say, yet,"—

"What is it you mean?" said Vivaldi.

"Why, Signor, I do not know what to think about my lady's death. To be sure, there is nothing certain; and I may only get scoffed at, if I speak my mind abroad, for nobody would believe me, it is so strange, yet I must have my own thoughts, for all that."

"Do speak intelligibly," said Vivaldi, "you need not apprehend censure from me."

"Not from you, Signor, but if the report should get abroad, and it was known that I had set it a-going."

"That never shall be known from me," said Vivaldi, with encreased impatience, "tell me, without fear, all that you conjecture."

"Well then, Signor, I will own, that I do not like the suddenness of my lady's death, no, nor the manner of it, nor her appearance after death!"

"Speak explicitly, and to the point," said Vivaldi.

"Nay, Signor, there are some folks that will not understand, if you speak ever so plain, I am sure I speak plain enough. If I might tell my mind,—I do not believe she came fairly by her death at last!"

"How!" said Vivaldi, "your reasons?"

"Nay, Signor, I have given them already; I said I did not like the suddenness of her death, nor her appearance after, nor"—

"Good heaven!" interrupted Vivaldi, "you mean poison!"

"Hush, Signor, hush! I do not say that; but she did not seem to die naturally."

"Who has been at the villa lately?" said Vivaldi, in a tremulous voice.

"Alas! Signor, nobody has been here; she lived so privately that she saw nobody."

"Not one person?" said Vivaldi, "consider well, Beatrice, had she no visitor?"

"Not of a long while, Signor, no visitors but yourself and her cousin Signor Giotto. The only other person that has been within these walls for many weeks, to the best of my remembrance, is a sister of the Convent, who comes for the silks my young lady embroiders."

"Embroiders! What convent?"

"The Santa Maria della Pieta, yonder, Signor; if you will step this way to the window, I will shew it you. Yonder, among the woods on the hill-side, just above those gardens that stretch down to the bay. There is an olive ground close beside it, and observe, Signor, there is a red and yellowish ridge of rocks rises over the woods higher still, and looks as if it would fall down upon those old spires. Have you found it, Signor?"

"How long is it since this sister came here?" said Vivaldi.

"Three weeks at least, Signor."

"And you are certain that no other person has called within that time?"

"No other, Signor, except the fisherman and the gardener, and a man who brings macaroni, and such sort of things; for it is such a long way to Naples, Signor, and I have so little time."

"Three weeks, say you! You said three weeks, I think? Are you certain as to this?"

"Three weeks, Signor! Santa della Pieta! Do you believe, Signor, that we could fast for three weeks! Why, they call almost every day."

"I speak of the nun," said Vivaldi.

"O yes, Signor," replied Beatrice "it is that, at least, since she was here."

"This is strange!" said Vivaldi, musing, "but I will talk with you some other time. Meanwhile, I wish you could contrive that I should see the face of your deceased lady, without the knowledge of Signora Ellena. And, observe me, Beatrice, be strictly silent as to your surmises concerning her death: do not suffer any negligence to betray your suspicions to your young mistress. Has she any suspicions herself of the same nature?"

Beatrice replied, that she believed Signora Ellena had none; and promised faithfully to observe his injunctions.

He then left the villa, meditating on the circumstances he had just learned, and on the prophetic assertion of the monk, between whom, and the

cause of Bianchi's sudden death, he could not forbear surmising there was some connection; and it now occurred to him, and for the first time, that this monk, this mysterious stranger, was no other than Schedoni, whom he had observed of late going more frequently than usual, to his mother's apartment. He almost started, in horror of the suspicion, to which this conjecture led, and precipitately rejected it, as a poison that would destroy his own peace for ever. But though he instantly dismissed the suspicion, the conjecture returned to his mind, and he endeavoured to recollect the voice and figure of the stranger, that he might compare them with those of the confessor. The voices were, he thought, of a different tone, and the persons of a different height and proportion. This comparison, however, did not forbid him to surmise that the stranger was an agent of the confessor's; that he was, at least, a secret spy upon his actions, and the defamer of Ellena; while both, if indeed there were two persons concerned, appeared to be at the command of his parents. Fired with indignation of the unworthy arts that he believed to have been employed against him, and impatient to meet the slanderer of Ellena, he determined to attempt some decisive step towards a discovery of the truth, and either to compel the confessor to reveal it to him, or to search out his agent, who, he fancied, was occasionally a resident within the ruins of Paluzzi.

The inhabitants of the convent, which Beatrice had pointed out, did not escape his consideration, but no reason appeared for supposing them the enemies of his Ellena, who, on the contrary, he understood had been for some years amicably connected with them. The embroidered silks, of which the old servant had spoken, sufficiently explained the nature of the connection, and discovering more fully the circumstances of Ellena's fortune, her conduct heightened the tender admiration, with which he had hitherto regarded her.

The hints for suspicion which Beatrice had given respecting the cause of her mistress's decease, incessantly recurred to him; and it appeared extraordinary, and sometimes in the highest degree improbable, that any person could be sufficiently interested in the death of a woman apparently so blameless, as to administer poison to her. What motive could have prompted so horrible a deed, was still more inexplicable. It was true that she had long been in a declining state; yet the suddenness of her departure and

the singularity of some circumstances preceding as well as some appearances that had followed it, compelled Vivaldi to doubt as to the cause. He believed, however, that, after having seen the corpse, his doubts must vanish; and Beatrice had promised, that, if he could return in the evening, when Ellena had retired to rest, he should be permitted to visit the chamber of the deceased. There was something repugnant to his feelings, in going thus secretly, or, indeed, at all, to the residence of Ellena at this delicate period, yet it was necessary he should introduce there some medical professor, on whose judgment he could rest, respecting the occasion of Bianchi's death; and as he believed he should so soon acquire the right of vindicating the honour of Ellena, that consideration did not so seriously affect him as otherwise it would have done. The enquiry which called him thither was, besides, of a nature too solemn and important to be lightly resigned; he had, therefore, told Beatrice he would be punctual to the hour she appointed. His intention to search for the monk was thus again interrupted.

CHAPTER IV.

"Unfold th' impenetrable mystery,
That sets your soul and you at endless discord."

MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

When Vivaldi returned to Naples, he enquired for the Marchesa, of whom he wished to ask some questions concerning Schedoni, which, though he scarcely expected they would be explicitly answered, might yet lead to part of the truth he sought for.

The Marchesa was in her closet, and Vivaldi found the confessor with her. "This man crosses me, like my evil genius," said he to himself as he entered, "but I will know whether he deserves my suspicions before I leave the room."

Schedoni was so deeply engaged in conversation, that he did not immediately perceive Vivaldi, who stood for a moment examining his countenance, and tracing subjects for curiosity in its deep lines. His eyes, while he spoke, were cast downward, and his features were fixed in an expression at once severe and crafty. The Marchesa was listening with deep attention, her head inclined towards him, as if to catch the lowest murmur of his voice, and her face picturing the anxiety and vexation of her mind. This was evidently a conference, not a confession.

Vivaldi advancing, the monk raised his eyes; his countenance suffered no change, as they met those of Vivaldi. He rose, but did not take leave, and returned the slight and somewhat haughty salutation of Vivaldi, with an inclination of the head, that indicated a pride without pettishness, and a firmness bordering on contempt.

The Marchesa, on perceiving her son, was somewhat embarrassed, and her brow, before slightly contracted by vexation, now frowned with severity. Yet it was an involuntary emotion, for she endeavoured to chase the expression of it with a smile. Vivaldi liked the smile still less than the frown.

Schedoni seated himself quietly, and began, with almost the ease of a man of the world, to converse on general topics. Vivaldi, however, was reserved and silent; he knew not how to begin a conversation, which might lead to the knowledge he desired, and the Marchesa did not relieve him from the difficulty. His eye and his ear assisted him to conjecture at least, if not to obtain the information he wished; and, as he listened to the deep tones of Schedoni's voice, he became almost certain, that they were not the accents of his unknown adviser, though he considered, at the same moment, that it was not difficult to disguise, or to feign a voice. His stature seemed to decide the question more reasonably; for the figure of Schedoni appeared taller than that of the stranger; and though there was something of resemblance in their air, which Vivaldi had never observed before, he again considered, that the habit of the same order, which each wore, might easily occasion an artificial resemblance. Of the likeness as to countenance, he could not judge, since the stranger's had been so much shrouded by his cowl, that Vivaldi had never distinctly seen a single feature. Schedoni's hood was now thrown back, so that he could not compare even the air of their heads under similar circumstances; but as he remembered to have seen the confessor on a former day approaching his mother's closet with the cowl shading his face, the same gloomy severity seemed to characterize both, and nearly the same terrible portrait was drawn on his fancy. Yet this again might be only an artificial effect, a character which the cowl alone gave to the head; and any face seen imperfectly beneath its dark shade, might have appeared equally severe. Vivaldi was still extremely perplexed in his opinion. One circumstance, however, seemed to throw some light on his judgment. The stranger had appeared in the habit of a monk, and, if Vivaldi's transient observation might be trusted, he was of the very same order with that of Schedoni. Yet if he were Schedoni, or even his agent, it was not probable that he would have shewn himself in a dress that might lead to a discovery of his person. That he was anxious for concealment, his manner had strongly proved; it seemed then, that this habit of a monk was

only a disguise, assumed for the purpose of misleading conjecture. Vivaldi, however, determined to put some questions to Schedoni, and at the same time to observe their effect on his countenance. He took occasion to notice some drawings of ruins, which ornamented the cabinet of the Marchesa, and to say that the fortress of Paluzzi was worthy of being added to her collection. "You have seen it lately, perhaps, reverend father," added Vivaldi, with a penetrating glance.

"It is a striking relique of antiquity," replied the confessor.

"That arch," resumed Vivaldi, his eye still fixed on Schedoni, "that arch suspended between two rocks, the one overtopped by the towers of the fortress, the other shadowed with pine and broad oak, has a fine effect. But a picture of it would want human figures. Now either the grotesque shapes of banditti lurking within the ruin, as if ready to start out upon the traveller, or a friar rolled up in his black garments, just stealing forth from under the shade of the arch, and looking like some supernatural messenger of evil, would finish the piece."

The features of Schedoni suffered no change during this speech. "Your picture is complete," said he, "and I cannot but admire the facility with which you have classed the monks together with banditti."

"Your pardon, holy father," said Vivaldi, "I did not draw a parallel between them."

"O! no offence, Signor," replied Schedoni, with a smile somewhat ghastly.

During the latter part of this conversation, if conversation it may be called, the Marchesa had followed a servant, who had brought her a letter, out of the apartment, and as the confessor appeared to await her return, Vivaldi determined to press his enquiry. "It appears, however," said he, "that Paluzzi, if not haunted by robbers, is at least frequented by ecclesiastics; for I have seldom passed it without seeing one of the order, and that one has appeared so suddenly, and vanished so suddenly, that I have been almost compelled to believe he was literally a spiritual being!"

"The convent of the Black Penitents is not far distant," observed the confessor.

"Does the dress of this convent resemble that of your order, reverend father? for I observed that the monk I speak of was habited like yourself; aye, and he was about your stature, and very much resembled you."

"That well may be, Signor," replied the confessor calmly; "there are many brethren who, no doubt, resemble each other; but the brothers of the Black Penitents are clothed in sackcloth; and the death's head on the garment, the peculiar symbol of this order, would not have escaped your observation; it could not, therefore, be a member of their society whom you have seen."

"I am not inclined to think that it was," said Vivaldi; "but be it who it may, I hope soon to be better acquainted with him, and to tell him truths so strong, that he shall not be permitted even to affect the misunderstanding of them."

"You will do right, if you have cause of complaint against him," observed Schedoni.

"And *only* if I have cause of complaint, holy father? Are strong truths to be told only when there is direct cause of complaint? Is it only when we are injured that we are to be sincere?" He believed that he had now detected Schedoni, who seemed to have betrayed a consciousness that Vivaldi had reason for complaint against the stranger.

"You will observe, reverend father, that I have not said I am injured," he added. "If you know that I am, this must be by other means than by my words; I have not even expressed resentment."

"Except by your voice and eye, Signor," replied Schedoni drily. "When a man is vehement and disordered, we usually are inclined to suppose he feels resentment, and that he has cause of complaint, either real or imaginary. As I have not the honour of being acquainted with the subject you allude to, I cannot decide to which of the two your cause belongs."

"I have never been in doubt as to that," said Vivaldi haughtily; "and if I had, you will pardon me, holy father, but I should not have requested your decision. My injuries are, alas! too real; and I now think it is also too certain to whom I may attribute them. The secret adviser, who steals into the bosom of a family only to poison its repose, the informer—the base asperser of innocence, stand revealed in one person before me."

Vivaldi delivered these words with a tempered energy, at once dignified and pointed, which seemed to strike directly to the heart of Schedoni; but, whether it was his conscience or his pride that took the alarm, did not certainly appear. Vivaldi believed the former. A dark malignity overspread the features of the monk, and at that moment Vivaldi thought he beheld a man, whose passions might impel him to the perpetration of almost any crime, how hideous soever. He recoiled from him, as if he had suddenly seen a serpent in his path, and stood gazing on his face, with an attention so wholly occupied as to be unconscious that he did so.

Schedoni almost instantly recovered himself; his features relaxed from their first expression, and that portentous darkness passed away from his countenance; but with a look that was still stern and haughty, he said, "Signor, however ignorant I may be of the subject of your discontent, I can not misunderstand that your resentment is, to some extent or other, directed against myself as the cause of it. Yet I will not suppose, Signor; I say I will not suppose," raising his voice significantly, "that you have dared to brand me with the ignominious titles you have just uttered; but"—

"I have applied them to the author of my injuries," interrupted Vivaldi; "you, father, can best inform me whether they applied to yourself."

"I have then nothing to complain of," said Schedoni, adroitly, and with a sudden calmness, that surprised Vivaldi. "If you directed them against the author of your injuries, whatever they may be, I am satisfied."

The cheerful complacency, with which he spoke this, renewed the doubts of Vivaldi, who thought it nearly impossible that a man conscious of guilt could assume, under the very charge of it, the tranquil and dignified air, which the confessor now displayed. He began to accuse himself of having condemned him with passionate rashness, and gradually became shocked at

the indecorum of his conduct towards a man of Schedoni's age and sacred profession. Those expressions of countenance, which had so much alarmed him, he was now inclined to think the effect of a jealous and haughty honour, and he almost forgot the malignity, which had mingled with Schedoni's pride, in sorrow for the offence that had provoked it. Thus, not less precipitate in his pity than his anger, and credulous alike to the passion of the moment, he was now as eager to apologize for his error, as he had been hasty in committing it. The frankness, with which he apologized and lamented the impropriety of his conduct, would have won an easy forgiveness from a generous heart. Schedoni listened with apparent complacency and secret contempt. He regarded Vivaldi as a rash boy, who was swayed only by his passions; but while he suffered deep resentment for the evil in his character, he felt neither respect nor kindness for the good, for the sincerity, the love of justice, the generosity, which threw a brilliancy even on his foibles. Schedoni, indeed, saw only evil in human nature.

Had the heart of Vivaldi been less generous, he would now have distrusted the satisfaction, which the confessor assumed, and have discovered the contempt and malignity, that lurked behind the smile thus imperfectly masking his countenance. The confessor perceived his power, and the character of Vivaldi lay before him as a map. He saw, or fancied he saw every line and feature of its plan, and the relative proportions of every energy and weakness of its nature. He believed, also, he could turn the very virtues of this young man against himself, and he exulted, even while the smile of good-will was yet upon his countenance, in anticipating the moment that should avenge him for the past outrage, and which, while Vivaldi was ingenuously lamenting it, he had apparently forgotten.

Schedoni was thus ruminating evil against Vivaldi, and Vivaldi was considering how he might possibly make Schedoni atonement for the affront he had offered him, when the Marchesa returned to the apartment; and perceived in the honest countenance of Vivaldi some symptoms of the agitation which had passed over it; his complexion was flushed, and his brow slightly contracted. The face of Schedoni told nothing but complacency, except that now and then when he looked at Vivaldi, it was with half-shut eyes, that indicated treachery, or, at least, cunning, trying to conceal exasperated pride.

The Marchesa, with displeasure directed against her son, enquired the reason of his emotion; but he, stung with consciousness of his conduct towards the monk, could neither endure to explain it, or to remain in her presence, and saying that he would confide his honour to the discretion of the holy father, who would speak only too favourably of his fault, he abruptly left the room.

When he had departed, Schedoni gave, with seeming reluctance, the explanation which the Marchesa required, but was cautious not to speak too favourably of Vivaldi's conduct, which, on the contrary, he represented as much more insulting than it really was; and, while he aggravated the offensive part of it, he suppressed all mention of the candour and self-reproach, which had followed the charge. Yet this he managed so artfully that he appeared to extenuate Vivaldi's errors, to lament the hastiness of his temper, and to plead for forgiveness from his irritated mother. "He is very young," added the monk, when he perceived that he had sufficiently exasperated the Marchesa against her son; "he is very young, and youth is warm in its passions and precipitate in its judgments. He was, besides, jealous, no doubt, of the friendship, with which you are pleased to honour me; and it is natural that a son should be jealous of the attention of such a mother."

"You are too good, father," said the Marchesa; her resentment increasing towards Vivaldi in proportion as Schedoni displayed his artificial candour and meekness.

"It is true," continued the confessor, "that I perceive all the inconveniences to which my attachment, I should say my duty to your family exposes me; but I willingly submit to these, while it is yet possible that my advice may be a means of preserving the honour of your house unsullied, and of saving this inconsiderate young man from future misery and unavailing repentance."

During the warmth of this sympathy in resentment, the Marchesa and Schedoni mutually, and sincerely, lost their remembrance of the unworthy motives, by which each knew the other to be influenced, as well as that disgust which those who act together to the same bad end, can seldom escape from feeling towards their associates. The Marchesa, while she

commended the fidelity of Schedoni, forgot his views and her promises as to a rich benefice; while the confessor imputed her anxiety for the splendor of her son's condition to a real interest in his welfare, not a care of her own dignity. After mutual compliments had been exchanged, they proceeded to a long consultation concerning Vivaldi, and it was agreed, that their efforts for what they termed his preservation should no longer be confined to remonstrances.



CHAPTER V.

"What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath ministered?"——

SHAKESPEARE.

Vivaldi, when his first feelings of pity and compunction for having insulted an aged man, the member of a sacred profession, were past, and when he looked with a more deliberate eye upon some circumstances of the confessor's conduct, perceived that suspicion was again gathering on his mind. But, regarding this as a symptom of his own weakness, rather than as a hint of truth, he endeavoured, with a magnanimous disdain, to reject every surmise that boded unfavourably of Schedoni.

When evening arrived, he hastened towards the villa Altieri, and, having met without the city, according to appointment, a physician, upon whose honor and judgment he thought he might rely, they proceeded on their way together. Vivaldi had forgotten, during the confusion of his last interview with Ellena, to deliver up the key of the garden-gate, and he now entered it as usual, though he could not entirely overcome the reluctance, which he felt on thus visiting, in secret and at night, the dwelling of Ellena. Under no other circumstances, however, could the physician, whose opinion was so necessary to his peace, be introduced without betraying a suspicion, which must render her unhappy, probably for ever.

Beatrice, who had watched for them in the portico, led the way to the chamber where the corpse was laid out; and Vivaldi, though considerably affected when he entered, soon recovered composure enough to take his station on one side of the bed, while the physician placed himself on the other. Unwilling to expose his emotion to the observation of a servant, and desirous also of some private conversation with the physician, he took the lamp from Beatrice and dismissed her. As the light glared upon the livid face of the corpse, Vivaldi gazed with melancholy surprize, and an effort of

reason was necessary to convince him, that this was the same countenance which only one evening preceding was animated like his own; which had looked upon him in tears, while, with anxiety the most tender, she had committed the happiness of her niece to his care, and had, alas! too justly predicted her approaching dissolution. The circumstances of that scene now appeared to him like a vision, and touched every fibre of his heart. He was fully sensible of the importance of the trust committed to him, and, as he now hung over the pale and deserted form of Bianchi, he silently renewed his solemn vows to Ellena, to deserve the confidence of her departed guardian.

Before Vivaldi had courage enough to ask the opinion of the physician, who was still viewing the face of the deceased with very earnest attention and disapproving countenance, his own suspicions strengthened from some circumstances of her appearance; and particularly from the black tint that prevailed over her complexion, it seemed to him, that her death had been by poison. He feared to break a silence, which prolonged his hope of the contrary, feeble though it was; and the physician, who probably was apprehensive for the consequence of delivering his real thought, did not speak.

"I read your opinion," said Vivaldi, at length, "it coincides with my own."

"I know not as to that, Signor," replied the physician, "though I think I perceive what is yours. Appearances are unfavourable, yet I will not take upon me to decide from them, that it is as you suspect. There are other circumstances, under which similar appearances might occur." He gave his reasons for this assertion, which were plausible even to Vivaldi, and concluded with requesting to speak with Beatrice, "for I wish to understand," said he, "what was the exact situation of this lady for some hours previous to her decease."

After a conversation of some length with Beatrice, whatever might be the opinion resulting from his enquiries, he adhered nearly to his formal assertions; pronouncing that so many contradictory circumstances appeared, as rendered it impossible for him to decide, whether Bianchi had died by poison, or otherwise. He stated more fully than he had done before, the reasons, which must render the opinion of any medical person, on this

subject, doubtful. But, whether it was that he feared to be responsible for a decision, which would accuse some person of murder, or that he really was inclined to believe that Bianchi died naturally, it is certain he seemed disposed to adopt the latter opinion; and that he was very anxious to quiet the suspicions of Vivaldi. He so far succeeded, indeed, as to convince him that it would be unavailing to pursue the enquiry, and almost compelled him to believe, that she had departed according to the common course of nature.

Vivaldi, having lingered awhile over the death-bed of Bianchi, and taken a last farewell of her silent form, quitted the chamber and the house as softly as he had approached, and unobserved, as he believed, by Ellena or any other person. The morning dawned over the sea, when he returned into the garden, and a few fishermen, loitering on the beach, or putting off their little boats from the shore, were the only persons visible at this early hour. The time, however, was passed for renewing the enquiry he had purposed at Paluzzi, and the brightening dawn warned him to retire. To Naples, therefore, he returned, with spirits somewhat soothed by a hope, that Bianchi had not fallen prematurely, and by the certainty that Ellena was well. On the way thither, he passed the fort without interruption, and, having parted with the physician, was admitted into his father's mansion by a confidential servant.

CHAPTER VI.

——"For here have been
Some six or seven, who did hide their faces
Even from darkness."

SHAKESPEARE.

Ellena, on thus suddenly losing her aunt, her only relative, the friend of her whole life, felt as if left alone in the world. But it was not in the first moments of affliction that this feeling occurred. Her own forlorn situation was not even observed, while affection, pity, and irresistible grief for Bianchi, occupied her heart.

Bianchi was to be interred in the church belonging to the convent of Santa Maria della Pieta. The body, attired according to the custom of the country, and decorated with flowers, was carried on an open bier to the place of interment, attended only by priests and torch-bearers. But Ellena could not endure thus lightly to part with the reliques of a beloved friend, and being restrained by custom from following the corpse to the grave, she repaired first to the convent, to attend the funeral service. Her sorrow did not allow her to join in the choral symphonies of the nuns, but their sacred solemnity was soothing to her spirits, and the tears she shed while she listened to the lengthening notes, assuaged the force of grief.

When the service concluded, she withdrew to the parlour of the lady Abbess, who mingled with her consolations many entreaties that Ellena would make the convent her present asylum; and her affliction required little persuasion on this subject. It was her wish to retire hither, as to a sanctuary, which was not only suitable to her particular circumstances, but especially adapted to the present state of her spirits. Here she believed that she should sooner acquire resignation, and regain tranquillity, than in a

place less consecrated to religion; and, before she took leave of the Abbess, it was agreed, that she should be received as a boarder. To acquaint Vivaldi with her intention was, indeed, her chief motive for returning to the villa Altieri, after this her resolution had been taken. Her affection and esteem had been gradual in their progress, and had now attained a degree of strength, which promised to decide the happiness or misery of her whole life. The sanction given by her aunt to this choice, and particularly the very solemn manner in which, on the evening preceding her death, she bequeathed Ellena to his care, had still endeared him to her heart, and imparted a sacredness to the engagement, which made her consider Vivaldi as her guardian and only surviving protector. The more tenderly she lamented her deceased relative, the more tenderly she thought of Vivaldi; and her love for the one was so ultimately connected with her affection for the other, that each seemed strengthened and exalted by the union.

When the funeral was over, they met at Altieri.

He was neither surprized or averse to her withdrawing awhile to a convent; for there was a propriety in retiring, during the period of her grief, from a home where she had no longer a guardian, which delicacy seemed to demand. He only stipulated, that he might be permitted to visit her in the parlour of the convent, and to claim, when decorum should no longer object to it, the hand, which Bianchi had resigned to him.

Notwithstanding that he yielded to this arrangement without complaining, it was not entirely without repining; but being assured by Ellena of the worthiness of the Abbess of the Santa Maria della Pieta, he endeavoured to silence the secret murmurs of his heart with the conviction of his judgment.

Meanwhile, the deep impression made by his unknown tormentor, the monk, and especially by his prediction of the death of Bianchi, remained upon his mind, and he once more determined to ascertain, if possible, the true nature of this portentous visitant, and what were the motives which induced him thus to haunt his footsteps and interrupt his peace. He was awed by the circumstances which had attended the visitations of the monk, if monk it was; by the suddenness of his appearance, and departure; by the truth of his prophecies; and, above all, by the solemn event which had verified his last warning; and his imagination, thus elevated by wonder and

painful curiosity, was prepared for something above the reach of common conjecture, and beyond the accomplishment of human agency. His understanding was sufficiently clear and strong to teach him to detect many errors of opinion, that prevailed around him, as well as to despise the common superstitions of his country, and, in the usual state of his mind, he probably would not have paused for a moment on the subject before him; but his passions were now interested and his fancy awakened, and, though he was unconscious of this propensity, he would, perhaps, have been somewhat disappointed to have descended suddenly from the region of fearful sublimity, to which he had soared—the world of terrible shadows—to the earth, on which he daily walked, and to an explanation simply natural.

He designed to visit again, at midnight, the fortress of Paluzzi, and not to watch for the appearance of the stranger, but to carry torches into every recess of the ruin, and discover, at least, whether it was haunted by other human beings than himself. The chief difficulty, which had hitherto delayed him, was that of finding a person, in whom he could confide, to accompany him in the search, since his former adventure had warned him never to renew it alone. Signor Bonarmo persisted absolutely, and, perhaps, wisely, to refuse his request on this subject; and, as Vivaldi had no other acquaintance, to whom he chose to give so much explanation of the affair as might induce compliance, he at length determined to take with him Paulo, his own servant.

On the evening, previous to the day of Ellena's departure to the Santa della Pieta, Vivaldi went to Altieri, to bid her adieu. During this interview his spirits were more than usually depressed; and, though he knew that her retirement was only for a short period, and had as much confidence in the continuance of her affection, as is, perhaps, possible to a lover, Vivaldi felt as if he was parting with her for ever. A thousand vague and fearful conjectures, such as he had never till this moment admitted, assailed him, and amongst them, it appeared probable, that the arts of the nuns might win her from the world, and sacrifice her to the cloister. In her present state of sorrow this seemed to be even more than probable, and not all the assurances which Ellena gave him, and in these parting moments she spoke with less reserve than she had hitherto done, could entirely re-assure his

mind. "It should seem Ellena, by these boding fears," said he, imprudently, "that I am parting with you for ever; I feel a weight upon my heart, which I cannot throw off. Yet I consent that you shall withdraw awhile to this convent, convinced of the propriety of the step; and I ought, also, to know that you will soon return; that I shall soon take you from its walls as my wife, never more to leave me, never more to pass from my immediate care and tenderness. I ought to feel assured of all this; yet so apt are my fears that I cannot confide in what is probable, but rather apprehend what is possible. And is it then possible that I yet may lose you; and is it only probable that you may be mine for ever? How, under such circumstances, could I weakly consent to your retirement? Why did I not urge you to bestow immediately those indissoluble bands, which no human force can burst asunder? How could I leave the destiny of all my peace within the reach of a possibility, which it was once in my power to have removed! Which it *was* in my power!—It is, perhaps, still in my power. O Ellena! let the severities of custom yield to the security of my happiness. If you do go to the Santa Maria, let it be only to visit its altar!"

Vivaldi delivered this expostulation with a rapidity, that left no pause for Ellena to interrupt him. When, at length, he concluded, she gently reproached him for doubting the continuance of her regard, and endeavoured to sooth his apprehensions of misfortune, but would not listen to his request. She represented, that not only the state of her spirits required retirement, but that respect to the memory of her aunt demanded it; and added gravely, that if he had so little confidence in the steadiness of her opinions, as to doubt the constancy of her affection, and for so short a period, unless her vows were secured to him, he had done imprudently to elect her for the companion of his whole life.

Vivaldi, then ashamed of the weakness he had betrayed, besought her forgiveness, and endeavoured to appease apprehensions which passion only made plausible, and which reason reprov'd; notwithstanding which, he could recover neither tranquillity nor confidence; nor could Ellena, though her conduct was supported and encouraged by justness of sentiment, entirely remove the oppression of spirits she had felt from almost the first moment of this interview. They parted with many tears; and Vivaldi, before he finally took his leave, frequently returned to claim some promise, or to

ascertain some explanation, till Ellena remarked with a forced smile, that these resembled eternal adieus, rather than those of only a few days; an observation which renewed all his alarm, and furnished an excuse for again delaying his departure. At length he tore himself away, and left the villa Altieri; but as the time was yet too early to suit his purposed enquiry at Paluzzi, he returned to Naples.

Ellena, meanwhile, endeavouring to dissipate melancholy recollections by employment, continued busied in preparation for her departure on the following day, till a late hour of the night. In the prospect of quitting, though only for so short a period, the home where she had passed almost every day since the dawn of her earliest remembrance, there was something melancholy, if not solemn. In leaving these well-known scenes, where, it might be said, the shade of her deceased relative seemed yet to linger, she was quitting all vestige of her late happiness, all note of former years and of present consolation; and she felt as if going forth into a new and homeless world. Her affection for the place increased as the passing time diminished, and it seemed as if the last moment of her stay would be precisely that, in which the villa Altieri would be most valued.

In her favourite apartments she lingered for a considerable time; and in the room where she had supped on the night immediately preceding the death of Signora Bianchi, she indulged many tender and mournful recollections, and probably would have continued to indulge them much longer, had not her attention been withdrawn by a sudden rustling of the foliage that surrounded the window, when, on raising her eyes, she thought she perceived some person pass quickly from before it. The lattices had, as usual, been left open to admit the fresh breeze from the bay below, but she now rose with some alarm to close them, and had scarcely done so when she heard a distant knocking from the portico, and in the next instant the screams of Beatrice in the hall.

Alarmed for herself, Ellena had, however, the courage to advance to the assistance of her old servant, when, on entering the passage leading to the hall, three men, masked and muffled up in cloaks, appeared, advancing from the opposite extremity. While she fled, they pursued her to the apartment she had quitted. Her breath and her courage were gone, yet she

struggled to sustain herself, and endeavoured to ask with calmness what was their errand. They gave no reply, but threw a veil over her face, and, seizing her arms, led her almost unresisting, but supplicating, towards the portico.

In the hall, Ellena perceived Beatrice bound to a pillar; and another ruffian, who was also masked, watching over and menacing her, not by words, but gestures. Ellena's shrieks seemed to recall the almost lifeless Beatrice, for whom she supplicated as much as for herself; but entreaty was alike unavailing for each, and Ellena was borne from the house and through the garden. All consciousness had now forsaken her. On recovering, she perceived herself in a carriage, which was driven with great rapidity, and that her arms were within the grasp of some persons, whom, when her recollection returned more fully, she believed to be the men, who had carried her from the villa. The darkness prevented her from observing their figures, and to all her questions and entreaties a death-like silence was observed.

During the whole night the carriage proceeded rapidly, stopping only while the horses were changed, when Ellena endeavoured to interest by her cries the compassion of the people at the post-houses, and by her cries only, for the blinds were closely drawn. The postilions, no doubt, imposed on the credulity of these people, for they were insensible to her distress, and her immediate companions soon overcame the only means that had remained by which she could make it known.

For the first hours, a tumult of terror and amazement occupied her mind, but, as this began to subside, and her understanding to recover its clearness, grief and despondency mingled with her fears. She saw herself separated from Vivaldi, probably for ever, for she apprehended that the strong and invisible hand which governed her course, would never relinquish its grasp till it had placed her irrecoverably beyond the reach of her lover. A conviction that she should see him no more came, at intervals, with such overwhelming force, that every other consideration and emotion disappeared before it; and at these moments she lost all anxiety as to the place of her destination, and all fear as to her personal safety.

As the morning advanced and the heat increased, the blinds were let down a little to admit air, and Ellena then perceived, that only two of the men, who had appeared at the villa Altieri, were in the carriage, and that they were still disguised in cloaks and visors. She had no means of judging through what part of the country she was travelling, for above the small openings which the blinds left she could see only the towering tops of mountains, or sometimes the veiny precipices and tangled thickets, that closely impended over the road.

About noon, as she judged from the excessive heat, the carriage stopped at a post-house, and ice-water was handed through the window, when, as the blind was lowered to admit it, she perceived herself on a wild and solitary plain, surrounded by mountains and woods. The people at the door of the post-house seemed "unused to pity or be pitied." The lean and sallow countenance of poverty stared over their gaunt bones, and habitual discontent had fixed the furrows of their cheeks. They regarded Ellena with only a feeble curiosity, though the affliction in her looks might have interested almost any heart that was not corroded by its own sufferings; nor did the masked faces of her companions excite a much stronger attention.

Ellena accepted the cool refreshment offered her, the first she had taken on the road. Her companions having emptied their glasses drew up the blind, and, notwithstanding the almost intolerable heat of noon, the carriage proceeded. Fainting under its oppression, Ellena entreated that the windows might be open, when the men, in compliance with their own necessity rather than with her request, lowered the blinds, and she had a glimpse of the lofty region of the mountains, but of no object that could direct her conjecture concerning where she was. She saw only pinnacles and vast precipices of various-tinted marbles, intermingled with scanty vegetation, such as stunted pinasters, dwarf oak and holly, which gave dark touches to the many-coloured cliffs, and sometimes stretched in shadowy masses to the deep vallies, that, winding into obscurity, seemed to invite curiosity to explore the scenes beyond. Below these bold precipices extended the gloomy region of olive-trees, and lower still other rocky steeps sunk towards the plains, bearing terraces crowned with vines, and where often the artificial soil was propped by thickets of juniper, pomegranate and olander.

Ellena, after having been so long shut in darkness, and brooding over her own alarming circumstances, found temporary, though feeble, relief in once more looking upon the face of nature; till, her spirits being gradually revived and elevated by the grandeur of the images around her, she said to herself, "If I am condemned to misery, surely I could endure it with more fortitude in scenes like these, than amidst the tamer landscapes of nature! Here, the objects seem to impart somewhat of their own force, their own sublimity, to the soul. It is scarcely possible to yield to the pressure of misfortune while we walk, as with the Deity, amidst his most stupendous works!"

But soon after the idea of Vivaldi glancing athwart her memory, she melted into tears; the weakness however was momentary, and during the rest of the journey she preserved a strenuous equality of mind.

It was when the heat and the light were declining that the carriage entered a rocky defile, which shewed, as through a telescope reversed, distant plains, and mountains opening beyond, lighted up with all the purple splendor of the setting sun. Along this deep and shadowy perspective a river, which was seen descending among the cliffs of a mountain, rolled with impetuous force, fretting and foaming amidst the dark rocks in its descent, and then flowing in a limpid lapse to the brink of other precipices, whence again it fell with thundering strength to the abyss, throwing its misty clouds of spray high in the air, and seeming to claim the sole empire of this solitary wild. Its bed took up the whole breadth of the chasm, which some strong convulsion of the earth seemed to have formed, not leaving space even for a road along its margin. The road, therefore, was carried high among the cliffs, that impended over the river, and seemed as if suspended in air; while the gloom and vastness of the precipices, which towered above and sunk below it, together with the amazing force and uproar of the falling waters, combined to render the pass more terrific than the pencil could describe, or language can express. Ellena ascended it, not with indifference but with calmness; she experienced somewhat of a dreadful pleasure in looking down upon the irresistible flood; but this emotion was heightened into awe, when she perceived that the road led to a slight bridge, which, thrown across the chasm at an immense height, united two opposite cliffs, between which the whole cataract of the river descended. The bridge, which

was defended only by a slender railing, appeared as if hung amidst the clouds. Ellena, while she was crossing it, almost forgot her misfortunes. Having reached the opposite side of the glen, the road gradually descended the precipices for about half a mile, when it opened to extensive prospects over plains and towards distant mountains—the sunshine landscape, which had long appeared to bound this shadowy pass. The transition was as the passage through the vale of death to the bliss of eternity; but the idea of its resemblance did not long remain with Ellena. Perched high among the cliffs of a mountain, which might be said to terminate one of the jaws of this terrific gorge, and which was one of the loftiest of a chain that surrounded the plains, appeared the spires and long terraces of a monastery; and she soon understood that her journey was to conclude there.

At the foot of this mountain her companions alighted, and obliged her to do the same, for the ascent was too steep and irregular to admit of a carriage. Ellena followed unresistingly, like a lamb to the sacrifice, up a path that wound among the rocks, and was coolly overshadowed by thickets of almond trees, figs, broad-leaved myrtle, and ever-green rose bushes, intermingled with the strawberry tree, beautiful in fruit and blossoms, the yellow jasmine, the delightful *acacia mimosa*, and a variety of other fragrant plants. These bowers frequently admitted glimpses of the glowing country below, and sometimes opened to expansive views, bounded by the snowy mountains of Abruzzo. At every step were objects which would have afforded pleasure to a tranquil mind; the beautifully variegated marbles, that formed the cliffs immediately above, their fractured masses embossed with mosses and flowers of every vivid hue that paints the rainbow; the elegance of the shrubs that tufted, and the majestic grace of the palms which waved over them, would have charmed almost any other eye than Ellena's, whose spirit was wrapt in care, or than those of her companions, whose hearts were dead to feeling. Partial features of the vast edifice she was approaching, appeared now and then between the trees; the tall west window of the cathedral with the spires that overtopped it; the narrow pointed roofs of the cloisters; angles of the insurmountable walls, which fenced the garden from the precipices below, and the dark portal leading into the chief court; each of these, seen at intervals beneath the gloom of cypress and spreading cedar, seemed as if menacing the unhappy Ellena with hints of future suffering. She passed several shrines and images half

hid among the shrubs and the cliffs; and, when she drew near the monastery, her companions stopped at a little chapel which stood beside the path, where, after examining some papers, an act which she observed with surprise, they drew aside, as if to consult respecting herself. Their conversation was delivered in voices so low, that she could not catch a single tone distinctly, and it is probable that if she could, this would not have assisted her in conjecturing who they were; yet the profound silence they had hitherto observed had much increased her curiosity, now that they spoke.

One of them soon after quitted the chapel and proceeded alone to the monastery, leaving Ellena in the custody of his comrade, whose pity she now made a last, though almost hopeless, effort to interest. He replied to all her entreaties only by a waving of the hand, and an averted face; and she endeavoured to meet with fortitude and to endure with patience, the evil which she could neither avoid nor subdue. The spot where she awaited the return of the ruffian, was not of a character to promote melancholy, except, indeed, that luxurious and solemn kind of melancholy, which a view of stupendous objects inspires. It overlooked the whole extent of plains, of which she had before caught partial scenes, with the vast chain of mountains, which seemed to form an insurmountable rampart to the rich landscape at their feet. Their towering and fantastic summits, crowding together into dusky air, like flames tapering to a point, exhibited images of peculiar grandeur, while each minuter line and feature withdrawing, at this evening hour from observation, seemed to resolve itself into the more gigantic masses, to which the dubious tint, the solemn obscurity, that began to prevail over them, gave force and loftier character. The silence and deep repose of the landscape, served to impress this character more awfully on the heart, and while Ellena sat wrapt in the thoughtfulness it promoted, the vesper-service of the monks breathing softly from the cathedral above, came to her ear; it was a music which might be said to win on silence, and was in perfect unison with her feelings; solemn, deep, and full, it swelled, in holy peels, and rolled away in murmurs, which attention pursued to the last faint note that melted into air. Ellena's heart owned the power of this high minstrelsy; and while she caught for a moment the sweeter voices of the nuns mingling in the chorus, she indulged a hope that they would not be wholly insensible to her sufferings, and that she should receive some

consolation from sympathy as soft as these tender-breathing strains appeared to indicate.

She had rested nearly half an hour on the turfy slope before the chapel, when she perceived through the twilight, two monks descending from the monastery towards the spot where she sat. As they drew near, she distinguished their dress of grey stuff, the hood, the shaven head, where only a coronet of white hair was left, and other ensigns of their particular order. On reaching the chapel they accosted her companion, with whom they retired a few paces, and conversed. Ellena heard, for the first time, the sound of her conductor's voice, and though this was but faintly, she marked it well. The other ruffian did not yet appear, but it seemed evident that these friars had left the convent in consequence of his information; and sometimes, when she looked upon the taller of the two, she fancied she saw the person of the very man whose absence she had remarked, a conjecture which strengthened while she more accurately noticed him. The portrait had certainly much resemblance in height and bulk; and the same gaunt awkwardness, which even the cloak of the ruffian had not entirely shrouded, obtruded itself from under the folded garments of the recluse. If countenance, too, might be trusted, this same friar had a ruffian's heart, and his keen and cunning eye seemed habitually upon the watch for prey. His brother of the order shewed nothing strongly characteristic either in his face or manner.

After a private conversation of some length, the friars approached Ellena, and told her, that she must accompany them to the convent; when her disguised conductor, having resigned her to them, immediately departed and descended the mountain.

Not a word was uttered by either of the party as they pursued the steep tract leading to the gates of this secluded edifice, which were opened to them by a lay-brother, and Ellena entered a spacious court. Three sides of this were enclosed by lofty buildings, lined with ranges of cloisters; the fourth opened to a garden, shaded with avenues of melancholy cypress, that extended to the cathedral, whose fretted windows and ornamented spires appeared to close the perspective. Other large and detached buildings skirted the gardens on the left, while, on the right, spacious olive-grounds

and vineyards spread to the cliffs that formed a barrier to all this side of the domain of the convent.

The friar, her conductor, crossed the court to the north wing, and there ringing a bell, a door was opened by a nun, into whose hands Ellena was given. A significant look was exchanged between the devotees, but no words; the friar departed, and the nun, still silent, conducted her through many solitary passages, where not even a distant foot-fall echoed, and whose walls were roughly painted with subjects indicative of the severe superstitions of the place, tending to inspire melancholy awe. Ellena's hope of pity vanished as her eyes glanced over these symbols of the disposition of the inhabitants, and on the countenance of the nun characterised by a gloomy malignity, which seemed ready to inflict upon others some portion of the unhappiness she herself suffered. As she glided forward, with soundless step, her white drapery, floating along these solemn avenues, and her hollow features touched with the mingled light and shadow which the partial rays of a taper she held occasioned, she seemed like a spectre newly risen from the grave, rather than a living being. These passages terminated in the parlour of the Abbess, where the nun paused, and, turning to Ellena, said, "It is the hour of vespers; you will wait here till our lady of the convent leaves the church; she would speak with you."

"To what saint is the convent dedicated," said Ellena, "and who, sister, presides over it?"

The nun gave no reply, and after having eyed the forlorn stranger for a moment, with inquisitive ill-nature, quitted the room. The unhappy Ellena had not been left long to her own reflections, when the Abbess appeared; a stately lady, apparently occupied with opinions of her own importance, and prepared to receive her guest with rigour and supercilious haughtiness. This Abbess, who was herself a woman of some distinction, believed that of all possible crimes, next to that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable. It is not surprising, therefore, that, supposing Ellena, a young woman of no family, to have sought clandestinely to unite herself with the noble house of Vivaldi, she should feel for her, not only disdain, but indignation, and that she should readily consent, not only to punish the

offender, but at the same time, to afford means of preserving the ancient dignity of the offended.

"I understand," said the Abbess, on whose appearance the alarmed Ellena had arisen, "I understand," said she, without making any signal for her to be seated, "that you are the young person who is arrived from Naples."

"My name is Ellena di Rosalba," said her auditor, recovering some degree of courage from the manner which was designed to depress her.

"I know nothing of your name," replied the Superior; "I am informed only that you are sent here to acquire a knowledge of yourself and of your duties. Till the period shall be passed, for which you are given into my charge, I shall scrupulously observe the obligations of the troublesome office, which my regard for the honour of a noble family, has induced me to undertake."

By these words, the author and the motives of this extraordinary transaction were at once revealed to Ellena, who was for some moments almost overwhelmed by the sudden horrors that gathered on her mind, and stood silent and motionless. Fear, shame, and indignation, alternately assailed her; and the sting of offended honour, on being suspected, and thus accused of having voluntarily disturbed the tranquillity, and sought the alliance of any family, and especially of one who disdained her, struck forcibly to her heart, till the pride of conscious worth revived her courage and fortified her patience, and she demanded by whose will she had been torn from her home, and by whose authority she was now detained, as it appeared, a prisoner.

The Abbess, unaccustomed to have her power opposed, or her words questioned, was for a moment too indignant to reply; and Ellena observed, but no longer with dismay, the brooding tempest ready to burst over her head. "It is I only, who am injured," said she to herself, "and shall the guilty oppressor triumph, and the innocent sufferer sink under the shame that belongs only to guilt! Never will I yield to a weakness so contemptible. The consciousness of deserving well will recall my presence of mind, which, permitting me to estimate the characters of my oppressors by their actions, will enable me also to despise their power."

"I must remind you," said the Abbess, at length, "that the questions you make are unbecoming in your situation; and that contrition and humility are the best extenuations of error. You may withdraw."

"Most true," replied Ellena, bowing with dignity to the Superior; "and I most willingly resign them to my oppressors."

Ellena forbore to make further enquiry or remonstrance, and perceiving that reproach would not only be useless, but degrading to herself, she immediately obeyed the mandate of the Abbess, and determined, since she must suffer, to suffer, if possible, with firmness and dignity.

She was conducted from the parlour by the nun who had admitted her, and as she passed through the refectory where the nuns, just returned from vespers, were assembled, their inquisitive glances, their smiles and busy whispers, told her, that she was not only an object of curiosity, but of suspicion, and that little sympathy could be expected from hearts, which even the offices of hourly devotion had not purified from the malignant envy, that taught them to exalt themselves upon the humiliation of others.

The little room, to which Ellena was led, and where, to her great satisfaction, she was left alone, rather deserved the denomination of a cell than of a chamber; since, like those of the nuns, it had only one small lattice; and a mattress, one chair, and a table, with a crucifix and a prayer-book were all its furniture. Ellena, as she surveyed her melancholy habitation, suppressed a rising sigh, but she could not remain unaffected by recollections, which, on this view of her altered state, crowded to her mind; nor think of Vivaldi far away, perhaps for ever, and probably, even ignorant of her destination, without bitter tears. But she dried them, as the idea of the Marchesa obtruded on her thoughts, for other emotions than those of grief possessed her. It was to the Marchesa that she especially attributed her present situation; and it now appeared, that the family of Vivaldi had not only been reluctant, but absolutely averse to a connection with hers, contrary to the suggestions of Signora Bianchi, who had represented, that it might be supposed only, from their known character, that they would disapprove of the alliance, but would of course be reconciled to an event, which their haughtiest displeasure never could revoke. This discovery of their absolute rejection awakened all the proper pride, which the mistaken

prudence of her aunt, and her affection for Vivaldi had lulled to rest; and she now suffered the most acute vexation and remorse, for having yielded her consent to enter clandestinely into any family. The imaginary honours of so noble an alliance vanished, when the terms of obtaining them were considered; and now, that the sound mind of Ellena was left to its own judgment, she looked with infinitely more pride and preference upon the industrious means, which had hitherto rendered her independent, than on all distinction which might be reluctantly conferred. The consciousness of innocence, which had supported her in the presence of the Superior, began to falter. "Her accusation was partly just!" said Ellena, "and I deserve punishment, since I could, even for a moment, submit to the humiliation of desiring an alliance, which I knew would be unwillingly conferred. But it is not yet too late to retrieve my own esteem by asserting my independence, and resigning Vivaldi for ever. By resigning him! by abandoning him who loves me,—abandoning him to misery! Him, whom I cannot even think of without tears,—to whom my vows have been given,—who may claim me by the sacred remembrance of my dying friend,—him, to whom my whole heart is devoted! O! miserable alternative!—that I can no longer act justly, but at the expence of all my future happiness! Justly! And would it then be just to abandon him who is willing to resign every thing for me,—abandon him to ceaseless sorrow, that the prejudices of his family may be gratified?"

Poor Ellena perceived that she could not obey the dictates of a just pride, without such opposition from her heart as she had never experienced before. Her affections were now too deeply engaged to permit her to act with firmness, at the price of long-suffering. The consideration of resigning Vivaldi was so very grievous, that she could scarcely endure to pause upon it for a moment; yet, on the other hand, when she thought of his family, it appeared that she never could consent to make a part of it. She would have blamed the erroneous judgment of Signora Bianchi, whose persuasions had so much assisted in reducing her to the present alternative, had not the tenderness with which she cherished her memory, rendered this impossible. All, that now remained for her, was to endeavour patiently to endure present evils, which she could not conquer; for, to forsake Vivaldi as the price of liberty, should liberty be offered her on such terms, or to accept him in defiance of honourable pride, should he ever effect her release, appeared to her distracted thoughts almost equally impracticable. But, as the probability

of his never being able to discover her abode, returned to her consideration, the anguish she suffered told how much more she dreaded to lose than to accept Vivaldi, and that love was, after all, the most powerful affection of her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

"The bell then beating one!"

SHAKESPEARE.

Vivaldi, meanwhile, ignorant of what had occurred at villa Altieri, repaired as he had proposed, to Paluzzi, attended by his servant Paulo. It was deep night before he left Naples, and so anxious was he to conceal himself from observation, that though Paulo carried a torch, he did not permit it to be lighted, till after he should have remained some time within the arch-way, thinking it most prudent to watch a while in secret for his unknown adviser, before he proceeded to examine the fort.

His attendant, Paulo, was a true Neapolitan, shrewd, inquisitive, insinuating, adroit; possessing much of the spirit of intrigue, together with a considerable portion of humour, which displayed itself not so much in words, as in his manner and countenance, in the archness of his dark, penetrating eye, and in the exquisite adaptation of his gesture to his idea. He was a distinguished favourite with his master, who, if he had not humour himself, had a keen relish of it in others, and who certainly did possess wit, with all its lively accompaniments, in an eminent degree. Vivaldi had been won by the *naïveté* and humour of this man, to allow him an unusual degree of familiarity in conversation; and, as they now walked together towards Paluzzi, he unfolded to Paulo as much of his former adventure there as he judged necessary to interest his curiosity and excite his vigilance. The relation did both. Paulo, however, naturally courageous, was incredulous to superstition of any kind; and, having quickly perceived that his master was not altogether indisposed to attribute to a supernatural cause the extraordinary occurrences at Paluzzi, he began, in his manner, to rally him; but Vivaldi was not in temper to endure jesting; his mood was grave, even

to solemnity, and he yielded, though reluctantly, to the awe which, at intervals, returned upon him with the force of a magical spell, binding up all his faculties to sternness, and fixing them in expectation. While he was nearly regardless of defence against human agency, his servant was, however, preparing for that alone; and very properly represented the imprudence of going to Paluzzi in darkness. Vivaldi observed that they could not watch for the monk otherwise than in darkness, since the torch which lighted them would also warn him, and he had very particular reasons for watching before he proceeded to examine. He added, that after a certain time had elapsed, the torch might be lighted at a neighbouring cottage. Paulo objected, that in the meanwhile, the person for whom they watched might escape; and Vivaldi compromised the affair. The torch was lighted, but concealed within a hollow of the cliffs, that bordered the road, and the centinels took their station in darkness, within the deep arch, near the spot where Vivaldi had watched with Bonarmo. As they did this, the distant chime of a convent informed Vivaldi that midnight was turned. The sound recalled to his mind the words of Schedoni, concerning the vicinity of the convent of the *Black Penitents*, to Paluzzi, and he asked Paulo whether this was the chime of that convent. Paulo replied that it was, and that a remarkable circumstance had taught him to remember *the Santa del Pianto*, or *Our Lady of Tears*. "The place, Signor, would interest you," said Paulo; "for there are some odd stories told of it; and I am inclined to think, this unknown monk must be one of that society, his conduct is so strange."

"You believe then, that I am willing to give faith to wonderful stories," said Vivaldi, smiling. "But what have you heard, that is so extraordinary, respecting this convent? Speak low, or we may be discovered."

"Why, Signor, the story is not generally known," said Paulo in a whisper; "I half promised never to reveal it."

"If you are under any promise of secrecy," interrupted Vivaldi, "I forbid you to tell this wonderful tale, which, however, seems somewhat too big to rest within your brain."

"The story would fain expand itself to your's, Signor," said Paulo; "and, as I did not absolutely promise to conceal it, I am very willing to reveal it."

"Proceed, then," said Vivaldi; "but let me once more caution you to speak low."

"You are obeyed, Signor. You must know, then, *Maestro*, that it was on the eve of the festival of *Santo Marco*, and about six years since"——

"Peace!" said Vivaldi. They were silent; but every thing remaining still, Paulo, after some time, ventured to proceed, though in a yet lower whisper. "It was on the eve of the *Santo Marco*, and when the last bell had rung, that a person"—— He stopped again, for a rustling sound passed near him.

"You are too late," said a sudden voice beside Vivaldi, who instantly recognized the thrilling accents of the monk—"It is past midnight; she departed an hour ago. Look to your steps!"

Though thrilled by this well-known voice, Vivaldi scarcely yielded to his feelings for a moment, but, checking the question which would have asked "who departed?" he, by a sudden spring, endeavoured to seize the intruder, while Paulo, in the first hurry of his alarm, fired a pistol, and then hastened for the torch. So certainly did Vivaldi believe himself to have leaped upon the spot whence the voice proceeded, that, on reaching it, he instantly extended his arms, and searching around, expected every moment to find his enemy in his grasp. Darkness again baffled his attempt.

"You are known," cried Vivaldi; "you shall see me at the *Santa del Pianto*! What, oh! Paulo, the torch!—the torch!"

Paulo, swift as the wind, appeared with it. "He passed up those steps in the rock, Signor; I saw the skirts of his garments ascending!"

"Follow me, then," said Vivaldi, mounting the steps. "Away, away, *Maestro*!" said Paulo, impatiently; "but, for Heaven's sake, name no more the convent of the *Santa del Pianto*; our lives may answer it!"

He followed to the terrace above, where Vivaldi, holding high the torch, looked round for the monk. The place, however, as far as his eye could penetrate, was forsaken and silent. The glare of the torch enlightened only the rude walls of the citadel, some points of the cliff below, and some tall

pinetrees that waved over them, leaving in doubtful gloom many a recess of the ruin, and many a tangled thicket, that spread among the rocks beyond.

"Do you perceive any person, Paulo?" said Vivaldi, waving the torch in the air to rouse the flame.

"Among those arches on the left, Signor, those arches that stand duskily beyond the citadel, I thought I saw a shadowy sort of a figure pass. He might be a ghost, by his silence, for aught I know, *Maestro*; but he seems to have a good mortal instinct in taking care of himself, and to have as swift a pair of heels to assist in carrying him off, as any Lazzaro in Naples need desire."

"Fewer words, and more caution!" said Vivaldi, lowering the torch, and pointing it towards the quarter which Paulo had mentioned. "Be vigilant, and tread lightly."

"You are obeyed, Signor; but their eyes will inform them, though their ears refuse, while we hold a light to our own steps."

"Peace, with this buffoonery!" said Vivaldi, somewhat sternly; "follow in silence, and be on your guard."

Paulo submitted, and they proceeded towards the range of arches, which communicated with the building, whose singular structure had formerly arrested the attention of Bonarmo, and whence Vivaldi himself had returned with such unexpected precipitancy and consternation.

On perceiving the place he was approaching, he suddenly stopped, and Paulo observing his agitation, and probably not relishing the adventure, endeavoured to dissuade him from further research: "For we know not who may inhabit this gloomy place, Signor, or their numbers, and we are only two of us after all! Besides, Signor, it was through that door, yonder;" and he pointed to the very spot whence Vivaldi had so fearfully issued; "through that door, that I fancied, just now, I saw something pass."

"Are you certain as to this?" said Vivaldi, with increased emotion. "What was its form?"

"It was so dusky thereabout, *Maestro*, that I could not distinguish."

Vivaldi's eyes were fixed upon the building, and a violent conflict of feelings seemed to shake his soul. A few seconds decided it. "I will go on," said he, "and terminate, at any hazard, this state of intolerable anxiety. Paulo, pause a moment, and consider well whether you can depend on your courage, for it may be severely tried. If you can, descend with me in silence, and I warn you to be wary; if you cannot, I will go alone."

"It is too late now, Signor, to ask myself that question," replied Paulo, with a submissive air; "and if I had not settled it long ago, I should not have followed you thus far. My courage, Signor, you never doubted before."

"Come on then," said Vivaldi. He drew his sword, and entering the narrow door-way, the torch, which he had now resigned to Paulo, shewed a stone passage, that was, however, interminable to the eye.

As they proceeded, Paulo observed, that the walls were stained in several places with what appeared to be blood, but prudently forbore to point this out to his master, observing the strict injunction of silence he had received.

Vivaldi stepped cautiously, and often paused to listen, after which he went on with a quicker pace, making signs only to Paulo to follow, and be vigilant. The passage terminated in a stair-case, that seemed to lead to vaults below. Vivaldi remembered the light which had formerly appeared there, and, as recollection of the past gathered on his mind, he faltered in his purpose.

Again he paused, looked back upon Paulo, but was going forward, when Paulo himself seized his arm. "Stop! Signor," said he in a low voice. "Do you not distinguish a figure standing yonder, in the gloom?"

Vivaldi looked onward, and perceived, indistinctly, something as of human form, but motionless and silent. It stood at the dusky extremity of the avenue, near the stair-case. Its garments, if garments they were, were dark; but its whole figure was so faintly traced to the eye, that it was impossible to ascertain whether this was the monk. Vivaldi took the light, and held it forward, endeavouring to distinguish the object before he

ventured further; but the enquiry was useless, and, resigning the torch to Paulo, he rushed on. When he reached the head of the stair-case, however, the form, whatever it might be, was gone. Vivaldi had heard no footstep. Paulo pointed out the exact spot where it had stood, but no vestige of it appeared. Vivaldi called loudly upon the monk, but he heard only the lengthening echoes of his own voice revolving among the chambers below, and, after hesitating a while on the head of the stairs, he descended.

Paulo had not followed down many steps, when he called out, "It is there! Signor; I see it again! and now it flits away through the door that opens to the vaults!"

Vivaldi pursued so swiftly, that Paulo could scarcely follow fast enough with the light; and, as at length he rested to take breath, he perceived himself in the same spacious chamber to which he had formerly descended. At this moment Paulo perceived his countenance change. "You are ill, Signor," said he. "In the name of our holy saint, let us quit this hideous place. Its inhabitants can be nothing good, and no good can come of our remaining here."

Vivaldi made no reply; he drew breath with difficulty, and his eyes remained fixed on the ground, till a noise, like the creaking of a heavy hinge, rose in a distant part of the vault. Paulo turned his eyes, at the same instant, towards the place whence it came, and they both perceived a door in the wall slowly opened, and immediately closed again, as if the person within had feared to be discovered. Each believed, from the transient view he had of it, that this was the same figure which had appeared on the stair-case, and that it was the monk himself. Reanimated by this belief, Vivaldi's nerves were instantly rebraced, and he sprang to the door, which was unfastened, and yielded immediately to his impetuous hand. "You shall not deceive me now," cried he, as he entered; "Paulo! keep guard at the door!"

He looked round the second vault, in which he now found himself, but no person appeared; he examined the place, and particularly the walls, without discovering any aperture, either of door or window, by which the figure could have quitted the chamber; a strongly-grated casement, placed near the roof, was all that admitted air, and probably light. Vivaldi was astonished! "Have you seen any thing pass?" said he to Paulo.

"Nothing, *Maestro*," replied the servant.

"This is almost incredible," exclaimed Vivaldi; "'tis certain, this form can be nothing human!"

"If so, Signor," observed Paulo, "why should it fear us? as surely it does; or why should it have fled?"

"That is not so certain," rejoined Vivaldi; "it may have fled only to lead us into evil. But bring hither the torch; here is something in the wall which I would examine."

Paulo obeyed. It was merely a ruggedness in the stones, not the partition of a door, that had excited his curiosity. "This is inexplicable!" exclaimed Vivaldi, after a long pause. "What motive could any human being have for thus tormenting me."

"Or any being superhuman, either, my Signor?" said Paulo.

"I am warned of evils that await me," continued Vivaldi, musing; "of events that are regularly fulfilled; the being who warns me, crosses my path perpetually, yet, with the cunning of a demon, as constantly eludes my grasp, and baffles my pursuit! It is incomprehensible, by what means he glides thus away from my eye, and fades, as if into air, at my approach! He is repeatedly in my presence, yet is never to be found!"

"It is most true, Signor," said Paulo, "that he is never to be found, and therefore let me entreat you to give up the pursuit. This place is enough to make one believe in the horrors of purgatory! Let us go, Signor."

"What but spirit could have quitted this vault so mysteriously," continued Vivaldi, not attending to Paulo; "what but spirit!"——

"I would fain prove," said the servant, "that substance can quit it as easily; I would fain evaporate through that door myself."

He had scarcely spoken the words, when the door closed, with a thundering clap that echoed through all the vaults; and Vivaldi and Paulo

stood for a moment aghast! and then both hastened to open it, and to leave the place. Their consternation may be easily conceived, when they found that all their efforts at the door were ineffectual. The thick wood was inlaid with solid bars of iron; and was of such unconquerable strength, that it evidently guarded what had been designed for a prison, and appeared to be the keep or dungeon of the ancient fort.

"Ah, Signor mio!" said Paulo, "if this was a spirit, 'tis plain he knew we were not so, by his luring us hither. Would we could exchange natures with him for a moment; for I know not how, as mere mortal men, we can ever squeeze ourselves out of this scrape. You must allow, *Maestro*, that this was not one of the evils he warned you of; or, if he did, it was through my organs, for I entreated you."——

"Peace, good Signor *Buffo*!" said Vivaldi; "a truce with this nonsense, and assist in searching for some means of escape."

Vivaldi again examined the walls, and as unsuccessfully as before; but in one corner of the vault lay an object, which seemed to tell the fate of one who had been confined here, and to hint his own: it was a garment covered with blood. Vivaldi and his servant discovered it at the same instant; and a dreadful foreboding of their own destiny fixed them, for some moments, to the spot. Vivaldi first recovered himself, when instead of yielding to despondency, all his faculties were aroused to devise some means for escaping; but Paulo's hopes seemed buried beneath the dreadful vestments upon which he still gazed. "Ah, my Signor!" said he, at length, in a faltering accent, "who shall dare to raise that garment? What if it should conceal the mangled body, whose blood has stained it!"

Vivaldi, shudderingly, turned to look on it again.

"It moves!" exclaimed Paulo; "I see it move!" as he said which, he started to the opposite side of the chamber. Vivaldi stepped a few paces back, and as quickly returned; when, determined to know the event at once, he raised the garment upon the point of his sword, and perceived, beneath, other remains of dress, heaped high together, while even the floor below was stained with gore.

Believing that fear had deceived the eyes of Paulo, Vivaldi watched this horrible spectacle for some time, but without perceiving the least motion; when he became convinced, that not any remains of life were shrouded beneath it, and that it contained only articles of dress, which had belonged to some unfortunate person, who had probably been decoyed hither for plunder, and afterwards murdered. This belief, and the repugnance he felt to dwell upon the spectacle, prevented him from examining further, and he turned away to a remote part of the vault. A conviction of his own fate, and of his servant's, filled his mind for a while with despair. It appeared that he had been ensnared by robbers, till, as he recollected the circumstances which had attended his entrance, and the several peculiar occurrences connected with the arch-way, this conjecture seemed highly improbable. It was unreasonable, that robbers should have taken the trouble to decoy, when they might at first have seized him; still more so, that they would have persevered so long in the attempt; and most of all, that when he had formerly been in their power, they should have neglected their opportunity, and suffered him to leave the ruin unmolested. Yet, granting that all this, improbable as it was, were, however, possible, the solemn warnings and predictions of the monk, so frequently delivered, and so faithfully fulfilled, could have no connection with the schemes of banditti. It appeared, therefore, that Vivaldi was not in the hands of robbers; or, if he were, that the monk, at least, had no connection with them; yet it was certain that he had just heard the voice of this monk beneath the arch; that his servant had said, he saw the vestments of one ascending the steps of the fort; and that they had both reason, afterward, to believe it was his shadowy figure, which they had pursued to the very chamber where they were now confined.

As Vivaldi considered all these circumstances, his perplexity increased, and he was more than ever inclined to believe, that the form, which had assumed the appearance of a monk, was something superhuman.

"If this being had *appeared only*," said he to himself, "I should, perhaps, have thought it the perturbed spirit of him, who doubtless has been murdered here, and that it led me hither to discover the deed, that his bones might be removed to holy ground; but this monk, or whatever it is, was neither silent, nor apparently anxious concerning himself; he spoke only of events connected with my peace, and predicted of the future, as well as

reverted to the past! If he had either hinted of himself, or had been wholly silent, his appearance, and manner of eluding pursuit, is so extraordinary, that I should have yielded, for once, perhaps, to the tales of our grandfathers, and thought he was the spectre of a murdered person."

As Vivaldi expressed his incredulity, however, he returned to examine the garment once more, when, as he raised it, he observed, what had before escaped his notice, black drapery mingled with the heap beneath; and, on lifting this also on the point of his sword, he perceived part of the habiliment of a monk! He started at the discovery, as if he had seen the apparition, which had so long been tempting his credulity. Here were the vest and scapulary, rent and stained with blood! Having gazed for a moment, he let them drop upon the heap; when Paulo, who had been silently observing him, exclaimed,

"Signor! that should be the garment of the demon who led us hither. Is it a winding-sheet for us, *Maestro*? Or was it one for the body he inhabited while on earth!"

"Neither, I trust," replied Vivaldi, endeavouring to command the perturbation he suffered, and turning from the spectacle; "therefore we will try once more to regain our liberty."

This was a design, however, beyond his accomplishment; and, having again attacked the door, raised Paulo to the grated window, and vociferated for release with his utmost strength, in which he was very ably seconded by Paulo, he abandoned, for the present, all further attempts, and, weary and desponding, threw himself on the ground of the dungeon.

Paulo bitterly lamented his master's rashness in penetrating to this remote spot, and bewailed the probability of their being famished.

"For, supposing, Signor, that we were not decoyed hither for plunder and butchery, and supposing that we are not surrounded by malicious spirits, which San Januarius forbid I should take upon me to affirm is impossible! supposing all this, Signor, yet still there remains almost a certainty of our being starved to death; for how is it possible that any body can hear our

cries, in a place so remote from all resort, and buried, as one may say, under ground, as this is?"

"Thou art an excellent comforter," said Vivaldi, groaning.

"You must allow, Signor, that you are even with me," replied Paulo; "and that you are as excellent a conductor."

Vivaldi gave no answer, but lay on the ground, abandoned to agonizing thought. He had now leisure to consider the late words of the monk, and to conjecture, for he was in a mood for conjecturing the worst, that they not only alluded to Ellena, but that his saying "she had departed an hour ago," was a figurative manner of telling that she had died then. This was a conjecture which dispelled almost all apprehension for himself. He started from the ground, and paced his prison with quick and unequal steps; it was now no longer a heavy despondency that oppressed him, but an acute anxiety that stung him, and, with the tortures of suspense, brought also those of passionate impatience and horror concerning the fate of Ellena. The longer he dwelt upon the possibility of her death, the more probable it appeared. This monk had already forewarned him of the death of Bianchi; and when he recollected the suspicious circumstances which had attended it, his terrors for Ellena increased. The more he yielded to his feelings, the more violent they became, till, at length, his ungovernable impatience and apprehensions arose almost to frenzy.

Paulo forgot, for a while, his own situation in the superior sufferings of his master, and now, at least, endeavoured to perform the offices of a comforter, for he tried to calm Vivaldi's mind, by selecting the fairest circumstances for hope which the subject admitted, and he passed without noticing, or, if noticing, only lightly touched upon, the most prominent possibilities of evil. His master, however, was insensible to all he said, till he mentioned again the convent del Pianto; and this subject, as it seemed connected with the monk, who had hinted the fate of Ellena, interested the unhappy Vivaldi, who withdrew awhile from his own reflections, to listen to a recital which might assist his conjectures.

Paulo complied with his command, but not without reluctance. He looked round the empty vault, as if he feared that some person might be lurking in

the obscurity, who would overhear, and even answer him.

"We are tolerably retired here too, Signor," said he, recollecting himself; "one may venture to talk secrets with little danger of being discovered. However, *Maestro*, it is best to make matters quite sure; and therefore, if you will please to take a seat on the ground, I will stand beside you and relate all I know of the convent of *Our Lady of Tears*, which is not much after all."

Vivaldi, having seated himself, and bidden Paulo do the same, the servant began in a low voice—"It was on the vigil of the *Santo Marco*, just after the last vesper-bell had tolled—You never was at the *Santa Maria del Pianto*, Signor, or you would know what a gloomy old church it has.—It was in a confessional in one of the side aisles of this church, and just after the last bell had ceased, that a person, so muffled up, that neither face nor shape could be distinguished, came and placed himself on the steps of one of the boxes adjoining the confessional chair; but if he had been as airily dressed as yourself, Signor, he might have been just as well concealed, for that dusky aisle is lighted only by one lamp, which hangs at the end next the painted window, except when the tapers at the shrine of San Antonio happen to be burning at the other extremity, and even then the place is almost as gloomy, as this vault. But that is, no doubt, contrived for the purpose, that people may not blush for the sins they confess; and, in good faith, this is an accommodation which may bring more money to the poor's box, for the monks have a shrewd eye that way, and"——

"You have dropt the thread of your story," said Vivaldi.

"True, signor, let me recollect where I lost it.—Oh! at the steps of the confessional;—the stranger knelt down upon them, and for some time poured such groans into the ear of the confessor, as were heard all along the aisle. You are to know, Signor, that the brothers of *Santa del Pianto* are of the order of *Black Penitents*; and people who have more sins than ordinary to confess, sometimes go there, to consult with the grand penitentiary what is to be done. Now it *happened*, that father Ansaldo, the grand penitentiary himself, was in the chair, as is customary on the vigil of the *Santo Marco*; and he gently reprov'd the penitent for bewailing so loud, and bade him take comfort, when the other replied only by a groan deeper than before, but

it was not so loud, and then proceeded to confess. But what he did confess, Signor, I know not; for the confessor, you know, never must divulge, except, indeed, on very extraordinary occasions. It was, however, something so very strange, and horrible, that the grand penitentiary suddenly quitted the chair, and before he reached the cloisters he fell into strong convulsions. On recovering himself, he asked the people about him, whether the penitent, who had visited such a confessional, naming it, was gone; adding, that if he was still in the church, it was proper he should be detained. He described, at the same time, as well as he could, the sort of figure he had dimly seen approaching the confessional just before he had received the confession, at recollecting which, he seemed ready to go off again into his convulsions. One of the fathers, who had crossed the aisle, on his way to the cloisters, upon the first alarm of Ansaldo's disorder, remembered that a person, such as was described, had passed him hastily. He had seen a tall figure, muffled up in the habit of a white friar, gliding swiftly along the aisle, towards the door which opened into the outer court of the convent; but he was himself too much engaged to notice the stranger particularly. Father Ansaldo thought this must be the person; and the porter was summoned, and asked whether he had observed such an one pass. He affirmed that he had not seen any person go forth from the gate within the last quarter of an hour; which might be true enough, you know, Signor, if the rogue had been off his post. But he further said, that no one had entered during the whole evening, habited in white, as the stranger was described to be: so the porter proved himself to be a vigilant watchman; for he must have been fast asleep too, or how could this personage have entered the convent, and left it again, without being seen by him!"

"In white, was he?" said Vivaldi; "if he had been in black, I should have thought this must have been the monk, my tormentor."

"Why, you know, Signor, that occurred to me before," observed Paulo, "and a man might easily change his dress, if that were all."

"Proceed," said Vivaldi.

"Hearing this account from the porter," continued Paulo, "the fathers believed, one and all, that the stranger must be secreted within the walls;

and the convent, with every part of the precincts, was searched; but no person was found!"

"This must certainly be the monk," said Vivaldi, "notwithstanding the difference of his habit; there surely cannot be two beings in the world, who would conduct themselves in this same mysterious manner!"

He was interrupted by a low sound, which seemed, to his distracted fancy, to proceed from a dying person. Paulo also heard it; he started, and they both listened with intense and almost intolerable expectation.

"Ah!" said Paulo, at length, "it was only the wind."

"It was no more," said Vivaldi; "proceed therefore."

"From the period of this strange confession," resumed Paulo, "Father Ansaldo was never properly himself; he"——

"Doubtless the crime confessed related to himself," observed Vivaldi.

"Why, no, Signor, I never heard that that was the case; and some remarkable circumstances, which followed, seemed to prove it otherwise. About a month after the time I have mentioned, on the evening of a sultry day, when the monks were retiring from the last service"——

"Hark!" cried Vivaldi.

"I hear whispers," said Paulo, whispering himself.

"Be still!" said Vivaldi.

They listened attentively, and heard a murmuring, as of voices; but could not ascertain whether they came from the adjoining vault, or arose from beneath the one in which they were. The sound returned at intervals; and the persons who conversed, whatever they were, seemingly restrained their voices, as if they feared to be heard. Vivaldi considered whether it were better to discover himself, and call for assistance, or to remain still.

"Remember, Signor," said Paulo, "what a chance we have of being starved, unless we venture to discover ourselves to these people, or whatever they are."

"Venture!" exclaimed Vivaldi. "What has such a wretch as I to do with fear? O, Ellena, Ellena!"

He instantly called loudly to the person whom he believed he had heard, and was seconded by Paulo; but their continued vociferations availed them nothing; no answer was returned; and even the indistinct sounds, which had awakened their attention, were heard no more.

Exhausted by their efforts, they laid down on the floor of the dungeon, abandoning all further attempts at escape till the morning light might assist them.

Vivaldi had no further spirits to enquire for the remainder of Paulo's narrative. Almost despairing for himself, he could not feel an interest concerning strangers; for he had already perceived, that it could not afford him information connected with Ellena; and Paulo, who had roared himself hoarse, was very willing to be silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

Who may she be that steals through yonder cloister,
And, as the beam of evening tints her veil,
Unconsciously discloses saintly features,
Inform'd with the high soul of saintly virtue?

During several days after Ellena's arrival at the monastery of San Stefano, she was not permitted to leave the room. The door was locked upon her, and not any person appeared except the nun, who brought her a scanty portion of food, and who was the same, that had first admitted her into that part of the convent appropriated to the abbess.

On the fourth day, when, probably, it was believed that her spirits were subdued by confinement, and by her experience of the suffering she had to expect from resistance, she was summoned to the parlour. The abbess was alone, and the air of austerity, with which she regarded Ellena, prepared the latter to endure.

After an exordium on the heinousness of her offence, and the necessity there was for taking measures to protect the peace and dignity of a noble family, which her late conduct had nearly destroyed; the abbess informed her, that she must determine either to accept the veil, or the person whom the Marchesa di Vivaldi had, of her great goodness, selected for her husband.

"You never can be sufficiently grateful," added the abbess, "for the generosity the Marchesa displays, in allowing you a choice on the subject. After the injury you have endeavoured to inflict upon her and her family, you could not expect that any indulgence would be shewn you. It was natural to suppose, that the Marchesa would have punished you with

severity; instead of which, she allows you to enter into our society; or, if you have not strength of mind sufficient to enable you to renounce a sinful world, she permits you to return into it, and gives you a suitable partner to support you through its cares and toils,—a partner much more suitable to your circumstances than him, to whom you had the temerity to lift your eye."

Ellena blushed at this coarse appeal to her pride, and persevered in a disdainful silence. Thus to give to injustice the colouring of mercy, and to acts most absolutely tyrannical the softening tints of generosity, excited her honest indignation. She was not, however, shocked by a discovery of the designs formed against her, since, from the moment of her arrival at San Stefano, she had expected something terribly severe, and had prepared her mind to meet it with fortitude; for she believed, that, so supported, she should weary the malice of her enemies, and finally triumph over misfortune. It was only when she thought of Vivaldi that her courage failed, and that the injuries she endured seemed too heavy to be long sustained.

"You are silent!" said the abbess, after a pause of expectation. "Is it possible, then, that you can be ungrateful for the generosity of the Marchesa? But, though you may at present be insensible to her goodness, I will forbear to take advantage of your indiscretion, and will still allow you liberty of choice. You may retire to your chamber, to consider and to decide. But remember, that you must abide by the determination you shall avow; and, that you will be allowed no appeal from the alternatives, which are now placed before you.—If you reject the veil, you must accept the husband who is offered you."

"It is unnecessary," said Ellena, with an air of dignified tranquillity, "that I should withdraw for the purposes of considering and deciding. My resolution is already taken, and I reject each of the offered alternatives. I will neither condemn myself to a cloister, or to the degradation, with which I am threatened on the other hand. Having said this, I am prepared to meet whatever suffering you shall inflict upon me; but be assured, that my own voice never shall sanction the evils to which I may be subjected, and that the immortal love of justice, which fills all my heart, will sustain my courage no less powerfully than the sense of what is due to my own

character. You are now acquainted with my sentiments and my resolutions; I shall repeat them no more."

The abbess, whose surprise had thus long suffered Ellena to speak, still fixed upon her a stern regard, as she said, "Where is it that you have learned these heroics, and acquired the rashness which thus prompts you to avow them!—the boldness which enables you to insult your Superior, a priestess of your holy religion, even in her sanctuary!"

"The sanctuary is prophaned," said Ellena, mildly, but with dignity: "it is become a prison. It is only when the Superior ceases to respect the precepts of that holy religion, the precepts which teach her justice and benevolence, that she herself is no longer respected. The very sentiment which bids us revere its mild and beneficent laws, bids us also reject the violators of them: when you command me to reverence my religion, you urge me to condemn yourself."

"Withdraw!" said the abbess, rising impatiently from her chair; "your admonition, so becomingly delivered, shall not be forgotten."

Ellena willingly obeyed, and was led back to her cell, where she sat down pensively, and reviewed her conduct. Her judgment approved of the frankness, with which she had asserted her rights, and of the firmness, with which she had reproved a woman, who had dared to demand respect from the very victim of her cruelty and oppression. She was the more satisfied with herself, because she had never, for an instant, forgotten her own dignity so far, as to degenerate into the vehemence of passion, or to falter with the weakness of fear. Her conviction of the abbess's unworthy character was too clear to allow Ellena to feel abashed in her presence; for she regarded only the censure of the good, to which she had ever been as tremblingly alive, as she was obdurately insensible to that of the vicious.

Ellena, having now asserted her resolutions, determined to avoid, if possible, all repetition of scenes like the last, and to repel by silence only, whatever indignity might be offered her. She knew that she must suffer, and she resolved to endure. Of the three evils, which were placed before her, that of confinement, with all its melancholy accompaniments, appeared considerably less severe, than either the threatened marriage, or a formal

renunciation of the world; either of which would devote her, during life, to misery, and that by her own act. Her choice, therefore, had been easy, and the way was plain before her. If she could endure with calmness the hardships which she could not avoid, half their weight would be unfelt; and she now most strenuously endeavoured to attain the strength of mind, which was necessary to support such equanimity.

For several days after the late interview with the abbess, she was kept a close prisoner; but on the fifth evening she was permitted to attend vespers. As she walked through the garden to the chapel, the ordinary freshness of the open air, and the verdure of the trees and shrubs were luxuries to her, who had so long been restricted from the common blessings of nature. She followed the nuns to a chapel where they usually performed their devotions, and was there seated among the novices. The solemnity of the service, and particularly of those parts, which were accompanied by music, touched all her heart, and soothed and elevated her spirit.

Among the voices of the choir, was one whose expression immediately fixed her attention; it seemed to speak a loftier sentiment of devotion than the others, and to be modulated by the melancholy of an heart, that had long since taken leave of this world. Whether it swelled with the high peal of the organ, or mingled in low and trembling accents with the sinking chorus, Ellena felt that she understood all the feelings of the breast from which it flowed; and she looked to the gallery where the nuns were assembled, to discover a countenance, that might seem to accord with the sensibility expressed in the voice. As no strangers were admitted to the chapel, some of the sisters had thrown back their veils, and she saw little that interested her in their various faces; but the figure and attitude of a nun, kneeling in a remote part of the gallery, beneath a lamp, which threw its rays aslant her head, perfectly agreed with the idea she had formed of the singer, and the sound seemed to approach immediately from that direction. Her face was concealed by a black veil, whose transparency, however, permitted the fairness of her complexion to appear; but the air of her head, and the singularity of her attitude, for she was the only person who remained kneeling, sufficiently indicated the superior degree of fervency and penitence, which the voice had expressed.

When the hymn had ceased, she rose from her knees, and Ellena, soon after, observing her throw back her veil, discovered, by the lamp, which shed its full light upon her features, a countenance, that instantly confirmed her conjecture. It was touched with a melancholy kind of resignation; yet grief seemed still to occasion the paleness, and the air of languor, that prevailed over it, and which disappeared only when the momentary energy of devotion seemed to lift her spirit above this world, and to impart to it somewhat of a seraphic grandeur. At those moments her blue eyes were raised towards Heaven, with such meek, yet fervent love, such sublime enthusiasm as the heads of Guido sometimes display, and which renewed, with Ellena, all the enchanting effects of the voice she had just heard.

While she regarded the nun with a degree of interest which rendered her insensible to every other object in the chapel, she fancied she could perceive the calmness in her countenance to be that of despair, rather than of resignation; for, when her thoughts were not elevated in prayer, there was frequently a fixedness in her look, too energetic for common suffering, or for the temper of mind, which may lead to perfect resignation. It had, however, much that attached the sympathy of Ellena, and much that seemed to speak a similarity of feeling. Ellena was not only soothed, but in some degree comforted, while she gazed upon her; a selfishness which may, perhaps, be pardoned, when it is considered, that she thus knew there was one human being, at least, in the convent, who must be capable of feeling pity, and willing to administer consolation. Ellena endeavoured to meet her eye, that she might inform her of the regard she had inspired, and express her own unhappiness; but the nun was so entirely engaged by devotion, that she did not succeed.

As they left the chapel, however, the nun passed close by Ellena, who threw back her veil, and fixed upon her a look so supplicating and expressive, that the nun paused, and in her turn regarded the novice, not with surprize only, but with a mixture of curiosity and compassion. A faint blush crossed her cheek, her spirits seemed to falter, and she was unwilling to withdraw her eyes from Ellena: but it was necessary that she should continue in the procession, and, bidding her farewell by a smile of ineffable pity, she passed on to the court, while Ellena followed with attention still fixed upon the sister, who soon disappeared beyond the door-way of the

Abbess's apartment, and Ellena had nearly reached her own, before her thoughts were sufficiently disengaged to permit her to enquire the name of the stranger.

"It is sister Olivia whom you mean, perhaps," said her conductress.

"She is very handsome," said Ellena.

"Many of the sisters are so," replied Margaritone, with an air of pique.

"Undoubtedly," said Ellena; "but she, whom I mean, has a most touching countenance, frank, noble, full of sensibility; and there is a gentle melancholy in her eye, which cannot but interest all who observe her."

Ellena was so fascinated by this interesting nun, that she forgot she was describing her to a person, whose callous heart, rendered her insensible to the influence of any countenance, except, perhaps, the commanding one of the lady abbess; and to whom, therefore, a description of the fine traits, which Ellena felt, was as unintelligible as would have been an Arabic inscription.

"She is passed the bloom of youth," continued Ellena, still anxious to be understood; "but she retains all its interesting graces, and adds to them the dignity of"——

"If you mean that she is of middle age," interrupted Margaritone, peevishly, "it is sister Olivia you mention, for we are all younger than she is."

Ellena, raising her eyes almost unconsciously, as the nun spoke this, fixed them upon a face sallow, meagre, seemingly near fifty years an inhabitant of this world; and she could scarcely suppress the surprize she felt, on perceiving such wretched vanity lingering among the chilled passions of so repulsive a frame, and within the sequestered shade of a cloister. Margaritone, still jealous of the praise bestowed on Olivia, repelled all further enquiry, and, having attended Ellena to her cell, locked her up for the night.

On the following evening Ellena was again permitted to attend vespers, and, on the way to the chapel, the hope of seeing her interesting favourite reanimated her spirits. In the same part of the gallery, as on the preceding night, she again appeared, and kneeling, as before, beneath the lamp, in private orison, for the service was not begun.

Ellena endeavoured to subdue the impatience she felt to express her regard, and to be noticed by the holy sister, till she should have finished. When the nun rose, and observed Ellena, she lifted her veil, and, fixing on her the same enquiring eye, her countenance brightened into a smile so full of compassion and intelligence, that Ellena, forgetting the decorums of the place, left her seat to approach her; it seemed as if the soul, which beamed forth in that smile, had long been acquainted with hers. As she advanced, the nun dropped her veil, a reproof which she immediately understood, and she withdrew to her seat; but her attention remained fixed on the nun during the whole service.

At the conclusion, when they left the chapel, and she saw Olivia pass without noticing her, Ellena could scarcely restrain her tears; she returned in deep dejection to her room. The regard of this nun was not only delightful, but seemed necessary to her heart, and she dwelt, with fond perseverance, on the smile that had expressed so much, and which threw one gleam of comfort, even through the bars of her prison.

Her reverie was soon interrupted by a light step, that approached her cell, and in the next moment the door was unlocked, and Olivia herself appeared. Ellena rose with emotion to meet her; the nun held forth her hand to receive hers.

"You are unused to confinement," said she, curtsying mournfully, and placing on the table a little basket containing refreshment, "and our hard fare"——

"I understand you," said Ellena, with a look expressive of her gratitude; "you have a heart that can pity, though you inhabit these walls;—you have suffered too, and know the delicate generosity of softening the sorrows of others, by any attention that may tell them your sympathy. O! if I could express how much the sense of this affects me!"

Tears interrupted her. Olivia pressed her hand, looked steadily upon her face, and was somewhat agitated, but she soon recovered apparent tranquillity, and said, with a serious smile, "You judge rightly, my sister, respecting my sentiments, however you may do concerning my sufferings. My heart is not insensible to pity; nor to you, my child. You were designed for happier days than you can hope to find within these cloisters!"

She checked herself as if she had allowed too much, and then added, "But you may, perhaps, be peaceful; and since it consoles you to know that you have a friend near you, believe me that friend—but believe it in silence. I will visit you when I am permitted—but do not enquire for me; and if my visits are short, do not press me to lengthen them."

"How good this is!" said Ellena, in a faltering voice. "How sweet too it is! you will visit me, and I am pitied by you!"

"Hush!" said the nun, expressively; "no more; I may be observed. Good night, my sister; may your slumbers be light!"

Ellena's heart sunk. She had not spirits to say, "Good night!" but her eyes, covered with tears, said more. The nun turned her own away suddenly, and, pressing her hand in silence, left the cell. Ellena, firm and tranquil under the insults of the abbess, was now melted into tears by the kindness of a friend. These gentle tears were refreshing to her long-oppressed spirits, and she indulged them. Of Vivaldi she thought with more composure than she had done since she left the villa Altieri; and something like hope began to revive in her heart, though reflection offered nothing to support it.

On the following morning, she perceived that the door of her cell had not been closed. She rose impatiently, and, not without a hope of liberty, immediately passed it. The cell, opening upon a short passage, which communicated with the main building, and which was shut up by a door, was secluded, and almost insulated from every other chamber; and this door being now secured, Ellena was as truly a prisoner as before. It appeared then, that the nun had omitted to fasten the cell only for the purpose of allowing her more space to walk in the passage, and she was grateful for the attention. Still more she was so, when, having traversed it, she perceived

one extremity terminate in a narrow stair-case, that appeared to lead to other chambers.

She ascended the winding steps hastily, and found they led only to a door, opening into a small room, where nothing remarkable appeared, till she approached the windows, and beheld thence an horizon, and a landscape spread below, whose grandeur awakened all her heart. The consciousness of her prison was lost, while her eyes ranged over the wide and freely-sublime scene without. She perceived that this chamber was within a small turret, projecting from an angle of the convent over the walls, and suspended, as in air, above the vast precipices of granite, that formed part of the mountain. These precipices were broken into cliffs, which, in some places, impended far above their base, and, in others, rose, in nearly-perpendicular lines, to the walls of the monastery, which they supported. Ellena, with a dreadful pleasure, looked down them, flagged as they were with larch, and frequently darkened by lines of gigantic pine bending along the rocky ledges, till her eye rested on the thick chesnut woods that extended over their winding base, and which, softening to the plains, seemed to form a gradation between the variegated cultivation there, and the awful wildness of the rocks above. Round these extensive plains were tumbled the mountains, of various shape and attitude, which Ellena had admired on her approach to San Stefano; some shaded with forests of olive and almond trees, but the greater part abandoned to the flocks, which, in summer, feed on their aromatic herbage, and on the approach of winter, descend to the sheltered plains of the *Tavogliere di Puglia*.

On the left opened the dreadful pass which she had traversed, and the thunder of whose waters now murmured at a distance. The accumulation of overtopping points, which the mountains of this dark perspective exhibited, presented an image of grandeur superior to any thing she had seen while within the pass itself.

To Ellena, whose mind was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, by scenes of nature, the discovery of this little turret was an important circumstance. Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro' the persecutions that might await her. Here, gazing upon the

stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world! How poor the boasted power of man, when the fall of a single cliff from these mountains would with ease destroy thousands of his race assembled on the plains below! How would it avail them, that they were accoutred for battle, armed with all the instruments of destruction that human invention ever fashioned? Thus man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminitiveness of a fairy; and she would experience, that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul, or compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue.

Ellena's attention was recalled from the scene without by a sound from within the gallery, and she then heard a key turning in the door of the passage. Fearing that it was sister Margaritone who approached, and who, informed by her absence of the consolatory turret she had discovered, would perhaps debar her from ever returning to it, Ellena descended with a palpitating heart, and found that nun in the cell. Surprize and severity were in her countenance, when she enquired by what means Ellena had unclosed the door, and whither she had been.

Ellena answered without any prevarication, that she had found the door unfastened, and that she had visited the turret above; but she forbore to express a wish to return thither, judging that such an expression would certainly exclude her in future. Margaritone, after sharply rebuking her for prying beyond the passage, and setting down the breakfast she had brought, left the room, the door of which she did not forget to secure. Thus Ellena was at once deprived of so innocent a means of consolation as her pleasant turret had afforded.

During several days, she saw only the austere nun, except when she attended vespers; where, however, she was so vigilantly observed, that she feared to speak with Olivia, even by her eyes. Olivia's were often fixed upon her face, and with a kind of expression which Ellena, when she did venture to look at her, could not perfectly interpret. It was not only of pity, but of anxious curiosity, and of something also like fear. A blush would

sometimes wander over her cheek, which was succeeded by an extreme paleness, and by an air of such universal languor as precedes a fainting fit: but the exercises of devotion seemed frequently to recal her fleeting spirits, and to elevate them with hope and courage.

When she left the chapel, Ellena saw Olivia no more that night; but on the following morning she came with breakfast to the cell. A character of peculiar sadness was on her brow.

"O! how glad I am to see you!" said Ellena; "and how much I have regretted your long absence! I was obliged to remember constantly what you had enjoined, to forbear enquiring after you."

The nun replied with a melancholy smile, "I come in obedience to our lady abbess," said she, as she seated herself on Ellena's mattress.

"And did you not wish to come?" said Ellena, mournfully.

"I did wish it," replied Olivia; "but"—and she hesitated.

"Whence then this reluctance?" enquired Ellena.

Olivia was silent a moment.

"You are a messenger of evil news!" said Ellena; "you are only reluctant to afflict me."

"It is as you say," replied Olivia; "I am only reluctant to afflict you; and I fear you have too many attachments to the world, to allow you to receive, without sorrow, what I have to communicate. I am ordered to prepare you for the vows, and to say, that, since you have rejected the husband which was proposed to you, you are to accept the veil; that many of the customary forms are to be dispensed with; and that the ceremony of taking the black veil, will follow without delay that of receiving the white one."

The nun paused; and Ellena said, "You are an unwilling bearer of this cruel message; and I reply only to the lady abbess, when I declare, that I never will accept either; that force may send me to the altar, but that it never

shall compel me to utter vows which my heart abhors; and if I am constrained to appear there, it shall be only to protest against her tyranny, and against the form intended to sanction it."

To Olivia this answer was so far from being displeasing, that it appeared to give her satisfaction.

"I dare not applaud your resolution," said she; "but I will not condemn it. You have, no doubt, connections in the world which would render a seclusion from it afflicting. You have relations, friends, from whom it would be dreadful to part?"

"I have neither," said Ellena, sighing.

"No! Can that be possible? and yet you are so unwilling to retire!"

"I have only one friend," replied Ellena, "and it is of him they would deprive me!"

"Pardon, my love, the abruptness of these enquiries," said Olivia; "yet, while I entreat your forgiveness, I am inclined to offend again, and to ask your name."

"That is a question I will readily answer. My name is Ellena di Rosalba."

"How?" said Olivia, with an air of deliberation; "Ellena di"——

"Di Rosalba," repeated her companion; "and permit me to ask your motive for the enquiry: do you know any person of my name?"

"No," replied the nun, mournfully; "but your features have some resemblance to those of a friend I once had."

As she said this, her agitation was apparent, and she rose to go. "I must not lengthen my visit, lest I should be forbidden to repeat it," said she. "What answer shall I give to the abbess? If you are determined to reject the veil, allow me to advise you to soften your refusal as much as possible. I am, perhaps, better acquainted with her character than you are; and O, my sister! I would not see you pining away your existence in this solitary cell."

"How much I am obliged by the interest you express for my welfare," said Ellena, "and by the advice you offer! I will yield my judgment in this instance to yours; you shall modulate my refusal as you think proper: but remember that it must be absolute; and beware, lest the abbess should mistake gentleness for irresolution."

"Trust me, I will be cautious in all that relates to you," said Olivia. "Farewell! I will visit you, if possible, in the evening. In the mean time the door shall be left open, that you may have more air and prospect than this cell affords. That staircase leads to a pleasant chamber."

"I have visited it already," replied Ellena, "and have to thank you for the goodness, which permitted me to do so. To go thither will greatly soothe my spirits; if I had some book, and my drawing-instrument, I could almost forget my sorrows there."

"Could you so?" said the nun, with an affectionate smile. "Adieu! I will endeavour to see you in the evening. If sister Margaritone returns, be careful not to enquire for me; nor once ask her for the little indulgence I give you."

Olivia withdrew, and Ellena retired to the chamber above, where she lost for a while all sense of sorrow amidst the great scenery, which its windows exhibited.

At noon, the step of Margaritone summoned Ellena from her retreat, and she was surprised that no reproof followed this second discovery of her absence. Margaritone only said, that the abbess had the goodness to permit Ellena to dine with the novices, and that she came to conduct her to their table.

Ellena did not rejoice in this permission, preferring to remain in her solitary turret, to the being exposed to the examining eyes of strangers; and she followed dejectedly, through the silent passages to the apartment where they were assembled. She was not less surprised than embarrassed to observe, in the manners of young people residing in a convent, an absence of that decorum, which includes beneath its modest shade every grace that ought to adorn the female character, like the veil which gives dignity to

their air and softness to their features. When Ellena entered the room, the eyes of the whole company were immediately fixed upon her; the young ladies began to whisper and smile, and shewed, by various means, that she was the subject of conversation, not otherwise than censorious. No one advanced to meet and to encourage her, to welcome her to the table, or still less display one of those nameless graces, with which a generous and delicate mind delights to reanimate the modest and the unfortunate.

Ellena took a chair in silence; and, though she had at first felt forlorn and embarrassed by the impertinent manners of her companions, a consciousness of innocence gradually revived her spirits, and enabled her to resume an air of dignity, which repressed this rude presumption.

Ellena returned to her cell, for the first time, with eagerness. Margaritone did not fasten the door of it, but she was careful to secure that of the passage; and even this small indulgence she seemed to allow with a surly reluctance, as if compelled to obey the command of a superior. The moment she was gone, Ellena withdrew to her pleasant turret, where, after having suffered from the coarse manners of the novices, her gratitude was the more lively, when she perceived the delicate attention of her beloved nun. It appeared that she had visited the chamber in Ellena's absence, and had caused to be brought thither a chair and a table, on which were placed some books, and a knot of fragrant flowers. Ellena did not repress the grateful tears, which the generous feelings of Olivia excited; and she forbore, for some moments, to examine the books, that the pleasing emotions she experienced might not be interrupted.

On looking into these books, however, she perceived, that some of them treated of mystical subjects, which she laid aside with disappointment; but in others she observed a few of the best Italian poets, and a volume or two of Guicciardini's history. She was somewhat surprised, that the poets should have found their way to the library of a nun, but was too much pleased with the discovery to dwell on the enquiry.

Having arranged her books, and set her little room in order, she seated herself at a window, and, with a volume of Tasso, endeavoured to banish every painful remembrance from her mind. She continued wandering in the imaginary scenes of the poet, till the fading light recalled her to those of

reality. The sun was set, but the mountain-tops were still lighted up by his beams, and a tint of glorious purple coloured all the west, and began to change the snowy points on the horizon. The silence and repose of the vast scene, promoted the tender melancholy that prevailed in her heart; she thought of Vivaldi, and wept—of Vivaldi, whom she might, perhaps, never see again, though she doubted not that he would be indefatigable in searching for her. Every particular of their last conversation, when he had so earnestly lamented the approaching separation, even while he allowed of its propriety, came to her mind; and, while she witnessed, in imagination, the grief and distraction, which her mysterious departure and absence must have occasioned him, the fortitude, with which she had resisted her own sufferings, yielded to the picture of his.

The vesper-bell, at length, summoned her to prepare for mass, and she descended to her cell to await the arrival of her conductress. It was Margaritone, who soon appeared; but in the chapel she, as usual, saw Olivia, who, when the service had concluded, invited her into the garden of the convent. There, as she walked beneath the melancholy cypresses, that, ranged on either side the long walks, formed a majestic canopy, almost excluding the evening twilight, Olivia conversed with her on serious, but general, topics, carefully avoiding any mention of the abbess, and of the affairs of Ellena. The latter, anxious to learn the effect of her repeated rejection of the veil, ventured to make some enquiries, which the nun immediately discouraged, and as cautiously checked the grateful effusions of her young friend for the attentions she had received.

Olivia accompanied Ellena to her cell, and there no longer scrupled to relieve her from uncertainty. With a mixture of frankness and discretion, she related as much of the conversation, that had passed between herself and the abbess, as it appeared necessary for Ellena to know, from which it seemed that the former was as obstinate, as the latter was firm.

"Whatever may be your resolution," added the nun, "I earnestly advise you, my sister, to allow the Superior some hope of compliance, lest she proceed to extremities."

"And what extremity can be more terrible," replied Ellena, "than either of those, to which she would now urge me? Why should I descend to practice

dissimulation?"

"To save yourself from undeserved sufferings," said Olivia mournfully.

"Yes, but I should then incur deserved ones," observed Ellena; "and forfeit such peace of mind as my oppressors never could restore to me." As she said this, she looked at the nun with an expression of gentle reproach and disappointment.

"I applaud the justness of your sentiment," replied Olivia, regarding her with tenderest compassion. "Alas! that a mind so noble should be subjected to the power of injustice and depravity!"

"Not subjected," said Ellena, "do not say subjected. I have accustomed myself to contemplate those sufferings; I have chosen the least of such as were given to my choice, and I will endure them with fortitude; and can you then say that I am subjected?"

"Alas, my sister! you know not what you promise," replied Olivia; "you do not comprehend the sufferings which may be preparing for you."

As she spoke, her eyes filled with tears, and she withdrew them from Ellena, who, surprised at the extreme concern on her countenance, entreated she would explain herself.

"I am not certain, myself, as to this point," said Olivia; "and if I were, I should not dare to explain it."

"Not dare!" repeated Ellena, mournfully. "Can benevolence like yours know fear, when courage is necessary to prevent evil?"

"Enquire no further!" said Olivia; but no blush of conscious duplicity stained her cheek. "It is sufficient that you understand the consequence of open resistance to be terrible, and that you consent to avoid it."

"But how avoid it, my beloved friend, without incurring a consequence which, in my apprehension, would be yet more dreadful? How avoid it, without either subjecting myself to a hateful marriage, or accepting the

vows? Either of these events would be more terrible to me, than any thing with which I may be menaced."

"Perhaps not," said the nun. "Imagination cannot draw the horrors of—— But, my sister, let me repeat, that I would save you! O, how willingly save you from the evils preparing! and that the only chance of doing so is, by prevailing with you to abandon at least the appearance of resistance."

"Your kindness deeply affects me," said Ellena; "and I am fearful of appearing insensible of it, when I reject your advice; yet I cannot adopt it. The very dissimulation, which I should employ in self-defence, might be a means of involving me in destruction."

As Ellena concluded, and her eyes glanced upon the nun, unaccountable suspicion occurred to her, that Olivia might be insincere, and that, at this very moment, when she was advising dissimulation, she was endeavouring to draw Ellena into some snare, which the abbess had laid. She sickened at this dreadful supposition, and dismissed it without suffering herself to examine its probability. That Olivia, from whom she had received so many attentions, whose countenance and manners announced so fair a mind, and for whom she had conceived so much esteem and affection, should be cruel and treacherous, was a suspicion that gave her more pain, than the actual imprisonment in which she suffered; and when she looked again upon her face, Ellena was consoled by a clear conviction, that she was utterly incapable of perfidy.

"If it were possible that I could consent to practise deceit," resumed Ellena, after a long pause, "what could it avail me? I am entirely in the power of the abbess, who would soon put my sincerity to the proof; when a discovery of my duplicity would only provoke her vengeance, and I should be punished even for having sought to avoid injustice."

"If deceit is at any time excusable," replied Olivia, reluctantly, "it is when we practise it in self-defence. There are some rare situations, when it may be resorted to without our incurring ignominy, and yours is one of those. But I will acknowledge, that all the good I expect is from the delay which temporizing may procure you. The Superior, when she understands there is a probability of obtaining your consent to her wishes, may be willing to

allow you the usual time of preparation for the veil, and meanwhile something may occur to rescue you from your present situation."

"Ah! could I but believe so!" said Ellena; "but, alas! what power can rescue me? And I have not one relative remaining even to attempt my deliverance. To what possibility do you allude?"

"The Marchesa may relent."

"Does, then, your possibility of good rest with her, my dear friend? If so, I am in despair again; for such a chance of benefit, there would certainly be little policy in forfeiting one's integrity."

"There are also other possibilities, my sister," said Olivia; "but hark! what bell is that? It is the chime, which assembles the nuns in the apartment of the abbess, where she dispenses her evening benediction. My absence will be observed. Good night, my sister. Reflect on what I have advised; and remember, I conjure you, to consider, that the consequence of your decision must be solemn, and may be fatal."

The nun spoke this with a look and emphasis so extraordinary, that Ellena at once wished and dreaded to know more; but before she had recovered from her surprize, Olivia had left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

——"He, like the tenant
Of some night-haunted ruin, bore an aspect
Of horror, worn to habitude."

MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

The adventurous Vivaldi, and his servant Paulo, after passing the night of Ellena's departure from villa Altieri in one of the subterraneous chambers of the fort of Paluzzi, and yielding, at length, to exhausted nature, awoke in terror and utter darkness, for the flambeau had expired. When a recollection of the occurrences of the preceding evening returned, they renewed their efforts for liberty with ardour. The grated window was again examined, and being found to overlook only a confined court of the fortress, no hope appeared of escaping.

The words of the monk returned with Vivaldi's first recollections, to torture him with apprehension, that Ellena was no more; and Paulo, unable either to console or to appease his master, sat down dejectedly beside him. Paulo had no longer a hope to suggest, or a joke to throw away; and he could not forbear seriously remarking, that to die of hunger was one of the most horrible means of death, or lamenting the rashness which had made them liable to so sad a probability.

He was in the midst of a very pathetic oration, of which, however, his master did not hear a single word, so wholly was his attention engaged by his own melancholy thoughts, when on a sudden he became silent, and then, starting to his feet, exclaimed, "Signor, what is yonder? Do you see nothing?"

Vivaldi looked round.

"It is certainly a ray of light," continued Paulo; "and I will soon know where it comes from."

As he said this he sprung forward, and his surprize almost equalled his joy when he discovered that the light issued through the door of the vault, which stood a little open. He could scarcely believe his senses, since the door had been strongly fastened on the preceding night, and he had not heard its ponderous bolts undrawn. He threw it widely open, but recollecting himself, stopped to look into the adjoining vault before he ventured forth; when Vivaldi darted past him, and bidding him follow instantly, ascended to the day. The courts of the fortress were silent and vacant, and Vivaldi reached the arch-way without having observed a single person, breathless with speed, and scarcely daring to believe that he had regained his liberty.

Beneath the arch he stopped to recover breath, and to consider whether he should take the road to Naples, or to the villa Altieri, for it was yet early morning, and at an hour when it appeared improbable that Ellena's family would be risen. The apprehension of her death had vanished as Vivaldi's spirits revived, which the pause of hesitation sufficiently announced: but even this was the pause only of an instant; a strong anxiety concerning her determined him to proceed to the villa Altieri, notwithstanding the unsuitableness of the hour, since he could, at least, reconnoitre her residence, and await till some sign of the family having risen should appear.

"Pray, Signor," said Paulo, while his master was deliberating, "do not let us stop here lest the enemy should appear again; and do, Signor, take the road which is nearest to some house where we may get breakfast, for the fear of starving has taken such hold upon me, that it has nearly anticipated the reality of it already."

Vivaldi immediately departed for the villa. Paulo, as he danced joyfully along, expressed all the astonishment that filled his mind, as to the cause of their late imprisonment and escape; but Vivaldi, who had now leisure to consider the subject, could not assist him in explaining it. The only certainty that appeared, was, that he had not been confined by robbers; and what interest any person could have in imprisoning him for the night, and suffering him to escape in the morning, did not appear.

On entering the garden at Altieri, he was surprized to observe that several of the lower lattices were open at this early hour, but surprize changed to terror, when, on reaching the portico, he heard a moaning of distress from the hall, and when, after loudly calling, he was answered by the piteous cries of Beatrice. The hall door was fastened, and, Beatrice being unable to open it, Vivaldi, followed by Paulo, sprang through one of the unclosed lattices; when on reaching the hall, he found the house-keeper bound to a pillar, and learned that Ellena had been carried off during the night by armed men.

For a moment he was almost stupified by the shock of this intelligence, and then asked Beatrice a thousand questions concerning the affair, without allowing her time to answer one of them. When, however, he had patience to listen, he learned that the ruffians were four in number; that they were masked; that two of them had carried Ellena through the garden, while the others, after binding Beatrice to a pillar, threatening her with death if she made any noise, and watching over her till their comrades had secured their prize, left her a prisoner. This was all the information she could give respecting Ellena.

Vivaldi, when he could think coolly, believed he had discovered the instigators and the design of the whole affair, and the cause, also, of his late confinement. It appeared that Ellena had been carried off by order of his family, to prevent the intended marriage, and that he had been decoyed into the fort of Paluzzi, and kept a prisoner there, to prevent him from intercepting the scheme, which his presence at the villa Altieri would effectually have done. He had himself spoken of his former adventure at Paluzzi; and it now appeared, that his family had taken advantage of the curiosity he had expressed, to lead him into the vaults. The event of this design was the more certain, since, as the fort lay in the direct road to the villa Altieri, Vivaldi could not go thither without being observed by the creatures of the Marchesa, who, by an artful manœuvre, might make him their prisoner, without employing violence.

As he considered these circumstances, it appeared certain, also, that father Schedoni was in truth the monk who had so long haunted his steps; that he was the secret adviser of his mother, and one of the authors of the

predicted misfortunes, which, it seemed, he possessed a too certain means of fulfilling. Yet Vivaldi, while he admitted the probability of all this, reflected with new astonishment on the conduct of Schedoni, during his interview with him in the Marchesa's cabinet;—the air of dignified innocence, with which he had repressed accusation, the apparent simplicity, with which he had pointed out circumstances respecting the stranger, that seemed to make against himself; and Vivaldi's opinion of the confessor's duplicity began to waver. "Yet what other person," said he, "could be so intimately acquainted with my concerns, or have an interest sufficiently strong for thus indefatigably thwarting me, except this confessor, who is, no doubt, well rewarded for his perseverance? The monk can be no other than Schedoni, yet it is strange that he should have forbore to disguise his person, and should appear in his mysterious office in the very habit he usually wears!"

Whatever might be the truth as to Schedoni, it was evident that Ellena had been carried away by order of Vivaldi's family, and he immediately returned towards Naples with an intention of demanding her at their hands, not with any hope of their compliance, but believing that they might accidentally afford him some lights on the subject. If, however, he should fail to obtain any hint that might assist him in tracing the route she had been carried, he determined to visit Schedoni, accuse him of perfidy, urge him to a full explanation of his conduct, and, if possible, obtain from him a knowledge of Ellena's place of confinement.

When, at length, he obtained an interview with the Marchese, and, throwing himself at his feet, supplicated that Ellena might be restored to her home, the unaffected surprize of his father overwhelmed him with astonishment and despair. The look and manner of the Marchese could not be doubted; Vivaldi was convinced that he was absolutely ignorant of any step which had been taken against Ellena.

"However ungraciously you have conducted yourself," said the Marchese, "my honour has never yet been sullied by duplicity; however I may have wished to break the unworthy connection you have formed, I should disdain to employ artifice as the means. If you really design to marry this person, I shall make no other effort to prevent such a measure, than by

telling you the consequence you are to expect;—from thenceforth I will disown you for my son."

The Marchese quitted the apartment when he had said this, and Vivaldi made no attempt to detain him. His words expressed little more than they had formerly done, yet Vivaldi was shocked by the absolute menace now delivered. The stronger passion of his heart, however, soon overcame their effect; and this moment, when he began to fear that he had irrecoverably lost the object of his dearest affections, was not the time, in which he could long feel remoter evils, or calculate the force of misfortunes which never might arrive. The nearer interest pressed solely upon his mind, and he was conscious only to the loss of Ellena.

The interview, which followed with his mother, was of a different character from that, which had occurred with the Marchese. The keen dart of suspicion, however, sharpened as it was by love and by despair, pierced beyond the veil of her duplicity; and Vivaldi as quickly detected her hypocrisy as he had yielded his conviction to the sincerity of the Marchese. But his power rested here; he possessed no means of awakening her pity or actuating her justice, and could not obtain even a hint, that might guide him in his search of Ellena.

Schedoni, however, yet remained to be tried; Vivaldi had no longer a doubt as to his having caballed with the Marchesa, and that he had been an agent in removing Ellena. Whether he was the person who haunted the ruins of Paluzzi, still remained to be proved, for, though several circumstances seemed to declare that he was, others, not less plausible, asserted the contrary.

On leaving the Marchesa's apartment, Vivaldi repaired to the convent of the Spirito Santo, and enquired for father Schedoni. The lay-brother who opened the gate, informed him that the father was in his cell, and Vivaldi stepped impatiently into the court requesting to be shewn thither.

"I dare not leave the gate, Signor," said the brother, "but if you cross the court, and ascend that stair-case which you see yonder beyond the door-way on your right, it will lead you to a gallery, and the third door you will come to is father Schedoni's."

Vivaldi passed on without seeing another human being, and not a sound disturbed the silence of this sanctuary, till, as he ascended the stairs, a feeble note of lamentation proceeded from the gallery, and he concluded it was uttered by some penitent at confession.

He stopped, as he had been directed, at the third door, when, as he gently knocked, the sound ceased, and the same profound silence returned. Vivaldi repeated his summons, but, receiving no answer, he ventured to open the door. In the dusky cell within no person appeared, but he still looked round, expecting to discover some one in the dubious gloom. The chamber contained little more than a mattress, a chair, a table, and a crucifix; some books of devotion were upon the table, one or two of which were written in unknown characters; several instruments of torture lay beside them. Vivaldi shuddered as he hastily examined these, though he did not comprehend the manner of their application, and he left the chamber, without noticing any other object, and returned to the court. The porter said, that since father Schedoni was not in his cell, he was probably either in the church or in the gardens, for that he had not passed the gates during the morning.

"Did he pass yester-evening?" said Vivaldi, eagerly.

"Yes, he returned to vespers," replied the brother with surprize.

"Are you certain as to that, my friend?" rejoined Vivaldi, "are you certain that he slept in the convent last night?"

"Who is it that asks the question?" said the lay-brother, with displeasure, "and what right has he to make it? You are ignorant of the rules of our house, Signor, or you would perceive such questions to be unnecessary; any member of our community is liable to be severely punished if he sleep a night without these walls, and father Schedoni would be the last among us so to trespass. He is one of the most pious of the brotherhood; few indeed have courage to imitate his severe example. His voluntary sufferings are sufficient for a saint. He pass the night abroad? Go, Signor, yonder is the church, you will find him there, perhaps."

Vivaldi did not linger to reply. "The hypocrite!" said he to himself as he crossed to the church, which formed one side of the quadrangle; "but I will

unmask him."

The church, which he entered, was vacant and silent like the court. "Whither can the inhabitants of this place have withdrawn themselves?" said he; "wherever I go, I hear only the echoes of my own footsteps; it seems as if death reigned here over all! But, perhaps, it is one of the hours of general meditation, and the monks have only retired to their cells."

As he paced the long aisles, he suddenly stopped to catch the startling sound that murmured through the lofty roof; but it seemed to be only the closing of a distant door. Yet he often looked forward into the sacred gloom, which the painted windows threw over the remote perspective, in the expectation of perceiving a monk. He was not long disappointed; a person appeared, standing silently in an obscure part of the cloister, cloathed in the habit of this society, and he advanced towards him.

The monk did not avoid Vivaldi, or even turn to observe who was approaching, but remained in the same attitude, fixed like a statue. This tall and gaunt figure had, at a distance, reminded him of Schedoni, and Vivaldi, as he now looked under the cowl, discovered the ghastly countenance of the confessor.

"Have I found you at last?" said Vivaldi. "I would speak with you, father, in private. This is not a proper place for such discourse as we must hold."

Schedoni made no reply, and Vivaldi, once again looking at him, observed that his features were fixed, and his eyes bent towards the ground. The words of Vivaldi seemed not to have reached his understanding, nor even to have made any impression on his senses.

He repeated them in a louder tone, but still not a single line of Schedoni's countenance acknowledged their influence. "What means this mummer?" said he, his patience exhausted, and his indignation aroused; "This wretched subterfuge shall not protect you, you are detected, your stratagems are known! Restore Ellena di Rosalba to her home, or confess where you have concealed her."

Schedoni was still silent and unmoved. A respect for his age and profession withheld Vivaldi from seizing and compelling him to answer; but the agony of impatience and indignation which he suffered, formed a striking contrast to the death-like apathy of the monk. "I now also know you," continued Vivaldi, "for my tormentor at Paluzzi, the prophet of evils, which you too well practised the means of fulfilling, the predictor of the death of Signora Bianchi." Schedoni frowned. "The forewarner of Ellena's departure; the phantom who decoyed me into the dungeons of Paluzzi; the prophet and the artificer of all my misfortunes."

The monk raised his eyes from the ground, and fixed them with terrible expression upon Vivaldi, but was still silent.

"Yes, father," added Vivaldi, "I know and will proclaim you to the world. I will strip you of the holy hypocrisy in which you shroud yourself; announce to all your society the despicable artifices you have employed, and the misery you have occasioned. Your character shall be announced aloud."

While Vivaldi spoke, the monk had withdrawn his eyes, and fixed them again on the ground. His countenance had resumed its usual expression.

"Wretch! restore to me Ellena di Rosalba!" cried Vivaldi, with the sudden anguish of renewed despair. "Tell me at least, where she may be found, or you shall be compelled to do so. Whither, whither have you conveyed her?"

As he pronounced this in loud and passionate accents, several ecclesiastics entered the cloisters, and were passing on to the body of the church, when his voice arrested their attention. They paused, and perceiving the singular attitude of Schedoni, and the frantic gesticulations of Vivaldi, hastily advanced towards them. "Forbear!" said one of the strangers, as he seized the cloak of Vivaldi, "do you not observe!"

"I observe a hypocrite," replied Vivaldi, stepping back and disengaging himself, "I observe a destroyer of the peace, it was his duty to protect. I"——

"Forbear this desperate conduct," said the priest, "lest it provoke the just vengeance of Heaven! Do you not observe the holy office in which he is engaged?" pointing to the monk, "Leave the church while you are permitted to do so in safety; you suspect not the punishment you may provoke."

"I will not quit the spot till you answer my enquiries," said Vivaldi to Schedoni, without deigning even to look upon the priest; "Where, I repeat, is Ellena di Rosalba?"

The confessor was still silent and unmoved. "This is beyond all patience, and all belief," continued Vivaldi. "Speak! Answer me, or dread what I may unfold. Yet silent! Do you know the convent *del Pianto*? Do you know the confessional of the *Black Penitents*?"

Vivaldi thought he perceived the countenance of the monk suffer some change. "Do you remember that terrible night," he added, "when, on the steps of that confessional, a tale was told?"——

Schedoni raised his eyes, and fixing them once more on Vivaldi, with a look that seemed intended to strike him to the dust, "Avaunt!" cried he in a tremendous voice; "avaunt! sacrilegious boy! Tremble for the consequence of thy desperate impiety!"

As he concluded, he started from his position, and gliding with the silent swiftness of a shadow along the cloister, vanished in an instant. Vivaldi, when attempting to pursue him, was seized by the surrounding monks. Insensible to his sufferings, and exasperated by his assertions, they threatened, that if he did not immediately leave the convent, he should be confined, and undergo the severe punishment to which he had become liable, for having disturbed and even insulted one of their holy order while performing an act of penance.

"He has need of such acts," said Vivaldi; "but when can they restore the happiness his treachery has destroyed? Your order is disgraced by such a member, reverend fathers; your"——

"Peace!" cried a monk, "he is the pride of our house; he is severe in his devotion, and in self-punishment terrible beyond the reach of——But I am

throwing away my commendations, I am talking to one who is not permitted to value or to understand the sacred mysteries of our exercises."

"Away with him to the *Padre Abbate!*" cried an enraged priest; "away with him to the dungeon!"

"Away! away!" repeated his companions, and they endeavoured to force Vivaldi through the cloisters. But with the hidden strength which pride and indignation lent him, he burst from their united hold, and, quitting the church by another door, escaped into the street.

Vivaldi returned home in a state of mind that would have engaged the pity of any heart, which prejudice or self-interest had not hardened. He avoided his father, but sought the Marchesa, who, triumphant in the success of her plan, was still insensible to the sufferings of her son.

When the Marchesa had been informed of his approaching marriage, she had, as usual, consulted with her confessor on the means of preventing it, who had advised the scheme she adopted, a scheme which was the more easily carried into effect, since the Marchesa had early in life been acquainted with the abbess of San Stefano, and knew, therefore, enough of her character and disposition to confide, without hesitation, the management of this important affair to her discretion. The answer of the abbess to her proposal, was not merely acquiescent, but zealous, and it appeared that she too faithfully justified the confidence reposed in her. After this plan had been so successfully prosecuted, it was not to be hoped that the Marchesa would be prevailed upon to relinquish it by the tears, the anguish, or all the varied sufferings of her son. Vivaldi now reproved the easiness of his own confidence in having hoped it, and quitted her cabinet with a despondency that almost reached despair.

The faithful Paulo obeyed the hasty summons of his master, but he had not succeeded in obtaining intelligence of Ellena; and Vivaldi, having dismissed him again on the same enquiry, retired to his apartment, where the excess of grief, and a feeble hope of devising some successful mode of remedy, alternately agitated and detained him.

In the evening, restless and anxious for change, though scarcely knowing whither to bend his course, he left the palace, and strolled down to the sea-beach. A few fishermen and Lazzaroni only were loitering along the strand, waiting for boats from St. Lucia. Vivaldi, with folded arms, and his hat drawn over his face to shade his sorrow from observation, paced the edge of the waves, listening to their murmur, as they broke gently at his feet, and gazing upon their undulating beauty, while all consciousness was lost in melancholy reverie concerning Ellena. Her late residence appeared at a distance, rising over the shore. He remembered how often from thence they had together viewed this lovely scene! Its features had now lost their charm; they were colourless and uninteresting, or impressed only mournful ideas. The sea fluctuating beneath the setting sun, the long mole and its lighthouse tipped with the last rays, fishermen reposing in the shade, little boats skimming over the smooth waters, which their oars scarcely dimpled; these were images that brought to his recollection the affecting evening when he had last seen this picture from the villa Altieri, when, seated in the orangery with Ellena and Bianchi, on the night preceding the death of the latter, Ellena herself had so solemnly been given to his care, and had so affectingly consented to the dying request of her relative. The recollection of that scene came to Vivaldi with all the force of contrast, and renewed all the anguish of despair; he paced the beach with quicker steps, and long groans burst from his heart. He accused himself of indifference and inactivity, for having been thus long unable to discover a single circumstance which might direct his search; and though he knew not whither to go, he determined to leave Naples immediately, and return no more to his father's mansion till he should have rescued Ellena.

Of some fishermen who were conversing together upon the beach, he enquired whether they could accommodate him with a boat, in which he meant to coast the bay; for it appeared probable that Ellena had been conveyed from Altieri by water, to some town or convent on the shore, the privacy and facility of such a mode of conveyance being suitable to the designs of her enemies.

"I have but one boat, Signor," said a fisherman, "and that is busy enough in going to and fro between here and Santa Lucia, but my comrade, here,

perhaps can serve you. What, Carlo, can you help the Signor to your little skiff? the other, I know, has enough to do in the trade."

His comrade, however, was too much engaged with a party of three or four men, who were listening in deep attention round him, to reply; Vivaldi advancing to urge the question, was struck by the eagerness with which he delivered his narrative, as well as the uncouthness of his gesticulation; and he paused a moment in attention. One of the auditors seemed to doubt of something that had been asserted. "I tell you," replied the narrator, "I used to carry fish there, two and three times a week, and very good sort of people they were; they have laid out many a ducat with me in their time. But as I was saying, when I got there, and knocked upon the door, I heard, all of a sudden, a huge groaning, and presently I heard the voice of the old house-keeper herself, roaring out for help; but I could give her none, for the door was fastened; and, while I ran away for assistance to old Bartoli, you know old Bartoli, he lives by the road side as you go to Naples; well, while I ran to him, comes a Signor, and jumps through the window and sets her at liberty at once. So then, I heard the whole story."——

"What story?" said Vivaldi, "and of whom do you speak?"

"All in good time, *Maestro*, you shall hear," said the fisherman, who looking at him for a moment, added, "Why, Signor, it should be you I saw there, you should be the very Signor that let Beatrice loose."

Vivaldi, who had scarcely doubted before, that it was Altieri of which the man had spoken, now asked a thousand questions respecting the route the ruffians had taken Ellena, but obtained no relief to his anxiety.

"I should not wonder," said a Lazzaro who had been listening to the relation; "I should not wonder if the carriage that passed Bracelli early on the same morning, with the blinds drawn up, though it was so hot that people could scarcely breathe in the open air, should prove to be it which carried off the lady!"

This hint was sufficient to reanimate Vivaldi, who collected all the information the Lazzaro could give, which was, however, little more than that a carriage, such as he described, had been seen by him, driving

furiously through Bracelli, early on the morning mentioned as that of Signora di Rosalba's departure. Vivaldi had now no doubt as to its being the one which conveyed her away, and he determined to set out immediately for that place, where he hoped to obtain from the post-master further intelligence concerning the road she had pursued.

With this intention he returned once more to his father's mansion, not to acquaint him with his purpose, or to bid him farewell, but to await the return of his servant Paulo, who he meant should accompany him in the search. Vivaldi's spirits were now animated with hope, slender as were the circumstances that supported it; and, believing his design to be wholly unsuspected by those who would be disposed to interrupt it, he did not guard either against the measures, which might impede his departure from Naples, or those which might overtake him on his journey.

CHAPTER X.

"What, would'st thou have a serpent sting thee twice?"

SHAKESPEARE.

The Marchesa, alarmed at some hints dropped by Vivaldi in the late interview between them, and by some circumstances of his latter conduct, summoned her constant adviser, Schedoni. Still suffering with the insult he had received in the church of the *Spirito Santo*, he obeyed with sullen reluctance, yet not without a malicious hope of discovering some opportunity for retaliation. That insult, which had pointed forth his hypocrisy, and ridiculed the solemn abstraction he assumed, had sunk deep in his heart, and, fermenting the direst passions of his nature, he meditated a terrible revenge. It had subjected him to mortifications of various kinds. Ambition, it has already appeared, was one of his strongest motives of action, and he had long since assumed a character of severe sanctity, chiefly for the purposes of lifting him to promotion. He was not beloved in the society of which he was a member; and many of the brotherhood, who had laboured to disappoint his views, and to detect his errors, who hated him for his pride, and envied him for his reputed sanctity, now gloried in the mortification he had received, and endeavoured to turn the circumstance to their own advantage. They had not scrupled already to display by insinuation and pointed sneers, their triumph, and to menace his reputation; and Schedoni, though he deserved contempt, was not of a temper to endure it.

But above all, some hints respecting his past life, which had fallen from Vivaldi, and which occasioned him so abruptly to leave the church, alarmed him. So much terror, indeed, had they excited, that it is not improbable that he would have sealed his secret in death, devoting Vivaldi to the grave, had

he not been restrained by the dreaded vengeance of the Vivaldi family. Since that hour he had known no peace, and had never slept; he had taken scarcely any food, and was almost continually on his knees upon the steps of the high altar. The devotees who beheld him, paused and admired; such of the brothers as disliked him, sneered and passed on. Schedoni appeared alike insensible to each; lost to this world, and preparing for a higher.

The torments of his mind and the severe penance he had observed, had produced a surprising change in his appearance, so that he resembled a spectre rather than a human being. His visage was wan and wasted, his eyes were sunk and become nearly motionless, and his whole air and attitudes exhibited the wild energy of something—not of this earth.

When he was summoned by the Marchesa, his conscience whispered this to be the consequence of circumstances, which Vivaldi had revealed; and, at first, he had determined not to attend her; but, considering that if it was so, his refusal would confirm suspicion, he resolved to trust once more to the subtilty of his address for deliverance.

With these apprehensions, tempered by this hope, he entered the Marchesa's closet. She almost started on observing him, and could not immediately withdraw her eyes from his altered visage, while Schedoni was unable wholly to conceal the perturbation which such earnest observation occasioned. "Peace rest with you, daughter!" said he, and he seated himself, without lifting his eyes from the floor.

"I wished to speak with you, father, upon affairs of moment," said the Marchesa gravely, "which are probably not unknown to you." She paused, and Schedoni bowed his head, awaiting in anxious expectation what was to follow.

"You are silent, father," resumed the Marchesa. "What am I to understand by this?"

"That you have been misinformed," replied Schedoni, whose apt confidence betrayed his discretion.

"Pardon me," said the Marchesa, "I am too well informed, and should not have requested your visit if any doubt had remained upon my mind."

"Signora! be cautious of what you credit," said the confessor imprudently; "you know not the consequence of a hasty credulity."

"Would that mine were a rash credulity!" replied the Marchesa; "but—we are betrayed."

"*We?*" repeated the monk, beginning to revive: "What has happened?"

The Marchesa informed him of Vivaldi's absence, and inferred from its length, for it was now several days since his departure, that he had certainly discovered the place of Ellena's confinement, as well as the authors of it.

Schedoni differed from her, but hinted, that the obedience of youth was hopeless, unless severer measures were adopted.

"Severer!" exclaimed the Marchesa; "good father, is it not severe enough to confine her for life?"

"I mean severer with respect to your son, lady," replied Schedoni. "When a young man has so far overcome all reverence for an holy ordinance as publicly to insult its professors, and yet more, when that professor is in the very performance of his duties, it is time he should be controlled with a strong hand. I am not in the practice of advising such measures, but the conduct of Signor Vivaldi is such as calls aloud for them. Public decency demands it. For myself, indeed, I should have endured patiently the indignity which has been offered me, receiving it as a salutary mortification, as one of those inflictions that purify the soul from the pride which even the holiest men may unconsciously cherish. But I am no longer permitted to consider myself; the public good requires that an example should be made of the horrible impiety of which your son, it grieves me, daughter, to disclose it!—your son, unworthy of such a mother! has been guilty."

It is evident that in the style, at least, of this accusation, Schedoni suffered the force of his resentment to prevail over the usual subtilty of his

address, the deep and smooth insinuation of his policy.

"To what do you allude, righteous father?" enquired the astonished Marchesa; "what indignity, what impiety has my son to answer for? I entreat you will speak explicitly, that I may prove I can lose the mother in the strict severity of the judge."

"That is spoken with the grandeur of sentiment, which has always distinguished you, my daughter! Strong minds perceive that justice is the highest of the moral attributes, mercy is only the favourite of weak ones."

Schedoni had a view in this commendation beyond that of confirming the Marchesa's present resolution against Vivaldi. He wished to prepare her for measures, which might hereafter be necessary to accomplish the revenge he meditated, and he knew that by flattering her vanity, he was most likely to succeed. He praised her, therefore, for qualities he wished her to possess, encouraged her to reject general opinions by admiring as the symptoms of a superior understanding, the convenient morality upon which she had occasionally acted; and, calling sternness justice, extolled that for strength of mind, which was only callous insensibility.

He then described to her Vivaldi's late conduct in the church of the *Spirito Santo*, exaggerated some offensive circumstances of it, invented others, and formed of the whole an instance of monstrous impiety and unprovoked insult.

The Marchesa listened to the relation with no less indignation than surprize, and her readiness to adopt the confessor's advice allowed him to depart with renovated spirits and most triumphant hopes.

Meanwhile, the Marchese remained ignorant of the subject of the conference with Schedoni. His opinions had formerly been sounded, and having been found decidedly against the dark policy it was thought expedient to practise, he was never afterwards consulted respecting Vivaldi. Parental anxiety and affection began to revive, as the lengthened absence of his son was observed. Though jealous of his rank, he loved Vivaldi; and, though he had never positively believed that he designed to enter into a sacred engagement with a person, whom the Marchese considered to be so

much his inferior as Ellena, he had suffered doubts, which gave him considerable uneasiness. The present extraordinary absence of Vivaldi renewed his alarm. He apprehended that if she was discovered at this moment, when the fear of losing her for ever, and the exasperation, which such complicated opposition occasioned, had awakened all the passions of his son, this rash young man might be prevailed upon to secure her for his own by the indissoluble vow. On the other hand, he dreaded the effect of Vivaldi's despair, should he fail in the pursuit; and thus, fearing at one moment that for which he wished in the next, the Marchese suffered a tumult of mind inferior only to his son's.

The instructions, which he delivered to the servants whom he sent in pursuit of Vivaldi, were given under such distraction of thought, that scarcely any person perfectly understood his commission; and, as the Marchesa had been careful to conceal from him her knowledge of Ellena's abode, he gave no direction concerning the route to *San Stefano*.

While the Marchese at Naples was thus employed, and while Schedoni was forming further plans against Ellena, Vivaldi was wandering from village to village, and from town to town, in pursuit of her, whom all his efforts had hitherto been unsuccessful to recover. From the people at the post-house at Bracelli, he had obtained little information that could direct him; they only knew that a carriage, such as had been already described to Vivaldi, with the blinds drawn up, changed horses there on the morning, which he remembered to be that of Ellena's departure, and had proceeded on the road to Morgagni.

When Vivaldi arrived thither, all trace of Ellena was lost; the master of the post could not recollect a single circumstance connected with the travellers, and, even if he had noticed them, it would have been insufficient for Vivaldi's purpose, unless he had also observed the road they followed; for at this place several roads branched off into opposite quarters of the country; Vivaldi, therefore, was reduced to chuse one of these, as chance or fancy directed; and, as it appeared probable that the Marchesa had conveyed Ellena to a convent, he determined to make enquiries at every one on his way.

He had now passed over some of the wildest tracts of the Apennine, among scenes, which seemed abandoned by civilized society to the banditti who haunted their recesses. Yet even here amidst wilds that were nearly inaccessible, convents, with each its small dependent hamlet, were scattered, and, shrouded from the world by woods and mountains, enjoyed unsuspectedly many of its luxuries, and displayed, unnoticed, some of its elegance. Vivaldi, who had visited several of these in search of Ellena, had been surprized at the refined courtesy and hospitality with which he was received.

It was on the seventh day of his journey, and near sun-set, that he was bewildered in the woods of Rugieri. He had received a direction for the road he was to take at a village some leagues distant, and had obeyed it confidently till now, when the path was lost in several tracts that branched out among the trees. The day was closing, and Vivaldi's spirits began to fail, but Paulo, light of heart and ever gay, commended the shade and pleasant freshness of the woods, and observed, that if his master did lose his way, and was obliged to remain here for the night, it could not be so very unlucky, for they could climb up among the branches of a chestnut, and find a more neat and airy lodging than any inn had yet afforded them.

While Paulo was thus endeavouring to make the best of what might happen, and his master was sunk in reverie, they suddenly heard the sound of instruments and voices from a distance. The gloom, which the trees threw around, prevented their distinguishing objects afar off, and not a single human being was visible, nor any trace of his art, beneath the shadowy scene. They listened to ascertain from what direction the sounds approached, and heard a chorus of voices, accompanied by a few instruments, performing the evening service.

"We are near a convent, Signor," said Paulo, "listen! they are at their devotions."

"It is as you say," replied Vivaldi; "and we will make the best of our way towards it."

"Well, Signor! I must say, if we find as good doings here as we had at the Capuchin's, we shall have no reason to regret our beds *al-fresco* among the

chestnut branches."

"Do you perceive any walls or spires beyond the trees?" said Vivaldi, as he led the way.

"None, Signor," replied Paulo; "yet we draw nearer the sounds. Ah, Signor! do you hear that note? How it dies away! And those instruments just touched in symphony! This is not the music of peasants; a convent must be near, though we do not see it."

Still as they advanced, no walls appeared, and soon after the music ceased; but other sounds led Vivaldi forward to a pleasant part of the woods, where, the trees opening, he perceived a party of pilgrims seated on the grass. They were laughing and conversing with much gaiety, as each spread before him the supper, which he drew from his scrip; while he, who appeared to be the *Father-director* of the pilgrimage, sat with a jovial countenance in the midst of the company, dispensing jokes and merry stories, and receiving in return a tribute from every scrip. Wines of various sorts were ranged before him, of which he drank abundantly, and seemed not to refuse any dainty that was offered.

Vivaldi, whose apprehensions were now quieted, stopped to observe the group, at the evening rays, glancing along the skirts of the wood, threw a gleam upon their various countenances, shewing, however, in each a spirit of gaiety that might have characterized the individuals of a party of pleasure, rather than those of a pilgrimage. The *Father-director* and his flock seemed perfectly to understand each other; the Superior willingly resigned the solemn austerity of his office, and permitted the company to make themselves as happy as possible, in consideration of receiving plenty of the most delicate of their viands; yet somewhat of dignity was mingled with his condescensions, that compelled them to receive even his jokes with a degree of deference, and perhaps they laughed at them less for their spirit than because they were favors.

Addressing the superior, Vivaldi requested to be directed how he might regain his way. The father examined him for a moment before he replied, but observing the elegance of his dress, and a certain air of distinction; and

perceiving, also, that Paulo was his servant, he promised his services, and invited him to take a seat at his right hand, and partake of the supper.

Vivaldi, understanding that the party was going his road, accepted the invitation, when Paulo, having fastened the horses to a tree, soon became busy with the supper. While Vivaldi conversed with the father, Paulo engrossed all the attention of the pilgrims near him; they declared he was the cleverest and the merriest fellow they had ever seen, and often expressed a wish that he was going as far with them as to the shrine in a convent of Carmelites, which terminated their pilgrimage. When Vivaldi understood that this shrine was in the church of a convent, partly inhabited by nuns, and that it was little more than a league and a half distant, he determined to accompany them, for it was as possible that Ellena was confined there as in any other cloister; and of her being imprisoned in some convent, he had less doubt, the more he considered the character and views of his mother. He set forward, therefore, with the pilgrims, and on foot, having resigned his horse to the weary *Father-director*.

Darkness closed over them long before they reached the village where they designed to pass the night; but they beguiled the way with songs and stories, now and then, only, stopping at command of the Father, to repeat some prayer or sing a hymn. But, as they drew near a village, at the base of the mountain on which the shrine stood, they halted to arrange themselves in procession; and the Superior having stopped short in the midst of one of his best jokes, dismounted Vivaldi's horse, placed himself at their head, and beginning a loud strain they proceeded in full chorus of melancholy music.

The peasants, hearing their sonorous voices, came forth to meet and conduct them to their cabins. The village was already crowded with devotees, but these poor peasants, looking up to them with love and reverence, made every possible contrivance to accommodate all who came; notwithstanding which, when Paulo soon after turned into his bed of straw, he had more reasons than one to regret his chestnut mattress.

Vivaldi passed an anxious night, waiting impatiently for the dawning of that day, which might possibly restore to him Ellena. Considering that a pilgrim's habit would not only conceal him from suspicion, but allow him opportunities for observation, which his own dress would not permit, he

employed Paulo to provide him one. The address of the servant, assisted by a single ducat, easily procured it, and at an early hour he set forward on his enquiry.

CHAPTER XI.

Bring roses, violets, and the cold snow-drop,
Beautiful in tears, to strew the path-way
Of our saintly sister.

A few devotees only had begun to ascend the mountain, and Vivaldi kept aloof even from these, pursuing a lonely track, for his thoughtful mind desired solitude. The early breeze sighing among the foliage, that waved high over the path, and the hollow dashing of distant waters, he listened to with complacency, for these were sounds which soothed yet promoted his melancholy mood; and he sometimes rested to gaze upon the scenery around him, for this too was in harmony with the temper of his mind. Disappointment had subdued the wilder energy of the passions, and produced a solemn and lofty state of feeling; he viewed with pleasing sadness the dark rocks and precipices, the gloomy mountains and vast solitudes, that spread around him; nor was the convent he was approaching a less sacred feature of the scene, as its gray walks and pinnacles appeared beyond the dusky groves. "Ah! if it should enclose her!" said Vivaldi, as he caught a first glimpse of its hall. "Vain hope! I will not invite your illusions again, I will not expose myself to the agonies of new disappointment; I will search, but not expect. Yet, if she should be there!"

Having reached the gates of the convent, he passed with hasty steps into the court; where his emotion increased as he paused a moment and looked round its silent cloisters. The porter only appeared, when Vivaldi, fearful lest he should perceive him not to be a pilgrim, drew his hood over his face, and, gathering up his garments still closer in his folded arms, passed on without speaking, though he knew not which of the avenues before him led to the shrine. He advanced, however, towards the church, a stately edifice, detached, and at some little distance, from the other parts of the convent. Its

highly vaulted aisles, extending in twilight perspective, where a monk, or a pilgrim only, now and then crossed, whose dark figures, passing without sound, vanished like shadows; the universal stillness of the place, the gleam of tapers from the high altar, and of lamps, which gave a gloomy pomp to every shrine in the church:—all these circumstances conspired to impress a sacred awe upon his heart.

He followed some devotees through a side aisle to a court, that was overhung by a tremendous rock, in which was a cave, containing the shrine of *our Lady of Mount Carmel*. This court was enclosed by the rock, and by the choir of the church, except that to the south a small opening led the eye to a glimpse of the landscape below, which, seen beyond the dark jaws of the cliff, appeared free, and light, and gaily coloured, melting away into the blue and distant mountains.

Vivaldi entered the cave, where, enclosed within a filigree screen of gold, lay the image of the saint, decorated with flowers and lighted up by innumerable lamps and tapers. The steps of the shrine were thronged with kneeling pilgrims, and Vivaldi, to avoid singularity, kneeled also; till a high peal of the organ, at a distance, and the deep voices of choristers announced that the first mass was begun. He left the cave, and, returning into the church, loitered at an extremity of the aisles, where he listened awhile to the solemn harmony pealing along the roofs, and softening away in distance. It was such full and entrancing music as frequently swells in the high festivals of the Sicilian church, and is adapted to inspire that sublime enthusiasm, which sometimes elevates its disciples. Vivaldi, unable to endure long the excess of feeling, which this harmony awakened, was leaving the church, when suddenly it ceased, and the tolling of a bell sounded in its stead. This seemed to be the knell of death, and it occurred to him, that a dying person was approaching to receive the last sacrament; when he heard remotely a warbling of female voices, mingling with the deeper tones of the monks, and with the hollow note of the bell, as it struck at intervals. So sweetly, so plaintively, did the strain grow on the air, that those, who listened, as well as those, who sung, were touched with sorrow, and seemed equally to mourn for a departing friend.

Vivaldi hastened to the choir, the pavement of which was strewn with palm-branches and fresh flowers. A pall of black velvet lay upon the steps of the altar, where several priests were silently attending. Every where appeared the ensigns of solemn pomp and ceremony, and in every countenance the stillness and observance of expectation. Meanwhile the sounds drew nearer, and Vivaldi perceived a procession of nuns approaching from a distant aisle.

As they advanced, he distinguished the lady abbess leading the train, dressed in her pontifical robes, with the mitre on her head; and well he marked her stately step, moving in time to the slow minstrelsy, and the air of proud yet graceful dignity, with which she characterized herself. Then followed the nuns, according to their several orders, and last came the novices, carrying lighted tapers, and surrounded by other nuns, who were distinguished by a particular habit.

Having reached a part of the church appropriated for their reception, they arranged themselves in order. Vivaldi with a palpitating heart enquired the occasion of this ceremony, and was told that a nun was going to be professed.

"You are informed, no doubt, brother," added the prior who gave him this intelligence, "that on the morning of our high festival, our *lady's* day, it is usual for such as devote themselves to heaven, to receive the veil. Stand by a while, and you will see the ceremony."

"What is the name of the novice who is now to receive it?" said Vivaldi, in a voice whose tremulous accents betrayed his emotion.

The friar glanced an eye of scrutiny upon him, as he replied, "I know not her name, but if you will step a little this way, I will point her out to you."

Vivaldi, drawing his hood over his face, obeyed in silence.

"It is she on the right of the abbess," said the stranger, "who leans on the arm of a nun, she is covered with a white veil, and is taller than her companions."

Vivaldi observed her with a fearful eye, and though he did not recognise the person of Ellena, yet, whether it was that his fancy was possessed with her image, or that there was truth in his surmise, he thought he perceived a resemblance of her. He enquired how long the novice had resided in the convent, and many other particulars, to which the stranger either could not or dared not reply.

With what anxious solicitude did Vivaldi endeavour to look through the veils of the several nuns in search of Ellena, whom he believed the barbarous policy of his mother might already have devoted to the cloister! With a solicitude still stronger, he tried to catch a glimpse of the features of the novices, but their faces were shaded by hoods, and their white veils, though thrown half back, were disposed in such artful folds that they concealed them from observation, as effectually as did the pendant lawn the features of the nuns.

The ceremony began with the exhortation of the *Father-Abbot*, delivered with solemn energy; then the novice kneeling before him, made her profession, for which Vivaldi listened with intense attention, but it was delivered in such low and trembling accents, that he could not ascertain even the tone. But during the anthem that mingled with the ensuing part of the service, he thought he distinguished the voice of Ellena, that touching and well-known voice, which in the church of San Lorenzo had first attracted his attention. He listened, scarcely daring to draw breath, lest he should lose a note; and again he fancied her voice spoke in a part of the plaintive response delivered by the nuns.

Vivaldi endeavoured to command his emotion, and to await with patience some further unfolding of the truth; but when the priest prepared to withdraw the white veil from the face of the novice, and throw the black one over her, a dreadful expectation that she was Ellena seized him, and he with difficulty forbore stepping forward and discovering himself on the instant.

The veil was at length withdrawn, and a very lovely face appeared, but not Ellena's. Vivaldi breathed again, and waited with tolerable composure for the conclusion of the ceremony; till, in the solemn strain that followed the putting on of the black veil, he heard again the voice, which he was now

convinced was her's. Its accents were low, and mournful, and tremulous, yet his heart acknowledged instantaneously their magic influence.

When this ceremony had concluded, another began; and he was told it was that of a noviciation. A young woman, supported by two nuns, advanced to the altar, and Vivaldi thought he beheld Ellena. The priest was beginning the customary exhortation, when she lifted her half-veil, and, shewing a countenance where meek sorrow was mingled with heavenly sweetness, raised her blue eyes, all bathed in tears, and waved her hand as if she would have spoken.—It was Ellena herself.

The priest attempted to proceed.

"I protest in the presence of this congregation," said she solemnly, "that I am brought hither to pronounce vows which my heart disclaims. I protest"——

A confusion of voices interrupted her, and at the same instant she perceived Vivaldi rushing towards the altar. Ellena gazed for a moment, and then, stretching forth her supplicating hands towards him, closed her eyes, and sunk into the arms of some persons round her, who vainly endeavoured to prevent him from approaching and assisting her. The anguish, with which he bent over her lifeless form, and called upon her name, excited the commiseration even of the nuns, and especially of Olivia, who was most assiduous in efforts to revive her young friend.

When Ellena unclosed her eyes, and looking up, once more beheld Vivaldi, the expression, with which she regarded him, told that her heart was unchanged, and that she was unconscious of the miseries of imprisonment while he was with her. She desired to withdraw, and, assisted by Vivaldi and Olivia, was leaving the church, when the abbess ordered that she should be attended by the nuns only; and, retiring from the altar, she gave directions that the young stranger should be conducted to the parlour of the convent.

Vivaldi, though he refused to obey an imperious command, yielded to the entreaties of Ellena, and to the gentle remonstrances of Olivia; and, bidding Ellena farewell for a while, he repaired to the parlour of the abbess. He was

not without some hope of awakening her to a sense of justice, or of pity; but he found that her notions of right were inexorably against him, and that pride and resentment usurped the influence of every other feeling. She began her lecture with expressing the warm friendship she had so long cherished for the Marchesa, proceeded to lament that the son of a friend, whom she so highly esteemed, should have forgotten his duty to his parents, and the observance due to the dignity of his house, so far as to seek connection with a person of Ellena di Rosalba's inferior station; and concluded with a severe reprimand for having disturbed the tranquillity of her convent and the decorum of the church by his intrusion.

Vivaldi listened with submitting patience to this mention of morals and decorum from a person, who, with the most perfect self-applause, was violating some of the plainest obligations of humanity and justice; who had conspired to tear an orphan from her home, and who designed to deprive her for life of liberty, with all the blessings it inherits. But, when she proceeded to speak of Ellena with the caustic of severe reprobation, and to hint at the punishment, which her public rejection of the vows had incurred, the patience of Vivaldi submitted no longer; indignation and contempt rose high against the Superior, and he exhibited a portrait of herself in the strong colours of truth. But the mind, which compassion could not persuade, reason could not appal; selfishness had hardened it alike to the influence of each; her pride only was affected, and she retaliated the mortification she suffered by menace and denunciation.

Vivaldi, on quitting her apartment, had no other resource than an application to the *Abate*, whose influence, at least, if not his authority, might assuage the severity of her power. In this Abate, a mildness of temper, and a gentleness of manner were qualities of less value than is usually and deservedly imputed to them; for, being connected with feebleness of mind, they were but the pleasing merits of easy times, which in an hour of difficulty never assumed the character of virtues, by inducing him to serve those, for whom he might feel. And thus, with a temper and disposition directly opposite to those of the severe and violent abbess, he was equally selfish, and almost equally culpable, since by permitting evil, he was nearly as injurious in his conduct as those who planned it. Indolence and timidity, a timidity the consequence of want of clear perception,

deprived him of all energy of character; he was prudent rather than wise, and so fearful of being thought to do wrong that he seldom did right.

To Vivaldi's temperate representations and earnest entreaties that he would exert some authority towards liberating Ellena, he listened with patience; acknowledged the hardships of her situation; lamented the unhappy divisions between Vivaldi and his family, and then declined advancing a single step in so delicate an affair. Signora di Rosalba, he said, was in the care of the abbess, over whom he had no right of control in matters relative to her domestic concerns. Vivaldi then supplicated, that, though he possessed no authority, he would, at least, intercede or remonstrate against so unjust a procedure as that of detaining Ellena a prisoner, and assist in restoring her to the home, from which she had been forcibly carried.

"And this, again," replied the Abate, "does not come within my jurisdiction; and I make it a rule never to encroach upon that of another person."

"And can you endure, holy father," said Vivaldi, "to witness a flagrant act of injustice and not endeavour to counteract it? not even step forward to rescue the victim when you perceive the preparation for the sacrifice?"

"I repeat, that I never interfere with the authority of others," replied the Superior; "having asserted my own, I yield to them in their sphere, the obedience which I require in mine."

"Is power then," said Vivaldi, "the infallible test of justice? Is it morality to obey where the command is criminal? The whole world have a claim upon the fortitude, the active fortitude of those who are placed as you are, between the alternative of confirming a wrong by your consent, or preventing it by your resistance. Would that your heart expanded towards that world, reverend father!"

"Would that the whole world were wrong that you might have the glory of setting it right!" said the Abate, smiling. "Young man! you are an enthusiast, and I pardon you. You are a knight of chivalry, who would go

about the earth fighting with every body by way of proving your right to do good; it is unfortunate that you are born somewhat too late."

"Enthusiasm in the cause of humanity"— said Vivaldi, but he checked himself; and despairing of touching a heart so hardened by selfish prudence, and indignant at beholding an apathy so vicious in its consequence, he left the Abate without other effort. He perceived that he must now have recourse to further stratagem, a recourse which his frank and noble mind detested, but he had already tried, without success, every other possibility of rescuing the innocent victim of the Marchesa's prejudice and pride.

Ellena meanwhile had retired to her cell, agitated by a variety of considerations, and contrary emotions, of which, however, those of joy and tenderness were long predominant. Then came anxiety, apprehension, pride, and doubt, to divide and torture her heart. It was true that Vivaldi had discovered her prison, but, if it were possible, that he could release her, she must consent to quit it with him; a step from which a mind so tremblingly jealous of propriety as hers, recoiled with alarm, though it would deliver her from captivity. And how, when she considered the haughty character of the Marchese di Vivaldi, the imperious and vindictive nature of the Marchesa, and, still more, their united repugnance to a connection with her, how could she endure to think, even for a moment, of intruding herself into such a family! Pride, delicacy, good sense seemed to warn her against a conduct so humiliating and vexatious in its consequences, and to exhort her to preserve her own dignity by independence; but the esteem, the friendship, the tender affection, which she had cherished for Vivaldi, made her pause, and shrink with emotions, of little less than horror, from the eternal renunciation, which so dignified a choice required. Though the encouragement, which her deceased relative had given to this attachment, seemed to impart to it a sacred character, that considerably soothed the alarmed delicacy of Ellena, the approbation thus implied, had no power to silence her own objections, and she would have regretted the mistaken zeal, which had contributed to lead her into the present distressing situation, had she revered the memory of her aunt, or loved Vivaldi, less. Still, however, the joy, which his presence had occasioned, and which the consciousness that he was still near her had prolonged, was not subdued, though it was frequently obscured, by such anxious considerations. With jealous and indiscreet solicitude, she now

recollected every look, and the accent of every word, which had told that his affection was undiminished, thus seeking, with inconsistent zeal, for a conviction of the very tenderness, which but a moment before she had thought it would be prudent to lament, and almost necessary to renounce.

She awaited with extreme anxiety the appearance of Olivia, who might probably know the result of Vivaldi's conference with the abbess, and whether he was yet in the convent.

In the evening Olivia came, a messenger of evil; and Ellena, informed of the conduct of the abbess, and the consequent departure of Vivaldi, perceived all her courage, and all the half-formed resolutions, which a consideration of his family had suggested, falter and expire. Sensible only of grief and despondency, she ascertained, for the first time, the extent of her affection and the severity of her situation. She perceived, also, that the injustice, which his family had exercised towards her, absolved her from all consideration of their displeasure, otherwise than as it might affect herself; but this was a conviction, which it were now probably useless to admit.

Olivia not only expressed the tenderest interest in her welfare, but seemed deeply affected with her situation; and, whether it was that the nun's misfortunes bore some resemblance to Ellena's, or from whatever cause, it is remarkable that her eyes were often filled with tears, while she regarded her young friend, and she betrayed so much emotion that Ellena noticed it with surprise. She was, however, too delicate to hint any curiosity on the subject; and too much engaged by a nearer interest, to dwell long upon the circumstance.

When Olivia withdrew, Ellena retired to her turret, to soothe her spirits with a view of serene and majestic nature, a recourse which seldom failed to elevate her mind and soften the asperities of affliction. It was to her like sweet and solemn music, breathing peace over the soul—like the oaten stop of Milton's Spirit,

"Who with his soft pipe, and smooth-dittied song,
Well knew to still the wild winds when they roar
And hush the waving woods."

While she sat before a window, observing the evening light beaming up the valley, and touching all the distant mountains with misty purple, a reed as sweet, though not as fanciful, sounded from among the rocks below. The instrument and the character of the strain were such as she had been unaccustomed to hear within the walls of San Stefano, and the tone diffused over her spirits a pleasing melancholy, that rapt all her attention. The liquid cadence, as it trembled and sunk away, seemed to tell the dejection of no vulgar feelings, and the exquisite taste, with which the complaining notes were again swelled, almost convinced her, that the musician was Vivaldi.

On looking from the lattice, she perceived a person perched on a point of the cliff below, whither it appeared almost impracticable for any human step to have climbed, and preserved from the precipice only by some dwarf shrubs that fringed the brow. The twilight did not permit her immediately to ascertain whether it was Vivaldi, and the situation was so dangerous that she hoped it was not he. Her doubts were removed, when, looking up, he perceived Ellena, and she heard his voice.

Vivaldi had learned from a lay-brother of the convent, whom Paulo had bribed, and who, when he worked in the garden, had sometimes seen Ellena at the window, that she frequented this remote turret; and, at the hazard of his life, he had now ventured thither, with a hope of conversing with her.

Ellena, alarmed at his tremendous situation, refused to listen to him, but he would not leave the spot till he had communicated a plan concerted for her escape, and, entreating that she would confide herself to his care, assured her she would be conducted wherever she judged proper. It appeared that the brother had consented to assist his views, in consideration of an ample reward, and to admit him within the walls on this evening, when, in his pilgrim's habit, he might have an opportunity of again seeing Ellena. He conjured her to attend, if possible, in the convent parlour during supper, explaining, in a few words, the motive for this request, and the substance of the following particulars:

The Lady-abbess, in observance of the custom upon high festivals, gave a collation to the *Padre-abate*, and such of the priests as had assisted at the vesper service. A few strangers of distinction and pilgrims were also to partake of the entertainments of this night, among which was included a

concert to be performed by the nuns. At the collation was to be displayed a profusion of delicacies, arranged by the sisters, who had been busy in preparing the pastry and confectionary during several days, and who excelled in these articles no less than in embroidery and other ingenious arts. This supper was to be given in the abbess's outer parlour, while she herself, attended by some nuns of high rank, and a few favourites, was to have a table in the inner apartment, where, separated only by the grate, she could partake of the conversation of the holy fathers. The tables were to be ornamented with artificial flowers, and a variety of other fanciful devices upon which the ingenuity of the sisters had been long employed, who prepared for these festivals with as much vanity, and expected them to dissipate the gloomy monotony of their usual life, with as much eagerness of delight, as a young beauty anticipated a first ball.

On this evening, therefore, every member of the convent would be engaged either by amusement or business, and to Vivaldi, who had been careful to inform himself of these circumstances, it would be easy, with the assistance of the brother, to obtain admittance, and mingle himself among the spectators, disguised in his pilgrim's habit. He entreated, therefore, that Ellena would contrive to be in the abbess's apartment this evening, when he would endeavour to convey to her some further particulars of the plan of escape, and would have mules in waiting at the foot of the mountain, to conduct her to the villa Altieri, or to the neighbouring convent of the Santa della Pietà. Vivaldi secretly hoped that she might be prevailed with to give him her hand on quitting San Stefano, but he forbore to mention this hope, lest it should be mistaken for a condition, and that Ellena might be either reluctant to accept his assistance, or, accepting it, might consider herself bound to grant a hasty consent.

To his mention of escape she listened with varying emotion; at one moment attending to it with hope and joy, as promising her only chance of liberation from an imprisonment, which was probably intended to last for her life, and of restoring her to Vivaldi; and at another, recoiling from the thought of departing with him, while his family was so decidedly averse to their marriage. Thus, unable to form any instant resolution on the subject, and entreating that he would leave his dangerous station before the thickening twilight should encrease the hazard of his descent, Ellena added,

that she would endeavour to obtain admittance to the apartment of the abbess, and to acquaint him with her final determination. Vivaldi understood all the delicacy of her scruples, and though they afflicted him, he honoured the good sense and just pride that suggested them.

He lingered on the rock till the last moments of departing light, and then, with a heart fluttering with hopes and fears, bade Ellena farewell, and descended; while she watched his progress through the silent gloom, faintly distinguishing him gliding along ledges of the precipice, and making his adventurous way from cliff to cliff, till the winding thickets concealed him from her view. Still anxious, she remained at the lattice, but he appeared no more; no voice announced disaster; and, at length, she returned to her cell, to deliberate on the subject of her departure.

Her considerations were interrupted by Olivia, whose manner indicated something extraordinary; the usual tranquillity of her countenance was gone, and an air of grief mingled with apprehension appeared there. Before she spoke, she examined the passage and looked round the cell. "It is as I feared," said she abruptly; "my suspicions are justified, and you, my child, are sacrificed, unless it were possible for you to quit the convent this night."

"What is it that you mean?" said the alarmed Ellena.

"I have just learned," resumed the nun, "that your conduct this morning, which is understood to have thrown a premeditated insult upon the abbess, is to be punished with what they *call* imprisonment; alas! why should I soften the truth,—with what I believe is death itself, for who ever returned alive from that hideous chamber!"

"With death!" said Ellena, aghast; "Oh, heavens! how have I deserved death?"

"That is not the question, my daughter, but how you may avoid it. Within the deepest recesses of our convent, is a stone chamber, secured by doors of iron, to which such of the sisterhood as have been guilty of any heinous offence have, from time to time, been consigned. This condemnation admits of no reprieve; the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness, receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to

prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death. Our records relate several instances of such horrible punishment, which has generally been inflicted upon nuns, who, weary of the life which they have chosen under the first delusions of the imagination, or which they have been compelled to accept by the rigour or avarice of parents, have been detected in escaping from the convent."

The nun paused, but Ellena remaining wrapt in silent thought, she resumed: "One miserable instance of this severity has occurred within my memory. I saw the wretched victim enter that apartment—never more to quit it alive! I saw, also, her poor remains laid at rest in the convent garden! During nearly two years she languished upon a bed of straw, denied even the poor consolation of conversing through the grate with such of the sisters as pitied her; and who of us was there that did not pity her! A severe punishment was threatened to those, who should approach with any compassionate intention; thank God! I incurred it, and I endured it, also, with secret triumph."

A gleam of satisfaction passed over Olivia's countenance as she spoke this; it was the sweetest that Ellena had ever observed there. With a sympathetic emotion, she threw herself on the bosom of the nun, and wept; for some moments they were both silent. Olivia, at length said, "Do you not believe, my child, that the officious and offended abbess will readily seize upon the circumstance of your disobedience, as a pretence for confining you in that fatal chamber? The wishes of the Marchesa will thus surely be accomplished, without the difficulty of exacting your obedience to the vows. Alas! I have received proof too absolute of her intention, and that to-morrow is assigned as the day of your sacrifice; you may, perhaps, be thankful that the business of the festival has obliged her to defer executing the sentence even till to-morrow."

Ellena replied only with a groan, as her head still drooped upon the shoulder of the nun; she was not now hesitating whether to accept the assistance of Vivaldi, but desponding lest his utmost efforts for her deliverance should be vain.

Olivia, who mistook the cause of her silence, added, "Other hints I could give, which are strong as they are dreadful, but I will forbear. Tell me how it

is possible I may assist you; I am willing to incur a second punishment, in endeavouring to relieve a second sufferer."

Ellena's tears flowed fast at this new instance of the nun's generosity. "But if they should discover you in assisting me to leave the convent," she said, in a voice convulsed by her gratitude,— "O! if they should discover you!"——

"I can ascertain the punishment," Olivia replied with firmness, "and do not fear to meet it."

"How nobly generous this is!" said the weeping Ellena; "I ought not to suffer you to be thus careless of yourself!"

"My conduct is not wholly disinterested," the nun modestly replied; "for I think I could endure any punishment with more fortitude than the sickening anguish of beholding such suffering as I have witnessed. What are bodily pains in comparison with the subtle, the exquisite tortures of the mind! Heaven knows I can support my own afflictions, but not the view of those of others when they are excessive. The instruments of torture I believe I could endure, if my spirit was invigorated with the consciousness of a generous purpose; but pity touches upon a nerve that vibrates instantly to the heart, and subdues resistance. Yes, my child, the agony of pity is keener than any other, except that of remorse, and even in remorse, it is, perhaps, the mingling unavailing pity, that points the sting. But, while I am indulging this egotism, I am, perhaps, increasing your danger of the suffering I deprecate."

Ellena, thus encouraged by the generous sympathy of Olivia, mentioned Vivaldi's purposed visit of this evening; and consulted with her on the probability of procuring admittance for herself to the abbess's parlour. Reanimated by this intelligence, Olivia advised her to repair not only to the supper-room, but to attend the previous concert, to which several strangers would be admitted, among whom might probably be Vivaldi. When to this, Ellena objected her dread of the abbess's observation, and of the immediate seclusion that would follow, Olivia soothed her fears of discovery, by offering her the disguise of a nun's veil, and promising not only to conduct

her to the apartment, but to afford her every possible assistance towards her escape.

"Among the crowd of nuns, who will attend in that spacious apartment," Olivia added, "it is improbable you would be distinguished, even if the sisters were less occupied by amusement, and the abbess were at leisure to scrutinize. As it is, you will hazard little danger of discovery; the Superior, if she thinks of you at all, will believe that you are still a prisoner in your cell, but this is an evening of too much importance to her vanity, for any consideration, distinct from that emotion, to divide her attention. Let hope, therefore, support you, my child, and do you prepare a few lines to acquaint Vivaldi with your consent to his proposal, and with the urgency of your circumstances; you may, perhaps, find an opportunity of conveying them through the grate."

They were still conversing on this subject, when a particular chime sounded, which Olivia said summoned the nuns to the concert-room; and she immediately hastened for a black veil, while Ellena wrote the few lines that were necessary for Vivaldi.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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Period spelling has been generally retained; however, where the text contained a word spelt in two different ways, the more familiar variant has been preferred. Hyphenation is inconsistent throughout.

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