

M. Thompson

Z. O F L O Y A ;

OR,

THE MOOR.

A ROMANCE

OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

CHARLOTTE DACRE,

BETTER KNOWN AS

ROSA MATILDA,

AUTHOR OF THE NUN OF ST. OMERS, HOURS OF SOLITUDE, &c.

VOL. III.

These shall the fury passions tear——

COLLINS.

——Let me not let pass—

Occasion which now smiles, behold alone

The woman, opportune to all attempts——

MILTON.

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Z O F L O Y A ;

OR,

THE MOOR.

CHAP. XXVI.

THIS dreadful and singular event spread consternation throughout the castle. Victoria alone could have attempted to explain it, and she carefully treasured in her bosom the ideas that presented themselves.

“ Oh ! most exquisite Zofloya,” exclaimed she, in the solitude of her chamber, “ well mightest thou say, that *those* who

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who

who beheld the body of the Conte, would be enabled to ascertain the cause of his death, while already thou had'st resolved that it should never more be seen ! No— I will doubt thee no longer, powerful Moor, nor thy care for my safety, for well do I now perceive thy infinite depth, and wisdom.”

But after the first emotions of joy at her narrow escape had subsided, she began to marvel and reflect upon the sudden and precipitate disappearance of the body. Whither, in that short space, could he have conveyed it? perhaps into some bottomless abyss, where the foaming torrent had embraced, and hid it ever more !— If not so—how then had he disposed of it?—no matter how, so that never more it revisited the light. “ Adieu then, for the present, to vain and useless surmises,” thought she, “ I will rest content with
with

with the effect that has been produced.

Events, however terrible and strange at the moment of their occurrence, lose by degrees their impression over the mind, for the ideas failing to identify the point at which they aim, relax their attempts, and revert to the consideration of objects more familiar to them.—Thus, after a certain lapse of time, though surprize and regret continued frequently to obtrude on the minds of all, strong anxiety and horror gradually, tho' slowly diminished.—A gloomy calm was perceptible throughout the house, as though every one bore about him the *memory* of some dreadful calamity, which time had ameliorated into a chastened grief.

On the heart of Henriquez had the melancholy death of his brother, and its

accompanying circumstances sunk the deepest;—the castle, where so late he had resided, became a gloomy memento in his sight, and the presence of Victoria daily and unaccountably more displeasing to him.—He meditated therefore, to abandon the former, and to quit Italy altogether for some distant clime, where the memory of his misfortunes should no more, in a thousand eloquent and mournful shapes, continue to haunt him.

The time, however, was now fast approaching, when the innocent Lilla would no longer consider it a point of religion or duty to hesitate at becoming his wife.—Till this period, therefore, he decided to remain stationary, to smother the repugnant feelings of his bosom; for he reflected, that unless he remained under the same roof with Victoria, he should be debarred the society of his Lilla, well
 knowing

knowing that her unaffected virtue and sense of decorum would deem it improper to be elsewhere so perpetually with him.

Mean time, the passion of Victoria having now, as she conceived, no further obstacles to surmount, grew to an unrestrained height.—She sought, by every wily blandishment and seduction, to attract the attention of Henriquez.—But vain were her artifices, for his soul was enslaved by the simplicity and innocence of the youthful Lilla; all other women were detestable in his sight—her trembling delicacy, her gentle sweetness, her sylph-like fragile form, were to him incomparable, and being familiarized to the observance of such soft loveliness, the rest of her sex, when placed beside her, appeared, in his idea, like beings of a different order. But, above all, Victoria he viewed with almost absolute dislike;—her

strong though noble features, her dignified carriage, her authoritative tone—her boldness, her insensibility, her violence, all struck him with instinctive horror; so utterly opposite to the gentle Lilla, that when, with an assumed softness she deigned to caress her, he almost trembled for her tender life, and compared the picture in his mind, to the snowy dove fondled by the ravenous vulture.

At length, with infinite reluctance, and to the bitter mortification of her pride, Victoria acknowledged to herself, that she was not only indifferent to Henriquez, but despised and hated by him.—At this bitter conviction her brain whirled—“Yes, he detests me,” she exclaimed in an agony of rage—“but he shall, he must be mine—his boyish caprice shall nought avail him;—ah!” she continued, relapsing into softness—“I will throw myself, my
fortune,

fortune, into his arms,—I will again sacrifice my liberty, and offer to become his wife.”

Amidst these reflections the haughty Victoria had scarce allowed herself to believe, that the attachment of Henriquez to Lilla was the cause of his indifference to her.—She resolved to be at once explicit therefore—to make to Henriquez a proposal which she imagined he would not dream of refusing, and to seize the earliest opportunity of doing so.

As if to coincide with her views, Lilla on the same evening, complaining of indisposition, retired early; and Henriquez who felt no desire to remain alone with a woman whom he viewed with sentiments of disgust, arose a few moments after Lilla had quitted the apartment, and bowing distantly to Victoria, was departing.

“ Stay, Henriquez,” cried the determined Victoria, starting from her seat—
“ I desire a few words with you.”

Henriquez bowed, and arrested his steps.

“ Be seated—I implore you.”

“ Have you any thing material to communicate, Signora?” inquired Henriquez, unable to conceal his reluctance to her society,—“ or will not to-morrow answer equally well?”

“ No,” replied Victoria, in an impressive accent, “ I request you, Henriquez, to be seated.”

Unwillingly Henriquez resumed his seat, when the frantic woman, incapable of restraining her emotion, cast herself at
his

his feet, and, seizing his hand—"Henri-quez!" she cried, "Henriquez, my soul adores you!—behold me at your feet,—I offer you all,—all that I possess—my hand in marriage—grant me but your love!"

"Signora," answered Henriquez, with assumed composure, disengaging himself from her grasp,—“as my brother’s wife, I tolerated, but never approved you,—since his *death*, my feelings towards you have acquired a stronger cast,—I now,” he cried, forgetting in a moment his attempt at coolness—“I now hate and despise you!—Wretch! worthless and insensible as you are, to forget so soon a husband that adored you, and doubly a wretch to confess to me your unhallowed thoughts, whose soul you know to be irrevocably another’s!”

Victoria sprang from her abject posture, the feelings which swayed her heart had been irrepressible; she had not intended to be thus premature in her avowal of love, but the violence of passion threw her off her guard!—now the emotions excited by the reply of Henriquez were equally unconquerable.

“Miserable youth!” she cried—“it is enough—your insulting coolness, your bitter reproaches, I could have borne,—have borne, proud as I am, with patience!—but that you should dare, without trembling, to acknowledge in my presence, your love for another”——

“Love!” interrupted Henriquez with enthusiasm —“Love! — say, adoration, idolatry!—by heaven my Lilla is a gem too bright to shed her pure rays beneath this contaminated roof,—oh! wretched
Victoria,”

Victoria," he continued, with a bitter smile, "and could *you* attempt to talk of love to the lover of *Lilla*?"——

Can language describe the feelings of Victoria? Her brain worked with wildest rage, producing almost instant madness!— Yet revenge, thirsting revenge, was the predominant sensation of her soul, swallowing up every other!—by an effort, and self-command, scarcely credible, she reined in the tumult of her passion, and forebore to recriminate upon Henriquez. —What! drive him from the castle, and lose thereby the power of sacrificing the abhorred *Lilla* to her vengeance, the pigmy, the immaterial speck, that she had deemed unworthy of a thought! To lose too, for ever, the possibility of softening, (perhaps even yet subduing) the stern insensibility of Henriquez?—No—the sacrifice to frantic rage would have

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been

been too great!—Her decision was prompt, and instantaneous.—Covering her face with her hands, she sunk into a chair, and audibly sobbed!

A reply so different to what he had taught himself to expect, knowing the violence of her nature, at once surprised and affected Henriquez.—In a moment he regretted the asperity with which he had spoken, and the reflection obtruded on his mind, that the female whose only fault towards him was the love which she bore him, merited at least a milder return; he hesitated an instant—the goodness of his heart prevailed, and he approached the wily Victoria.

“ I would offer, Signora,” in a gentle voice he said, (taking her hand)—
 “ some apology for my warmth—I meant not,—I assure you, I meant not to be
 severe,—

severe,—will you then,” he added, “pardon me, and accept this acknowledgment of my error?”

“Oh, Henriquez!” replied Victoria, redoubling her tears, “it is I alone who am in fault; at this moment I feel within me the reproaches due to my conduct!—The words which I have suffered to escape my lips, now strike me with shame and horror—scarcely can I account for the impulse that forced me to give them utterance!—Noble and generous as you are, forget, if you possibly can, the phrenzy of the moment, and do not—do not,” she pursued, casting herself again at his feet, “despise me to the degree that I feel you ought.”

Henriquez, infinitely affected, raised in his arms her whom he believed was indeed the abashed and repentant Victoria:

toria: he besought her to be composed, and to forgive him the pain that he had caused her.

“ Ah, all that I ask is *your* forgiveness,” said Victoria, “ and your promise that you will not reflect upon what has passed this night, to my disadvantage. Oh, Henriquez ! I will shew you, that if Victoria yields for a moment to an unpardonable weakness, that she knows how to conquer and become herself again.”

Henriquez assured her, that he would blot from his mind every impression unfavourable to her, and added, that by the immediate revival of noble sentiments in her bosom, and the candour with which she had arraigned herself, she had more than expiated the imperfect part of her conduct.

Victoria

Victoria, affecting to be satisfied, and grateful for this assurance, took, with well-feigned diffidence and humility, the hand of Henriquez, and raising it to her lips, turned from him, as if unable to restrain her emotion, and hurried out of the room.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVII.

REACHING her own apartment, the miserable, because guilty, Victoria threw herself upon her bed, in torture too great to be described. The most infuriate passions, forcibly restrained as they had been in the presence of Henriquez, now agitated her breast, and now found vent in terrible imprecations. She cursed herself, the hour that gave her being, and the mother that had borne her; outraged pride swelled her heart to bursting, and its insatiable fury called aloud for vengeance, for blood, and the blood of the innocent Lilla.

“ Oh! let me at once destroy the
minion,”

minion," she wildly exclaimed, starting from the bed, and snatching from her bosom a dagger, which she usually carried there, "Let me at once, I say, destroy the puny wretch, who dares to call destruction on her head by thus becoming of consequence."

"Not yet, Victoria," said a melodious voice; and before her stood the Moor, who gently seized her uplifted arm, and smiled.

"How came you hither, Zofloya?" she cried—"your voice, nor your smile, nor your promises, have power to calm me now."

"Beautiful Victoria," he answered, "I come to counsel and to sooth."

"Thou canst do neither, Moor, for
Henriquez

Henriquez hates me;—canst thou change the genuine sentiments of the heart?—Canst thou of hatred make love?”

“ I can do much, Victoria, if you will confide in me.”

“ But thou art not a sorcerer !”

“ It is possible to have a knowledge of physic, and yet not be a physician.”

“ Oh, yes, thou hast infinite knowledge, Zofloya—every day proves it beyond doubt—but thou canst not—no, thou canst not charm love for *me* into the heart that loves another.”

“ Not readily, while that other intervenes, fair Victoria.”

“ Canst thou assist me?—Say at once, canst thou assist me, Zofloya?”

Lovely

“Lovely Victoria!”

The silver tones of the Moor penetrated to the very heart of Victoria; his wily accent was piteously tender; tears, spontaneous tears, rushed into her eyes, and involuntarily she threw herself into his arms, which opened to receive her, and wept upon his bosom. Zofloya gently pressed her in his arms.

The delusion of Victoria continued but a few moments: she hastily disengaged herself from his embrace, and hesitatingly said—

“’Tis strange, Zofloya!—I know not why, but thou soothest me ever, and attractest me irresistibly.—I do, indeed, believe,” she added, with an earnest smile, “that thou art truly a sorcerer!”

The

The Moor smiled also, and bent, as in acknowledgment, his graceful form ;—fascination dwelt in every movement of this singular being, and in nothing was it more evinced, than in the power he held over the proud heart of Victoria.

“ Incomparable and lovely mistress,” he cried, falling upon one knee, and laying his hand upon his heart, “ Deign to inform the most lowly of your slaves, what you would require of him ? and, having said, trust to him for the performance.”

“ Rise then, Zofloya,” cried Victoria, flattered and delighted by a condescension of late somewhat unusual with the Moor—
“ Rise and tell me—ah ! canst thou not divine, Zofloya ?—Lilla—Lilla !—

“ The orphan Lilla stands between you and your love ;—is it not so ?”

“ Yes,

“ Yes, yes.”

“ And you would have her”——

“ Die!” cried Victoria, relapsing into phrenzy.

“ Calm, calm,” in gentle accents said the Moor.—“ The orphan Lilla must not die, Signora.”

“ No!”——

“ No—for it would excite instant suspicion, and then farewell to all your hopes—you forget, fair Victoria, that already”——

“ True, true,” hastily returned Victoria; “ but what then?”

“ It must not be.”

“ Oh,

“ Oh, madness!—it shall, it must—without your aid, then.”

Zofloya looked stern.—“ Be it so then, Signora,” he cried, and moved with dignity towards the door.

“ Oh stay, inconsistent being!” cried Victoria, “ and forgive my despair.”

“ Despair!—despair when *I* have bid you hope—you must confide.”

“ Oh, be at once explicit, and tell me”—

“ Well, then, Lilla must not die; but she shall be at your disposal, and you may inflict on her such misery, that”—

“ Such torments!” interrupted Victoria, with demoniac sparkling eyes—“ Yes, such
such

such torments, as shall pay for those she has inflicted upon me!—But when, oh when, Zofloya, may this be?”

“ At to-morrow’s dawn be in the forest; proceed through the narrow break on your left, ascend the steep rock which overlooks the wood, making it appear an inconsiderable dell; and when you have gained the summit, remain, and await my coming.”

“ I will be punctual—but Lilla.”

“ She shall be with me—enquire no further, Victoria.”

Joy and abominable triumph filled the breast of Victoria; well was she now versed, and well could decypher the ambiguous answers of the Moor.

“ Zofloya,”

“Zofloya,” she cried, in a voice of exultation, “excellent Zofloya, say how can I repay you?” and eagerly taking a brilliant of immense value from her finger, she added, “accept this, and wear it for my sake, but wear it concealed in your bosom.”

With a proud and dignified air, Zofloya put back with his hand the offered gift.

“Keep your diamond, Signora; the riches of the world are valueless to me—my aim is higher.”

“And what is it you aim at, then, Zofloya?”

“*Your friendship—your trust—your confidence—yourself, Signora!*”

Victoria smiled at what she thought the gallantry

gallantry of the Moor; the Moor smiled likewise, but with a different air, and bowing respectfully to Victoria as he advanced towards the door, he said, "Farewell, Signora, for the present; watch for the first streak of the morning."

"Sleep shall not visit my eyes, I will gaze upon the firmament, and at the last fading of the stars, will leave my chamber."

The Moor waved gracefully his hand, and retired.

No sooner was he gone, than Victoria extinguished the lamp, that no artificial light might render unobserved the first approach of dawn. Then opening the window, she seated herself beside it, and gazed with unblushing front upon the serene majesty of the cloudless heavens.

Patiently did she endure the loss of sleep, patiently attend, like the blood-thirsty murderer, who rendered invulnerable to external ills by the strong nerved fierceness of his mind, lurks ambushed through the lonely night for the unconscious footstep of his destined victim; so did she wake, so watch, anticipating alternately the gratification of her revenge, and scenes of future bliss with the beloved Henriquez. Compelled at length with bitter reluctance to view the blooming Lilla, as the powerful shield presumptuously opposed to her facinations, she determined, while pride and hatred nerved anew her heart, to inflict upon the innocent girl, all that malice or that vengeance could invent.

Meanwhile, Henriquez, being left to the solitude of his reflections, reviewed the conduct of Victoria. He began to
fear,

fear he had ultimately treated her with too great lenity and forbearance; disgust rose in his soul against her; he compared to her shameless and dishonorable confession, the blushing sweetness, the retiring modesty of the young orphan, Lilla. Ardently he longed for the hour, in which with propriety he could withdraw her from the tainted roof, under which, still rich in native purity, she continued to breathe. Joy and complacent delight diffused itself through his bosom, when he reflected that a few days only need now elapse, ere the pious scruples of his innocent love would be at an end; he might then call her legally and for ever his. The probationary year was nearly expired; he resolved in the moment of its completion, to claim her for his bride, and depart, not only from the spot where he had lost an only and idolized brother, but from his native land, for

ever, the very atmosphere of which had now become obnoxious to him. Now his mind wandered into anticipated scenes of happiness ; he beheld himself the father of a blooming progeny, the delighted husband of a beautiful wife, and regret passed through his mind, when he reflected that his lost Berenza would never make one among the blissful group, enjoying a felicity he would have delighted to contemplate.

Ah, miserable Henriquez ! little didst thou dream that these thy fairy visions of love and happiness were never, never to be realised, but to end, on the contrary, in reduplicated horror and despair.

Victoria remained sitting at the window, immersed in gloomy meditation, till the opening horizon began to shew faint streaks
of

of light between clouds of darker hue, and the blue mists of the distant waters slowly to dissipate. The stars became fainter, and a fresher breeze was wafted from the east, when intent on evil, she stole with cautious footsteps from her chamber. Now with beating heart she gained the court, and passed into the forest, hastening onwards to the path described by Zofloya; the deep gloom rendered almost imperious the lonely way, and the break on the left, to which he had alluded; she ascertained it however, and as she proceeded, a deeper gloom informed her, that she approached the frowning rock, which cast its dark shadow around.—Though never before had she wandered in the light of day so far, she trusted implicitly to the directions of Zofloya, and prepared to ascend the rocky acclivity.

Morning gradually advanced, but surrounding

rounding objects were still rendered indistinct by a delusive mist:—she proceeded a considerable way up the rock, when the loud solemn roar of the foaming cataract, dashing from a fissure on the opposite side into the precipice beneath, broke upon her ear.—She fearlessly advanced, however, till she gained the summit, while louder and more stunning became the angry sound of the waters. Here, for a while she decided to remain; the dim light even yet afforded no correct view over the lengthened rocks; mountains of mist appeared rising above each other, till the last ridge dimly stretched its gigantic outline upon the distant horizon, shewing no world beyond.

The stars had all retired, as though shrinking abashed from the view of so much guilt, but lowering clouds obscured the face of heaven, the wind sighed hollow

low among the trees of the forest, and though the lonely solemn grandeur of the scene would have inspired in the breast of virtue deep awe and devotion, directing the soul to inward contemplation, yet was it sad and unwelcome to the evil mind, which, bearing within itself an eternal night, feels troubled and appalled in the gloom of nature.

Such was the state of Victoria—restless and impatient for the encreasing light;—encreasing light came on, she arose from the spot where she had seated herself, and gazed around; on one side, the yet shade-enveloped forest, seeming, as Zofloya had said, an inconsiderable dell, appeared far beneath her feet, while, on the other, a dark blue line of mist gave distant warning of the sky-girt ocean, that in oblique ascent seemed blending with the heavens.

The rock on which she stood being an elevated point, had caught the first light of the morning, and to herself she was fully revealed; objects below were still partially engloomed, and eagerly she strained her anxious eyes, to catch the first glimpse of what alone could interest her attention. Every moment which elapsed, appeared to her sanguinary soul like so much time robbed her of her revenge; but at length, to her infinite joy, the sight so ardently desired greeted her view. Hastening onwards with rapid strides along the winding path she had so lately traversed, she beheld the gigantic figure of the Moor, gigantic even from the diminishing points of height and distance.—Hanging lifeless over his shoulder, encircled by his nervous arms, he bore the once blooming Lilla—blooming now no longer, but paler than the white rose teint!—

Swiftly

Swiftly he approached, and careless of his burthen, bounded like lightning up the rugged rock.—Victoria contemplated, with joyous exultation, the helpless and devoted orphan:—her fragile form lay nerveless, her snow-white arms, bare nearly to the shoulder (for a thin night-dress alone covered her,) hung down over the back of the Moor; her feet and legs resembling sculptured alabaster, were likewise bare, her languid head drooped insensible, while the long flaxen tresses, escaping from the net which had enveloped them, now partly shaded her ashy cheek, and now streamed in dishevelled luxuriance on the breeze.

“ Shall we hurl her down the precipice?” cried Victoria, while her fierce and jealous eyes wandered over the betrayed graces of her spotless victim.

c 5

“ No!”

“No!” said Zofloya, “follow me.” He darted down a rugged path on the opposite side of the rock, and, though not with equal swiftness, Victoria pursued his steps. Now, he hovered on the edge of a precipice, now ascended a mountainous steep; at length in a narrow valley, or rather rocky division, between two mountains of gigantic height, he paused for a moment; an irregular winding path, forming a steep declivity, seemed leading almost to a bottomless abyss. Zofloya, looking at Victoria, observed that she was nearly exhausted with violent exertion to keep him in view.

“Have courage,” he cried, “but a few steps further.”

Victoria endeavoured to smile, and followed him with new alacrity; for the
base

base passions of her soul stung her with a desperate firmness.

Suddenly Zofloya stopped; he laid his still inanimate burthen upon the rugged path, and with apparent ease, though it seemed to require super-human strength, removed what had appeared a projecting point of rock, but which Victoria now perceived to be only a huge and independent fragment of it,—a deep narrow opening presented itself beneath; the Moor, raising Lilla again in his arms, entered the aperture, with an inclination of the body;—Victoria still followed, and soon beheld herself in a spacious cavern, gloomily enlightened alone by the opening at which they had entered.

“Here, Victoria,” cried the Moor, your rival may be at least secured from

the possibility of further molesting you ;— now, if the heart of Henriquez be vincible, there is nothing to impede your happiness.”

“ But,” answered Victoria with a gloomy air, “ while Lilla *lives*, is there not a remote possibility that she might escape hence ?”

“ Behold then,” said the Moor, “ what shall ever remove that vain fear,” lifting from the floor of the cavern, as he spoke, a massy chain, which though fixed to the opposite side of the wall, extended in length to the sloping irregular ascent, leading to the mouth of the aperture.

“ With this ring at the extremity,” he pursued, “ while the girl is still insensible, I will fasten it round her
wrist

wrist; will you then, Victoria, be satisfied?"

"I will endeavor," hesitatingly replied Victoria, still desiring nothing less than the death of one whose beauty was blasting to her sight.

"It shall be done then," said Zofloya, "though wholly unnecessary; for when she returns to the power of thought, how will she be enabled to divine the true situation of the spot in which she will find herself? she will even be ignorant of the means by which she came hither,—as when she awakened, and found me bearing her from her bed,—(for deep in sleep as she was, and smiling, at her dreams of love no doubt, I seized her in my arms, to fulfil my promise to you)—then, vainly struggling within my grasp, she fainted, and has since remained insensible.—How then,

then, unassisted, incredulous fearful Victoria, could she trace out a path which she had not even power to observe? Further precautions than leaving her here are, be assured, unnecessary."

"Still I would wish the chain," muttered Victoria;—"if unnecessary as a precaution, it may have its advantage as a punishment;—come, hasten good Zofloya," she continued, putting in his hand the fair and lifeless hand of Lilla—"let us depart from hence, before our absence is discovered."

Zofloya, smiling with a scornful archness, retained the hand of Lilla in one hand, and holding the chain in the other, while he looked upon it, said to her in a jeering accent:

"Think you, Victoria, that il Con-
ciglio

ciglio di Deici hath ever confined any of its victims in a spot so remote as this cavern ? this ring, this massy chain, seem almost an evidence that” — —

At that terrible name the colour of Victoria forsook her cheek.

“ Cruel and ill timed remark,” she cried, interrupting the Moor in his malicious insinuation—“ why at this moment allude to subjects irrelevant ?—I pray you fasten the chain, and let us go.”

Still with the smile upon his countenance, he prepared to obey the desire of the terror struck Victoria.—In a moment, the galling chain was clasped around the delicate wrist of Lilla, and Victoria hastening towards the aperture, exclaimed:

“ Let

“ Let us now leave this place—come Zofloya, and precede me hence.”

Suffering the devoted orphan to remain stretched upon the flinty ground, both now prepared to quit the cavern;—already they had gained the ascent, when at that moment the miserable Lilla opened her eyes. Without being fully restored to sense, she perceived with dismay her situation;—she essayed to speak, but could not, and starting up, cast herself despairingly upon her knees, raising her innocent hands in agonized supplication. The motion and noise of the chain caused Victoria to turn her head—she beheld the kneeling defenceless orphan—but she saw only her rival, and pausing while a smile of exulting malice passed over her features, she waved her hand as in derision, and instantly hastened on. As she gained the mouth of the aperture, and retreated
from

from the sight of the wretched girl, who with horror had recognized Victoria, a shrill and piercing scream assailed her ears, but failed to excite in her breast one emotion of pity, for the state in which she had abandoned her.

“ Signora,” observed Zofloya, as again they took their path across the mountains, —“ it is my intention to return hither in the course of this day with provisions for our prisoner, and a mantle of leopard skin which I possess, to serve her at once for bed and covering—I likewise intend”—

“ Methinks you are tender of the upstart,” angrily interrupted Victoria.

“ It is not my intention,” coolly returned the Moor, “ that the death of your rival should be caused by famine—
she

she shall have food, therefore ; for in the spot where she is doomed to breathe the residue of her days, her dissolution will be accelerated in sufficient time."

" Why, there is certainly a pleasure," with a fierce malignant smile, observed Victoria, " in the infliction of prolonged torment ; I therefore approve your arrangement."

" You will sometimes visit the young girl, Signora, will you not ?"

" It will be an exquisite delight that I shall occasionally confer on myself," she replied, " but if Henriquez prove unkind, she shall have no reason to thank me for my visit."

" A just and excellent combination, Signora," satyrically remarked the Moor ;
" if

“ if Henriquez prove unkind, she deservedly suffers, whose memory is the cause; indeed I admire that inflexible spirit you possess, Signora—that unyielding soul, whose thirsty vengeance is never satiated.”

Victoria turned her looks upon the Moor, to read if he spoke earnestly—and she rejoiced to behold, in the lambent fire of his ardent eyes, relentless cruelty and mischievous delight, as he had uttered the last words.

The morning was now far advanced, but no beams of the chearing sun irradiated the heavens—light hovering clouds overspread with gloom the deep recesses of the forest, upon which they almost appeared to descend;—all was awful stillness; not even the carol of a bird broke upon the solemn silence, as though the
eye

eye of morning paused in grief, upon the crimes that had ushered in its dawn.

The Moor spoke not, and Victoria, absorbed in calculations of the conduct most eligible to be pursued for the attainment of her wishes, sought not to draw him into converse.

In this manner they proceeded till they gained the open forest, when Zofloya observed, it would be expedient to separate before they came in view of the castle.—Victoria acquiesced in the propriety of the idea.—She hastened towards the castle, and he struck into an opposite direction.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVIII.

HENRIQUEZ awakened, in the fond hope of beholding her whose lovely image had visited him in his dreams; he hastened to a certain part of the wood, the most open and chearful, where, as frequent, he expected to find her; for Lilla sometimes inhaled the pure breeze from the mountains at an early hour of the morning.

For some time he traversed this favorite spot with patience, conceiving it possible, that, yielding longer than usual to sleep, she had not yet arisen. Yet the morning was already so far advanced, that every moment rendered this idea more improbable; he determined therefore

fore to return into the house—still he beheld no sign of her his soul adored— impatiently he summoned a female servant; and ordered her to repair to the chamber of the Signora Lilla, to awaken her, and inform her of the lateness of the hour. What alarm then must have seized him, when the servant, returning, informed him that the bed of the young Signora was vacant, and appeared to have been so for some time, but that her clothes remained upon the chair beside it, where they seemed to have been cast on the preceding night.

Henriquez, naturally impetuous, made no remark, but, springing from his seat, rushed past the servant, and flew wildly into her chamber, where failing indeed to behold her, with frantic impatience he searched every part of the castle that was habitable, it is needless to say, in vain.

Regard-

Regardless at length of every thing but his lost love, the door of Victoria's chamber meeting his view, he burst it, with the strength of madness, open, and rushed into her apartment.

The artful Victoria, fully prepared for the scene she expected to ensue, had retired to her bed, on returning from the dreadful deed of the early morning, and as Henriquez forced himself into her chamber, appeared to start up alarmed, as if suddenly aroused from a peaceful slumber. Henriquez, regardless of her seeming terror or surprise, flew towards the bed, scarce knowing what he did, and seizing her by the arm, exclaimed, in frantic voice,

“ My Lilla is missing!—tell me, tell me, I implore thee, where she is.”

“ Lilla

“ Lilla missing !” answered Victoria, with assumed surprise—“ impossible, Signor ;” but observing the air with which Henriquez regarded her, she added, “ yet if it be so, would I could indeed inform you where to seek her.”

“ Oh, I shall die mad with agony !” cried Henriquez, “ if my Lilla be not found.”

“ Retire a moment then, Signor Henriquez,” in sympathising accents said Victoria ; “ I will arise and dress myself, and together we will seek our beloved little friend.” Perceiving the despair and anguish of Henriquez painted in his eyes, she continued, “ Be pacified, I entreat you, and rest assured the fair girl cannot be far distant.”

Henriquez, striking his hand upon his forehead,

forehead, darted out of the room, and Victoria hastily rising, and dressing herself, followed him into the apartment where they usually assembled. She proposed to the distracted lover, that they should seek Lilla together. Again every corner of the castle was searched, again the forest was inspected, and resounded to the name of Lilla. In vain, in voice of agony, Henriquez called upon that name. The lovely Innocent, naked, chained, and solitary, was far, far beyond the possibility of replying.

Once more they now entered her chamber ; the clothes she had worn on the preceding day remained untouched upon the spot where she appeared, upon taking them off, to have cast them. The bed clothes seemed dragged on one side, and lay partly upon the floor ; in one place the curtains were twisted and torn, and

the net, which was supposed to have encircled her head at night, lay likewise upon the ground, near the door, as though it had fallen off. Upon this more accurate examination, the despair of Henriquez knew no bounds ; it appeared as if his innocent love had been torn defenceless from her bed ; the terrible idea wound his mind to a pitch of dreadful anguish, and scarcely knowing what he did, he darted like lightning from the house, determined to explore the inmost recesses of the wood, and even to traverse the very mountains in search of her.

After a lapse of many hours, towards the close of the evening, he returned, unable to give the smallest account of where he had been wandering, and with a raging fever burning in his veins. Scarce had he power, distracted as he was, to ask if tidings of his Lilla had yet arrived ;
ere

ere confirmed by a dreadful negative, in his despair he fell senseless upon the earth.

He was immediately conveyed to bed by order of Victoria. Wild delirium seized his brain; his ravings, and frantic struggles to escape from those who surrounded him, were dreadful to hear and to behold. For three weeks his life was despaired of, and the phrenzy which possessed him scarcely left hopes, that even if it were spared, his mind could ever recover its former sanity.

Meanwhile the poor Lilla, the guiltless cause of so much havoc, continued to linger in her dreadful confinement. The Moor Zofloya attended her with un-deviating punctuality, furnished her with provisions, and a mantle of leopard-skin, to preserve her in some degree from the

flinty hardness of the ground, and on which too often she was, in her own despite, compelled to stretch her tender limbs. Yet, in this pitiable situation, she still lived and still cherished faint hope in her spotless bosom, that time would end her miseries, and restore her to the world, and to him she fondly adored. Sometimes she trusted to soften the impenetrable Moor, but hope of that soon faded from her heart when he appeared ; for though he brought her food, he never uttered a single sentence, and if by chance his eye met hers, the gloomy fierceness of its expression damped the assumed courage of her innocent soul, and the little resolution she might have acquired in his absence.

Faint dawnings of returning reason, and reanimated life, began at length to reveal themselves in the unhappy Henriquez.

riquez. During the whole of his illness, Victoria had never quitted his apartment, administering to him with her own hands every medicine that was prescribed, and sleeping by night with one of her attendants in his chamber. When the powers of his mind became sufficiently restored to recognize surrounding objects, her attentions, if possible, redoubled ; and could Henriquez have divested himself of the unconquerable disgust with which he viewed her, her singular tenderness and care towards him must have excited in him the utmost gratitude and regard.

But vain was her solicitude, rather painful than pleasing to him, and the moments in which his wretched mind felt most relief from intolerable anguish, were those very few in which she was absent from him. But his coldness and repugnance

was either unperceived, or unheeded by Victoria — She became daily more passionately tender, more undisguised in her manner towards him, and this as well involuntarily as by the previous decision of her mind. Gloomy melancholy and perpetual abstraction, still, however, possessed the unfortunate Henriquez, when, conceiving that she advanced too slowly, by simply paying the attentions of friendship (so understood at least) to Henriquez, she resolved once more gently to probe the present situation of his heart respecting her; for presumptuously she flattered herself, that her complete devotion to him, throughout a long and dangerous malady, must in some degree have impressed him in her favor.

One evening when she was sitting in his apartment, with the silent meditative Henriquez, he feeling an anxious wish
to

to indulge in solitude the luxury of his grief, gently, though with perfect coolness, observed to her :

“ I do not desire, Signora, thus to be a tax upon your time and your friendship ; I pray you, now that I am so far convalescent, be less punctilious in your attentions towards me, and use some recreation to relieve your mind.”

Determined to let no opportunity pass for touching upon the subject nearest her heart, Victoria replied in a voice of tender reproach.

“ Cruel Henriquez ! is it thus you address one, who lives but in your presence ? forbear, at least forbear to tatint a heart that loves as——”

“ Signora !” with agitation interrupted

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Hen-

Henriquez—"is *this* a time?—is *this* a subject?—I thought it was never more to be renewed."

"I can forbear no longer," exclaimed Victoria, throwing herself at his feet; "Oh, Henriquez! I love—I adore you to madness!—if you have a spark of feeling, of compassion in your soul, reject me not, but pity a wretch who feels it impossible to overcome her fatal passion!"

Henriquez knew not how to reply, for he felt that local circumstances made gratitude due to Victoria; yet her present base avowal, doubly infamous at such a time,—her abject prostration at his feet, excited anew all the gall of his bosom against her, and, spite of every consideration, he found it impossible to treat her with softness. For a
few

few moments, then, he remained in painful silence, but his determination to crush at once those hopes his anguished heart told him he could never realise—shocked too at the cruel indelicacy that so early could attempt to obliterate from his mind all traces of his first and only love—he attempted with impatient gesture to raise her from the ground.—Finding, however, that with still-existing feebleness he was incapable of doing so, he said—

“ Signora, I entreat you to rise from your unworthy situation—till then I cannot say any thing.”

Victoria, in violent agitation, arose.

“ Signora,” then pursued Henriquez,
 “ my heart is still smarting with agony in
 the never to be forgotten affliction of
 D 5 having

having lost the only being for whom I ever considered life desirable!—I feel, Signora, that the anguish of that heart will not long endure; for though my body becomes sane, my feelings convince me, that the wound I have received no time can heal, and that I shall expire, God grant it soon, of a broken heart!——This alone, Signora, you might deem a sufficient reply to the confession with which you have just honored me; but that I may not, by an undue warmth of expression, leave the shadow of a doubt upon your mind respecting my cooler feelings, or my unchangeable sentiments, let me at once add, that were circumstances even *different* from what they are—were my soul even unattached to the pure heavenly memory of my lost Lilla—had I never even *known* her to become attached, still, Signora, the present feelings of my
heart

heart towards you convince me, that even then, I could never have returned your flattering partiality.—I feel that we are dissimilar in every respect; nay more, —whether from a fault of my nature I know not—but I feel likewise, that I could sooner poignard myself,” he added, with an increased elevation of voice, “than bring myself to entertain for *you* the slightest sentiments of tenderness!”

“ ’Tis well!” cried Victoria, in accents scarcely articulate, “ungrateful Henriquez!—you are indeed explicit—farewell!—I will no longer pain you by my presence. Yet, ere I go, call to mind, that your Lilla, still mourned for, is no more!”

“But her *memory* still lives!—still triumphs in my bleeding heart?”—cried the agonized Henriquez, starting from

his seat, and wildly clasping his emaciated hands ; when, overcome by weakness and the conflicting violence of his emotions, he could no longer support himself, but fell enanguished on the floor.

Victoria, returning, flew towards him, and raising him in her arms, laid her head upon his bosom.

“ Ah !” she cried, while the bitter smile of disappointed pride and passion passed over her features—“ Ah, stubborn relentless Henriquez ! thou shalt yet be mine, though death were the consequence !”

“ Death—death *will* be the consequence,” cried the half frantic Henriquez, who had caught her last words ; and perceiving that his head reclined upon her bosom,

bosom, started hastily from the floor, as though he felt the sting of a scorpion !

Victoria, fearful of returning delirium, spoke no more ; but assisting him, against his will, to rise, led him to the side of his bed, and left him to himself.

With perturbed and gloomy spirits, mechanically she bent her steps towards the forest. It was late in the evening ; the sky was overcast with black heavy clouds, but unheeding she pursued her way ; the thunder now rattled over her head, and the blue lightning flashed across her path ; her mind, however, too engaged in its internal warfare, regarded not the warring of the elements, and external circumstances had rarely power to affect her stubborn mind.

“ Ah ! what means *can* I pursue ? ”
she

she cried aloud, certain that no one was nigh, "how satisfy my destroying passion?—Shall all I have done be in vain then, and the sole object of my ardent wishes, the goal of my hopes, elude at last my wild pursuit?—no, no, it must not be!—Yet, that he were mine at last, I would not hesitate to plunge my soul in deepest perdition for his sake! for without him I cannot live—this world would to me be an earthly purgatory——Ah, Zofloya?—why art *thou* not here, to offer thy assistance and advice?—Surely thou wilt not forsake me at the period when *most* I need thy aid— or perhaps even thou art powerless to assist me in this."

As she uttered these words, a soul-enchanting melody rose gradually in swelling notes upon her ear; she paused to listen—her mind became calmed, and
 wrapt

wrapt in attention. She wondered at the magical powers of the invisible musician. In a few minutes it sunk in thrilling cadence, and was heard no more.

The gloom of Victoria's mind began to return, and, angry that any external circumstance should have had power for a moment to interrupt the despondency of her thoughts, she prepared, disgusted as she was at not having met with Zofloya, to leave the forest. As she hastily turned, however, suddenly she encountered him.

“ I am glad, Zofloya, to behold thee,” she cried; “ but how cam'st thou here? for till this moment I have not seen thee.”

“ I have followed you, Signora, for some time past.”

“ And

“ And why would'st not thou overtake me ?”

“ That I might have the frequent, yet ever new delight, fair Victoria, of hearing myself called upon.”

“ *Then* why did'st thou not reveal thyself ?”

“ You were listening, I believe, to the music. Soon as it ceased you turned, and we met;—but say, Victoria, how speed your wishes ?”

“ Alas ! miserable wretch that I am,” returned Victoria—“ much I fear, success will never be mine—Henriquez loaths me. This evening only, did he formally, finally, and coolly reject me.”

“ And his excuse for refusing the loveliest of her sex ?”——

“ Love,

“ Love, and ceaseless devotion to the memory of his Lilla;—yet, has he insultingly added, that had a Lilla never existed, Victoria could have had no power to excite his love.”

“ Most insensible idiot!” indignantly cried the Moor. “ He would have loved you, I presume, had you chanced to have *resembled* Lilla.”

“ Ah! would,” cried the degenerate Victoria, “ would that this unwieldy form could be compressed into the fairy delicacy of hers, these bold masculine features assume the likeness of her baby face!—Ah! what would I not submit to, to gain but one look of love from the pitiless Henriquez.”

“ Beautiful Victoria,” cried the Moor in a soft flattering voice—“ call not that
graceful

graceful form unwieldy, nor to those noble and commanding features offer such indignity.—Eminent loveliness is yours,—could the tasteless Henriquez but *believe* you Lilla” ——— he paused—and Victoria fixed her eager searching eyes upon his countenance;—when finding that Zofloya did not proceed, she exclaimed.

“Speak, speak Zofloya; if you have aught to suggest, withhold it not an instant from me.”

At this moment, a vivid flash of lightning dividing the skies, Zofloya said:

“Let us seek, Signora, a more sheltered spot—the storm appears encreasing.”

“Oh, heed not the storm!—but speak,”
cried

cried Victoria, "if aught you can adduce to sooth the despair of my mind."

"You heed not the lightning, Signora, neither do I—deign then to answer me; is it now your firm belief that Henriquez will never grant you his love?"

"Alas! I have said so," replied Victoria in a gloomy accent.

"And, under these circumstances, do you still love *him*?—still feel him necessary to your happiness?"

"Sooner then resign all hopes of obtaining him, I would plunge this instant a stiletto in my bosom!"

Zofloya remained a few moments silent, and then resumed——

"If

“If you could only obtain his love, and every mark of unrestrained passion, in the delusive belief on his side, that you were his betrothed Lilla, would you upon *such terms* accept”——

“Oh! yes, with joy, with delight,” interrupted Victoria——“say but *how* such blissful delusion could be conveyed to his mind.”

“It grows late Signora—the storm becomes more violent; shall I defer till the morrow what further I might say?”

“If you would have me expire at your feet,” cried Victoria wildly——“attempt to leave me thus unsatisfied——in the very midst too of the faint hope you have suffered to beam upon my soul.—What of the hour?—what of the storm?” she pursued, as the blue lightning conjured trees

trees of fire, and seemed to dance upon the summit of the mountains;—" what even of the dissolution of nature in a moment like this, when my soul pants for——"

" Well then," interrupted the Moor, " noble intrepid Victoria! mark me, for truly do I love, and glory in your firm unshrinking spirit—I possess a drug, the peculiar property of which it is—not to stupify the faculties, or induce actual insanity, but to cause a sort of temporary delirium upon any particular point optionable with those who shall administer this drug;—for instance, a partial mania as it were, as many that are termed mad may be perfectly sane upon every subject but the individual one which caused their madness.—This drug has a singular power of confusing the mind, and of so far deluding it, that those who take it must
ing-

inevitably believe that which it is desired to convey to their minds.—Thus, those who go mad for love, imagine that in every female they see her who caused their madness, involuntarily pursuing and indulging the conceit which is uppermost in their diseased fancies.—You begin, Signora, to obtain some insight into the nature of my plan—the only one that suggests itself at this pressure for the achievement of your love;———Allow me to proceed, however,———this drug which I will give you, being administered to Henriquez, suppose this night, when, with a restrained and tranquil tenderness, such as might befit a sister, you give him ere he sleeps some draught of a refreshing or composing nature. During the night it will have leisure to attain its proposed effect; in the morning, on awakening, he will be furious for Lilla, her image having so possessed him

him during the night, that he will be almost incapable of considering it as the mere delusion of a dream;—in consequence of his possession (strange and unaccountable to those around.) being reported to you, considered by all as a proof of confirmed lunacy, you will instantly hasten to his chamber.—Scarcely will you have entered, ere, flying towards you, he will clasp you with wild fervor in his arms, calling you his adored his long lost Lilla.”

Victoria, unable any longer to restrain her emotions, threw herself upon her knees, and clasped her hands eagerly together.

“ Oh, rapture! oh inexpressible bliss !” she cried—oh, moment for which my heart so long has panted!—shall I then at length be clasped—voluntarily and ardently

dently clasped to the bosom of Henriquez?—oh, enfeebled soul! help me to support the reality of this happiness, which now thou tremblest but to think of!”

“ Reserve your transports, fair Victoria—reserve them for that moment which I swear to you shall arrive; meantime arise, and hear me to an end.”—

“ Henriquez, being fully persuaded, that you are his idolized Lilla, will call you by the name of wife, and believe you such, for his mind will be in that state of anarchy and confusion, he will have no conception of time that is past, nor that his marriage, fixed to have taken place on a given day long since elapsed, has never yet been performed.—He will merely be enabled to combine your appearance with your supposed return, and feel as though after suffering for your loss,
 deep

deep affliction for a certain space of time, you were at length restored to his arms. The elation of his spirits will be great in consequence, his mind will be attuned to love and pleasure, and you must beware of doing aught to thwart or offend him.—Indulge him with wine, enliven him with music, let an elegant banquet be prepared—humour his delusion, assume as much as possible the character of Lilla and of his wife—in all you do be collected, be firm, and love shall be propitious to your wishes.”

Once more, and for the last time, Zofloya drew forth the box, the fatal repository of so much mischief—then placing in the hands of Victoria, a small folded paper containing the philtre to which he had alluded, he bade her, with a serious smile, use well her advantages, and, without

another sentence, turned suddenly away. As he retreated into the thick gloom of the forest, a vivid flash now and then revealed his swift moving figure to her view—now emerging from among the trees—now scaling the pointed rock, and now appearing a figure of fire upon its lofty summit.

Victoria, too inebriated with joy at the prospect she beheld of at length obtaining her dearest wishes, to remark or wonder at the precipitate departure of the Moor, thought only of the exquisite happiness he had promised her, and unmindful of the awe inspiring thunder,—unmindful of the red lightning (which gleaming around at quick repeated intervals, shewed mountains, rocks, and forests of fire,) remained with undefended form, but a heart beating high with the fervor of
hope,

hope, rooted, as it were, to the spot in idolatrous anticipation of future bliss.

At length forcibly rousing herself, she returned to the castle ; on her way she beheld no traces of Zofloya, and concluded (an idea not unfavourable to his character) that he had chosen a night like the present, to wander among the mountains:—She proceeded, however, and entering the castle, gently approached the chamber of Henriquez.—With air humbled and abashed, she presented herself before him, and addressed him in a faltering voice of tender humility.

Again Henriquez became the dupe of her artifice—again he regretted his cruel explicitness, and though he could not help feeling for her a certain portion of involuntary disgust, he received her with

gentle politeness. She, with well-assumed melancholy softness, but secret exultation, busied herself in silence, in little offices about his chamber; these completed and arranged, she proposed to retire for the night.—Henriquez with a grateful bow, as if for her attention, acquiesced in the movement, when Victoria, retreating with an air of mortified resignation towards the door, pretended suddenly to remember that she had not administered to him a certain restorative medicine, which with her own hand she had insisted on presenting to him, every night since his recovery. Hastily returning at the further end of the room, remote from the pensive Henriquez, she prepared his mixture, and infused the drug given her by Zofloya. Approaching him then, with hand rendered unsteady from ravishing anticipation

tion of the effects it would produce, she tendered it to him. Henriquez felt no inclination for his potion, yet unwilling to dismiss Victoria from him with an aching heart, he took it with a soft thankful smile from her hand, and instantly drank it off.—This accomplished so far, with frame still tremulous, and heart wildly beating with the thoughts of the morning, Victoria received back the glass, and bidding him farewell, retired from the chamber.

Henriquez having laid his head upon his pillow, soon fell into a heavy sleep. His mind became gradually disturbed, and the form of Lilla glided in his view; now, as formerly, he beheld her under the same roof with himself, constituting a part of the family,—now she sat beside him—now rambled with him in the fo-

rest, and now bestowed on him her innocent endearments, pure as innocence itself. All night these blissful but deceptive visions haunted his fancy, and when towards morning he awoke, so far was the delusion from vanishing with sleep, that scarce could he restrain himself in his bed, though a confused idea of the earliness of the hour, prevented him from arising.

Every moment, however, his infatuation increased,—he believed that he had been for a long time in a state of mental derangement, that he had only now recovered his senses, and that the image of Lilla being so deeply impressed upon his mind, was owing to his having actually beheld her the day preceding, of which, he even thought he entertained a faint recollection. Unable longer to contend with

with the powerful delusions of his disordered fancy, he started wildly from his bed, and flew towards the well-known spot in the forest, where frequently they had been wont to ramble. Loudly he called upon the name of Lilla, till his voice obtaining involuntary latitude, he repeated that dear loved name briefly, and incessantly, till he panted for breath. Finding at length, that his search was vain, he returned to the castle. Victoria, anxiously upon the watch, heard all his movements; the better to deceive him, she wore a veil of Lilla's, and such parts of her dress as might suit indiscriminately either the one or the other. His conduct had already evinced to her, how powerfully the philtre was acting, but she deemed it expedient to increase his impatience, that

the delusion practised upon him might be the less liable to detection.

She had left her own apartment, and now occupied that of the poor victim, Lilla;—presently she heard the distracted lover pacing to and fro before the well-known door he firmly believed to enclose his mistress. This was the moment for Victoria—she threw open the door of the chamber, as if by chance, and came forth!—Scarcely was she beheld by Henriquez, ere he darted towards her, and seizing her in his arms, exclaimed—

“ Wife of my soul!—my beloved—my darling Lilla!—have I then at length recovered the pride of my life? the darling of my bosom!—her, for whom alone existence is worthy the bearing!—oh, my
heart’s

heart's Lilla, speak to me my love, and tell me whence thou comest, and whither thou hast been!"

Who can describe the delight of Victoria at this proof of the extravagance of Henriquez? she clearly perceived his distraction to be at the height, and that without fear she might humour the deception;—looking tenderly upon him, she cried—

“ Dearest Henriquez be composed— I have indeed never departed from thee since the day of our marriage; but dost thou not remember, on that eve which should have proved so blisful, thou wert attacked by sudden malady, and conveyed to bed?—for nearly three weeks thou wert insensible—nor could'st thou, oh! my love, recognize even thy faithful wife,

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although

although she neither quitted thee by night nor day! But no more of the melancholy past—thou knowest me now;— Ah! little durst I hope, when sad and heart-broken I retired from thee last night, that this morning would bring with it such happiness!”

“ And wert thou with me last night, my Lilla?—Oh! yes—I know thou wert, for now I recollect”—and he pressed his hand upon his burning forehead—“ now I recollect—surely thou hast never once been from me——yet I thought—I thought—fool I must have been!—that thou wert *not* Lilla——but—ah! I must indeed have been severely ill to mistake that heavenly face!”

“ No more, my Henriquez——my husband,” cried the artful Victoria,
but

but let this blisful day be dedicated to love and joy; and although we have never in reality been separated—yet let us celebrate this day, as for our restoration to each other.”

At these words the heart of the poor Henriquez bounded in his bosom,—for his brain was high wrought fired to phrenzy, and madly eager for noisy revelry and delight. He seized the hand of Victoria, and pressing it to his lips, cried out aloud in a mirthful voice,

“ Let us feast, and dance then, on this glorious day, my Lilla!—Let’s have a banquet, let’s have music, and cause the mountains to re-echo!”

“ Yes, yes, my love,” interrupted Victoria, joyfully smiling, we will have a

banquet, and music ; and in these beautiful solitudes, we will be the world to each other."

" Ah !—spoken like my Lilla !" cried Henriquez, " if we were in Venice, we should be tortured with guests,—yet do we need no company, but that of each other,—thou sayest true,—but we must dance then, my Lilla !—Yes," he added with a loud laugh, " we must dance together,—or by heaven I shall die of pent up bliss."

He threw his arm round the waist of the joy-mad Victoria, and, in wild sport, dragged, rather than led, her from the spot.

On this day, high beat her heart—her bosom's fierce triumph flashed from her
eyes,

eyes, as she gazed on the devoted youth, and secretly she swore to bestow upon Zofloya whatever reward he should desire for thus accomplishing her soul's first wish. At once she gave orders for a sumptuous feast, and determined that the day should be dedicated, in compliance to the whim of Henriquez, to mirth and revelry; the most delicious viands, the choicest and most intoxicating wines, constituted the banquet, and as she pressed them upon Henriquez, his blood circulated with wilder rapidity, and the delirium of his brain increased.

The graceful Zofloya, highly skilled in the science of harmony, and seated at the further end of the banqueting room (retired from others, who occasionally joined him, but a host in himself)

self) drew from his harp sounds of such overpowering melody, as by turns reduced the soul into the most delicious softness, or excited it with transport even to madness!—Now drowned in tender tears, the inspired Henriquez listened with restrained enthusiasm,—now raised to distracting rapture, he leaped from his seat, and his strong emotion found no vent but on the beating bosom of Victoria; her he pressed eagerly in his arms, and on that treacherous breast shed tears of the wildest transport.

In his phrenzy he had desired to dance, and Victoria, with the grace of a sylph, flitted in varied movements to the soft music of Zofloya.—Henriquez gazed with ravished eyes, but soon starting up, seized her by the hands, and joined with her
in

in the dance, while Zofloya struck a wilder note to the no longer measured footsteps.

Till a late hour of the evening the pleasures of the banquet were protracted, even till the high-wrought spirits of Henriquez becoming less violent, though his delusion still continued in full force, he said—

“ I am weary, beloved Lilla, of this excess of happiness—my mind feels jaded and confused, as though it stood in need of rest to restore its energies :—let us retire then, my life, and in gentle dreams we may retrace the pleasures of the day.”

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIX.

NEVER had the sun risen on a day of equal horror to that which succeeded the one just described;—scarce had its first beam played into the chamber of Henriquez, ere sleep forsook his eyes, and with that all the traces of the wild delirium that had possessed his brain on the preceding day.—Yes, the delusion was at an end! Scarce could his phrenzied gaze believe the sight which presented itself.—Not the fair Lilla, the betrothed and heart-wedded wife of his bosom, but Victoria! appearing Lilla no longer, blasting his strained eyes with her hated image!—Sleep still overpowered her senses,

senses, unconscious of the horror she inspired—those black fringed eyelids, reposing upon a cheek of dark and animated hue—those raven tresses hanging unconfined—oh, sad! oh, damning proofs!—Where was the fair enamelled cheek—the flaxen ringlets of the delicate Lilla?—*Real* madness now seized the brain of the wretched Henriquez—his eye-balls, bursting almost from their sockets, furiously rolled, till he could gaze no longer.—A frantic cry escaped his lips—it was the inarticulate name of Lilla; as springing, a raging maniac, from the bed, he snatched a sword that hung on the opposite wall, and, dashing its hilt on the floor, threw himself, in desperate agony, upon its point!—Exposed, defenceless as he was, it entered instantly his beating breast, and he sunk to the ground bathed in his purple gore!—

Victoria

Victoria had awakened as he sprang from the bed, but not in time to prevent his dreadful and unthought for deed;— she reached him only as he fell, and, casting herself wildly on her knees beside him, raised his head upon her bosom.

At her touch, strong convulsive shudderings seized the frame of the dying Henriquez; he sought to lift his head from her breast and dash it on the ground, when finding himself incapable of doing so, his agonies encreased ten-fold?—For a moment his closing eyes glared upon her, as in desire of vengeance, but the strong emotion expired with his fleeting breath, and a harrowing smile—a smile of despairing triumph, passed over his waning features, as though he would have said, “Thus do I escape thee for ever, persecuting fiend!” — No word passed his
his

his lips—no sigh heaved his bosom, and, exulting in his agonies, he died!

Thus vanished at once, Victoria beheld her death-reared visions;—frantic rage fired her soul at the thought, and keen disappointment maddened her brain.—Now she clasped her hands, and twisted her fingers in each other, and now tore, by handfuls, the hair from her head, strewing it in agony over the lifeless body of Henriquez. At length her violence subsided; a sudden portentous calm took possession of her mind, and she started on her feet. Wildly she seized her dagger, and, throwing a few clothes over her, revolved in her mind a confusion of horrible intent. Quitting hastily the chamber of despair and death, yet instinctively securing the door after her, she sped her way into the forest.

Scarce

Scarce was she herself conscious of the dire purpose that throbbed at her heart—yet her steps were directed towards that fatal spot, where, in hopeless imprisonment, the miserable Lilla still languished. Now nerved with hellish strength, she ascended the sloping rock ;—now the cataract foamed loud in her ears ; the rapidity of her movements increased, scarcely she felt the rugged ground ; the mountainous steep appeared a level path, and yawning precipices inspired no dread. At length she beheld herself where instinctive rage and terrible despair had led her. Till this moment, never had she visited the defenceless object of her hate and vengeance ; indifferent to her state, whether of death or long-protracted torment, never had she sought of Zofloya aught concerning her, and unnoticed, even on this fatal morn, had she still remained, but
for

for the horrible purpose that had seized her soul—a purpose fitted as the catastrophe to the scenes which had preceded it.— Without pausing to take breath, she rushed hastily down the rugged descent which led into the gloomy dungeon of the orphan Lilla.

The sight that then presented itself nerved, instead of softening, the fierce rage of her bosom. Extended on the flinty ground lay the emaciated and almost expiring girl; her pale cheek reposing upon her snowy arm, barely preserving it from unworthy contact with its rocky pillow. Beside her were some coarse fragments of scanty food. Victoria approaching, raised her dagger, which she firmly grasped, and, seizing her chained wrist, loudly commanded her to rise.— With trembling limbs, the feeble Lilla
en-

endeavored to obey. Over her alabaster shoulders was thrown a mantle of leopard skin, brought her by Zofloya, and her flaxen tresses hung around her in mournful disorder.

Clasping her thin hands upon her polished bosom, and with some of her long tresses, still in pure unaltered modesty, essaying to veil it, she raised her eyes, of heavenly blue, to the stern and frantic countenance of her gloomy persecutor, appearing, in figure, grace, and attitude, a miniature semblance of the Medicean Venus.

“Minion!—accursed child!” wildly shrieked the maddened Victoria, “prepare for death!”—for even in this state of forlornness and woe, the seraph beauty of the orphan Lilla, rising pre-eminently

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to circumstance and situation, excited her jealousy, and renewed her rage.—“ Ah, Victoria!” in mournful accents she cried, “ is it you—you then who would kill me? —I thought, I hoped, (only that your angry looks bid me doubt) that you came to give me liberty.”

“ I do, wretch!—puny babbler,” she answered,—“ Behold!” —unloosing with frantic violence the chain from her wrist, “ I come to give thee liberty! —the liberty of death!”

“ Alas! Victoria, in what then have I offended you, that you should hate me thus?—Ah, consider I am but a poor and friendless orphan, who can never do you ill.”

“ Peace, I say, puppet!” shrieked Victoria,

toria;" thou hast already done me more ill than the sacrifice of thy worthless life can repay—follow me!"

" I cannot walk:—I cannot follow you indeed," sobbed the innocent Lilla, while the tears rolled fast down her snow-white cheeks.

" Then will I teach thee!" cried Victoria; and seizing her by the arm, dragged her over the rugged ground, and up the irregular ascent, while her delicate feet, naked and defenceless to the pointed rock, left their blood red traces at every step!—still to the uttermost heighth she forced, relentless, her panting victim:—

" Now, look down," she cried.—
A bottomless abyss yawned at the mountains base; and from the opposite side
the

the tumbling torrent rushed furious over immense projections, till finding the receptacle of the abyss, it dashed down its rugged sides into the cavity below.

“ See’st thou ?” cried Victoria again.—
 “ Now then, stand firm, beautiful, unconquerable Lilla ! thou whom no art could root from the breast of Henriquez, stand firm, I say !—for now I push thee headlong !”

“ Oh, mercy ! mercy ! shrieked, in accents of agony, the terrified Lilla, clinging, with the strength of horror, round the body of Victoria. — “ Oh ! sweet Victoria, remember we have been friends.—I loved thee ! nay, even now I love thee, and believe that thou art mad ! — Oh, think ! think we have been companions, bedfellows ! — Sweet and
 VOL. III. F gentle

gentle Victoria, murder not, then, the friendless Lilla, who for worlds would not injure thee!"

"I tell thee, thou shalt die, wretch! —Wert thou not the beloved of Henriquez?"

"Henriquez!—ah me! I was indeed! —but where, where is Henriquez now, Victoria?"

"Dead! dead!" with a fiend-like laugh, cried Victoria.—"Let me send thee to him."

"Dead! — Ah, cruel Victoria! murdered by thee?"

"Murdered by *thee*, viper!" fiercely returned Victoria. — "'Twas thee who plunged

plunged the sword into his breast,—thy accursed image revelling there, impelled him to the frantic deed!—leave thy hold I say, or by heaven I will dash thee at once down the rock!”

“ Oh, Henriquez!—Art thou indeed gone?—Yes, yes, or the wretched Lilla would not be thus!—no one would dare,” she sobbed, “ while thou wert near, thus to treat the miserable Lilla;—no hope, no happiness for her now, in lengthened life!”

“ Die then at once, presumptuous babbler!” exclaimed Victoria, endeavouring to shake off the firmly clinging form of the defenceless Lilla.

“ Ah! dearest Victoria—I am afraid of so terrible a death!—If I must die—

be it then the same death as my Henriquez suffered,—plunge thy stiletto in my heart.”

“ That will I do,” cried the enraged Victoria, “ and dash thee head-long beside. Raising her dagger high, she sought then to plunge it in the fair bosom of the beautiful orphan, but she, suddenly relinquishing her hold, the point of the dagger, wounded only her uplifted hand, and glancing across her alabaster shoulder, the blood that issued thence, slightly tinged her flaxen tresses with a brilliant red.

The courage of the wretched Lilla forsook her—the death she had preferred; her innocent soul shrunk from enduring; but perceiving that Victoria was desperate, and determined, she resolved to
make

make a last effort for her life.—Again the fell poignard was uplifted for surer aim—when springing from her knees, on which she had cast herself, to implore mercy, she forgot at once her wounds and her weakness, and endeavoured by speed to escape her barbarous enemy; seeming, as she wildly flew, the beautiful and timid spirit of the solitude.

Nerved anew by this feeble attempt to escape her vengeance, Victoria pursued her flying victim. At the uttermost edge of the mountain she gained upon her, when Lilla perceiving that hope of escape was vain, caught frantic, for safety, at the scathed branches of a blasted oak, that, bowed by repeated storms, hung almost perpendicularly over the yawning depth beneath.—Round these, she twisted her slender arms, while, waving to and fro

with her gentle weight over the immeasurable abyss, they seemed to promise but precarious support.

Victoria advanced with furious looks—she shook the branches of the tree, that Lilla might fall headlong. Enhorrored at this terrible menace, the miserable girl quitted suddenly her hold, and on the brink of the mountain sought despairingly to grapple with the superior force of her adversary!—Her powers were soon exhausted, when clasping together her hands, and looking piteously upon that which had received the wound, from whence the blood now streamed up to her elbow; she exclaimed, “Barbarous Victoria!—look down upon me, behold what thou hast done, and let the blood thou hast shed appease thee. Ah! little did I think, when a deserted orphan, invited

vited by thee to remain beneath thy roof, that such would be my miserable fate! Remember *that*, Victoria—have pity on me—and I will pray of heaven to forgive thee the past!”

The only answer of Victoria was a wild laugh, and again she raised the poignard to strike.

“Is it even so, then?” cried the despairing Lilla.—“Take then my life Victoria—take it at once,—but kill me I implore, with that same dagger with which you murdered Henriquez, because he loved me more than he did you!”

Fired to madness by this accusation, and the concluding remark, Victoria, no longer mistress of her actions, nor desiring to be so, seized by her stream-

ing tresses the fragile Lilla, and held her back.—With her poignard she stabbed her in the bosom, in the shoulder, and other parts:—the expiring Lilla sank upon her knees.—Victoria pursued her blows—she covered her fair body with innumerable wounds, then dashed her headlong over the edge of the steep.—Her fairy form bounded as it fell against the projecting crags of the mountain, diminishing to the sight of her cruel enemy, who followed it far as her eye could reach. Soon as a hollow momentary sound struck on the rapt ear of Victoria, informing her that Lilla was sunk into her grave, no more to rise, she hastened from the dreadful spot in a state of mind, which, if exulting, was far from being at ease—possessed rather with the madness and confusion of hell. A certain trepidation of spirits that she had never

never before experienced, caused her to rush along with even greater rapidity, if possible, than she had used in her way thither.—Though sinking with fatigue, she durst not abide in these gloomy solitudes to rest—she feared even to turn her head, lest the mangled form of Lilla, risen from the stream, should be pursuing her.—Now precipices yawned at her feet, and now that lovely form, bounding from crag to crag, seemed at every turn to meet her view;—those fair tresses dyed in crimson gore, that bleeding bosom was before her; and now the agonised shriek for mercy rang in her distracted ears!—

At length she passed the rocks, and issued into the forest from the narrow break that led to them;—at this moment the Moor, Zofloya, appeared before

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her,

her, as if he had there awaited her coming.

“Victoria!” he cried, in a voice less sweet than usual, and with a brow more gloomy,—“thou art too precipitate—and thereby hastenest thy fate!—why hast thou destroyed the orphan Lilla?—the deed was premature, and thou wilt repent it;—mean time enter not the castle, for evil awaits thee there!”

“Who told thee I had murdered the orphan, Lilla?” haughtily, returned Victoria—“but if I have, the deed is mine, and I will answer it.—Stand aside Moor—the *castle* is mine and I will enter it.”

“Do so,” said the Moor, with a bitter smile, “and thereby court the
fate

fate thou might'st yet a little have protracted."

"The consequences be on my own head," answered Victoria,—"I will pass."—

"Thou shalt—but remember, poor Victoria, that independently of *me*, thou canst not even breathe!"

With a look of scorn and disgust at the changed manner of the Moor, Victoria turned from him, and pursued her way.—Her mind already in a ferment, could brook no additional irritation;—just as she reached the castle, she beheld Zofloya entering before her, yet she had not seen him pass her, and he had even remained some moments upon the spot where she had encountered him.—

This circumstance excited some slight surprise, but objects of higher consequence engaged her mind, and she followed him into the castle.

Her first step was to repair to the chamber of Henriquez.—It immediately appeared to her, that no one had found entrance to it during her absence; the lifeless body bathed in its blood still remained extended on the floor; and all was in the state she had left it.—She decided, therefore, despising in her mind the false prophecies of Zofloya, to secure the door, without as yet making known the death of Henriquez.—His non-appearance she readily conceived would excite no immediate remark, he having frequently of late passed the whole of the day in his chamber. Thus, she determined, (for her mind was a chaos, and could

could suggest no better conduct for the moment)—to make fast the door; repairing then to the solitude of her own apartment, she secured it likewise, and throwing herself upon her bed, desired to take a retrospect of the past, and consider, if possible, respecting the future.—She endeavoured to collect her wandering thoughts, but instead of this, an unconquerable lassitude crept over her, accompanied by a disposition to sleep.—In vain she tried to shake it off, the influence became resistless—her eyelids involuntarily closed, and she was compelled to yield to a power superior to her will.

Total forgetfulness, however, did not ensue;—she experienced a sensation similar to that of persons who have taken too large a quantity of opium to allow
of

of calm undisturbed repose.—To herself her eyes appeared as if strained to their fullest extent—strange visions swam in her sight; yet unable to trust the delusion, she believed herself under the unconquerable horrors of a waking-dream.—Now the ringing of bells sounded in her ears, and now she beheld herself transported into an apartment; distant from the habitable part of the castle, and which, ever since the death of Berenza, had not even been opened.—In this room formerly there had stood a huge iron chest, this she had once seen; now likewise it was present to her view, and she recognised it.—Suddenly the door of the apartment was thrown open, and a number of persons appeared rushing in, consisting chiefly of the domestics of the castle. One, however, preceded the rest, and him her mind identified for the old.

old and favourite servant of Berenza, named Antonio.

With horror and perturbation in his looks, Antonio seemed rapidly advancing towards the chest, and calling aloud for some of his companions to assist him, by their joint efforts they raised the lid.— This was no sooner accomplished than a shout of universal horror prevailed, accompanied by the strongest marks of terror and perturbation. The cause was presently explained.—Forth from the chest they drew the disclosed, half mouldered skeleton, that once had been Berenza!

At this sight of horror, it seemed to her, that with animated gestures of indignation and revenge, they unanimously rushed towards her, to drag her from her bed.—In the midst of this terrible scene,

Zofloya.

Zofloya entered; at once the croud vanished, the confusion ceased, and in indescribable agony she awoke, while the cold drops of terròr bedewed her forehead.

On opening her eyes, the first object she beheld was the Moor, standing in fixed attitude at the foot of her bed.—His aspect was frigid and severe, yet his eyes shone with lambent fire, as a dark thunder-cloud emits the vivid flame.—Conceiving the whole to be still delusion, she cast her eyes anxiously around the chamber—it was gloomy and dim—and the evening seemed far advanced. Surprised that she should have slumbered so long, she sought, in confusion of mind, to throw herself from the bed, when the sweetly solemn voice of Zofloya arrested her movement.

“Victoria,”

“Victoria,” he said, “attend. This morning you unwarily disregarded my words; but, nevertheless, for the love I bear towards you, I desire to preserve you from immediate destruction!—Already have the unrestrained passions of your soul precipitated your fate, and hastened the shame that waits to overcome you;—from that shame, even yet, I offer to rescue you.—Listen to what I shall reveal.—You have dreamt, but it was no fable; you have slept some hours; the sun had not long passed the horizon when you entered your chamber, and now the evening is drawing to a close.—At an early hour of the night the servant of the deceased Berenza, Antonio, will retire to repose;—a fearful dream will awaken him, concerning the disappearance of the body of his late master. Actuated by its resistless influence, he will arise, and
alarm

alarm his fellow domestics—he will relate to them his dream. Naturally weak and superstitious, they will be all induced to accompany him to the solitary chamber, remote from the habitable part of the castle. There—contained in the iron chest within—they will discover the mouldering skeleton of Berenza!”—

“ Oh, Zofloya! Zofloya—is this thy truth and thy friendship?” exclaimed Victoria. “ Did’st thou not promise thou would’st preserve me from suspicion and from ill?”

“ I said not that I could do so for ever. Over the body of the Conte I had not eternal power—yet thy own folly, and impatience hath hastened”——

“ Ah, little could I dream of this reserve,”

serve," interrupted Victoria, "yet surely, surely, it is in *thy* power to preserve me for ever from suspicion; for, Zofloya, thou possessest superior power—the future is exposed to thy view—thou anticipatest events, and canst therefore guard against them. Save me then—save me, I implore thee, from the shame thou sayest awaits me—or wretch shall I consider myself ever to have confided in thy power, or thy promises!"

The terrible eyes of Zofloya shot fire, as they turned their burning glances on Victoria.

"This is no time," he fiercely exclaimed, "for retrospect or idle observation.—If you repent your confidence, do, in the present instance, without my assistance—write between the pillars of
St.

St. Mark!—I may *visit* you there perhaps — farewell! — but remember,” he added, shaking his finger with a menacing air, “remember there is now no escape for you.”

“Oh, strange, mysterious, and, to me, indefinable being!” cried Victoria—“your words, your looks, terrify and confound me; yet go not,” she continued, as with angry, though majestic pace, Zofloya moved towards the door; “abandon me not at this crisis, cruel Zofloya.”

The Moor turned from the door; fire gleamed no longer from his eyes, but a beautiful and haughty smile diffused itself over his countenance, which appeared like the sun beaming from a gloomy cloud.

“Well then—once more thou entreatest,”

"treatest," he cried, "once more I be-
 friend thee; but beware, Victoria, how
 again I am reproached;—to irritate me
 now would be vain and impolitic, and
 sharpen against thyself that sentiment of
 hate which I bear——but this is irre-
 levant," he hastily added—"suspicion
 will, as I said, attach to thee—by what
 means induced I scarcely need now ex-
 plain; the terrible Inquisition will drag
 thee before its tribunal; infinite confusion
 will reign in this castle; the chamber of
 Henriquez will be forced open, (for
 strange surmises begin already to prevail
 concerning thee) and instantly they will
 discover that which, of itself, would damn
 thee.—The body of Henriquez remains
 bathed in its blood upon the floor of his
 chamber—beside it lies thy veil, and di-
 vers articles of dress in which thou wert
 seen yesterday. Thy guilt, in the estima-
 tion

tion of all, will be made clearly evident; but, forbearing to alarm thee with the knowledge of their discovery, they will secure thee, merely a prisoner in thine own apartment, and dispatch messengers to Venice, for the purpose of making it known and bringing condign punishment on thy head. Need I expatiate upon the events that will follow?—public infamy and public”——

“ Oh! spare me,” cried Victoria—
 “ horrible is my fate!—yet I swear to thee, Zofloya, that I would meet it with indifference, if Henriquez still lived, and lived for me. Ah, tell me, Moor, didst thou not promise that”——

“ Beware, Victoria!—to the very extent of my promise have I performed;—I swore to thee that Henriquez should call thee
 thee

“thee his, and clasp thee voluntarily to his bosom;—I swore to thee that thou should’st have his love—did I promise thee that his delusion should last for ever? or profess to be amenable for those consequences which should follow the completion of my promise?”

Victoria longed to reply—but awe and terror checked the words that rose to her lips; yet the idea glanced for an instant through her mind, (and bitter was the suggestion) how fleeting, and how short-lived had been the moments of precarious pleasure procured for her by Zofloya, yet how terrible and how lasting the evils they had produced; they were, as the passing shadows, the mere mockery only of what they promised, while real horrors waiting to overwhelm and destroy, attended close upon them.

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The Moor, with a piercing glance, seemed to penetrate her inmost thoughts; a shade of severity passed over his features, and he said:

“If you hesitate respecting the path you should pursue at present, I leave you free to chuse.”

Victoria clasped her hands—too well she beheld the desolate prospect before her—too keenly felt the words of the Moor;—there appeared indeed no escape for her.

“Decide, Victoria!” cried Zofloya, with increased sternness.

“I do! I do!” replied Victoria.—
“I confide in you.—I rely on you to save me from the horrors that now encompass me.”

me, or to bear me safely through them;—
to save me from them, Zofloya," she
added emphatically, "for ever."

"To that I pledge myself;—you shall
be saved for ever from the disgrace and
horrors that here await you;—but you
must fly."

"Fly!"

"Yes,—for I cannot turn the tide of
events, in which I have no concern.—
I cannot, Victoria, influence the course
of justice, nor prevent that from arising,
which arises independently of me.—
Whatever you may deem my power, be
assured, that although I may induce the
occurrence of many events that otherwise
might not have been, yet I cannot prevent
from occurring aught which is already
written in the book of fate."

“ And whither then must I fly ?” with an abstracted air demanded Victoria.

“ Entrust that to me. — A few words more, and I go. — Take heed that you rest where you are — resign yourself unresistingly to repose. — It will be calm, and undisturbed, but deep ! — On the morrow, when this abode shall be the seat of confusion — when the city of Venice shall be alarmed, and your person be even vociferated for by the populace who will surround your pallazzo there, then shall you be far from danger, from pursuit, and from Venice !”

As Zofloya concluded, slightly waving his hand, he suddenly turned, and retreated from the apartment with the rapidity of a passing shade.

It was now quite dark ; Victoria, was
sensible

sensible neither of hunger nor thirst, yet felt a desire to retrace the terrible events that had been crowded into her life.—The attempt was vain, a numbing torpor began to creep over her as before; she essayed to conquer it, though contrary to the direction of Zofloya; and her incapacity to do so conveyed a bitter pang to her heart, while she felt that she was no longer mistress over herself or her faculties.—Chill horror took possession of her, and in an agony of mind that words cannot describe, seeming subject as it were to an unknown power, and unable to resist, she hopelessly resigned herself to the arbitrary spell that appeared to be cast over her.

CHAP. XXX.

DARKNESS and gloomy solitude reigned around, when the eyes of Victoria again opened to the sense of life and perception. She found herself reclining on the bare earth; the thunder rolled aloud over her head, and flashes of vivid flame now and then displayed the terrific sublimity of surrounding objects. — Immense mountains, piled upon one another, appeared to encompass her, and to include within their inaccessible bosoms the whole of the universe. Beyond their towering walls, (capped only by the misty clouds,) the imagination, suddenly thrown back and staggered at its own conceptions, could not

not presume to penetrate.—Mighty rocks, and dizzying precipices at their base, in which the water, falling from an immeasurable height, frantically battled gloomy caverns, which seemed the entrance to Pandæmonium; Alpine cliffs, that in their fierce projection menaced ruin to the wretch beneath:—Such was the scene that, as the blue lightning flashed, in terrible and stupendous confusion, struck upon her view.—Amidst these awful horrors, with folded arms and majestic air, stationed nearly opposite to her stood the towering Zofloya. To him the scene appeared congenial, and Victoria acknowledged to herself, that never before had she beheld him in his proper sphere.—Common objects seemed to shrink in his presence, the earth to tremble at the firmness of his step; now alone his native grandeur shone in its full glory, not eclipsed by,

but adding to the terrible magnificence of the scene.

On him the eyes of Victoria involuntarily fixed; dignity, and ineffable grace, were diffused over his whole figure;— for the first time she felt towards him an emotion of tenderness, blended with her admiration, and, strange inconsistency, amidst the gloomy terrors that pressed upon her heart, amidst the sensible misery that oppressed her, she experienced something like pride, in reflecting, that a Being so wonderful, so superior, and so beautiful, should thus appear to be interested in her fate.

As if he penetrated her thoughts, the Moor approached, with a sweet though awful smile, and extended his hand for her to rise. Trembling, as much from conscious-
ness

ness at the confused sentiments she felt arising in her bosom, as from alarm, occasioned by external circumstances, she took his proffered hand.

“ Tell me, Zofloya,” she said, in a tremulous accent, “ Tell me where we now are, and how we came hither.”

“ Know you not, beautiful Victoria, that we are among the Alps, the boundaries of your native kingdom?—how we came hither is surely not material for you to know,—but we are safe.”

“ But I have no remembrance of our journey. — If I recollect aright, it was evening when last we parted;—it appears evening still, though late,—in what time then.” —

“ It appears, as it is, late in the evening;

ing—it was, as you justly observe, evening when we parted,—this then infers the probability, that a night and a day have nearly elapsed.”

“But how!—Have my faculties been so long suspended?” cried Victoria, with uneasiness, “and it is to you alone that I am now indebted for their restoration?—Oh, Zofloya! I perceive too clearly, how much, how compleatly I am in your power!”

She sighed deeply as she uttered these words, and the conviction of her subjection pressed heavily upon her mind:—her self-confidence vanished, and uneasy sensations filled her bosom.

Zofloya smiled, and tenderly took her hand.—“Why these reflections, Victoria,
and

and why these inferences?—are you not now secure from the shame and horror that awaited you?—no *common* means could have extricated you in such an exigence,—the case pressed, and required prompt exertion, why then regret, if superior power *was* employed to save and to deliver you?”

Zofloya paused—a loud peal of thunder rattled madly above them, and reverberated in stern and hollow sounds among the echoing rocks,—the pointed lightning fearfully gleamed in long and tremulous flashes,—Victoria’s firm bosom felt appalled, for never before had she witnessed the terrible phenomena of nature, in a storm among the Alps.—She drew closer to the proud unshrinking figure of the Moor—he passed his arms round her waist, and gently pressed her to his breast.

G 5

Victoria

Victoria felt reassured—she seemed to herself as an isolated being, possessing no earthly friend or protector, but him on whose bosom she now tremblingly reposed. —Never, till this moment, had she been so near the person of the Moor—such powerful fascination dwelt around him, that she felt incapable of withdrawing from his arms; yet ashamed, (for Victoria was still proud) and blushing at her feelings, when she remembered that Zofloya, however he appeared, was but a menial slave, and as such alone had originally become known to her — she sought, but sought vainly, to repress them; for no sooner (enveloped in the lightning's flash as he seemed, when it gleamed around him without touching his person),—did she behold that beautiful and majestic visage, that towering and graceful form, than all thought of his inferiority vanished,

nished, and the ravished sense, spurning at the calumnious idea, confessed him a being of superior order.

While thus they remained in the midst of these terrible and sublime solitudes, as there was a solemn pause in the fury of the storm, (which, exhausted by its own violence, seemed suspended only to collect force for renovated explosion,) the sound of human voices broke on their ears: lights gleamed suddenly from the rocky heights, which appearing rapidly to move (like flaming meteors athwart a gloomy sky,) were discovered at length to be torches, carried by the hands of men. As they continued to approach, their dress, their arms, and fierce demeanor, revealed them for Condottieri or banditti.

Zofloya, inclining his body, said in a low voice to Victoria,

“Be not alarmed, we shall be presently surrounded by these bands, hordes of whom infest these mountains, particularly mount Cenis, where we now are; but regret not the circumstance, no immediate ill will arise; on the contrary, we may, if we will, procure shelter and accommodation.”

Victoria made no reply, for by this time a ring began to be formed round them of armed men, the red flame of whose torches betrayed forms and features of such desperate and horrid cast, that scarcely bore they the semblance of human beings.—One stepping from among them, brandished his dagger, and thus spoke:

“What

“What do ye here, in the midst of this storm?—Whence came ye?—whither are ye going? and what riches do ye carry that ye will resign at once without bloodshed?”

“Whence we come, and whither we designed to go, is now immaterial,” answered Zofloya, “the riches we possess are not worthy your notice, but we desire to be led to your chief.”

There was a pause among the band; Zofloya resumed—

“You behold that we are unarmed— you have nothing therefore to fear, in permitting us to see your chief—we are neither spies nor enemies with bad intent.” —So saying, with an authoritative air, he waved

waved his hand, as if to say, "Lead on without further question."

Thus, at least, the action appeared to be understood; respectfully the ring opened on either side, and him who had first spoken, inclining his head with submissive air to the Moor, motioned to lead the way.

With one arm round the waist of Victoria, and holding a torch that had been tendered to him in the other hand, Zofloya walked stately in the midst of the band, his plumed head towering above all, as the lofty poplar of the forest proudly towers above surrounding shrubs.

"Astonishing being that he is,"
thought

thought Victoria—" even these ferocious bandit are tamed into submission by the magic power of that fascinating voice."—

They ascended the side of the mountain; then, by narrow and dangerous defiles, gradually declined.—Now they touched on the brink of a precipice, now glided with the ease of habit along the slippery ridges of stupendous rocks.—At length a deep hollow presented itself—they descended its almost perpendicular sides, and reached the rocky valley below;—a rude projecting mass of rock, (seeming to sustain itself in mid air, as it were) became, by the winding of the path, presently visible; it extended nearly to the opposite side of the mountain, forming thereby a kind of huge irregular arch.—Entering beneath it, a narrow aperture

ture

ture presented itself, through which one by one the band began to pass. Victoria beheld herself in her turn at the darksome mouth of this cavern, (to which the o'er-hanging brow of the rock formed a natural and tremendous portico) and again her spirits failed, and her heart began to sink.

Compelled to proceed, however, for the bandit from behind pressed onwards, she consoled herself with the reflection, that Zafloya was nigh, and resumed her courage.—By degrees the opening became more spacious, but turning and winding in an endless labyrinth, while other openings perpetually crossed their path, sometimes divided from each other by an arch, whose heavy summit was indivisible from the roof of the cavern, sometimes by rude pillars of stone forming an
irre-

irregular colonade. At length they found themselves in an extensive space, whose slimy walls, as the red glare of the torches passed along, reflected the various and blended colours of the rainbow. Victoria looked around; the gloomy cave reminded her of that in which the unfortunate Lilla had been pitilessly immured, and involuntarily she trembled.

One of the banditti, approaching a certain part of the cavern, with the butt end of his tromboni knocked loud and distinctly three successive times against it; after a pause of about a minute, the knocks were repeated on the inside; he then drew from his girdle a small instrument, in shape resembling a horn, and applying it to his mouth, he blew a shrill peculiar sound. Immediately that part, which bore no remarkable appearance, but seemed

seemed only a plain indissoluble portion of the rocky wall, flew suddenly open, in form of a rude door, as if actuated by a secret spring, and discovered, seated round a blazing fire, with wine and various provisions spread in rude confusion before them, a crowd of bandit, in savage attire, resembling those who now rapidly poured in, as if inspired by an anxious desire to partake of the good cheer they beheld.

In the midst of this horde, the bandit ranged respectfully on either side, elevated by a rude bench of stone from the rest (who merely squatted on the floor) appeared a graceful figure, distinguished by his high and single-plumed helmet and by the fierce eccentric costume of his dress. He looked, and was the chief of the Condottieri, elected unanimously as their

their leader, on the death of a famed chief who had preceded him. His face was concealed by a mask, which circumstance excited the surprize of Victoria. Beside him sat, (fancifully but splendidly attired) a female, whose countenance, though neither remarkable for extreme youth or beauty, struck instantly peculiar emotion to her breast, in the confused but uneasy recollection of having some where before beheld it; in this idea she was confirmed by the look with which her slight glance was returned; it bespoke instant recognition, and with it fury and unfaded hate.

Zofloya boldly advanced, leading his companion by the hand; the chief instinctively arose, with a dignified and commanding air. As the strangers drew nigh their chief, the tenacious and suspicious bandit

bandit sprang on their feet, to a man; and drew, as with one accord, the shining stiletto from their belts, to guard against the bare possibility of treachery or evil intent. Zofloya, observing this movement, haughtily smiled, and waved his hand, as if to imply that their suspicions were erroneous; the chief, by a turn of the head, commanded them to put up their weapons, and Zofloya thus addressed him—

“ Signor, we are strangers, but would willingly become friends: we fly from danger and persecution, and request for a while the safety of your protection.”

Victoria felt surprize to hear the Moor speak thus; but surprize at *his* conduct had ceased to be a new sensation: she remained silent therefore, and the chief thus replied:

“ It

“ It is enough—we injure not the defenceless, nor those who throw themselves upon our mercy. Honour is our law, and the lives of those who would place themselves under our protection are sacred. I pray you, then, be seated, and partake, without compliment, of our supper.— Friends, be seated all, and let your daggers remain sheathed.” In a moment every one resumed his seat.

“ Drink,” said the masked chief, and offered to Zofloya a flask of wine, who, receiving it, presented it immediately to Victoria.

This movement appeared to draw towards her the regards of the chief; for a moment they were fixed stedfastly upon her; he became agitated, and laid his hand upon the hilt of the stiletto in his belt, then

then half rose from his seat, and again reseated himself!—Victoria trembled, she knew not why; the company seemed surprised; Zofloya alone remained collected and unmoved; he pressed Victoria to eat with respectful entreaty. By degrees the chief resumed his composure, he looked no longer towards Victoria with pointed regard, and her uneasiness abating, she accepted the attentions of Zofloya. Reserve wore off, cheerfulness, and at length conviviality, began to prevail; the band drank success to each other, and health to their brave commander; they joked, they laughed, they sang; the female joined in their merriment with indecorous glee, but the chief, though no longer disturbed, remained still silent and absorbed. At length, either displeased at their mirth, or rousing himself by an effort, he said—

“ Our

“ Our brave comrades are all here.”

“ All,” replied several voices at once.

“ They go forth no more to-night; let every one retire to repose, save those whose turn it is to guard. For you, Signor, looking towards Zofloya, you must fare as we do.—Victoria!—the Signora I mean—(she is neither your wife or mistress I presume) will find matting to repose on in a separate nook of our cavern.”

The words of the masked chief electrified Victoria—surprize possessed her soul, for it was evident she was known to him. She looked towards the Moor, but in his strong marked countenance saw no unusual expression.

“ The Signora is not my wife,” he replied,

plied, addressing the chief, "neither is she my mistress—she will be mine, however, for we are linked by indissoluble bands."

"What, I suppose, the bands of love," cried the female with a loud laugh, as she sat beside the chief, and now resembled a Bacchante.

Again the chief became visibly agitated. "*Your's!*" he muttered—but suddenly checking himself, added—"The accommodations here are scanty—you must arrange for the best therefore;"—then, haughtily inclining his head, he retired beneath an arch at the extremity of the cavern, which appeared to lead into an interior recess. The female, who seemed either his wife or companion, retired likewise.

With

With skins and matting the Moor Zofloya composed for Victoria a tolerable bed; he spread it in a rugged nook, remote from the band, and, leading her towards it, was retiring, when Victoria's proud, but now almost subjugated heart, touched with the respectful attentions of the only companion her vices and her crimes had left her, extended to him, with softened looks, her hand.—He took it with tenderness, yet delicate reserve, and raised it to his lips—his manner but increased to ardour the feelings of Victoria. The dying embers at the further side of the cavern cast round a dusky light—the form, the features, and, above all, the luminous eyes of Zofloya appeared more than human—they shone with a brilliant fire—resistless fascination dwelt about him. Victoria, as he held her hand to his lips, gazed upon him with admiration

and gratitude, and her high wrought emotion vented itself in a flood of tears!—yes, the proud, the inhuman Victoria, conquered and affected by the shew of kindness, wept from feeling, from an emotion of the heart!—but who could withstand the enchanting influence of Zofloya?

“Sweet and gentle Victoria,” he cried, in a voice that seemed the music of the spheres, “compose yourself, and retire to rest—why should my trifling attentions call forth this excess of feeling?—believe me, I feel that you will yet repay me all.”

“Repay thee, Zofloya!—I am thine ever.”

“I know that thou art, in a degree,

gree, lovely Victoria—but not sufficiently so.”

“ Ah, tell me then Zofloya!—can I be more so?—teach me—for I feel—I think that it is impossible—the gratitude of my heart, the sentiments of my soul are thine!”

An indefinable, yet bewitching smile, passed over the features of Zofloya.

“ Ah, Victoria!” he softly said, “ the time is not yet come—I will not claim thee yet—but when I do, then thou wilt be wholly and completely mine—wilt thou not?”

“ Ah! Zofloya, Zofloya.”

“Thou wilt, thou shalt, fair Victoria, I have sworn it—by myself I have sworn it—but now,—now I leave thee to repose—delay will but encrease the value of my prize.”

“Oh inscrutable Moor!—thy language is ever indefinable!”

“Time will explain it—fairest Victoria, good night.”

The Moor withdrew, and Victoria sunk oppressed upon her couch,—a couch harder far than any on which hitherto she had reposed;—“Yet the poor departed Lilla!”—whispered conscience, which in the gloomy hour of adversity ever wakes, “the poor Lilla!—she had not even such as this”——Yet for the hardness of the couch, for the pang of conscience, what repaid?—strange to say, the

the conviction of Zofloya's proximity, who now shed enchantment around, and ravished her deluded mind.

She fell, at length, into a slumber, from which she did not awake till the noise of the bandit, moving to and fro in the cavern, caused her to start and gaze eagerly round for Zofloya, the only being on whom she now considered herself to possess the smallest claim;—he observed her eager looks, and hastening towards her, said—

“ I have obtained permission of the chief, sweet Victoria, that you shall quit the cavern, and enjoy the keen air of the mountains; he relies upon the word of Zofloya that we return to this spot, which has afforded us shelter in an hour of necessity, and that whenever we quit

H 3

it,

it, we shall consent to be escorted by some of his troop, to the other side of the mountain, or some miles forward, in whatever direction we may desire to go: this to avoid the possibility of evil design on our parts, and to satisfy his mind with respect to us:—mean time, he permits us to go unaccompanied.”

“Has he yet unmasked?” whispered Victoria, “and can I see him?”

“He has not—nor does he ever, I understand, in the presence of strangers. Come, I have a basket of provisions on my arm,—let us quit for a few hours this subterraneous abode.—I last night noted the labyrinthian windings of the path leading to and from the mountain,—we shall need no guide.”

Victoria

Victoria gave her hand to the Moor, secretly surprised he should have been able so readily to mark the devious way,—but nothing was impossible to Zoffoya; his noble presence seemed to diffuse around respect and admiration,—submissively the fierce bandit fell back as he passed, w' n, as they reached the rugged ascent leading to the mouth of the cavern, and were on the point of issuing thence, the graceful chief (still masked) appeared before them, with his female companion leaning on his arm. For a moment he stopped with a proud, uneasy air, when seeming to remark the respect manifested by the Moor towards Victoria, he slightly bowed, and retreated a few steps, leaving room for them to pass beneath the frowning portico that concealed and overhung the aperture of the cavern. His companion, however, fixed her

her eyes upon Victoria, with a look at once of hate and malicious scorn;—Victoria felt agitated, and again the features of this woman impressed forcibly her mind;—well she remembered that bold and phrenzied countenance, though appearing far less beautiful than when she saw it first, being now from irregular living, or some other cause, bloated and coarse. But yet the never-fading expression of features, so familiar to her fancy, remained, though the power of memory was vain to identify them.

As they emerged from subterrene gloom to the light of day, Victoria expressed to the Moor the sensations which oppressed her—

“I know not whence it is,” she said,
 “but the stately and solemn deportment
 of

of that chief affects me strangely,—his regards, not of an approving kind, are pointed particularly at me.—The sight of the female too, agitates and discomfits me.—Sure I am, Zofloya, that I have somewhere beheld that face.”

“ It is far from improbable,” observed Zofloya.

“ But why should she regard me,” pursued Victoria, “ with looks so hostile and malignant?—why should the chief direct his looks towards me?”

“ *Time* will explain all,” laconically, though with emphasis, observed Zofloya again.

“ But you are not surprized Zofloya; these incidents draw from you no remark.”

H 5

“ I am

“ I am *never* surprised.”

“ But tell me at least thy thoughts, I entreat thee.”

“ *My* thoughts !” said the Moor with a serious air, and looking gloomily upon Victoria:

“ Yes—thou takest, methinks, Zofloya, no part in the common occurrences of life—what are thy thoughts ?”

“ Destruction !”——he returned, in a terrible voice.

Victoria involuntarily shuddered——

“ True,”——he pursued——“ I take no part in the common occurrences of life——
common occurrences do not interest me.

——The

—The dreadful, the terrific, the surprising alone of nature, have power to call me forth,—nor even in them do I mix, unless invited or allured !”

“ Oh, Zofloya !” cried Victoria, “ wretched and friendless as I am, yet ever to lament that thy converse to me is unintelligible.”

“ It will not *always* be so, Victoria— but seat thyself here beside me, and let us discourse on other subjects.”

Victoria obeyed—for it was impossible for her to resist the smallest proposition of the Moor ;—he placed himself near her, and entreated her to partake of the provisions he had brought, but she felt an oppression at her heart, and could not eat.—Perceiving her uneasi-

H 6

ness,

ness, he passed his arm round her waist, and said—

“ Fair Victoria, why this discontent? wherefore this gloom; canst thou not place thy entire confidence in me?—or canst thou not be happy with Zofloya?—say at once, for thou knowest, lovely creature, that we are affianced.”—

Victoria started involuntarily.—“ Zofloya, what mean you?”

“ A truce, fair Victoria, to folly!—am I not thy equal?—Ay thy superior!—proud girl, to suppose that the Moor, Zofloya, is a slave in mind!”

Victoria repented her ill-timed check—she felt herself in the power of the Moor, while his manner, at once proud and imperious,

perious, carried with it an irresistible charm, a somewhat that penetrated her heart, and took from her the wish, as well as the power, to offer further reproof.

“Victoria,” resumed the Moor, “remember, that I have been thy willing instrument, and that literally I have performed to thee the promises I made.”

The heart of Victoria did not assent; she felt that his promises had been fallacious, or indefinitely performed; but still she forbore remark, and he proceeded as though he understood her thoughts.

“Am I to blame, if circumstances operated to make my services unpropitious; have I not sacrificed all future prospects to save thee from disgrace, and accom-

accompany thee in thy flight?—Thou canst not be displeas'd; Victoria,—am I to blame for the unkindness of fortune?"

The speciousness and futility of his arguments were sufficiently evident to Victoria, yet her soul involuntarily became softened. Graceful beauty shone conspicuous in the form of the Moor, and a fascinating sweetness dwelt on his features;—his resplendent, yet tender beaming eyes, sent their powerful softness through her bosom, and her heart dissolved in willing pleasing delusion, delighting to cherish, while it felt its weakness.—A triumphant smile now lighted up the expressive countenance of the Moor; he took her hand, and pressed it to his lips with haughty tenderness.

“ Yes

“ Yes, too sure I feel,” cried Victoria, unable to contend with the emotions of her heart,—“ that for thee, Zofloya, I could at this moment resign the world,—nay life itself!—Yet my soul sickens at the prospect before me,—say, how long must we reside amid this savage Condottieri?”

“ Yet awhile, lovely Victoria;—and when thou quittest these solitudes”—he pursued, while his eyes sparkled with more than mortal fire—“ Then art thou mine—*for ever!*”

Victoria ventured to look upon him, but did not speak.

“ Say,—wilt thou not be mine?” resumed Zofloya—“ yet why do I ask—since there is no appeal for thee,” he added

160. ZOFLOYA; OR, THE MOOR.

added, with a terrible smile—"thou, in reality, being mine already."—As he concluded, he grasped the hand which he held in his with violence.

A faint exclamation of pain escaped the lips of Victoria, but looking in his countenance, illumined as it was with wild and singular expression, she attributed his violence to uncontrollable ardour, and only smiled.—The Moor seized her in his arms—then pushing her from him, surveyed her from head to foot.

"Yes, yes,—thou wilt be *mine!*" he exclaimed, "to all eternity!"

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXI.

SOME time had now elapsed, since Victoria had been the associate of Banditti—the vile and lawless outcasts of society—her constant companion and presumed lover a vile Moor, introduced originally to her notice in a menial capacity. Banned from the world by her crimes, and her vices, and seeking, in the depth of an almost unfathomable obscurity, safety from the punishment their due.

Such was now the situation of one, whose early character and propensities (naturally

turally evil) required in youth the strong curb of virtuous example to reprove, and ultimately reform them. Maternal imprudence, and maternal indiscretion, by destroying the bonds of respect, rendered abortive all future attempt to preserve from baleful example the hopeless victim of premature corruption.—Thus, too, noble emulation was perished, and with the character became identified as careless habits, errors which time and strict education would have withered in the germ.

In moments of solitude, which occurred but seldom, the wretched Victoria, reflecting upon her early youth, what she *might* have been, and what she *was*, cursed, (terrible to say) the mother that first had weakly indulged, and then, by her own example, tempted and destroyed her.

During

During the whole of the time that she had resided among the Condottieri, never once had she beheld the countenance of their chief. Yet in her absence Zofloya had said, that he unmasked. "He hath a reason," added he, for concealing his features from you; but time will develope all, and then you will know it."

In manners however, the haughty chief was considerably changed—he seemed to have remarked, and approved the terms on which Victoria and the Moor continued to live; ever delicately respectful in his presence, though incomparably tender at other times, was the manner of Zofloya towards her—the more distant indeed, the more reserved and punctilious he appeared, the more did the chief unbend, and the more appear pleased; but if by a word, or even a look, he expressed
aught

aught of tenderness or warmth, then did he become agitated, lay his hand upon his dagger, or start uneasily from his chair. In his voice there was a something that powerfully awakened the attention of Victoria—his manner affected her less for its solemnity, than for other reasons, which she could not define, and she would at times have given the universe for a glance at his features.

As for the mistress of the chief, her manners underwent a considerable change; she behaved to Victoria with civility, sometimes even with attention, but at others, particularly in the absence of the chief, she would regard her with a look that wanted only the *power* of destroying.

The Moor Zofloya occasionally accompanied

accompanied a chosen troop of the bandit in their adventurous excursions among the Alps; and Victoria could not avoid observing that when he did so, they were such generally as were esteemed most desperate, and were most in repute for their ferocity and contempt of life; such too, as were considered by the rest capable of any enormity, and troubled neither with the weakness of compassion, qualms of conscience, or a distaste to bloodshed: they were, in fact, ruffians rather than robbers, and the blood hounds of the band.—These Zofloya chose to select, when he went forth with any, and unanimously they swore, that when he was among them, they felt impelled to deeds which otherwise would have remained unattempted.

One gloomy evening, seated on the declivity

clivity of a mountain, Victoria reflected involuntarily upon this circumstance;—she loved, yet trembled at the inscrutable Zofloya—but lost and abandoned—seeking an object to fix on, she yielded without struggle to his fascinations.—That he loved her, she believed; yet such was the dignity, sometimes haughty repulsiveness of his manners, that even in his softest moods, she watched the turning of his eye with secret dread, fearing and dubious of what the next moment might produce. Never, even had she been completely at ease with him; there was always a proud reserve about him, in the midst of his tenderness;—his softness resembled more the condescension of a superior than the devotion of a lover.

“ Strange mysterious being,” she mentally exclaimed, “ thy looks, thy words, thine

thine actions, have ever to me been indefinable.—Better, ah ! better perhaps it were” she added with a sigh, “ that I had never known thee.”—She paused, her ideas reverted to her past life, she retraced its black and disastrous career,—“ Ah, mother, mother !” she cried, “ all is attributable to thee ; why did’st thou, when in early youth,—when my passions were strong, and my judgment weak, why did’st thou imprudently bring before my eyes scenes to inflame my soul, and set my senses madding ?—It was thou first taughtest me, to put nor check, nor restraint, upon the incitements of unholy love.—’Twas thy example too, which caused me to deem lightly of the marriage vow.—Thy heart wandered from its allegiance to thy husband, my heart wandered from mine.—Thy husband died through means of thee,—mine died by
poison,

poison, which I administered—yet wherefore do I thus retrace?” she added, casting herself upon the mountain,—“do I repent me of that which I have done? No,—I regret only the state to which circumstances have reduced me.—Wretch! that I am, Zofloya,—oh, Zofloya! thou hast helped on my destruction—yet am I now so bound, so trammelled to thee (by what magic arts I know not,) that though at this moment I feel strong wish to fly thee, yet it is counteracted by conviction that the attempt is impossible.” She sighed deeply, then in a mournful voice resumed—“Here must I wait thy coming, for into the cavern I will not descend—the gloomy silence of the chief oppresses my soul, while the now cool, now ferocious looks of his mistress, throw my senses into confusion!”

She

She remained still prostrate on the side of the mountain, till, wearied with grievous and unavailing reflection, she closed her eyes. By degrees sleep stole over her faculties, and she dreamed, that gliding lightly over the highest rocks, she beheld a beautiful and seraphic form approach.—When it came near, it seemed to her that her eyes could not sustain the exceeding brilliancy which shot from the countenance, the hair, and the garments of this celestial vision.

“Victoria!” it pronounced in a sweet and awful voice, “I am thy good genius; I come to warn thee at this moment, because it is the first, for many years, in which a spark of repentance hath visited thy guilt-benighted soul.—The Almighty, who wishes to save his creatures from destruction, permits that I appear before
VOL. III. I thee.

thee.—If thou wilt forsake, even yet, the dark and thorny path of sin, if thou wilt endeavour, by thy future life, to make amends for the terrible list of the past, even yet shalt thou be saved!—But above all, thou must fly the Moor Zofloya, who is not what he seems.”

At that instant, Victoria saw beneath the feet of the resplendent vision, the Moor Zofloya—he lay prostrate—stripped of his gaudy habiliments, and appearing monstrous and deformed!—Still she recognized him for Zofloya.

“Attend,” pursued the Angel:—“Fly immediately the false pretended Moor, and heaven will direct thy steps. Retire for a while from the world—look into thine heart—*Repent*—and thy sins shall be forgiven thee!—Yet mark!” and loud thunder

thunder seemed to rattle from above,—
 “ If thou pursuest thy present path,
 speedy death and eternal destruction will
 be thine !”

As the splendid form pronounced these words, the earth opening at its feet, shewed an immeasurable abyss—down headlong it spurned the Moor, who uttering terrific yells, which echoed through the mountains, sunk struggling from view. The celestial vision ascended, pointing, as it rose, its fair finger to heaven.—The awful voice of the thunder solemnly sounded—the dazzled eyes of Victoria beheld the heavens open as the spirit drew towards them; the music of the spheres in loud choral harmony struck for an instant on her ravished ears; her high-wrought fancy could bear no more, and she awoke.

Opening her eyes, she beheld that all around was still and gloomy; yet so far was she still possessed by her dream, that even yet she beheld a stream of radiance in the air, and fancied she could identify that spot in the sky at which the Angel entered its bright abode. Celestial shapes and sparkling corruscations still swam in her view; and when she closed her eyes she saw them with increased brilliancy in imagination's eye.

By degrees the vividness of these impressions subsided. She felt ashamed to yield observance to a dream, yet still her soul was touched.

“But whither, and how can I fly?” she cried;—“yet destruction awaits me if I stay.—Oh, no, it cannot be—I will not yield thus to a vision—a frolic of the fancy,

fancy, let loose when the senses slumber— and for that to quit Zofloya;— ungrateful Victoria! no, I feel, I feel that to be impossible!”

Scarce had the unhappy Victoria pronounced these words when, darting from a cleft in the mountain, the Moor appeared before her!—even through the dusky gloom Victoria beheld the fire which sparkled in his eyes; his whole figure seemed more proudly dignified, more lofty than ever.—If she hesitated before to adopt the conduct she was warned to pursue, that hesitation now vanished.—She remembered her dream no longer; the presence of Zofloya put reflection and consideration to flight—he took her hand, and in a gentle voice said —

“ You would not forsake me, Victoria !”

Victoria started, for this remark implied a knowledge of her thoughts.

“How is this Zofloya?” she said, and faintly smiled: “You seem to read”—

“Your thoughts! fair creature,” added the Moor—“and have I not always read them?”

“True, true,” said the embarrassed Victoria—“but how?”

“No matter!” cried the Moor.—
“You are mine, I have gained you, and lose you now I neither can nor will.—
You do not hate me, Victoria.”

Victoria replied not; her thoughts were confused respecting the Moor, and again a sentiment of fear predominated over every other sensation.

“Come,

“Come,” he resumed, nothing checked by her silence, “come, let us remain here no longer, but return to our home; it is more chearful than this gloom, my Victoria, and will disperse thy melancholy.”

He passed his arm gently round her waist, and led her on:—though her scruples ceased to occupy her, her heart was oppressed, and she could not speak.

In softest language the Moor addressed her as they walked; by degrees the sweet tones of his harmonious voice, his honied flattery, and soft attentions, produced their wonted effect:—again the changing Victoria began to feel irresistibly rivetted to him, and the more, from the temporary gloom that had affected her in his absence.

“ Wert thou always with me, Zofloya,” she at length said, in a low voice, as they approached the cavern, “ black melancholy and gloomy visions would never agitate my soul.”

Zofloya pressed her hand. “ While thou livest,” said he, “ I will remain with thee—and death shall have no power to tear thee from me.”

They now entered the cave; in the midst of a few stragghing bandit sat the chief, still masked, with his bold companion by his side, showily habited, and looking the wild genius of the terrible abode. The chief sat solemn and reserved, listening, rather than partaking in the conversation of his band. Some of them sat cross-legged, some reclined, talking over deeds of bloody outrage, while
the

the red fire-light cast upon their marked features an additional tinge of ferocity.

Victoria seated herself among them, and the Moor took his station beside her, though at a respectful distance. The chief looked towards them, (not unkindly) but did not speak; his fierce companion scowled upon Victoria, to whose features exercise and agitation had given an unusual brilliancy:—the look, as usual, caused a thousand dim remembrances to rush into the mind of Victoria;—for an instant she almost identified the countenance before her, but, at all events, returned the malignant glance with visible contempt and indignation. Fire flashed from the eyes of the female; she half rose, but the chief, who silently observed both, caught her arm, and restrained her on her seat. At this instant three loud
1 5 distinct

distinct knocks were heard outside the door ; one of the robbers started up, and returned them on the inside with the hilt of his stiletto ; then sounded, without, the loud shrill noise of the horn, and the robber instantly touching a spring, the door flew open.

Several of the bandit entered ; in the midst of them was a female, supported by and leaning on the arm of one of them ; her figure, though faded, was still beautiful ; her features were haggard and pale ; tears streamed down her cheeks, and on her temple appeared a wound, from whence the blood flowed over her bosom, which was bare, and cruelly bruised ; her long dark hair hung wild and dishevelled, her clothes were torn to tatters, and one fair arm, gashed at the wrist, hung useless by her side.

This

This miserable object was led, or rather brought into the midst of the assembly. The chief drew near, and regarded her for a few moments with agitated but stedfast air ; then staggering back several paces, he laid his hand upon his heart with convulsive emotion.

“ Is it possible ?” in a voice of smothered agony, he cried. Hardly had he spoken, when more of the band rushed in, with daggers drawn in their right hands, and securing with their left a man of tall majestic figure, in whose countenance was discernible traces of the deepest rage and the most gloomy ferocity.—In an instant the attention of the chief was attracted towards him ; he gazed no longer on the pitiable object before him, but approached, with uneven pace, the stranger thus forcibly secured.—Scarce had

he seemed to fix his eyes upon his countenance, ere he recoiled, horror struck!—then hastily returned, and looked again, as doubting the testimony of his senses; now he appeared dreadfully convinced, his whole frame trembled with violent emotion:—madly impelled, as it were, he snatched the stiletto from his belt; he rushed towards the unarmed stranger, and tearing him from the grasp of the banditti with the strength of a raging lion, he buried it to the hilt in his panting bosom!

At this the wounded female, uttering a cry of horror, sunk upon the floor, but, as if new strung by this very circumstance, the chief, with tenfold fury, tore the reeking dagger from the breast of the stranger, and plunged it unnumbered times in different parts of his body!—The band perceiving this unusual and sanguinary violence

lence on the part of their chief, and that he no longer required of them to secure the object of his rage, resigned entirely the hold they had resumed, and retired to a distance. Exhausted, then, by horrible and repeated wounds, the stranger sunk down, bathed in his blood. The chief bent over him, still gasping with unsated vengeance ; he knelt on his mangled form, and with his left hand pinioned him to the earth, then raising his dagger high, transfixed it in the centre of his panting heart !

“ Die, infamous and thrice damned villain !” he cried, in a tremendous voice. “ Thus die !—for this moment I implored incessantly just Heaven—and Heaven, in its justice, has at length granted my prayer.”—As he uttered these words, he tore off his mask, and throwing back his

his plumed helm, Victoria recognised—her brother!—

“ Now, wretched Victoria,” he cried, gazing full upon her, with stern and piercing eyes, “ Dost thou know me?—and dost thou know the wretch who lies there weltering in his blood?—Him, who within this instant,” he exultingly cried, “ has met by *my* hand the punishment his due—dost thou not *know* him?—methinks, unhappy girl, *thou* should'st remember—Ardolph!—the vile Ardolph—the betrayer of thy miserable mother—of that mother, who now lies extended on the ground, in the wretched person of that dying female!”——

Victoria was on the point of speaking, when Leonardo, rushing wildly towards the bleeding body of Ardolph, exclaimed, with a convulsive laugh,

“ What!

“What!—did the wretch hope to escape for *ever* the vengeance of my soul!—Villain and coward!” he pursued, spurning the body with his foot, “that put thy trust for safety in the weakness of my youthful arm!—did’st thou believe it would remain for ever weak?—and that thy infamy would pass unpunished?—To rob us of our mother—to destroy our father—and to blast for ever the fair honor and the happiness of their children!—Ah, villain and coward!—did’st thou dare to hope that the young and boyish Leonardo would forget thee?—No, no—he, whose soul could feel disgrace and injury sufficiently to fly the spot where it had overwhelmed his miserable family, could never, never forget the wretch who had caused it!—could never forget those accursed features, stamped in indelible characters upon his burning brain!—

brain!—No, no, I tell thee—nor age, nor time, nor circumstances, could hide thee with a veil so thick that outraged honor could not pierce it!—a Venetian's outraged honor!—For this blessed hour my young heart panted—for this my maturer feelings, encreasing as I grew in bitter sense of the wrong done us, and in desire of revenge, longed with wilder enthusiasm!—For this I implored Heaven, and Heaven," he cried, falling on his knees, while a fierce but noble enthusiasm burnt in his eyes, "Heaven has listened to me. — Father!—my injured father!—*thy* wrongs are avenged!"——He smiled exultingly on the disfigured corpse of the once gay, but now justly punished Ardolph, and arose from his knees.

At this moment the wretched Laurina
uttered

uttered a faint sigh. Leonardo started, and appeared recalled to himself; he clasped his hands, and tears started to his eyes; he approached his wretched mother, and Victoria followed; between them they raised her in their arms. Leonardo turned fiercely towards the silent, though surprised banditti, who stood around, and in an angry voice exclaimed—

“ Which among ye have dared thus to maltreat a female ? ”

“ Not any of us,” in one voice, answered the banditti.

“ How came she thus wounded ? ”

One of the band stepped forward, and replied, “ We had wandered far, and were returning homewards, when loud shrieks

shrieks from a distance first called our attention,—we turned again, and hastened to the spot from whence they appeared to proceed; there we discovered him who lies bleeding yonder, cruelly beating this Signora.—On perceiving us, he attempted to drag her forward,—she fell, and cut her temple against the point of the rock;—on this, he redoubled his blows, and barbarously kicked her;—the Signora must have upon her head wounds more dangerous than that which is apparent: we secured the inhuman Signor, however, while some of our bravos seized the mules and baggage, which were following at a distance—they could not retain possession, however, without encountering the servants and muleteers, whom they soon routed, some one way some another—we then”——

“ No

“No more,” cried the chief, haughtily
—“I have heard enough.”

The offended bravo bit his lips, and muttered somewhat between his teeth to Zofloya, who stood beside him, and regarded him with an approving air.

“What!—how sayest thou, villain!”—
exclaimed Leonardo, passionately.

“I say we did our duty—and”

“Peace,—base born ruffian!” cried
the chief, “I’ll hear no more.”

The vindictive bravo laid his hand upon his dagger—the action was not un-noted by Leonardo;—he left the feeble Laurina in the arms of Victoria, and rushing towards him, with one blow levelled him to the earth.

“Inso-

“ Insolent ruffian !” he cried, “ darest thou to rebel against thy chief ? lend me a dagger,” he called aloud, “ it shall drink his heart’s blood !”

Seventy hands at once tendered their daggers ; Leonardo seizing one, brandished it for a moment over the prostrate robber ;—then seeming to consider the object unworthy, checked his rage, and bade him rise.

The wily robber rose upon his knees, and crossing his arms upon his bosom, declined his head in token of submission.

The chief threw the weapon from him with a smile of contempt.

“ Thou art unworthy of death from *my* hand,” he cried “ arise reptile !”

The

The robber rose on his feet, and joined his comrades with a sullen air.

Leonardo returned to his mother ;—he regarded her with an air of pity, and supporting her in his arms, brought her forward, and offered wine to her lips. The wretched Laurina swallowed a little, and it appeared to revive her.—Leonardo then commanded that a bed should be prepared, the very best that the cavern could afford ; when ready, with his own hands he endeavoured to render it more commodious, but still it was a sorry couch for one who had till now reposed on beds of down, and made the grievous transition at a period like the present. On this, however, her languid limbs were stretched,—the wounds on her head were bathed, and her gashed wrist bound up.—All these tender offices were performed

formed by Leonardo, while Victoria stood silently by, regarding her wretched mother with a stern unpitiful air, or, wholly indifferent to what was passing, conversed with Zofloya in another part of the cavern.

At length the miserable Laurina sunk into a slumber, and Leonardo, quitting then her lowly couch, rejoined his companions. Supper was prepared, and, while partaking of it, those of the bandit that had been out-detailed more at large the particulars of the evening's adventure. Little more of moment was, however, related, than what the bravo had already specified;—still Leonardo listened with the deepest attention, making, however, no comment, while Victoria (terrible to say) seemed to exult in the
awful

awful fate that had overtaken her deeply punished mother.

The wine passed briskly about—the banditti resigned themselves by degrees to the arms of sleep, reclining round the expiring embers of the fire.—Victoria retired to her usual place of rest, while Leonardo, motioning his female companion to retire, approached the uneasy pillow of his mother with intent to watch beside her during the night.

Thus, by the wonderful and inscrutable ways of Providence, were gathered together under the same roof, those whose fates were so intimately connected with each other. The one suffering under the dreadful visitation of her crime,—her children under its fatal consequences; while the infamous author of all had met

met, unprepared, the fate due to his guilt, as to his barbarity towards the woman he had betrayed.

Not long had the hapless Laurina retained that unworthy love for which she had made such sacrifices;—the injured Loredani no more,—her son Leonardo fled, no one knew whither,—Victoria eloped from the confinement in which she had been placed;—no further obstacles, no further alarms to encounter, the passion of the ungenerous Ardolph cooled apace, nought existing, nought occurring to give it the required zest. He began to regret that he had resigned his liberty for a woman, whose almost constant melancholy damped his spirits, or whose strained attempts at gaiety but reproached him for expecting the effort. He became first indifferent to, and at length even

even hated the wretched victim of his artifices;—he retained no longer traces of the fascinating elegant Ardolph, but degenerated gradually into the harsh and savage tyrant.—Grief had stolen the roses from the cheeks of Laurina, remorse had faded her graceful form—she was no longer an object of triumph or of envy, to exhibit to the worthless ephemera of the day, and she was reproached with her broken charms. The gay, the infamous seducer became weary of his acquisition; by degrees he absented himself from her for lengthened periods,—mirthful and joyous when away, he returned to her gloomy and severe.—Next, frequent infidelities struck the barbed arrow of despised love into her soul.—Bitter reproaches, and at length personal ill treatment, even to a degree of barbarity, closed the list of her outrages, and filled up

the measure of her punishment and misery!

It was in these dreadful moments—or in those of cheerless solitude—smarting to agony beneath the pangs and indignities of brutal tyranny, that the wretched Laurina reflected upon her past conduct,—upon the husband and the children she had abandoned—upon the husband, the fond husband, that for her had died,—upon her children, hating her and flying from her presence.—Ah, terrible and severe must be the compunctious visitings of the mother, who stepping aside from the path of honor and of virtue, becomes amenable for the distraction and death of a doting husband, for the crimes and miseries of her offspring! Awhile, faintly may you triumph, sad daughter of infamy!—glitter awhile the vain and despised

spised pageant of the hour, but short-lived is your ignoble glory—bitter and permanent your punishment and regret!

Among other vices resorted to by the vile ungrateful Ardolph, was that of deep play. In this he engaged with a spirit of enterprize, so hazardous and wild, that his fortune became rapidly impoverished:—It was the conviction of this that determined him to quit Venice, and retire to Switzerland.—In haughty terms he expressed his intention to Laurina, and brutally added that his exile from the gay world would be pleasing, if unaccompanied by her; but the lost and broken hearted mourner replied not to the insinuation;—to accompany him she felt unavoidable, for spite

of his baseness, spite of his inhumanity, she loved him still.

On their journey, notwithstanding, he continued to treat her with the utmost harshness and severity. Not till the period of their encounter on the Alps, however, with Leonardo's band, had he resorted to personal ill usage. Thus did it happen, that his aggravated crimes and cruelty caused him to rush upon his fate,—for, terror for her life, excited by the violence of his blows, extorted loud shrieks from the terrified Laurina; these shrieks attracted and guided the robbers to the spot; the barbarian was immediately secured by ruffians less ferocious than himself, and deservedly met his death by the hands of one, on whom he had entailed misery and destruction!

struction! Such are the retributions of a just Providence, which, though sometimes tardy, are generally sure, even in this world.

CHAP. XXXII.

ABOUT noon the following day, the wretched Laurina, (who had not, during the night, nor till the present period uttered aught but incoherent exclamations, appearing wholly unconscious, and insensible to surrounding objects)—opened her dim eyes;—they fell first upon the countenance of Victoria, who happened to be standing near her,—she gazed for a few moments—by degrees, weakened memory resumed its power; she identified her daughter, and faintly shrieked!—she passed her feeble hand over her eyes, then raised it trembling to heaven, and extended it towards Victoria.

“ Daughter !

“ Daughter !—beloved daughter,” in broken accents she said—“ by what chance do I behold thee ?—but no matter—I have not time to ask,—forgive—forgive me !”

Victoria answered not, neither did she extend her hand—but the soul of Leonardo was more noble ;—he likewise stood beside the death-bed of his mother, though she knew him not ;—he bent over her, and took her feeble hand, which had sunk again upon her miserable couch.

“ Mother,” he cried, glancing angrily towards the cruel Victoria, “ Mother, dost thou forget thy son Leonardo ?”

The wretched parent turned upon him her heavy eyes ; Nature spoke resistless in her bosom, and in the strong marked

K 4 features,

features, the muscular figure of the chief of a banditti, she recognized the once delicate and blooming boy, that she had nurtured in her bosom ! and an anguished sigh convulsed her heart.

“ Oh, God !” she murmured, “ can this be ;—and dost *thou* pardon me—say, dost thou, whom I deserted and abandoned ?”

“ Mother, as I love and pardon thee, may Heaven look down and speak peace to thy soul.”

“ Oh, my Leonardo !—thy nature was ever noble,—raise me in thine arms,—beloved—injured son—raise me in thine arms— —if—if—thou darest not pollution,” she added, shuddering violently.

The cavern at this time contained only
Victoria,

Victoria and Leonardo;—at the further end blazed a bright wood fire, but still it served not wholly to reveal its gloomy expanse to the dim sight of the expiring Laurina. Near her abject couch, upon a fragment of stone, serving for a table, burned a lamp, which shed its red rays full upon the objects near her, and partially revealed the rude horrors by which her last moments were encompassed. Here plumed hats, here stilletos, swords, and other instruments of murder, hung around; and there the spoils of the slain were scattered in lawless profusion;—the body of the murdered Ardolph had been removed, and cast perhaps—(meriting no other burial) adown some measureless abyss, but his unwashed blood still dyed in a dark red stream the flinty ground, while his garments, crimsoned over, and pierced in unnumbered holes by the fierce

K 5

dagger

dagger of the avenging Leonardo, remained awful mementos scattered near.

Upon such a scene of massacre and confusion, Leonardo, in her last moments raised his mother in his arms! she gazed wildly round—but at this fearful moment thoughts of higher import appeared to possess her soul.—Her eyes reverted again towards her daughter, who remained still standing beside her, with folded arms and the stern countenance of a relentless fiend.

“ Daughter,”—in a hollow voice cried the dying mother, clasping the weak hand, which she could just move, over that which was wounded, and incapable of motion, “ daughter,—thy dying mother prays to thee for pardon!—ah,—look not so unkindly upon her,—unbend those stern

stern features—let me not enter the presence of offended God—unpitied!—unforgiven by thee!—Daughter I say—oh, Victoria!—”

A deep and shuddering sigh interrupted further utterance, and she remained gasping in the arms of Leonardo.

“ Speak!—speak to thy poor mother, Victoria,” cried the superior soul’d Leonardo—hast thou been in thine *own* conduct so faultless, and so pure, that thou should’st deny to thy mother the assurance of love and pardon in an hour like this?”

“ Hah!—that is the very point,” exclaimed Victoria, with a wild frightful laugh,——“ that which I have been, my
K 6
mother

mother made me !——Mother,” she pursued, addressing the anguished Laurina——
 “ why did’st thou *desert* thy children, to follow the seducer, who hath justly rewarded thee ?——’Tis thou who hast caused *my* ruin ; on thy head, therefore, will my sins be numbered.—Can I—oh can I reflect upon my deeds of horror, without arraigning thee as the primary cause ?—thou taughtest me to give the reins to lawless passion,—for that I dishonoured my husband ;—caused the death of his brother, and murdered a defenceless orphan !—For these crimes—all, all, I say, rising out of *thy example*, I am now a despised exile in the midst of robbers—of robbers, of whom the noble son who supports thee in his arms is *Chief* !—for this”——

“ Infamous, abandoned girl !” exclaimed
 Leonardo,

Leonardo, “ palsied be thy tongue!— can’st thou, wretch ! without one compunctious pang, strew with sharp thorns the dying pillow of thy mother?—kneel, monster of barbarity ! kneel and solicit heaven and her for pardon.”

The fierce countenance of Victoria relaxed into a smile of contempt, and she remained immoveable.

Laurina still gasped in the arms of her son ; convulsive shudderings seized her shattered frame ;—her eyes, fixed on Leonardo, beheld his noble features, irradiated with filial love and tenderness.—In the agony of approaching death, she could only grasp his hand, but the grasp spoke eloquent to his heart the anguished gratitude which filled her own !—once more she turned her piteous looks upon Victoria,

ria, who unfeelingly regarded her pallid countenance (rendered doubly pallid by the blood stained bandage which bound her wounded forehead,) but spoke not.

Excess of agony pressed upon the burning brain of the wretched mother; the pulsation of her breaking heart increased to violence—then it nearly ceased—the film of death crept over her eyes, cold damps bedewed her brows, and in accents scarcely articulate she murmured—

“ Terrible—yet just God!—oh, pardon—pardon—*mercy!* ”

The last word quivered on her lips—violent and universal convulsion seized for a moment her frame—it was the last struggle of life with death—the struggle ended, life became extinct for ever!

When

When Leonardo could no longer doubt that his mother had expired, he reclined her gently upon the rugged pillow, now no longer uneasy to the departed sufferer, and kneeling beside her corpse, pressed her cold hand to his lips, and bedewed it with the heart-wrung tears of bitterest anguish.

“ Fool !” exclaimed Victoria from the opposite side of the couch — “ how can’st thou weakly lament over the death of one who hath made thee what thou now art—the vile chief of a band of robbers?—Let the noble chief weep then—well he may, when he remembers, that instead of being thus distinguished—he should have figured the highest nobleman in Venice !”

“ ~~Base obdurate hearted wretch !~~” replied

plied Leonardo, with dignity, “ the vile chief of a band of robbers can lament at once over the *errors*, and over the miserable *fate* of a misguided mother—deeply, too deeply, by the death bed *thou* hast given her, independently of the punishment her errors have received, hath she expiated the wretched delusion of the moment.—Nor wholly on her, abandoned girl, dare to affix thy guilt and crimes—far, far beyond what her example ever taught thee. No, Victoria, thy base mind was naturally evil;—a mother’s example might have checked thy depravity, but could never have rendered thee virtuous!”

“ But for her,” gloomily returned Victoria, “ the accursed pleasures of illicit love would never have tempted me to sin—she *first* corrupted and allured my mind—her example opened wide the flood
gates

gates of passion in my soul—from its resistless turbulence, bearing down all before it, *first* came my crimes, if crimes they are ; and——But who art thou that presumest to reproach me ?—Why do I reply to thee ?—Did'st thou not attempt to *murder*, in his sleep, the man who never injured thee ?—did'st thou not spill the blood of thy sister ?—did'st thou not forsake thy broken-hearted father ?—and art thou not now an outcast of society ?—a lawless captain of banditti ? lurking amid dreary mountains, to seize as he passes the unwary traveller !—to despoil him of his all—perhaps to kill !—No doubt, many a precipice among these solitudes (safe but for thee and thy horde) hath received the frequent corse of the defenceless, butchered victim !—no doubt——”

“ Babbling and aggravating fiend !
 provoke

provoke me no further," cried the enraged Leonardo, starting on his feet.

The horrible Victoria burst into a loud laugh, and flew to the extremity of the cavern. Leonardo's blood boiled in his veins, but he cast his eyes upon his mother's corpse; her livid features, which still wore the cast of anguish, appealed to his heart; they seemed to say—"At such a moment, forbear!" A sacred sentiment pervaded his bosom; by a powerful effort, conquering his indignation, he wreaked not merited vengeance upon a wretch that he remembered was his sister, but turning hastily away, he cast himself across the couch of his mother, and covered his face with his hands.

At this juncture the figure of Zofloya presented itself to Victoria, at the entrance
of

of the cavern; he was unperceived by Leonardo, and beckoned to her with his finger; she flew joyfully towards him:—the Moor received her with a smile, but strange meaning appeared on his features, and he pressed his finger on his lip, to enjoin her silence. Victoria spoke not, for to Zofloya she was all yielding and obedience.

He gently took her arm, and led her from the cavern; they proceeded in silence till they gained the mountain, when Zofloya, desiring her to be seated on a rugged projection, and taking his station beside her, spoke thus:—

“Victoria, thy brother hath offended thee, but ere long thy revenge will be complete!—Dost thou remember the bravo that he struck last night, Ginotti by name?—I stood beside him.”

“E

"I remember him well," answered Victoria.

"I stood beside him — did'st thou mark?"

"I did."

"Bitter hate, and thirst of vengeance, instantly filled his bosom against thy brother. At the first streak of dawn, he stole from the cavern: sleep had not closed his eyes during the night: he went forth with the resolution of hurling destruction upon the head of his chief, and, rather than not sacrifice him to his vengeance, implicate the whole of his associates. Ere now, he hath given information to the government of Turin, and betrayed the caverned recess, deemed, without clue, impenetrable. At an early hour on the
morrow,

morrow, Savoy's duke will have dispatched a considerable force to Mount Cenis; the avenue from the cavern will be surrounded, and for those within there will be no escape!—Thy brother will fall, perhaps, the first, and” ——

“ And what will be my fate ?” eagerly enquired Victoria, with her usual regard for self, “ must I fall likewise, Zofloya ?”

“ Have I forsaken thee yet ?” sternly enquired the Moor. “ Return without fear to the cavern; even were the troops already within its walls, I would rescue thee !”

“ But wherefore return, Zofloya ?”

“ I will it so !” replied the Moor, in a loud voice. “ Learn to rely upon me
even

even in the heart of danger.—Now let us converse no more,” he added, in a softened voice, “upon this subject.”

Victoria durst not reply. They continued wandering for a short time among the mountains. Zofloya then caused her to return to the cavern, but, to her infinite dismay, did not himself follow. At the usual hour, still without having seen him, she was compelled to retire to repose, indifferent respecting the fate of others, but tormented with selfish terrors for her own.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXIII.

IT was the hour of noon, on the following day, when Leonardo, who had never quitted the cavern since the death of his unfortunate mother, heard the usual signals for entrance given without.

The band were not often in the habits of returning at this hour; he therefore conceived that somewhat extraordinary must have occurred, and hastened to give them entrance. Several of the robbers rushed tumultuously in, with looks of horror and alarm.

“ We are lost!” they exclaimed, in
terrified

terrified accents, "we are betrayed!—our retreat is discovered:—an armed force now hastens to surround the entrance to the cavern; every avenue of escape will be blocked up; such of our comrades as are out will stand no chance, for they will be secured by innumerable soldiers, awaiting them in ambush; for ourselves, our temporary security will be presently penetrated; we shall all be sacrificed, unless our captain can discover to us any secret paths, by which we may find a passage under the mountains, and evade our foes."

"My brave comrades," returned Leonardo, with a cool and dignified air, "if the case be such as you represent, all is over with us.—I know of no secret paths leading from this cave, nor do I believe there are any, its own concealed and secret situation, its o'er-hanging portico,
and

and labyrinthian avenues, having ever been deemed sufficient protection : — malice or treachery could alone have revealed us ; — all I can recommend, therefore, is, that we sell dearly our liberty and our lives, and yield not an inch that is not purchased by blood !”

While thus he spoke, the signals from without were rapidly repeated.

“ Some of our brave fellows have found means to elude the vigilance of the guards,” cried Leonardo. — “ Our signal is unknown to any but ourselves — haste and give them entrance — perhaps they bring further intelligence.”

At this time the cavern contained only an inconsiderable number of banditti, their chief Leonardo, his mistress, and

Victoria, who sat beside her, trembling with apprehension of danger, and dismayed at the non-appearance of Zofloya, whom she began to fear intended to abandon *her* in the common ruin.

The order of Leonardo was obeyed; the signals were exchanged, the door thrown open, when in rushed, to the horror of all, a numerous band of armed soldiers, headed and conducted by Ginotti! the dastard whom Leonardo in momentary passion had struck:

Surprized and shocked, even the brave soul of the chief was daunted! — The soldiers hastened to surround him. — With the pride of genuine nobility, he waved his hand, and instinctively they fell back! —

“ But

“But a few moments, Signors,” he cried, “and I am yours:” — for in an instant he beheld that resistance against an host would be vain.—“I would but speak,” he continued, “a few words to this female, the companion of my fortunes, then will I no longer claim your courtesy.”

He approached his mistress, who, more surprized than intimidated, remained sitting beside Victoria.

“Megalina Strozzi!” he exclaimed.

The name in a moment electrified Victoria—she beheld herself seated next a dire foe, surrounded by death and danger!—she looked for Zofloya; he was no where to be seen, and her soul shook within her — she sat in fearful silence, listening to the words of Leonardo.

“Megalina Strozzi!” he cried again; then, lowering his voice, he proceeded, “I will not reproach thee now.—I will not tell thee that thy delusions misled my youthful mind, or have ultimately caused my ruin.—No, I will not tell thee so— for the original cause lies deeper, and more remote!—but look around.—At this moment, oh! Megalina, I consider only the love that I have borne thee,—the years that we have been united,—that thou hast uniformly shared my perils and my miseries,—and at the remembrance, my soul freely pardons whatever evil thou hast caused me!—Yet less lightly wilt thou be judged of by others, and suffer common ignominy with the lowest of our band—a disgraceful death!”

“I have security against *that*,” in an agitated but low voice, interrupted Megalina

upon Ginotti, and (ere his intention could be surmised) plunging a poignard in his heart, — “ thus do *I* reward a traitor, and disappoint him of his expected triumph !”

Ginotti fell, bathed in blood, and uttering hideous imprecations. — The guards hastened to seize the frantic Leonardo, but, breaking with the strength of madness from their grasp, he fled to the extremity of the cavern, and before he could be again secured, had given himself repeated wounds with the poignard, still reeking from the heart of the treacherous Ginotti! — Fainting, bleeding profusely, he staggered, and would have fallen ; the soldiers supported him in their arms, and some attempted to staunch his wounds, but even in the agonies of death he struggled furiously to prevent them, crying

ing out repeatedly, in broken accents of frantic joy—

“ ’Tis too late! — ’tis too late! — Heaven be praised.” — He endeavoured to dash himself upon the earth, when finding he was forcibly restrained, and that his strength failed him, he rolled his wild eyes around, as in contempt of their further power, and resigning himself calmly into their arms, expired, with a smile of triumph on his features!

Finding that the chief of the robbers had thus escaped them, the soldiers hastened to secure, with all possible diligence, the remainder of the band. Some approached, and offered to seize Zofloya, supposing him to be at least second in command.

L 4

“ Oh!

“ Oh! we are lost,” whispered Victoria to him in accents of alarm.

“ Fear not,” softly returned the Moor, “ but accustom thyself to rely upon me wholly. Signors,” he cried, addressing himself to the guards, “ retire immediately from the cavern—if you persist in remaining, evil must betide you!—you impede my movements, and will yourselves suffer,—here is my dagger, take it, and be now convinced, *I* meditate not to escape your hands by means of self destruction.”

Selfish terror, or awe, perhaps both, acted involuntarily upon the minds of the soldiers, and they retreated to a distance. Zofloya, then passing his arm round the waist of Victoria, stepped back a few paces.—Suddenly a frightful noise
like

like the rumbling of thunder was heard, —the cavern, and even the mountain itself, seemed to shake to the foundation! huge pieces from the walls, and from the roof, became as it were forcibly disjoined! —the soldiers, frantic from terror, no longer retained their hold of the banditti, but rushed in one common croud towards the entrance of the cavern, pressing tumultuously forward to escape, as expecting to meet death at every foot-step! —Even Victoria, though supported by the arm of Zofloya, yielded to the terrible impressions excited by this scene of dismay, —the reiterated shouts of the soldiery, of “An explosion! an explosion!” and the feeling she had of her own inevitable danger; —her senses became overpowered, confused horrors danced in her sight, her eyes closed, and, unable to preserve her fleeting faculties, she swooned. —

On recovering, she beheld herself in the midst of a spacious plain, reclining in the arms of Zofloya, and encompassed by myriads of guards—she gazed wildly around—scarcely could she believe that still she existed!

“ Oh, Zofloya, Zofloya !” she cried, in a voice of horror,—“ where are we?—no longer in the cavern, but in a situation equally perilous;—oh! dost thou not mean at last to preserve me from impending fate?—behold how we are surrounded,—no hope of escape.—Would that, like Leonardo, I had preserved myself from the ignominious death that too well I see awaits me !”

“ Wilt thou not trust to me then ?” in a terrible voice cried the Moor.—“ I tell thee I can save thee from the fate
 thou

thou darest—though surrounded by numbers, we are beheld of none!—Swear then thou wilt confide in me,—trust me wholly, and, in an instant, I bear thee from the midst of them!”

“Oh I swear, I swear!” cried the agonised Victoria.

More swift than a point of time was the transition:—she beheld herself no longer in the midst of armed soldiers; but on the summit of a mighty rock!—Zofloya led her to its uttermost brink; extreme terror filled the soul of Victoria; but she could not speak.—Involuntarily she cast downwards her eyes,—a dizzying precipice, that made the senses stagger; yawned at her feet; far, far in its bottomless abyss, battled the deafening cataract; which, from the summit of the adjacent
rock,

rock, tumbled a broad tremendous stream, till broken mid-way in its course by some rude projection, it divided into numberless dancing sprays, and branches of foam, uniting again at a considerable distance beneath, and thundering as it fell with resistless fury down the rugged sides of the precipice, whose hollow bosom sternly re-echoed to the mighty sounds.

Victoria trembled, for the spirit of the beautiful Lilla seemed to rise to her view from the depth of the frightful abyss!—mournful it appeared, and mangled with many a wound.—Victoria remembered, that for her she had felt no pity. The images of the dying Berenza, of the destroyed Henriquez, glided before her on the rocky steep—*remorse* filled her guilty soul, but filled it too late, for it came accompanied by *despair*!—In utterable anguish

guish she gazed around, and wildly clasped her hands.

“ Now then, Victoria !” cried the Moor, but not in the gentle voice in which he had been wont to address her—“ Now then, thou art emancipated from falling ruins, from hostile guards, from fear of shame, and an ignominious death,—already hast thou witnessed my power, therefore thou knowest what I am capable of.—I have watched thee, followed thee, and served thee until now :—If, then, I save thee for ever from all future accidents—all future worldly misery—all future disgrace ; say—wilt thou, for that future, resign thyself entirely to me ?”

“ Alas, Zofloya !” answered the terrified Victoria, “ am I not already in thy
thy

thy power—can I chuse then but be thine?”

“No evasion, woman!” sternly cried the Moor,—“no forced concessions,—hast thou not always promised to be mine? Have I ever,” he added, in a softened voice, “have I ever availed myself till now, of that promise which thou madest?—but yet I cannot, Victoria, compel thee, nor, so dearly do I covet thee, will thy forced compliance satisfy me;—say then at once—wilt thou unequivocally give thyself to me, heart, and body, and soul?”

“Oh, yes! yes, for ever!” answered Victoria, rejoiced at even the semblance of returning softness in the Moor, in whose power she so completely beheld herself.

herself.—“ Oh, yes for ever ! but rescue me, I implore thee, at once from this frightful situation, and hereafter thou shalt dispose of me as thou wilt.—Taunt me no more, oh Zofloya ! with hopes of safety and of peace, for my soul grows sick within me at the view of surrounding horrors !”

“ Yet awhile, fair Victoria !—thou must first swear to abide by what thou hast now said.”

“ I swear, then !” answered the trembling Victoria.

“ And thou hast said it often, rash girl !” replied the Moor, bursting into a loud laugh, and fixing on her his terrible eyes, from whose fiery glances Victoria

toría turned enhorrored!—"Nay, turn not away," he tauntingly pursued,—but look again, and see to *whom* thou hast sworn!"

Victoria raised her eyes—horrible was the sight which met them!—no traces of the beautiful Zofloya remained,—but in his place, stripped, as in her dream, of his gaudy habiliments, stood a figure, fierce, gigantic, and hideous to behold!—Terror and despair seized the soul of Victoria; she shrieked, and would have fallen from the dizzying heights, had not his hand, who appeared Zofloya no longer, seized her with a grasp of iron by the neck!

"Dost thou mark, vain fool!" he cried in a terrific voice, which drowned the thundering

deringecho of the waters—"Behold me as I am!—no longer that which I appeared to be, but the sworn enemy of all created nature, by men called—SATAN!—'Tis I that lay in wait for frail humanity—but rare, too rarely it is, that by allurements or temptation, I seduce them to my toils!—Few venture far as thou hast ventured in the alarming paths of sin—thy loose and evil thoughts first pointed thee out to my keen, my searching view, and attracted me towards thee, in the eager hope of prey!—Yes, it was, that under semblance of the Moorish slave (supposed the recovered favorite of Henriquez)—appeared to thee first in thy dreams, luring thee to attempt the completion of thy wildest wishes!—I found thee, oh! of most exquisite willingness, and yielding readily to all my temptations!—But
 what

what hast thou gained? for I have deceived thee throughout;—yet hast thou permitted thyself to be led along!—thou hast damned thy soul with unnumbered crimes, rendering thyself, by each, more fully mine.—Thou hast enjoyed no moment of peace, nor even the smallest of those fruits for which thou wast reduced so deeply to sin!—Thus hath my triumph been richly completed, thou art at once *betrayed and cursed!* and the glory of thy utter destruction is *mine!*—*Thus then,*” with a terrible laugh, he pursued—*“thus do I now perform my promise to thee of saving from future worldly ill!”*—As he spoke, he grasped more firmly the neck of the wretched Victoria—with one push he whirled her headlong down the dreadful abyss!—as she fell, his loud demoniac laugh, his yells of triumph, echoed

echoed in her ears, and a mangled corse, she was received into the foaming waters below!

Reader—consider not this as a romance merely.—Over their passions and their weaknesses, mortals cannot keep a curb too strong. The progress of vice is gradual and imperceptible, and the arch enemy ever waits to take advantage of the failings of mankind, whose destruction is his glory! That his seductions may prevail, we dare not doubt; for can we otherwise account for those crimes, dreadful and repugnant to nature, which human beings are sometimes tempted to commit? Either we must suppose that the love of evil is born with us (which would be an insult to the Deity), or we must attribute them

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them (as appears more consonant with reason) to the suggestions of infernal influence.

FINIS.

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