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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

The bell of the Capuchin church had only just begun to ring, yet the church was already full. The people of Madrid had not come there because they were deeply holy. Many women came to be seen, and many men came to look at the women. Some came because the preacher was famous, some because they had nothing better to do before the play began, and some only because they expected to meet friends. Only a few old devotees and a few jealous preachers truly cared about the sermon. Still, whatever their reasons were, they filled every corner of the church.

There were people on the benches, people in the aisles, and even boys climbing on the statues. “There is no room here!” people cried again and again. “Do not push, señora!” said one voice. “You cannot pass this way,” said another. But an older woman kept moving forward as if none of them had spoken. She used her strong arms, pushed through the crowd, and made a path for herself and for the young lady who followed close behind her in silence.

“Holy Virgin!” cried the older woman at last. “What heat! What a crowd! We had better go home. There is not a single seat, and no one is kind enough to offer us one.” Her voice made two young gentlemen turn their heads. One look at the speaker was enough for them, and they turned back at once, for the woman had red hair and a squint. Then the younger lady spoke softly, “Yes, Leonella, let us go home. I am afraid of such a crowd.” At that sweet voice, both young men looked again, and this time they rose from their seats.

The girl’s face was hidden by a thick black veil, but her figure was light and graceful, and her fair hair fell in long curls. One of the young men, Lorenzo de Medina, offered her his seat at once. His friend, Don Christoval, did the same for Leonella. Leonella sat down with many loud thanks, while the younger lady made only a quiet bow. Lorenzo stayed near her, and Christoval began to talk to the aunt

so that Lorenzo might speak more freely to the niece.

"You must be new to Madrid," Lorenzo said. "If not, the whole city would already be speaking of you." The young lady answered only in a low voice, "No, señor." Lorenzo smiled and tried again. "Will you stay here long?" "Yes, señor," she said. He offered his help with all the politeness of a nobleman, but she only bowed, and he thought, "Now she must speak." She did not.

At last Lorenzo said, "Since you are a stranger, perhaps you do not know our custom. Ladies uncover their faces in church. Allow me to lift your veil." He reached toward it, but she raised her hand quickly. "I never uncover in public, señor," she said. "And why not?" cried Leonella. "Do you not see that all the other ladies have done so? Come, child, show your face. No one will steal it from you." Antonia answered gently, "Dear aunt, it is not the custom in Murcia," but Leonella insisted, and the veil was lifted.

Lorenzo saw at once that Antonia was very young, shy, and lovely. Her face was not perfect in every part, yet the whole of it was sweet and full of feeling. Her blue eyes shone like clear water in the sun, and every time they met Lorenzo's eyes, she blushed and looked down at her beads. Leonella noticed his admiration and began at once to explain everything. "She knows nothing of the world," she said. "She was brought up far away in an old castle with only her mother." Christoval answered with false surprise, and Leonella, delighted to have listeners, went on with the whole story.

She told them that her sister Elvira had secretly married a young nobleman, the son of the Marquis de las Cisternas. The old Marquis had been furious. "He came in a rage," Leonella said, "and would have carried my sister away if he could. But she escaped with her husband to the Indies. My poor father was thrown into prison, and the Marquis even took away my sister's little son. Soon after that, we heard the child had died." Then she told how Elvira had returned to Spain a widow, poor and helpless, with only Antonia left to her. "Now the old Marquis is dead," she said, "and my sister has come to Madrid to beg his son to continue her small pension."

Lorenzo listened with growing interest. When he heard the name of the

family, he said, “I know the new Marquis. He is expected in Madrid soon, and he is said to be a good man. If Antonia allows it, I will speak for her cause.” Antonia looked up and thanked him with a smile, but Leonella thanked him with enough words for them both. Then she turned to Christoval and asked, “But tell me, why is this place so full today?” Christoval replied, “Because Ambrosio, the abbot of this monastery, preaches here every Thursday. All Madrid calls him the Man of Holiness.”

He then spoke of Ambrosio’s strange history. No one knew who his parents were. He had been found as a baby at the monastery door, raised by the monks, and had spent his whole life in study, prayer, and strict self-denial. “He is only thirty,” Christoval said, “but people think him a saint. Some even say he does not know the difference between man and woman.” At this Antonia asked innocently, “Does that make a saint? Then am I one?” “Child!” cried Leonella. “What a question! A young lady should not speak of such things.” She was about to say much more when a murmur ran through the church and stopped every tongue.

Ambrosio had entered. He was tall, handsome, and grave, with dark eyes that seemed both bright and severe. His face was calm, and he bowed humbly, yet there was something in him that filled the whole church with awe. Antonia looked at him and felt a new and strange joy move in her heart. When he began to preach, even Lorenzo forgot that she sat beside him. Ambrosio spoke in clear and powerful words of religion, sin, judgment, fear, mercy, and heaven, and the people trembled, hoped, and listened as if he had taken hold of every soul in the church.

When the sermon ended, no one wished to move. Then suddenly the silence broke, and the people pressed around Ambrosio, blessing him, kissing his robe, and reaching eagerly for his rosary when it slipped from his hand and broke among them. He smiled, blessed them, and passed into the abbey. Antonia watched him until the door closed, and then a tear came into her eye. “He is shut away from the world,” she thought. “Perhaps I shall never see him again.” Lorenzo saw the tear and asked, “Are you pleased with our great preacher, or does Madrid praise him too much?”

Antonia answered more freely now than before. “No, señor,” she said. “He

is greater than I expected. Until today I did not know what eloquence could do. While he spoke, I felt such respect, such warmth, almost such affection for him, that I hardly understand myself." Lorenzo smiled and replied, "You are young, and your heart trusts too easily. Yet in this case, I think your feelings do not deceive you. Ambrosio's life has been without blame, though the world may still test him." "Oh, surely he will remain pure," said Antonia. Then she turned to her aunt and said, "Dearest aunt, ask my mother to choose him as our confessor."

Part 2

"Ask your mother?" cried Leonella. "I will do no such thing. I do not like this Ambrosio at all. He looks so severe that he makes me shake from head to foot. If he were my confessor, I would never dare to confess half my little sins, and then what would become of me?" Don Christoval laughed and said, "Many people say the same, señora. He is just, learned, and pure, but perhaps too hard on the faults of others. Even among his own monks, he already rules with a very firm hand." Then, seeing that the crowd was beginning to thin, he added with a bow, "May we have the honor of walking you home?"

Leonella drew herself up and answered with great importance, "Oh no, señor, that is quite impossible. If I arrived home with two such gallant cavaliers beside me, my sister would scold me for an hour. And besides, I should not wish anyone to think that I accepted certain proposals too quickly." "Proposals?" repeated Christoval. "I assure you, señora—" Leonella interrupted him at once. "No, no, do not press me. I know too well what impatience means in a lover. You shall hear from me tomorrow, and that must be enough for the present."

Lorenzo could hardly keep his face still, and Christoval looked at him in despair. Leonella then asked their names, and Lorenzo answered for both. "My friend is the Condé d'Ossorio," he said, "and I am Lorenzo de Medina." "Very well," said Leonella. "I shall remember both. I will tell my sister of your kind offer, Don Lorenzo, and I will not forget your devotion, Don Christoval." Then she stretched out a thin hand to Christoval, who was forced to bend over it with

the saddest grace in the world. Antonia said nothing, but when she reached the church door, she turned once, looked back at Lorenzo, and answered his bow with one of her own before she disappeared into the street.

"Well, Lorenzo," said Christoval the moment they were alone, "you have used me cruelly. To help your little romance, I spoke a few polite words to that aunt, and now I find myself very near marriage. How will you repay me for kissing that dreadful hand? I swear I shall smell of garlic for a month." Lorenzo laughed, but not for long, for Antonia still filled his thoughts. "You may mock as much as you please," he said, "but I tell you seriously that I have never seen anyone so gentle and so charming. My uncle has often wished me to marry, and until now I would not listen. Tonight I begin to think differently."

Christoval stared at him and then cried, "Surely you do not mean marriage with that young girl?" "Why not?" asked Lorenzo. "Her mother was daughter to the late Marquis de las Cisternas, and Raymond, the present Marquis, is honorable enough to acknowledge her. Besides, I would be a villain if I thought of her in any other way. She is young, modest, sweet, and sensible." "Sensible?" said Christoval. "She said almost nothing." Lorenzo answered, "Yes, but what little she said was always right." Christoval shook his head, laughed again, and at last said, "Go then to your convent and your holy thoughts. I shall leave you to your dreams."

He departed, and Lorenzo remained behind in the church. The night had grown darker, and only a faint light from the moon entered through the painted windows. The vast church was nearly empty now, and the cool air moved softly through the aisles. Lorenzo stood where Antonia had sat and felt a strange sadness after the joy of seeing her. He thought of her beauty, of her innocence, of the obstacles that might stand between them, and of his sister Agnes, who had chosen the convent and seemed lost to the world. These thoughts suited well with the solemn silence around him, and at last he sat down near one of the pillars and let himself sink into a half-sad, half-pleasant dream.

Sleep came over him slowly. He still believed himself to be in the church, yet now it shone with silver lamps and was full of music. The altar was dressed

as for a great feast, and before it stood Antonia in white, blushing and lovely, like a bride. Lorenzo's heart beat with fear and hope together. Then the door of the abbey opened, and Ambrosio entered with a long train of monks behind him. He came forward and said, "Where is the bridegroom?"

Antonia looked around her with anxious eyes, and Lorenzo stepped toward her before he knew what he was doing. At once her face brightened. She held out her hand and seemed to call him to her without words. He threw himself before her, and she said, "Yes, you are the one. You are my bridegroom." She moved as if to enter his arms, but before he could touch her, a dark and terrible figure rushed between them. The stranger was huge, with fierce eyes, a face full of pride and lust, and fire seemed to come from his mouth. Antonia shrieked as he seized her and leaped with her upon the altar.

Lorenzo tried to save her, but thunder burst above him, and the whole church seemed to shake and fall to pieces. The altar sank, and in its place opened a pit of fire. The monks fled in terror, and the lamps went out. The monster tried to drag Antonia down into the flames, but she tore herself free. Her robe remained in his hands, and at once bright wings spread from her arms. She rose upward in a flood of light and cried, "Friend, we shall meet above." Then the roof opened, heavenly music sounded, and the brightness became so strong that Lorenzo could no longer bear it.

He woke suddenly on the cold pavement. The church was lit, and the sound of evening prayer came from the abbey chapel. For a few moments the dream seemed so real that he could not separate it from life. At last he understood where he was and rose to leave the church. His mind was still full of Antonia and of the strange vision when he noticed a moving shadow on the wall. He looked carefully and saw a man wrapped in a cloak, walking with great caution and often turning his head as if afraid of being watched.

Lorenzo knew that he had no right to spy on a stranger, yet curiosity held him in place. The man drew a letter from under his cloak and slipped it beneath a great statue of Saint Francis. Then he hid himself in a darker corner of the church, as if waiting for someone to come and take it. "So," thought Lorenzo, "this is only

some secret affair of love." He told himself that he should go away and mind his own business, but he did not move. Just then someone rushed into the church so violently that Lorenzo almost drew his sword. It was Christoval again.

"You are still here?" Christoval whispered. "Excellent. Come quickly and hide. In a moment you shall see something worth staying for." "What is it now?" asked Lorenzo. "The nuns of Saint Clare are coming," Christoval answered. "Because Ambrosio will not leave his own walls, they must come here to confess. They will enter by the private door. I have just heard of it from a friend, and if fortune is kind, we may see some pretty faces." "They will be veiled," said Lorenzo. "Not when they enter a church," replied Christoval. "Watch, and you will see."

Soon the procession appeared. First came the prioress, then one nun after another. Each one lifted her veil as she entered and bowed before the image of Saint Francis. Lorenzo watched them closely, wondering who would take the hidden letter. Several passed, and he almost gave up hope. Then one of the nuns let her rosary fall. As she bent to pick it up, the light fell upon her face. At the same moment, with quick and practiced movement, she took the letter from beneath the statue and hid it in her bosom. "Agnes!" cried Lorenzo in a low voice.

Christoval turned to him in surprise, but Lorenzo's face had already changed with anger and alarm. The procession passed through the private door into the abbey, and almost at once the unknown man left his hiding place and hurried toward the church entrance. Lorenzo stepped into his path. "Stop," he said. "You shall not leave until you tell me who you are and what you have written to my sister." The stranger pulled his hat low over his face and answered coldly, "By what right do you question me?" "By the right of her brother," said Lorenzo, laying his hand on his sword. "Answer me, or defend yourself."

The man drew his own sword, and they had already crossed blades before Christoval sprang between them. "Are you mad?" he cried. "Will you shed blood in a church?" At once the stranger lowered his weapon and exclaimed, "Medina? Lorenzo, do you not know me?" Lorenzo looked hard at him, and the voice struck his memory. "Raymond de las Cisternas!" he said. "The same," answered the other.

“If you still call me friend, come with me and hear the truth. I love Agnes, and she loves me. There is much to explain, but not here.” Lorenzo stood silent with astonishment, and then, without another word, he followed Raymond out into the night.

Part 3

The two young men reached the Hotel de las Cisternas in silence. Lorenzo was troubled, and Raymond saw it clearly. As soon as they entered his room, Raymond began to speak kindly of their old friendship, but Lorenzo stopped him at once. “Forgive me,” he said, “if I answer you coldly. My sister’s honor stands in the middle of this matter. Until I know the truth, I cannot speak to you as freely as before.” Raymond bowed his head and replied, “You are right. Ask what you wish, and I will hide nothing from you.”

Lorenzo remained standing and fixed his eyes on him. “Then tell me first,” he said, “what this secret name means. Why are you called Alphonso d’Alvarada, and how did you come to this hidden understanding with Agnes?” Raymond answered, “If you will hear me with patience, you shall know everything. I have loved your sister truly, and she has not given her heart lightly.” Lorenzo’s face softened a little, but only a little. “I will hear you fairly,” he said. “I love Agnes too well to judge her without hearing her side. But speak plainly, Raymond, for I can bear suspense no longer.”

“Then listen,” said the Marquis, and he sat down opposite Lorenzo. “You know that, though Agnes and I were born of the same house, our lives were divided early. You were also much away from her when she was young. So you cannot know every step that led us here. As for this false name, it was first given to me by advice, not by shame.” Lorenzo said, “Go on,” and Raymond continued, “When I was still very young, I had already begun to taste too much pleasure and too much praise. My uncle, the Duke, feared that my rank would spoil me.”

Raymond then repeated the Duke’s counsel almost word for word. “You shall travel,” the old man had told him, “but you shall not travel as the Condé de las

Cisternas. Under your true name, every door will open before you, and every fool will flatter you. Go instead as Alphonso d'Alvarada. Then, if men like you, they will like you for yourself. Speak not only with nobles, but with common people also. Enter poor houses. Learn how men live, how they suffer, and how power should be used." Raymond looked at Lorenzo and said quietly, "I followed that advice, and I have often thanked him for it since."

"I left Spain with one faithful servant," he went on, "and first stopped in Paris. At the beginning I liked it well enough. I was young, rich, and ready for pleasure, and Paris offers pleasure at every step. But after a time I grew tired. The smiles seemed false, the friendships light, and the hearts empty. I said to myself, 'This city shines like gold, but there is little warmth in it,' and so I left it without regret." Lorenzo answered, "That sounds like truth, not complaint." Raymond smiled faintly and said, "It is both."

"From France I turned toward Germany," he continued, "intending to visit several courts, but first to rest a little at Strasbourg. On the way I stopped at Luneville, and there, at an inn called the Silver Lion, I saw a rich carriage waiting at the door. Soon a lady came out with two women behind her and entered it. I asked the host who she was, and he told me, 'A German baroness, very rich and of high rank. She is going to Strasbourg to meet her husband, and from there they will return to their castle in Germany.' I thought no more of it then, and continued my own journey."

"But fate had other plans," said Raymond. "Before night my chaise broke down in the middle of a thick forest. It was winter, the light was almost gone, and Strasbourg was still far away. I saw no choice except to take my servant's horse and ride on alone, leaving the postillion with the broken carriage and my baggage. When I told him this, he shook his head and said, 'You will not reach Strasbourg without a guide, monsieur. The road is bad, and the forest is worse.' Then he told me that not far away there lived a woodman who sometimes gave shelter to travelers."

"I took his advice and followed him through the trees," said Raymond. "At last we saw a small cottage with firelight shining through the cracks. The

postillion knocked, and a man inside called, ‘Who is there?’ When he heard the driver’s voice, he opened the door and welcomed us in. He was a broad, healthy old man with an honest face, and his name was Baptiste. ‘Come in, monsieur,’ he said. ‘I feared you might be a rogue, for there are too many of them in this forest. Our house is poor, but what we have is yours.’” Lorenzo nodded. “That was well said,” he replied.

“His wife did not receive me so kindly,” said Raymond. “She rose, bowed a little, and sat down again without a word. Her name was Marguerite, and there was such bitterness in her face that I disliked her at once. Baptiste saw that I was cold and tired and cried, ‘Move, wife! Get supper ready, find sheets, and put more wood on the fire.’ She obeyed, but with clear anger. While she worked, Baptiste talked with cheerful freedom, and I soon liked him more and more.” Lorenzo said, “So the husband was open, and the wife closed and sharp.” “Exactly,” answered Raymond. “You see them already.”

“After a while,” he continued, “the postillion prepared to go on to Strasbourg for help with my carriage. Baptiste tried to keep him for supper. ‘Eat first, Claude,’ he said. ‘The gentleman is not cruel enough to send you out hungry into such a night.’ I agreed at once, and Claude went to stable the horses. Baptiste then spoke proudly of his two sons, Jacques and Robert. When I asked Marguerite whether she too waited anxiously for them, she answered, ‘Not I. They are no children of mine.’ Baptiste laughed at first and tried to turn it into a joke, but soon he admitted to me in private that she hated her stepsons and loved only the children of her former husband.”

“Just then,” said Raymond, “the sound of wheels came near the cottage, and another carriage stopped outside. Baptiste looked uneasy, for he had little room left, but when I learned who had arrived, I gave up my place without delay. It was the same lady whom I had seen at Luneville, the Baroness Lindenberg. I helped her down from the carriage and brought her inside. She thanked me with great politeness, and Baptiste at last found a way to lodge us all. ‘The lady shall have one chamber, the gentleman another,’ he said. ‘My wife’s room shall do for the two maids, and the male servants must sleep in the barn with a good fire and some

supper.’”

“Soon after, two young men entered the cottage suddenly and stopped short when they saw strangers there. They were Baptiste’s sons, Jacques and Robert, both strong, rough, and sunburnt. They carried pistols and short swords, and when I remarked on their being so well armed, Robert answered, ‘It is wise to be careful in this forest after dark.’ The Baroness grew uneasy and asked, ‘Are there robbers here?’ Robert shrugged and said, ‘So people say, madam, though I have not met them myself.’ At that very time Claude offered to carry a letter for the Baroness to Strasbourg, so that her husband might know of her delay. I advised him to wait until morning, but the Baroness wished the letter sent, and he departed.”

“The Baroness was tired and went upstairs to rest,” said Raymond. “Soon Marguerite made it plain enough that she wanted the room clear, so I asked Robert to show me to the chamber where I was to sleep until supper was ready. ‘Which room?’ he asked. ‘The one with the green hangings,’ said Marguerite sharply. Robert took up a light and led the way toward a narrow staircase. Then Marguerite crossed close by me, seized my hand for a moment, and pressed it hard.”

Part 4

Marguerite had hardly let go of Raymond’s hand before she passed on as if nothing had happened. He stood still for a moment, surprised and uneasy, and then followed Robert up the narrow stairs. At the door of the chamber Robert said, “Here is your room, monsieur. The fire is good, and you will be warm enough.” He set down the candle and added, “Have you any further orders?” Raymond answered, “None,” and when the young man had gone, he shut the door and remembered Marguerite’s strange warning. “Look at the sheets,” she had said, and now he hurried to the bed and turned back the cover.

The sheets were marked with blood. The sight struck him with horror, and in the same instant many small things joined together in his mind and became one terrible thought. The armed sons, the evil look of the wife, the false road, the hidden uneasiness of Baptiste, and the bad name of the forest all pointed one way.

“This house is a trap,” he said to himself. “We are among robbers.” He forced himself to stay calm, went softly to the window, and looked down into the yard below.

There he saw Baptiste walking quickly through the moonlight, stopping now and then to listen. Soon another man joined him, and Raymond recognized Claude, the very postillion who had promised to ride to Strasbourg with their letters. Raymond put out his candle at once and returned to the window so that he might hear them better. Claude was saying, “My delay shall be repaired now. In an hour I can reach the cave.” Baptiste answered, “Be quick then, for this is rich prey. The Spaniard has money, and the lady carries jewels. If your friends come by midnight, we are made men.”

Claude replied, “Your wife may still betray you.” Baptiste gave a low laugh and said, “She fears me too much for that, and she loves her children. Jacques and Robert watch her well. The servants are safe in the barn, and if help comes, we shall kill all and keep all.” Then Claude asked for the watchword, and Baptiste answered, “The reward of courage.” After that the two men separated, and Raymond, left alone with what he had heard, felt cold from head to foot. “So that is their plan,” he thought. “If I remain here quietly, we are all dead before dawn.”

He relit his candle, went down at once, and took his place again opposite the Baroness as if nothing had happened. One glance told Marguerite that he had understood her meaning. She no longer seemed to him dark and cruel. Now her gloomy face looked like the face of a woman who lived among crimes that she hated and feared. He wished to speak to her, but the sons watched him too closely, and he could only sit, force himself to answer the Baroness, and hide the trembling of his hands as well as he could.

The Baroness, knowing nothing, talked with ease about Germany, travel, and the comforts of the Castle of Lindenberg, where she urged Raymond to stay as a guest. He answered as clearly as he was able, but his thoughts were all on escape, on the barn, and on the coming gang. Jacques and Robert kept their eyes on him, and he knew he could not step outside without being stopped. Then Baptiste returned, full of false smiles and apologies. “Forgive my absence,” he said. “I was

detained by business that could not wait. Come, my noble guests, let us eat, and if chance keeps you here longer than you expect, I hope to treat you even better tomorrow."

The meal was plain, but the danger at the table made it terrible. Baptiste spoke of wine and cried, "We do not open this bottle for common company. It was my father's, and I keep it for an evening of honor." He gave a key to Marguerite and sent her to fetch it. She obeyed unwillingly, came back with a sealed bottle, and while she washed the small horn cups, she caught Raymond's eye and made a quick motion with her head. The meaning was clear. "Do not drink," it said, and Raymond prepared himself.

Baptiste filled two cups and offered one to the Baroness and one to Raymond. The Baroness protested a little and then drank, for Baptiste pressed her again and again. Raymond lifted his cup, touched it to his lips, and sprang up at once as if disgusted. "I beg your pardon," he said. "Champagne always makes me ill." He hurried to the water vessel and, while pretending to spit out the wine, emptied the poisoned drink into it. Jacques half rose with his hand on a weapon, but Raymond returned calmly and added, "A few drops only have passed my lips. I trust they will do no harm."

Robert took away the cup and looked into it before he sat down again. Soon the drug began to work upon the Baroness. Her eyes closed, her head sank, and she fell into a deep sleep. Raymond still spoke and smiled when he was forced to do so, but now the danger was greater than before, for the robbers had begun to suspect him. Then Marguerite passed behind the chairs, stopped for an instant near him, and bent her head upon her shoulder with closed eyes. He understood her at once. He let his own head fall back and pretended that sleep had mastered him too.

"At last," said Baptiste, when he believed Raymond senseless, "I began to fear he had guessed something." Jacques answered savagely, "Then let me kill him now." "No," said the father. "If our friends do not come, we may still have to let them go in the morning. But if the band arrives, then not one of them will leave us alive." When he asked whether the waiting-women had also been drugged,

Marguerite said yes. At that moment the sound of horses came from outside, and she cried in despair, “Almighty God! They are lost!”

The men paid no attention to her grief. “Open! Open!” voices shouted at the door, and Baptiste exclaimed with joy, “Our friends are here. Go to the barn. You know what is to be done there.” The sons rushed out. Baptiste stayed behind, muttering that he would deal with the sleepers and the women above. Raymond lay still until he felt a hand shake him gently. “Now,” whispered Marguerite. “Now, or never.” He opened his eyes and saw Baptiste with his back turned, trying the point of a dagger that he had taken from a cupboard.

Raymond sprang upon him before he could cry out, seized his throat with both hands, and forced him to the ground. Baptiste struggled, but only for a few moments. Marguerite snatched away the dagger and struck again and again until the robber lay dead. Then she said, “There is no time. We must fly.” Raymond answered, “The Baroness shall not be left here,” took the sleeping lady in his arms, and followed Marguerite out of the cottage. Several horses stood near the door, and in an instant both were mounted and riding for Strasbourg with all the speed they could command.

As they passed the barn, the door stood open, and they heard cries for mercy, curses, and the sounds of slaughter. Jacques saw them in the torchlight and shouted, “Betrayed! Betrayed!” Then the robbers came after them. The chase grew closer and closer, and Marguerite cried, “We are lost!” But Raymond heard horses coming from the town and shouted back, “Ride on! Ride on! There is help ahead.” A troop of riders appeared in the road. Marguerite called out, “Save us, for God’s sake!” and one of the foremost men answered with a cry of wonder, leaped down, and ran to her. “Mother!” he cried. Another rider saw the senseless Baroness in Raymond’s arms and exclaimed, “My wife!”

The newcomers were the Baron Lindenberg, soldiers from Strasbourg, and Marguerite’s son, who had learned of the danger and ridden out to meet them. The robbers turned and fled, and the soldiers pursued them. Raymond and the others returned at once to the Austrian Eagle in Strasbourg. There a physician was called, the Baroness was cared for, and Raymond was forced to tell the whole story. Bad

news soon followed. Stephano had been killed in the barn, though two servants still lived. The waiting-women were found safe but senseless, and a small child was brought from the cottage. When Marguerite saw the child, she threw herself upon it with tears and kisses, and when her first joy was over, she said in a broken voice, “You have a right to know who I am. My story is shameful, but I will hide it no longer.”

Part 5

Marguerite held the child close and stood silent for a little while. Then she set him gently on her knee, looked down, and said, “You have saved me from one shame only to ask me about another. Still, you are right. You have a right to know who I am, and I will hide nothing from you.” Her voice shook, but she went on. “I was born at Strasbourg in an honest house. My father is still alive, and for his sake I will not speak his name yet.”

“A man won my heart,” she said, “and to follow him I left my father’s house. I was foolish and weak, but I did not become false and cold. I loved him with all my soul, and I was true to him. These two boys are the signs of that love, and even now I cannot think of him without tears.” Raymond saw that she still mourned him deeply, and no one interrupted her.

“He was of noble birth,” she continued, “but he had wasted his fortune, and his own family cast him away. Trouble followed him, the law looked for him, and at last he fled from Strasbourg with nothing left. He joined the robbers in the forest because he saw no other way to live. I should have left him then, but I did not. I said, ‘Where you go, I go,’ and I followed him to the robbers’ cave.”

“At first,” she said, “I knew only that they lived by theft. He hid the worst part from me. He knew that I could not have remained with him if I had seen blood on his hands. For eight years he kept that truth from me, and all that time he still loved me.” Then her face darkened, and she added, “Only after he died did I learn the whole horror. Only then did I know that the man I loved had often stood among murderers.”

“One night they brought him back to the cave covered with wounds,” she said. “He had helped attack an English traveler, and the others killed the poor man after the fight. My lover had only time to ask my pardon. He kissed my hand and died before me.” She pressed the child harder to her breast and said, “My grief nearly broke me, but when the first wild pain had passed, I said to myself, ‘I will return to my father. I will throw myself at his feet with my children and beg for mercy.’”

She shook her head sadly. “I was not allowed even that poor hope. They told me, ‘No one who knows our hiding place leaves us alive.’ Then they said, ‘You must choose another man among us, and at once.’ I begged, I wept, I refused, but they only laughed. They cast lots like gamblers, and I fell to Baptiste. A robber who had once been a monk muttered some wicked mockery of a marriage over us, and I was given into Baptiste’s hands.”

“At first he tried kindness,” said Marguerite. “He told me, ‘I have long loved you. I was silent only for my friend’s sake. In time you will grow used to me.’ But I hated him more with every day. When gentle words failed, he turned to force, and after that I had nothing left but patience and fear.” Then she looked at Theodore and said, “I would have run away and taken death with me if I had been alone. But he swore that if I tried to escape, my children would pay for it.”

“I had already seen enough to know that he would do exactly what he said,” she went on. “My first lover had hidden the worst things from me, but Baptiste almost took pleasure in showing them. He liked to see me tremble. He wanted me to grow hard like him, to stop fearing blood, to stop pitying the dead.” She covered her face for a moment, then lowered her hands and said, “I was sinful, but I was not cruel. My life had gone wrong, but my heart had not become like theirs.”

“In that misery,” she said, “I lived only for my children. The younger boy was still too small to understand much, but Theodore heard me gladly. I spoke to him whenever I could. I said, ‘Do not learn from these men. Do not let their words become your thoughts.’ He listened to me with all his heart.” Theodore lowered his eyes, and Raymond now understood why the boy’s face had seemed so different from the faces around the cottage.

“So when you came to us that night,” said Marguerite, turning to Raymond, “I felt pity the moment I saw you. You were young, open, and noble in your manner, and I thought, ‘If I do nothing, this man will die before morning.’ I wanted to warn you with my voice, but I dared not. Baptiste watched me too closely, and I had not the courage to throw away my life in one instant. So I tried another way. I spread on your bed the sheets stained with blood, hoping you would understand.”

“At the same time,” she continued, “I stole into Theodore’s room. He was ill, yet when I told him my plan, he answered, ‘Mother, I will go.’ I tied one of those bloody sheets about him so that he might frighten away anyone who stopped him in the dark, and I lowered him from the window. He took Claude’s horse, rode to Strasbourg, and begged help from the magistrates. His story passed from mouth to mouth until it reached the Baron, who cried, ‘My wife travels that road tonight. Saddle at once.’ That is how help came in time.”

Raymond then asked, “Why did Baptiste mean to drug me instead of killing me at once?” Marguerite answered, “Because he feared you were armed. He often said, ‘A desperate man can kill dearly, even when he must die in the end.’ He wanted you helpless before the murder began.” Then the Baron asked her, “And what will you do now, poor woman, if safety is truly yours at last?” She replied, “I am tired of the world. I wish only for a convent. But before I go, I must place my children somewhere safe. If my father can be moved to forgive me and receive them, then I shall bless heaven.”

Raymond and the Baron both promised help at once. Raymond said, “If your father refuses, Theodore shall not be abandoned. I will care for him myself.” The Baron added, “And the younger child shall be mine to protect.” At these words Marguerite wept again, but now her tears were softer. “You repay me far beyond my service,” she said, and then withdrew to put the little boy to bed, for sleep had already closed his eyes.

The Baroness, when she awoke and learned all that had happened, thanked Raymond with all the warmth of a grateful heart. Both she and the Baron urged him so strongly to come with them to their castle in Bavaria that he could not refuse. During the week that followed at Strasbourg, they did not forget

Marguerite. They went together to her father, and by good fortune they found him willing to pardon her. He had lost his wife, had heard nothing of his daughter for many long years, and now received her and her children with tears and open arms.

He would not hear a word about a convent. “No,” he told her, “you are too necessary to an old man who has lost too much already.” Marguerite gave way, and Theodore too was settled for a time. Yet when Raymond prepared to leave Strasbourg, the boy came to him in tears and said, “Take me with you, sir. I will serve you faithfully. I may be small, but I can learn quickly, and I cannot bear to lose you.” Raymond tried to refuse, but Theodore begged so warmly and showed so much affection that at last permission was given, and the boy became his page.

“So,” said Raymond to Lorenzo, “I traveled on with the Baron, the Baroness, and Theodore into Bavaria. That is how Alphonso d’Alvarada first entered the Castle of Lindenberg. Your aunt speaks boldly, but she seldom speaks truly.” He paused for a moment, then continued in a quieter voice. “My journey there was pleasant. The Baron was honest, good-hearted, and proud above all things of hunting. Because I rode and shot fairly well, he soon decided that I was a man of rare talent and gave me his whole friendship.”

Raymond smiled faintly, but the smile disappeared almost at once. “That friendship soon became very dear to me,” he said, “for at Lindenberg I first saw your sister Agnes. From the first moment, I loved her. I had never seen anyone who joined so much sweetness with so much life. She was not yet sixteen, graceful in figure, simple in dress, open in temper, and gifted in music and drawing. I asked the Baroness who she was, and she answered, ‘She is my niece. I am sister to the Duke of Medina Celi, and Agnes is the daughter of my brother Don Gaston. She has been promised to the convent from her cradle, and she will soon take the veil at Madrid.’”

Lorenzo started in his seat and cried, “Promised to the convent from her cradle? By heaven, this is the first word I have ever heard of such a plan!”

Part 6

Raymond raised his hand gently and said, “Be patient, Lorenzo. What I tell you will pain you, but it is the truth.” Lorenzo sat down again, though with clear anger still in his face, and answered, “Go on then. If my sister was marked for such misery, I must know how and why.” Raymond nodded and continued, “Your parents, for all their virtues, were slaves to superstition. When such fears ruled them, every other feeling gave way.”

“While your mother was carrying Agnes,” he said, “she fell dangerously ill. Her physicians gave her up, and in that terror she made a vow. ‘If I recover,’ she said, ‘the child within me shall be given to religion. If it is a girl, she shall belong to Saint Clare. If it is a boy, he shall belong to Saint Benedict.’ She recovered, Agnes was born, and from that hour her future was decided before she had even opened her eyes upon the world.” Lorenzo struck the arm of his chair and cried, “What madness! What cruel madness!” Raymond answered, “Yes, but the madness was made into duty, and no one near her had the courage to oppose it.”

“Your father agreed with her at once,” he went on. “Yet they knew very well that your uncle, the Duke, hated the thought of forcing a child into a convent. For that reason the whole matter was hidden from him. To keep the secret safe, Agnes was sent away with her aunt, Donna Rodolpha, when that lady went to Germany after her marriage to Baron Lindenberg. There, in a convent near the castle, Agnes was raised under the eyes of nuns who were told to make her love retirement, obedience, and the cloister.” Lorenzo said bitterly, “Then from the start they meant to take from her both home and choice.”

“They did,” replied Raymond. “The nuns taught her music, drawing, and all the usual accomplishments, and in those she became excellent. But they could not change her nature. Agnes was lively, playful, and born for the open air and human affection, not for walls, rules, and silence. She laughed at ceremonies that the convent held sacred, and she delighted in teasing the old abbess and the rough porteress whenever she could do it without punishment.” A faint smile crossed Lorenzo’s face in spite of his anger. “That sounds like Agnes indeed,” he said. “Even as a child she could not help turning gravity into sport.”

Raymond smiled too and said, “Yes, that same spirit remained in her. Yet

beneath it there was real unhappiness. She looked ahead to the veil with horror, though at first she had no power to resist. She submitted because no other path was shown to her, but she submitted sadly. When her dislike began to appear too plainly, your father grew afraid that you, if told the truth, would take her side and oppose his plan. So the secret was kept from you as carefully as from the Duke." Lorenzo leaned forward and said, "Now I understand much that once seemed strange."

"She was never allowed to know where you traveled," Raymond continued. "Your letters were opened before they reached her. Anything in them that might strengthen her love of family, liberty, or the world was cut away. Her answers were not truly her own. They were watched, guided, and often dictated either by her aunt or by her governess, Dame Cunegonda." Lorenzo turned pale and murmured, "Poor Agnes. She must have believed me careless, or cold, or forgetful." "No," said Raymond. "She did not blame you. She loved you too well for that. She only suffered from your absence and from the silence forced upon her."

"The moment I learned these things," said Raymond, "I resolved to save her if I could. At first I approached her in the simplest way. I spoke of you, of your kindness, of your courage, and of the affection you had always shown me. She listened as if every word were precious. More than once she said, 'Tell me again how my brother speaks, how he laughs, what he likes, what he hopes. When you praise him, it is as if I heard from him myself.' Seeing this, I used every chance to please her, but not with bold speeches. I wished first to win her trust."

"And did she trust you quickly?" asked Lorenzo. Raymond answered, "Not quickly, but deeply. She was innocent, and at first she feared even her own feelings. Yet little by little she grew more open. We walked, talked, read together, and often sat with Theodore nearby, drawing or singing. At last I could no longer hide my heart. One evening I said to her, 'Agnes, if I have become too dear to you, speak, and I will bless the word. If not, I will still remain your faithful servant and friend.' She trembled, tried to turn away, and at last answered in a low voice, 'You know too well that I cannot hear you with indifference.'"

Raymond paused for a moment and then went on more softly. “It cost her much to confess even that much. But once the truth had passed her lips, I urged her at once to escape with me. I said, ‘Leave this place, Agnes. Come away before these people bury you alive in a convent. I will protect your honor with my life. You shall be my wife, and no earthly power shall part us.’ She listened with tears in her eyes, yet she shook her head. ‘No, Alphonso,’ she said, ‘do not ask that of me. I love you, but do not make me blush before my own conscience.’”

“Then she spoke more firmly,” said Raymond. “‘Be generous. You possess my heart, but do not use that gift dishonorably. I am young, unprotected, and almost friendless. My brother is far away, and those who should guard me are planning my misery. If you truly love me, win them first. The Baron esteems you. My aunt, who is harsh to almost everyone, is kinder to you because you saved her life. Use that influence. If they consent, my hand is yours. From what you have told me of Lorenzo, I cannot doubt his approval, and perhaps even my parents, when they see resistance is useless, will allow some other offering to replace that cruel vow.’”

Lorenzo, who had listened with wet eyes, said warmly, “That was my sister. Even in distress she could think more of honor than of ease.” Raymond answered, “Yes, and that is why I loved her the more. Her refusal disappointed me, yet it also raised her still higher in my esteem. I took her hand and said, ‘You shall not find me selfish. I will try the road you choose. If patience can gain you, I will be patient.’ She thanked me with such sweetness that I went away happier even in delay than many men are in success.”

“From that hour,” he continued, “I worked with all my strength to gain the favor of her guardians. My chief effort was directed toward the Baroness, for it was easy to see that her word ruled the whole castle. The Baron submitted to her in everything. She was a woman of strong mind, violent passions, warm friendship, and even warmer hatred. She could be generous, but only when it pleased her. I said to myself, ‘If I can win her completely, I may yet win Agnes honestly.’ So I read to her for hours, obeyed her smallest wishes, praised what she liked, and bore all her long old romances without complaint.”

Lorenzo gave a short laugh. “You must have suffered greatly.” “More than once,” said Raymond, “I thought the great books would kill me before love could reward me. Yet I persevered. Day after day I read of wandering knights, giants, enchanted ladies, and endless battles, while my heart longed to be elsewhere with Agnes. Still, I saw that the Baroness grew more and more pleased with my company, and Agnes herself advised me to seize the first good moment and confess our attachment to her aunt. At last such a moment seemed to come. One evening I found myself alone with Donna Rodolpha in her own room, and I thought, ‘Now my fate will be decided.’”

Part 7

Raymond drew a breath and continued, “I had just finished reading one of those endless old love stories when the Baroness looked at me very strangely and said, ‘Those poor lovers! Tell me, Don Alphonso, do you believe that a man can love with such truth and constancy?’” He answered her with more warmth than caution. “I do,” he said. “My own heart proves it. Ah, Donna Rodolpha, if I could only hope for your approval! If I could only speak the name of the woman I love without fearing your anger!” At once the Baroness interrupted him and said, “Suppose I spared you that confession. Suppose I told you that I already know the object of your love, that she returns it, and that she suffers as deeply as you do from the vows that stand between you.”

“At those words,” said Raymond, “I thought all my difficulties ended in one moment. I fell on my knees before her, kissed her hand, and cried, ‘Then you know my secret! Tell me, señora, must I despair, or may I hope for your favor?’ She did not draw away her hand. She turned her face aside, covered it with the other, and after a pause answered in a broken voice, ‘How can I refuse? Ah, Don Alphonso, I have long seen where your attentions were directed, but not until now have I understood what impression they themselves had made upon my own heart.’”

Lorenzo started, but Raymond raised his hand for silence and went on. “She

then spoke without reserve. ‘I can hide my weakness no longer,’ she said. ‘I adore you. For three months I fought against this passion, but resistance has only made it stronger. Pride, fear, honor, all are conquered. I give them all up for you, and still it seems to me that I pay too little for your love.’ You may imagine my confusion. In one instant I understood the whole mistake. All the attention that I had paid her for Agnes’s sake, she had believed to be meant for herself.”

“For a few moments,” he continued, “I could not speak at all. She saw my face change and asked in a trembling voice, ‘What does this silence mean? Where is the joy that I expected to see?’ Then I knew that delay would only make the evil worse, and so I answered as carefully as I could. ‘Forgive me, señora, if necessity forces me to speak plainly. You have mistaken friendship for love. The affection I wished to awaken in your heart was no warmer than esteem. Gratitude to the Baron and respect for you forbid me to feel more. And even if they did not, my heart already belongs to another.’”

Raymond paused for a moment and then said, “I tried to soften the blow. I told her, ‘You have charms that might conquer any unoccupied heart. It is my safety that mine is no longer free. Recollect yourself, noble lady. Think what you owe to your husband, and let friendship take the place of a passion that I can never return.’ She listened only for the first few lines. Then shame turned to rage. Her face, which had gone pale, burned red, and she cried, ‘Villain! Monster of deceit! Is this the answer to my love?’ The next moment she threw herself at my feet and said, ‘No, no, it shall not end so. Pity me. She who holds your heart, what has she done to deserve it? What places her above Rodolpha?’”

“I was terrified,” said Raymond. “‘For God’s sake, señora,’ I said, trying to raise her, ‘restrain yourself. Your attendants may hear you. Your secret will be discovered. Let me go. My presence only makes you suffer more.’ But she sprang up, seized my arm, and said in a voice full of fury, ‘And who is this happy rival? I will know her name. She is someone in my power, or she will be. You asked for my protection. Let me only discover who dares to rob me of your heart, and she shall feel what jealousy can do. Answer me. Do not hope to hide her. I will set eyes to watch you. Every look, every step shall betray her to me.’”

“Her anger rose so high,” he said, “that at last it stopped her breath. She panted, groaned, and then fainted. I caught her before she fell, laid her on a sofa, called her women, and escaped the room while I could. I went straight into the garden, my mind full of disorder and fear. A moment before I had imagined that all might end well. Now I saw superstition, family pride, and the Baroness’s violent passion standing together against us. I did not know whether I should tell Agnes what had happened or keep silence for the moment.”

“While I was still debating,” said Raymond, “I passed a low parlor that opened upon the garden and saw Agnes inside. She sat at a table with papers spread before her and was drawing with quiet attention. She looked up and said, ‘Oh, it is only you. Come in. You are no stranger, and I shall not stop my work for you.’ I entered and sat near her, but my thoughts were so troubled that I scarcely knew what I was doing. I took up one of her sketches and looked at it. The scene struck me at once. It showed the great hall of the castle. Men and women were flying in terror, some hiding under a table, some falling on their knees, and in the middle stood a tall nun with a lamp and dagger in her hands.”

“What is this?” I asked. Agnes smiled and said, ‘The Bleeding Nun. Have you not heard of her yet? Then the castle has kept one of its dearest stories from you.’ Seeing that I was curious, she told me the tale. Long ago, she said, a lady of the house had loved unhappily, had taken the veil against her will, and afterward had stained the convent with blood and guilt. Since then her ghost was believed to walk once in every five years through the castle at night. ‘My aunt believes every word of it,’ Agnes said. ‘Dame Cunegonda swears that she saw the spectre herself fifteen years ago. I do not believe it, but I must not say so openly, for superstition rules everyone here except me.’”

“Then she showed me the rest of the drawing,” said Raymond. “Among the terrified faces was one so absurdly ugly that I could not help smiling in spite of all my anxiety. Agnes laughed and said, ‘That is Dame Cunegonda. I drew her from life, though perhaps with a little improvement. She was very angry when she found that I had made her look exactly like herself.’ Her playful spirit, so lively even under such a heavy fate, charmed me more than ever. I praised the sketch,

and she answered, ‘Wait a moment. I will show you something still better, and if you like it, you may keep it.’ She went to a cabinet, opened a drawer, took out a small case, and put it into my hand.”

“I opened it and saw her own portrait,” Raymond said softly. “Imagine what I felt. I pressed it to my lips, dropped on my knees, and poured out all my gratitude and love. She listened with sweetness and told me that she returned my affection. At that instant she uttered a loud cry, snatched away her hand, and fled into the garden through the open door. I sprang to my feet in astonishment, and then I saw the cause. The Baroness stood beside me, pale with jealousy and almost choking with rage. She had followed her suspicions to the room and had arrived in time to see Agnes give me the portrait and hear my vows at her feet.”

“For some moments we could neither of us speak,” said Raymond. “At last she recovered herself and fixed on me a look that I shall never forget. I understood at once that the danger had grown far worse. Before, she had guessed that I loved someone. Now she knew that the rival she sought was Agnes herself. I thought only of protecting your sister if I could. But at that moment, Lorenzo, I had no plan, no ally, and no hope except courage. I stood before the Baroness silent, while she stood before me burning with offended pride and furious love.”

Part 8

Raymond continued, “The Baron and Baroness received the news of my departure with perfect calm. The Baron said, ‘So soon, Don Alphonso? We shall lose a pleasant companion.’ The Baroness added, ‘Travel is the proper business of young men. You have already remained too long in one place.’ I answered them with all the respect that I could command, though my heart burned within me. I saw clearly that I should not be allowed another open interview with Agnes, and I left them more troubled than ever.

“My fear was just,” he said. “That same day Agnes was shut up in her chamber and watched with double care. Even her walks were stopped, and I could only hope that some message might still reach me by Theodore. The boy served

me with more wisdom than many grown men. Though I had never plainly confessed my love to him, he understood it all and concealed his knowledge until the right moment. He watched, listened, and moved so quietly through the castle and grounds that I trusted him as if he had been born for secret service."

"At last his skill saved us," said Raymond. "Two nights later he brought me word that Agnes wished to speak with me once more and that she believed she could leave her room for a short time after midnight. I answered, 'Tell her I will be waiting wherever she chooses, even if I must remain hidden there till dawn.' Theodore returned and soon brought me her answer. She appointed the old west pavilion in the garden, the place where she had often drawn in the daytime and where, she said, the trees cast so deep a shade that even sharp eyes might be deceived."

"I obeyed her instructions exactly," Raymond went on. "I rode to Munich, left my chaise there with my servant Lucas, and returned on horseback to a village about four miles from the castle. Theodore was with me, and both of us were disguised so that no one might know us. We lodged at a poor inn, and I gave the old host a story that satisfied him and made him ask no more questions. So a fortnight passed, and in that time I had one comfort. Agnes was no longer wholly a prisoner, for every Friday she went with Dame Cunegonda to the convent where she had once been educated, and twice I saw her carriage pass."

"The first time," he said, "I only saw her from a distance. The second time she looked at me and knew me at once, though I wore a common dress and kept my head bent. A blush rose to her cheek, and she bowed with the slight motion that a lady gives to one beneath her. But that small sign was enough. I said to myself, 'She has not forgotten, and she still dares to hope.' From that hour every day seemed longer, but every day also brought me nearer to the fifth of May."

"At last the long-awaited night arrived," said Raymond. "The moon was full, and the air was still. As soon as the castle clock struck eleven, Theodore and I climbed the garden wall with a ladder that he had hidden earlier in the day. We drew it up after us, and I took my place in the west pavilion, listening for every sound. I cannot describe that hour of waiting. Every leaf that moved, every breath

of wind, every little stir in the branches made me think, ‘She comes.’ Yet the minutes dragged on so slowly that when the bell struck twelve, I could scarcely believe that only one hour had passed.”

“A quarter after twelve,” he continued, “I heard a step that was not made by the wind. Agnes entered softly, and I flew to meet her. She looked pale but firm, and before I could say more than her name, she stopped me. ‘We have no time to lose, Alphonso,’ she said. ‘An express has come from my father, and I must leave almost at once for Madrid. I begged for a week’s delay, and I have obtained it with difficulty. My parents’ superstition and my aunt’s cruelty leave me no hope. So I have resolved to trust myself to your honor. God grant that I may never have cause to repent it.’”

“Then she unfolded her plan,” said Raymond. “‘Listen carefully,’ she told me. ‘We are now at the thirtieth of April. Five days from now the Bleeding Nun is expected. During my last visit to the convent I obtained a religious dress fit for the part. On the fifth night, when the castle waits for the ghost, I will leave my chamber at one o’clock dressed like the apparition. Whoever sees me will be too frightened to stop me. Bring a carriage and wait near the great gate. I will come straight to you and place myself under your protection.’ Then her voice fell lower, and she added, ‘But if you deceive me, Alphonso, there will not be a more miserable woman in the world. All my hope rests on you. If your own heart does not plead for me, I am lost forever.’”

“I was deeply moved,” Raymond said. “I took her hand and answered, ‘Agnes, you shall never repent this trust. Till the Church makes you my wife, your honor shall be as safe with me as that of my own sister. My first wish after saving you will be to find Lorenzo and win his pardon and blessing.’ She leaned her head sadly upon my shoulder, and by the moonlight I saw tears on her face. I tried to comfort her, and for a few moments she listened quietly. But all at once we heard a sound outside, and before either of us could move, the door of the pavilion was thrown open.”

“Dame Cunegonda stood before us,” he said. “She had followed Agnes from her room, crept beneath the trees, and heard our whole conversation. Agnes gave

a cry, but the old woman cried louder still. ‘Excellent!’ she shrieked. ‘A noble plan indeed! You mean to play the Bleeding Nun, do you? What wickedness! What unbelief! I almost wish to let you try, if only that the real spirit might teach you better manners.’ She turned on me then and screamed, ‘And you, señor traitor, you shall answer for this before the whole house. I will go this instant to the Baroness. Before another hour passes, every servant in the castle shall know what your fine love means.’”

“I saw that all was ruined if she escaped us,” said Raymond. “I sprang toward her, but she tried to run and cried out so shrilly that I feared the whole castle must hear. Theodore, who had remained hidden nearby, rushed in at once. Together we seized the old woman before she reached the garden path. She fought like fury, though more with noise than strength. ‘Take away her power to cry out,’ I whispered, and Theodore, quicker than thought, bound a scarf across her mouth. Then we wrapped her closely in a cloak, carried her to the garden wall, and lifted her over it as if she had been no more than a bundle of linen.”

“The ride back to the inn was not pleasant for her,” Raymond added with a faint smile, “nor perhaps for us. She was jolted on horseback, shaken by every stone in the road, and nearly frightened out of her senses when we crossed a shallow river in the dark. Once at the inn I decided at once what must be done. While Theodore delayed the landlord at the door, I carried our prisoner upstairs, shut her in a large closet, and locked it fast. When I opened the door a little later to speak to her, she glared at me with such rage that I scarcely knew whether to laugh or pity her. ‘Forgive the roughness of this treatment,’ I said, ‘but your freedom for five days would destroy us all.’ She could not answer except with her eyes.”

“So the five days passed,” said Raymond. “At meals I loosened her bonds, but I never let her remain unguarded, and Theodore made her captivity more painful by teasing her without mercy. Meanwhile the castle searched for her everywhere. Ponds were dragged, woods were examined, servants ran through every passage, and Agnes alone knew the truth. The Baroness at last began to suspect that the old woman had drowned herself or lost her way in the forest. Thus

our secret remained safe. During those five days I prepared everything for the great attempt, and with every hour that passed I said to myself, ‘Now the fifth of May comes nearer. Now the false Nun and the true lover must meet at the gate.’”

Part 9

On the evening of the fifth of May, I made every preparation with the greatest care. Before sunset I had hired a carriage at Munich, chosen horses that could endure speed, and ordered the driver to wait for me on the road near the great gate of the castle. “You must ask no questions,” I told him. “Keep the horses quiet, hold yourself ready, and the moment a lady enters the carriage, drive on with all your strength.” The man stared at me, but the money which I put into his hand made him obedient. When darkness had fully fallen, Theodore and I took our places near the gate and waited in silence.

The whole castle was full of expectation and fear. Lights moved behind several windows, but no one came near the entrance. After a time Theodore whispered, “Do you think she will come, sir?” I answered, “She must come. Every other road is shut to her.” Then I took his arm and said more softly, “But remember this, Theodore. If by any evil chance we are discovered, think first of Agnes. Save her if you can. Think little of me.” The boy replied at once, “I will think only of both of you, sir,” and his voice, though low, was steady.

The castle clock at last began to strike one. At the first sound the porter, an old servant named Conrad, opened the gate as custom required on that fearful night. We heard him muttering prayers as he drew back the bolts. Then, from within the hall, a figure in a nun’s dress came slowly forward with a lamp in one hand and a dagger in the other. Even I, though I knew what to expect, felt my heart stop for a moment. The dress, the walk, the deep silence, and the strange light upon the walls made the whole scene so terrible that it seemed more than human.

The figure passed through the gate without hindrance. Conrad had fallen on his knees and hidden his face, crying, “Holy Mother, protect me!” I sprang forward, hurried to the supposed Agnes, and said in a low voice, “Not a word now.

Lose no time. The carriage waits." She obeyed without resistance, and I handed her in quickly. Her silence seemed natural enough to me, for I thought, "She is frightened, poor girl, and no wonder." I entered the carriage beside her, called out to the driver, "To Ratisbon by the shortest road," and in an instant we were rolling away from the castle.

For some time I spoke often, but received no answer. "Courage, Agnes," I said. "The danger is over now. Before morning we shall be far beyond pursuit." Still she remained silent. I took her hand, intending only to comfort her, and started at its coldness. "You tremble," I said. "You are chilled to the heart. Here, let me wrap this cloak more closely about you." Yet even then she neither thanked me nor drew nearer, and a strange uneasiness began little by little to steal over me.

We drove on for several hours. Whenever the moon came out from the clouds, I tried to see her face beneath the veil, but she always sat turned a little away from me. At last I said with some impatience, "Agnes, this silence pains me. Have you no word for the man who risks everything for you?" Still nothing came. Then I tried a gentler tone. "Forgive me," I said. "I have no right to complain. This has been a dreadful night for you. Say only one word, and I will be content." The figure remained motionless, and my fear became stronger.

When dawn began to appear, we stopped at a lonely inn to change horses. I left the carriage for a moment, gave the necessary orders, and returned almost immediately. Yet even in that short absence my companion had not moved. "This must end," I said to myself. "Either Agnes is ill, or some new terror has taken away her senses." So I seated myself beside her again and spoke firmly. "You must answer me now. If you are angry, tell me so. If you are faint, tell me that. But do not sit like the dead and make me fear what I dare not name." Then slowly, very slowly, she turned her head toward me.

With a hand that shook in spite of myself, I lifted the veil. Great God! What I saw before me was no living woman. It was a face wasted, bloodless, and horrible, the face of a corpse that moved and looked at me. The cheeks were hollow, the lips pale as ashes, and the eyes were fixed upon me with a dead, cold stare. I would have cried out, but my voice died in my throat. Every drop of blood

in my body seemed changed to ice, and I could only lean back against the seat and gaze at that dreadful face in helpless terror.

For some moments the apparition looked at me without speaking. Then, in a voice low, hollow, and sepulchral, she repeated the very words which I had once spoken to Agnes in the pavilion. “Raymond, Raymond, you are mine,” she said. “Raymond, Raymond, I am thine. While blood can move within your veins, you are mine. Your body is mine, your soul is mine.” I tried to break from the spell of those eyes, but I could not. They held me as if some evil power had entered through them into my very mind and chained every faculty within me.

At length the spectre dropped the veil again and sat silent by my side. I do not know how the journey ended, nor how we reached Ratisbon, for my senses were half gone already. I only remember that I was led into a chamber at the inn, that someone undressed me, and that I fell upon the bed burning and freezing by turns. The fright, the long anxiety, the disappointment, and the terrible journey together threw me into a violent fever. The people of the inn sent at once for a physician, and when he came, he said that my life would be in danger if my mind were not kept perfectly quiet. Quiet! As if quiet had any place left in me.

The whole next day passed without news of Agnes and without relief to my spirit. At first I raved continually, calling on her by name, begging her to answer me, and then crying out that the Bleeding Nun was at my side. Later I grew silent, but my silence was worse than noise, for my thoughts became darker and heavier every hour. My attendants believed that the fever had begun to lessen because I no longer struggled, and before night they gave me medicine to make me sleep. They left me at last alone, but sleep would not come, for every time I closed my eyes, I saw again that dead face bending over me in the carriage.

So I lay restless until the neighboring clock struck one. The sound had scarcely died away when a deadly chill ran through my whole body. I sat up in bed and stared toward the door. Heavy steps were coming slowly up the staircase. The door opened with violence, and the Bleeding Nun herself entered the chamber. She no longer carried the lamp and dagger, but she came straight to my bedside, raised her veil, and fixed on me those same hollow eyes.

Again I was powerless. I could neither call for help nor move a hand. The spectre looked at me for a long time, then repeated in that grave-like voice, “Raymond, Raymond, you are mine. Raymond, Raymond, I am thine.” After that she sat at the foot of my bed and continued to watch me in perfect silence. So passed a whole hour, until the clock struck two, and then she rose, came nearer, seized my hand with fingers cold as ice, pressed her dead lips upon mine, repeated the same dreadful words once more, and left the room with slow and solemn steps. The door closed behind her, the spell was broken, and with one deep groan I fell senseless upon my pillow.

Part 10

Raymond paused for a moment, and then said, “You may wonder that I made no search for Agnes during that time. But on the morning after my first dreadful night, I was too weak to rise, and before noon my fever had grown so much worse that even speaking tired me. I still hoped, however, that Theodore would explain everything for me. I trusted him, and I also trusted the letter which I had sent to the Baroness, for I had written plainly that no coldness or falsehood had kept me from the meeting, but a strange accident beyond my power. These thoughts gave me a little comfort by day, though when evening came, all comfort left me.”

“That next night,” he continued, “I said to myself, ‘It cannot return. Such horror does not visit the same man twice.’ Yet I could not master my fear, and I begged that a servant might sleep in my room. He sat near my bed in a great chair, and I believed that his presence would save me if the vision came again. But when the clock struck one, the very same cold seized my heart, and when I turned to wake him, he was sunk in such deep sleep that no shaking could move him. Then I heard the heavy steps, the door opened, and once more the Bleeding Nun stood beside me.”

“Everything was repeated,” said Raymond. “Again she came close to the bed, again she fixed those dead eyes upon me, again she spoke those fatal words: ‘Raymond, you are mine. I am yours. Your body is mine, and your soul is mine.’

Again she remained till the clock struck two, and again she pressed my hand and kissed me with lips colder than death itself. When she left me, my strength went with her, and I lay senseless till the host and his wife came running in at the sound of my groan. From that hour my health, my peace, and almost my reason seemed to belong to the grave."

"Night after night it was the same," he said more slowly. "Far from growing used to her, I feared her more with every visit. My attendants thought me sad from weakness only, for I never confessed the true cause of my misery. No one could have helped me, since no one saw the spectre but I. More than once I said, 'Stay awake with me, and if I cry out, save me,' but the moment the clock struck one, every watcher sank into irresistible sleep, and not one of them opened his eyes till the ghost had gone."

"Thus several months passed," said Raymond. "I became so thin and faint that I could scarcely cross my room without support. The physician looked at me and whispered to others as if my end were near. Theodore, faithful as ever, did all that affection could do. He would say to me, 'Courage, dear sir. You will yet conquer this evil, whatever it is,' and I answered him with a sad smile, for I had almost ceased to believe in any deliverance on earth."

"At length," he went on, "when I had been moved from my bed to a sofa, a stranger asked to speak with me in private. I ordered him to be admitted. He was a man whose appearance I cannot forget. There was something at once noble and terrible in his face, and before he had spoken many words, I felt a fear unlike any common fear. He looked at me steadily and said, 'Young man, your sufferings are known to me. I can free you from them, but you must obey me exactly.'"

"I stared at him in amazement," said Raymond, "and asked, 'Who are you? How do you know my misery?' He answered only, 'Ask nothing now. It is enough that I know what troubles you, and that I can end it. On Saturday night, when the clock strikes twelve, expect me at your chamber door.' As he turned, part of a dark band slipped from his forehead, and I saw there a burning cross, bright and dreadful, as if fire had entered the flesh itself. I drew back in horror without knowing why, and he saw my terror. 'Such is my curse,' he said. 'All who look

on me feel fear and hatred. I will not stay to add to your suffering. Farewell till Saturday.'"

"That promise changed me at once," Raymond said. "The very hope of help gave me more strength than medicine had done for many weeks. Theodore noticed it the same day. 'Why, sir,' he cried, 'your eyes look brighter already. Have you made peace with death, or has some great doctor been with you?' I answered, 'Perhaps with neither. But if heaven is kind, Theodore, this evil may soon end.' He laughed and called the stranger my Great Mogul, yet I counted every hour till Saturday as a prisoner counts the steps of the guard outside his cell."

"At last the night came," he said. "I went to bed as usual so that no suspicion might be raised, but as soon as my servants withdrew, I rose and dressed myself again. Exactly at midnight the stranger entered carrying a small chest. Without useless words, he opened it, took out a crucifix, a great Bible, and several dreadful objects from the grave. With a dark red liquid that looked like blood, he traced a circle upon the floor, set the relics around it in the form of crosses, and beckoned me within. 'Speak no word,' he whispered. 'Step not from this circle. And as you value your life, do not look upon my face.'"

"The clock struck one," said Raymond, lowering his voice, "and the Bleeding Nun entered as before. Yet this time I did not shake as I used to do, for I stood under another power. The stranger lifted the crucifix toward her and cried, 'Beatrice! Beatrice! What disturbs your rest? Why do you torment this young man? Speak, and tell by what act your spirit may be set at peace.' The ghost answered in a hollow voice, 'I dare not tell. I am forced to continue my punishment.' Then he spoke in a stronger tone and commanded her again, and when he drew the black band from his brow, I saw once more that burning cross. At the sight of it the spectre trembled, bowed her head, and confessed all. Her bones, she said, lay still unburied in Lindenberg Hole. Because I was of her blood and had once given myself to her in foolish words, she had power over me till I should gather those bones, lay them in the family vault in Andalusia, and cause thirty masses to be said for her soul. As soon as she had spoken, her form melted away like smoke."

“The stranger then led me out of the circle and explained the rest,” said Raymond. “The Bleeding Nun, whose true name was Beatrice de las Cisternas, had been one of my own relations, wicked in life and more wretched in death. He told me how she had left her convent, lived in sin, murdered the man who would not marry her, and then been murdered in turn by the lover for whom she had done the deed. Her unburied bones had kept her spirit restless for a hundred years. ‘Do exactly as she has required,’ the stranger said, ‘and she will trouble you no more.’ I caught his hand and cried, ‘Tell me at least who you are. What is that burning mark, and how can you know these ancient things?’ He refused at first, then said that he would explain all on the next day if I would wait. But when morning came, he was gone. My messengers searched for him in vain, and when later I told the whole adventure to my uncle, he said, ‘There is little doubt. The man who saved you was the Wandering Jew.’ From that night my recovery was swift. The Bleeding Nun returned no more, and as soon as I could travel, I rode to Lindenberg, found the bones of Beatrice in the cave, buried them in our family vault in Andalusia, and had the promised masses said. Then, with that duty finished, I gave myself wholly to one hope only: to find Agnes again.”

Part 11

“The ghost never returned,” said Raymond, “and once I was strong enough to travel, I went straight back to Lindenberg. The Baron received me kindly and was delighted to hear that his castle would no longer be troubled by that dreadful visitor. But I found one thing there that gave me no pleasure at all. Donna Rodolpha still loved me as rashly as before, and even in private tried once more to make me return her passion. I could only answer her coldly, for after all that had happened, I felt for her nothing but dislike.”

“I found the bones of Beatrice where the spirit had said they would be,” he continued. “That was all I needed from Lindenberg, so I left the castle quickly. I wished both to complete the burial and to escape the importunity of a woman whom I could neither love nor respect. As I departed, she said to me with anger,

‘You will not long laugh at my contempt.’ I did not answer her, but her words remained in my memory.”

“From Germany I came to Spain with all speed,” he said. “Lucas joined me on the road with my baggage, and I reached Andalusia safely. There I buried Beatrice in the family vault, caused the proper masses to be said, and fulfilled every condition that had been laid upon me. Then I said to myself, ‘Now nothing remains but Agnes. I will find her, or I will lose all hope only after I have done everything that a man can do.’”

“I began my search at once,” said Raymond. “The Baroness had declared that Agnes had already taken the veil, but I believed jealousy had made her lie. I asked questions everywhere. I learned that your mother was dead before Agnes could return to Madrid, that you were abroad and could not be traced, and that your father was absent in another province. But as for Agnes, every door closed upon me. No one would tell me where she was, or no one knew.”

“Theodore returned to Strasbourg as he had promised,” Raymond went on, “and found his grandfather dead and his mother rich at last. She begged him to stay with her, but he refused. ‘My place is with you, my lord,’ he told me, and he followed me to Madrid. Together we searched in every direction. He ran where I could not go, listened where I could not be heard, changed his dress a hundred times, and never grew tired. Yet all was useless. Agnes remained hidden from us, and little by little even hope itself began to grow weak.”

“Then one night,” he said, “as I returned from the theatre in dark and unhappy thoughts, three men fell upon me in a lonely street. I had not seen them following me. They attacked me at once and with such fury that I knew they meant murder, not robbery. I drew my sword and defended myself as well as I could. I wounded one of them, but I had already received several blows and was close to being overpowered when another gentleman came suddenly to my aid with his servants and torches.”

“That stranger saved my life,” Raymond continued. “The assassins fled when they saw more men coming up, and in the darkness they escaped us. My rescuer asked at once, ‘Are you badly hurt, sir?’ I answered with difficulty, for I was faint

from loss of blood, and begged him to let me be taken to the Hotel de las Cisternas. The moment he heard the name, he replied, 'Then you are known to me, and you shall not be moved so far until a surgeon has examined you. My house is near. Lean on me.' I had not the strength to refuse, and so he led me to his own dwelling."

"There I learned from a servant that my preserver was connected with the Duke de Medina and that the Duke himself was then in the country. A surgeon was called, and my wounds were judged slight. Once I had rested, I looked more closely at the gentleman who had helped me and saw that he was young, polished, and of noble bearing. He treated me not as a burden, but as a friend. Yet by then my mind was too full of Agnes and too tired from the attack for me to observe much clearly. The rest belongs to another part of the story."

Raymond stopped, and for a few moments both men were silent. Lorenzo at last rose, came nearer, and took his friend's hand. "Raymond," he said, "if strict family honor alone ruled me, I should call you my enemy. But I will not judge you so. The fault lies less in you and Agnes than in the cruel superstition that drove her into this misery. What is done cannot be undone, but it may still be repaired. You love my sister, and she loves you. I give you my hand as a friend, and, if heaven allows it, I will soon give you hers as a brother."

Raymond's eyes filled with gratitude. "Lorenzo," he said, "you have taken a weight from my heart that seemed greater than I could bear. Tell me only that you truly forgive me." Lorenzo answered, "I do more than forgive you. Tomorrow night I will go with you myself. I will conduct Agnes to the Cardinal's house with my own hand, and my presence shall show the world that she has not acted without a brother's protection." Raymond embraced him warmly and cried, "You give me life again."

Lorenzo then told him that Donna Rodolpha need no longer be feared. "She is dead," he said. "Five months ago, in a violent fit of passion, she broke a blood vessel and died within a few hours." Raymond crossed himself and said, "Then I pity her, though I cannot mourn her." After that Lorenzo spoke of Antonia and of Elvira, and Raymond listened with great surprise. "My father hated my brother's widow to the last," he said. "He never once told me that she still lived. But if she

is indeed my brother's wife and Antonia his daughter, they shall find me ready to acknowledge them both."

"Tomorrow I cannot visit them," Raymond continued, "for the business of Agnes leaves me no freedom. But tell them from me that they have a friend. Tell Donna Elvira that until I can serve her in person, you will act in my place. If she needs money, let her ask for it freely. I will not allow my brother's family to remain unprotected." Lorenzo promised this at once. Then, the night being nearly spent, he took leave of Raymond and went back to the Palace de Medina, while the Marquis withdrew to his chamber with a heart lighter than it had been for many months.

Dawn was already near when Raymond entered the outer room before his bedchamber. There he found Theodore still awake, seated at a table with pen and paper before him. The boy was so deeply occupied that he did not hear his master come in. Raymond stood still and watched him. Theodore wrote a few lines, frowned, crossed out several words, wrote again, smiled at what he had done, and then at last sprang up, clapped his hands, and cried aloud, "There! Now it is beautiful!"

Raymond could not help laughing. Theodore started, blushed deeply, and snatched up the paper in confusion. "My lord!" he exclaimed. "I did not know you were there. Do you want anything? Lucas has gone to bed." Raymond sat down and said, "Yes. I want to know what keeps you awake writing till morning. Do not hide it. Those are verses." Theodore tried to look humble, though his eyes shone with vanity. "They are only trifles, my lord," he said. "They are not worth your notice."

"Not worth my notice?" repeated Raymond. "A moment ago you declared them charming. Come, Theodore, let me judge for myself. I promise to be gentle." The boy hesitated exactly long enough to be asked once more and then held out the paper with affected reluctance. "If you insist, my lord," he said, "you may look. But you must remember that I am no great poet." Raymond took the page, smiling at the childlike pride that Theodore tried so badly to hide.

"And for whom are these charming lines written?" asked Raymond.

Theodore colored still more and said, “For no one of consequence.” Raymond raised his eyes and answered, “That means for someone of very great consequence. Is she fair? Is she cruel? Has she already broken your heart?” Theodore put both hands to his face and cried, “My lord, you are laughing at me.” “A little,” said Raymond, “but not unkindly. Come, tell me the truth. Have you fallen in love?” Theodore dropped his hands slowly and said in a soft voice, “I do not know what else to call it.”

Raymond laid the paper on his knee and looked at him more kindly than before. “Then you are a man already,” he said. “Sit down and tell me everything. Who is she, and where did you see her?” Theodore obeyed at once, half ashamed and half delighted. “If you must know,” he said, “it is one of the waiting-women at Saint Clare. I saw her when I went there in disguise, and since then her face has never left me. When I sleep, I dream of her. When I wake, I think of her. So I tried to make verses, because common words did not seem enough.” Raymond smiled and answered, “Then let us see whether your verses deserve the praise you gave them.”

Part 12

Raymond took the paper and leaned back in his chair, while Theodore stood before him with a face that tried to look humble but could not hide its hope. “So this is the great work that has kept you awake till morning,” Raymond said. “I begin to understand why you guarded it like a treasure.” Theodore answered, “My lord, you must not laugh before you have read it.” Raymond smiled and replied, “That is a fair condition. I will laugh only if the verses deserve laughter, and I suspect they deserve something kinder.” The boy said nothing more, but his bright eyes followed every movement of his master’s face.

The poem was about Love and Age, and it imagined old Anacreon sitting alone by his fire until Cupid came to him again and brought back warmth, song, and youth. Raymond read it slowly, more than once stopping to see whether Theodore still watched him, and each time the boy’s color rose higher. When he

had finished, he laid the paper on his knee and remained silent for a moment, not because he disliked the poem, but because he enjoyed the little writer's suspense. At last he said, "Theodore, there is life in these lines. You feel what you write, and that is worth more than smooth words without a heart." Theodore clasped his hands and cried, "Then you do not hate them?" "Hate them?" said Raymond. "No. I would be ungrateful to hate anything that has so much spirit."

Yet Raymond, who wished to guide the boy as well as please him, did not stop there. "Still," he added, "because I value you, I must speak honestly. Your images are sometimes too many, and they struggle with one another. Here and there you love the sound of a line better than its meaning, and once or twice I suspect that some dead poet has lent you an idea without your knowing it." Theodore looked down and said softly, "I feared there must be faults." Raymond answered, "Of course there are faults. There are faults in everything written by anyone who is still alive. But faults in a young writer are not a sentence of death. They are only signs that he must work more and admire himself less."

Theodore tried to smile, though he was a little wounded. "Then I am vain?" he asked. "A little," said Raymond. "And so is every poet before he has been corrected, and most of them afterward as well." Theodore could not help laughing at this, and Raymond went on in a gentler tone. "Listen to me. Never write merely to hear yourself praised. If you write, write because some thought or feeling troubles you till it takes shape in words. Then revise it. Then cut away half of what first pleased you. Then show it only to those who love you enough to tell the truth." Theodore answered, "That last rule is the hardest of all."

"Yes," said Raymond, "and the most necessary. The world is full of foolish praise and cruel blame, and both can spoil a young mind. Some men write badly and are proud because weak friends call them wonderful. Others write well and lose courage because malicious people mock them. You must belong to neither class. Praise should not make you vain, and blame should not make you despair." Theodore listened more seriously now and said, "I will remember it. But tell me one thing more. Do you think I should stop writing altogether?" Raymond folded the paper and gave it back. "No," he said. "I think you should go on, because you

cannot help it."

The boy's face brightened again. "Then there is hope for me," he cried. "There is hope for anyone," said Raymond, "who is willing to labor more than he dreams." Theodore took the paper eagerly and hid it in his breast. "I shall make it better tomorrow," he said. "I shall change those weak places and remove what sounds borrowed." Raymond rose and answered, "Do as you please, only do not sit up till dawn every night in service of the Muses. They are charming ladies, but they keep bad hours." Theodore laughed and replied, "I suspect, my lord, that lovers also keep bad hours." Raymond looked at him keenly and said, "That is very true. But poets at least are not usually hanged for it."

Those light words were spoken with a smile, yet as soon as they had left his lips, both remembered the more serious business waiting for the next night. Theodore's manner changed at once. "My lord," he said, "forgive me if I have amused myself when I ought rather to have served you. I know that your mind is fixed elsewhere." Raymond laid a hand on his shoulder and answered kindly, "No, Theodore. Your verses did me good. A lighter thought is sometimes a mercy before a dangerous one returns." Then, after a pause, he added, "But you are right. Tomorrow night may decide the happiness or misery of many lives."

Theodore drew nearer and lowered his voice. "Do you still mean to go forward?" he asked. "Without hesitation," said Raymond. "Lorenzo will be with me, and that gives both strength and honor to the design. Agnes expects deliverance, and if we fail her now, we abandon her not only to sorrow, but to disgrace and perhaps to death." Theodore crossed himself and murmured, "God grant that no accident may betray us." Raymond replied, "We must leave that to heaven and do our own part firmly. The gardener is secured, the key is safe, the road is prepared, and the Cardinal's house will receive her. Nothing remains now but courage and silence."

For a while they spoke over every point of the plan once more, though each already knew it by heart. Raymond said, "At twelve we must be near the garden door. No noise, no light, no delay. If Agnes is there, we move quickly and speak little. If she is not there, we wait as long as prudence permits, but no longer, for

every minute of uncertainty increases danger." Theodore answered, "And if the prioress has discovered all?" Raymond was silent for a moment before he replied, "Then we must learn the truth as we can, and act afterward. But I will not begin by fearing what has not yet happened." Theodore bowed his head and said, "You are right. Fear is a bad servant before action."

At last Raymond dismissed him to rest. Theodore obeyed, though unwillingly, and twice turned back at the door as if he still had something to say. The second time he asked, "May I keep the verses, my lord, even with all their faults?" Raymond smiled and answered, "Keep them by all means. They may one day remind you that the first step toward writing well is to survive writing badly." Theodore laughed once more, wished him good night, and went away. When the room had grown quiet, Raymond remained standing where the boy had left him, the smile still on his lips, but already fading from them.

Alone again, he felt all the weight of the coming night descend upon him. Agnes rose before his mind not as he had first seen her, young, playful, and free among the trees of Lindenberg, but pale, hidden, and trembling behind the walls of Saint Clare. He thought of her danger, of the child she carried, of the cruel pride of the prioress, and of the long chain of errors that had brought them both to this point. "Tomorrow," he said to himself, "I must either save her or lose her more terribly than before." He then knelt for a few moments in prayer, not with the calm of a saint, but with the broken earnestness of a man who has done wrong and now seeks strength to repair it.

When he rose, the first faint light of morning had begun to show itself at the window. He undressed at last and lay down, but sleep came only in short and troubled moments. Each time he woke, he seemed to hear again Agnes's voice, now tender, now fearful, now full of reproach, and then Lorenzo's promise returned to steady him. "I will accompany you tomorrow night," his friend had said, and that generous promise gave him more comfort than rest could have done. So the hours passed slowly on, while outside the city moved toward another day, and within the Hotel de las Cisternas a lover waited for night with a heart divided between hope and dread.

Part 13

The next day passed with a slowness that seemed almost cruel. Lorenzo tried to busy himself with the last details of the plan, while Raymond could neither sit still nor speak of anything except Agnes. Again and again he repeated, “At twelve all will be over. At twelve she will be free.” Lorenzo answered as firmly as he could, “Yes, if courage and prudence can save her, she will be with us before morning.” But even while he spoke, he felt the weight of that uncertain hope, and more than once he caught himself listening for the night as if it were already at the door.

At last the hour came. A coach with four horses waited near the garden wall of Saint Clare, and the two friends stood beside it in silence. Raymond drew out the key which Agnes had caused to be placed in his hands and said, “This at least is true. She meant to come.” Lorenzo replied, “Then let us enter and waste no time.” They unlocked the little door, passed into the garden, and closed it carefully behind them. For a while they remained near the wall, expecting every moment to hear a light footstep among the trees, but none came.

Half an hour passed, and then another. The convent was dark and still, and not a leaf moved in the quiet air. At first Raymond said, “She is delayed, nothing more. Some watchful nun keeps her back for a moment.” Later he began to walk up and down in growing trouble and cried, “This silence is unnatural. Something has happened.” Lorenzo tried to calm him. “We must not lose ourselves to fear too soon,” he said. “If we move rashly now, we may destroy her only chance.” Raymond struck his hands together and answered, “Every minute of waiting destroys me.”

At length he could bear it no longer. “I will go nearer the building,” he said. “I will look at the windows and judge whether all is quiet in truth or only in appearance.” Lorenzo consented, and together they advanced carefully through the garden. The whole convent lay before them like a place of death. No lamp shone from any cell, no whisper came through the walls, and no sound broke the

stillness except their own cautious steps. They waited there till the east began to grow pale, and then Lorenzo said in a grave voice, “We can do no more tonight. If we remain longer, daylight will betray us.”

Raymond turned on him wildly. “Leave her?” he cried. “Leave Agnes in there, perhaps calling for me?” Lorenzo seized his arm and said, “Listen to reason. If she is prevented from coming, we cannot help her now by being taken like thieves in the garden. We must retire, discover what has been done, and return with better knowledge.” Raymond still resisted, but at last despair forced him to yield. Without noise they quitted the garden, regained the coach, and drove back to the city with hearts heavier than when they had left it.

Early the next morning Lorenzo went to the convent and demanded to see his sister. The prioress appeared at the grate with a face full of false sorrow and folded hands. “Alas, Don Lorenzo,” she said, “your poor sister has for some days been in a very agitated state. We urged her tenderly to confide in us, but she refused all comfort and concealed the cause of her distress. Yesterday evening her disorder became so violent that she was forced to take to her bed.” Lorenzo looked hard at her and replied, “I do not believe one syllable of this tale. If Agnes cannot come to the grate, then I will go to her cell.”

The prioress crossed herself as if shocked by blasphemy. “A man admitted within these sacred walls?” she exclaimed. “Impossible, absolutely impossible. You forget yourself, señor. Such a thing was never heard of in a house so holy.” Lorenzo leaned closer and said sternly, “Then at least let me receive one line written by her own hand, or hear from the physician himself.” But the prioress shook her head and answered, “She is too weak for writing, and too much in need of quiet for any visit. Return tomorrow, and I trust that our blessed Virgin will have restored her enough to speak with you.”

Lorenzo left the convent in anger and carried the story to Raymond, who heard it with burning eyes and clenched hands. “She lies,” he said at once. “Agnes is discovered, watched, and hidden from us.” Don Christoval also joined them and reported that he had tried in vain to draw some secret from the old porteress of Saint Clare. “That woman is cautious as a judge,” he said. “She smiles, chats, and

tells you nothing." So there was nothing to be done that day except watch, inquire, and suffer. Each hour seemed to make ignorance more terrible.

Lorenzo returned the next morning even earlier than before. This time he was told, after a long delay, that Agnes had grown worse in the night and that the physician declared her in danger. "You cannot see her," said the lay-sister who brought the message. "She must be kept perfectly quiet." Lorenzo's patience broke at last. He raised his voice, threatened, pleaded, demanded to speak again with the prioress, and would hardly leave the grate. When she finally appeared, he said, "Mother, I warn you. If any harm has been done to my sister, you shall answer for it before men as well as God." She answered only, "Your violence grieves me, señor. We do our duty, and heaven is our witness."

So the days went by, one after another, and each day Lorenzo visited the convent only to receive some new lie. Agnes was first ill, then weaker, then too weak to move, then too weak even to hear her brother's name. Lorenzo and Raymond were now equally certain that the attempt had been discovered and that the story of sickness was only a veil thrown over some darker truth. Yet because they did not know that truth, they could not strike. At this moment a letter arrived from the Cardinal-Duke of Lerma, and with it came the Pope's Bull commanding that Agnes be released from her vows and restored to her family. Lorenzo pressed the paper to his breast and cried, "Now at least they cannot refuse me."

The next morning he carried the Bull to Saint Clare and demanded immediate obedience. The prioress read the paper through with an unmoved face and then handed it back. "You come too late, Don Lorenzo," she said. "Your sister is beyond the reach of earthly commands." Lorenzo grew pale and answered, "What do you mean?" She looked at him with cold severity and replied, "I mean that Agnes is dead." He staggered back as if struck, but before he could speak, she continued, "Her crimes were great, and when you hear them, perhaps your grief will be less than now."

Lorenzo forced himself to answer. "Take care, mother," he said. "I am not in a mood for riddles or insults. If Agnes is dead, tell me how she died. If you speak truth, prove it." The prioress touched the crucifix at her girdle and said, "Then

hear it. She returned from confession on Thursday in a state of great disorder. We, in our simplicity, suspected no evil. On Friday she was delivered of a stillborn child, and immediately after, she followed it to the grave. Three days have passed since she was buried." Then, after kissing her crucifix, she added with a cruel smile, "Even a second Bull from Rome will not raise her for you."

Lorenzo left the convent almost beside himself and carried the news to Raymond. The Marquis refused to believe it. "Dead?" he cried. "No, never. They have hidden her, that is all. They hope to break me with this lie." From that hour he became nearly wild with grief and hope together. Every day he invented some new plan to gain entrance to the convent or some new trick for obtaining news of Agnes, and every day the attempt failed. Lorenzo, though less hopeful, suspected foul play more strongly than ever, and while he supported Raymond's search, he also began to think of another duty long delayed. Since no help for Agnes could yet be forced from Saint Clare, he resolved at last to speak openly to his uncle of Antonia and ask for leave to love her without concealment.

Part 14

At the usual hour Lorenzo went again to Donna Elvira's house. She had ordered that he should be admitted, but when he entered the room, he found her alone. Antonia had withdrawn with Leonella, and this at once told him that something serious was to be said. Elvira received him more kindly than on the former visit, pointed to a place beside her on the sofa, and after a moment of silence began to speak with quiet dignity. "Do not think me ungrateful, Don Lorenzo," she said. "No one remembers better than I do how much I owe you."

"If I wound you by what I am about to say," she continued, "believe that I do it only for my child. My health is weak, and perhaps my days are not many. If I die, Antonia will be left almost friendless. She is young, innocent, and full of feeling. She has seen little of the world, and she does not know how dangerous admiration can become when it comes from one above her in rank and power." She then fixed her eyes on him and added, "Judge, then, whether a mother can see

such danger near her daughter and remain silent."

Lorenzo grew pale, yet he did not interrupt her. Elvira went on more firmly now, though her voice trembled from time to time. "You are amiable, Don Lorenzo, and my poor Antonia is grateful. Gratitude soon becomes something warmer in a heart like hers. I have watched her closely, and I am no longer deceived. Your presence troubles her peace. You have already made an impression there, and though I do not accuse you of any dishonorable design, I cannot permit that impression to grow." Then, after gathering courage, she said plainly, "I must ask you to give up these visits."

For a moment Lorenzo could not answer. At last he rose from his seat and cried, "Good God, señora! Is it possible that you can believe me capable of abusing the confidence which you have placed in me? Do you think I would repay kindness by treachery, or seek to win the heart of a noble and innocent girl only to ruin her?" Elvira answered, "No, I do not think you base. If I did, I would not speak to you thus calmly. But even an honorable affection may bring misery. You love Antonia perhaps for the moment. Suppose your uncle forbids the match. Suppose your family rejects her. What then becomes of my daughter?"

Lorenzo came a step nearer and said with warmth, "Then hear me clearly, señora. I do love Antonia. I love her sincerely, deeply, and with all the respect that the purest heart can feel. I do not ask from her a secret favor, nor from you a dangerous trust. I ask for her hand. If she can be mine with your consent and my uncle's approval, I desire no other happiness in the world." Elvira looked at him in astonishment, for though she had feared his love, she had not expected it to declare itself so openly and so nobly.

"You speak generously," she said at last, "and I would gladly believe you. But remember who Antonia is and who you are. She is poor, unknown, and dependent. You are heir to one of the first houses in Spain. Even if your own heart is true, will the Duke of Medina receive her? Without his full consent, I never will expose my child to the sorrows which I myself have suffered." Lorenzo replied at once, "You are right. My uncle's consent is necessary, and I will seek it without delay. If he refuses, I will obey him in all things except one: I will never marry

another."

Elvira was deeply moved by these words, though prudence still held her back. "I would not make you promises too hastily," she said. "A mother must fear even while she hopes. Yet I will speak honestly in return for your honesty. If the Duke consents, and if the Marquis de las Cisternas acknowledges Antonia as his brother's child, I will no longer oppose your addresses. Until then, I beg you to remember that her peace depends upon caution." Lorenzo bowed over her hand and answered, "You shall find me patient, respectful, and grateful. This very night I will speak to my uncle."

He left the house with a heart almost wild from joy. The sorrow caused by Agnes's danger had not vanished, yet love now threw a bright light even across his anxiety. "She does not reject me," he said to himself. "Antonia may yet be mine." He went at once to the Duke and asked for a private audience. The old nobleman, who loved his nephew truly, saw at once from Lorenzo's face that the matter touched him closely and said, "Come, tell me all. You do not look like a man who asks a favor lightly."

Lorenzo concealed nothing. He described Antonia's beauty, innocence, and birth, told all that he had learned of Elvira, and ended by saying, "My lord, I have given my heart where I can neither recall nor divide it. If you command me to forget her, I may obey you outwardly, but inwardly I never shall." The Duke listened more kindly than Lorenzo had dared to hope. "You have chosen a poor bride," he said, "but not, it seems, an unworthy one. If the girl is truly what you paint her, I would rather see you happy with her than rich with another. Win first the certainty of her birth and the assent of the Marquis, and for my part I place no obstacle in your way."

Lorenzo could scarcely believe his good fortune. He threw himself into his uncle's arms and thanked him with all the warmth of filial affection. The Duke, though he smiled at such eager gratitude, was himself touched by it and added, "Do not thank me yet. Tomorrow you must first free your sister, and after that we will think of weddings. Love is a fine thing, nephew, but it must wait its turn when family duty calls." Lorenzo promised obedience at once. Yet when he retired for

the night, his heart was divided between two hopes, one full of fear for Agnes, the other full of trembling sweetness for Antonia.

Part 15

While Lorenzo's heart moved between love and duty, a darker design was advancing elsewhere. Ambrosio had not abandoned Antonia. On the contrary, every obstacle had only made his desire more violent and more shameless. Flora's watchfulness had already taught him that he could not hope to reach the girl by open and honest means, even if he had wished for such means, which he did not. So he returned again and again to Matilda, and the two of them spent whole hours searching for some plan that would place Antonia helpless in his power.

During those same days, Antonia herself was passing through grief and fear. Her mother's warnings still remained in her mind, yet they had not been able to destroy her trust in Ambrosio. She wished to think well of him even after Elvira had taught her to be careful. But sorrow weakened her, and loneliness made every thought darker. She had already been disturbed by a terrible vision and by foolish talk of spirits, and all this made her easy prey for both fear and deceit.

One fatal night Ambrosio gained entrance to the house and crept near Antonia's bed while she lay under the power of a heavy drug. He was no longer struggling with conscience. Shame had nearly left him, and he was already stretching out his hands toward the sleeping girl when a cry behind him froze him where he stood. Elvira had risen from bed in terror after a fearful dream and had come just in time to find him there. "Monster!" she cried. "So this is the saint of Madrid. So this is the holy man whom fools adore. I will expose you to the whole city."

Ambrosio tried to excuse himself, but his words broke against one another and fell to pieces before they reached her. Elvira would not listen. She hurried to Antonia, shook her, called for Flora, and cried out for help with all the force left in her weak body. Then the Monk saw that his ruin stood directly before him. "Hear me for one moment," he said. "Her honor is still safe. Spare me, and I will

go in silence." Elvira answered, "Silence would be a crime. You shall be known for what you are."

At that answer his fear became murder. To save himself, he killed her. Before help could arrive, Elvira fell lifeless, and Ambrosio, shaking with horror at his own deed, fled from the chamber. He escaped unseen, and by morning the house believed only that Elvira had died in one of her violent fits. No one guessed that her last struggle had been with the man whom the city still called pure and holy. Antonia, waking later than usual, found her mother's body herself and fell to the floor with a cry that filled the whole house.

Flora came running first, then the landlady, Dame Jacintha, and soon after a physician. Nothing could be done for Elvira. The physician declared that life had left her entirely, and all his care was given to Antonia, who was almost beside herself with grief. Jacintha, foolish but warm-hearted, took the whole business of the burial upon herself and insisted that it should be done quickly, for she was half mad with fear at the thought of sleeping in the same house as a corpse. "I tell you plainly," she said to anyone who would listen, "the poor lady will walk tonight, and I for one do not wish to be here when she does."

Time and youth prevented Antonia from dying of sorrow, but they could not prevent sorrow from settling deeply in her heart. She became quiet, easily moved to tears, and full of a sadness that clung to every small thing around her. She was poor, alone, and uncertain even where her nearest relations might be found. Leonella was absent. The Marquis de las Cisternas had not yet answered her needs. Lorenzo seemed lost to her. And though she sometimes thought of asking Ambrosio for advice, her mother's last warnings stopped her every time.

Flora, however, remained firm where Antonia was still divided. She never forgot Elvira's commands. When Ambrosio tried to renew his visits, Flora found reasons to refuse him and watched him so closely that he soon understood how dangerous she was to his desires. He saw that he would never be left alone with Antonia while that faithful servant stood beside her. This angered him, but it also made him more cunning. Then chance, or rather evil fortune, placed in his hands the very tool he needed.

One day a lay brother came to tell him that a woman named Jacintha wished to speak with him. Ambrosio was impatient and would have sent her away, but Matilda stopped him at once. “See her,” she said quietly. “She is Antonia’s hostess. She may be useful to us.” So he went with Matilda to the parlor, where Jacintha was waiting in great disorder. The old woman fell on her knees and began such a long and wandering story that the Abbot nearly lost all patience before she reached the point.

At last the matter became clear. Jacintha believed that Elvira’s ghost had appeared in Antonia’s room and that only a man of extraordinary holiness could protect the house from such a visitor. “Stay there tonight, reverend father,” she begged. “Watch in the haunted room and lay the spirit to rest. If you leave me alone with it, I shall certainly die of fright.” Ambrosio pretended to resist. He told her that ghosts were dreams of weak minds and that she was making herself foolish. But Jacintha begged so hard, and so loudly, that at last he said, as if against his own wish, “Very well. I will remain.”

Flora mistrusted this readiness at once, yet she could not openly oppose it. That night Ambrosio visited Antonia, who still spoke with trembling of the strange warning she believed she had received. He used every argument he could to calm her. “It was grief,” he said. “It was darkness, loneliness, and fear. Your mind deceived your eyes.” Antonia listened respectfully, but she was not convinced. When he left the house, he had gained only one thing for certain: Jacintha’s gratitude and permission to remain all night under the same roof.

At dawn he returned to the abbey and told Matilda all that had passed. He confessed that Antonia’s terror had shaken even him for a moment. Matilda smiled at his weakness and swept the whole story aside. “Dreams, shadows, old women’s tales,” she said. “Do not tremble at smoke. If fear has failed to help us, let skill do what fear cannot.” Then she unfolded a new plan. “At Saint Clare there is a laboratory. In a closet there stands a green liquid. Bring it to me, or rather bring it for Antonia. Give her only a few drops, and for forty-eight hours she will lie as if dead. After that she will wake where you choose, in whatever place you prepare for her.”

Ambrosio listened with burning eyes. “Then she will be in my power?” he asked. “Entirely,” said Matilda. “If you have courage enough to use the gift.” He needed no more urging. That very morning he went to Saint Clare, where the nuns received him with wonder and delight, and the prioress proudly led him through the convent like a saint visiting lesser saints. Ambrosio spoke humbly of duty, of charity, and of the need to comfort the sick, while all the time he waited only for the right moment to reach the closet. At last the chance came. He filled a small phial with the green liquor and left the convent pleased with his own success.

He waited till evening to return to Antonia’s house. Jacintha welcomed him like a savior and repeated her thanks for his promised watch in the haunted chamber. Antonia was calmer than before, but still weak and full of sorrow, and Flora did not move an inch from her side. Then the physician came. Because it had grown dark, lights were called for, and Flora had to go downstairs for them, leaving the doctor in the room and believing that a few moments could do no harm. That brief absence was enough. Ambrosio slipped to the table by the window, opened the phial, and let a few drops fall into Antonia’s draught. When Flora returned, all seemed exactly as before, and a little later, on the physician’s advice, Antonia emptied the cup with her own hand while the Monk watched in silence and waited for the poison-like sleep to begin.

Part 16

Ambrosio left Antonia’s chamber with a face carefully composed, though his heart beat with fear and impatience. Flora followed him downstairs with a lamp in her hand and thanked him for having tried to calm her mistress’s mind. “If there is any change in Donna Antonia,” she said, “I will let you know it.” He answered in a voice loud enough for Jacintha to hear, for he wished the old woman to remember her own request. She did remember it at once. The moment he reached the foot of the stairs, she hurried out and cried, “Why, reverend father, you are not surely going away? You promised to watch in the haunted chamber, and I will not be left alone with ghosts and devils before morning!”

Ambrosio pretended to resist. “My good woman,” he said, “there is no ghost in your house except in your own imagination. Why should I waste a whole night fighting shadows?” But Jacintha joined her hands, lifted her eyes, and pressed him with all the strength of her fears. “Do not leave me, father,” she begged. “Simon Gonzalez has refused to marry me, and now the spirit will certainly tear me to pieces before dawn. Stay only till sunrise, and I shall pray for you while I have breath.” He still made a show of reluctance, yet he yielded at last, exactly as he had wished to do from the start.

Flora saw through that false struggle much more clearly than Jacintha did. She said nothing, but her distrust returned at once in full force. “He desired this from the beginning,” she thought. “He would not remain under this roof all night unless he hoped for some evil chance.” Yet because the old physician had just left, because Antonia seemed quiet, and because the house was full of people, she could not openly accuse a man whom half Madrid worshipped. So she contented herself with watching every movement of his face and listening to his voice more narrowly than before. Ambrosio felt the weight of that silent suspicion and hated her for it more every moment.

The night passed without any ghost, and without any chance for him to approach Antonia again. Jacintha crossed herself a hundred times, muttered prayers at every creak of the boards, and from time to time asked in a whisper whether the spirit had been laid already in the Red Sea. Ambrosio replied shortly that nothing supernatural had appeared and that she must learn to fear God more than old women’s stories. Yet all the while his thoughts were not on ghosts, but on Antonia’s chamber above, on the drug he had given her, and on the terrible uncertainty whether it would bring sleep or death. Never had a few hours seemed so long to him.

When morning came and he returned to the abbey, his first care was not prayer, but secrecy. He did not yet know what effect the medicine would produce, and therefore he judged it wisest to wait quietly till news should reach him. Meanwhile Antonia remained in a state of great weakness and trouble of mind. Her mother was dead, Leonella absent, the Marquis silent, and no near protector

stood beside her in that house of strangers. Flora and Jacintha did what they could. One served her with faithful tenderness, and the other comforted her in her clumsy but warm-hearted fashion, saying again and again, “As long as you stay here, child, I will treat you like my own.”

Flora then tried the only step that seemed left to them. She sent to the Palace de las Cisternas and hoped that the Marquis, once informed of Elvira’s death and Antonia’s loneliness, would take immediate charge of his brother’s child. But fortune was against them even there. Raymond was at that time crushed by the belief that Agnes was lost to him forever, and his illness and delirium were so great that no one was allowed to approach him with business of any kind. The servants told Flora, “The Marquis cannot attend to letters. A few hours may decide his life.” She had no choice but to carry back this miserable answer, and Antonia, hearing it, felt herself more forsaken than before.

“Then I have no one,” she said, and the tears filled her eyes again. Flora knelt beside her and answered warmly, “You have me, señora, while I live.” Jacintha, much moved, added, “And me too, if that is worth anything. I am only a poor foolish woman, but I would rather lose money than leave you friendless.” Those words were awkwardly spoken, yet they gave Antonia some comfort, for she saw that both women were sincere. A little later a letter was brought for Elvira. Antonia knew the hand at once. “It is from my aunt!” she cried, and for the first time in many days a look almost like joy came over her face.

The letter was full of Leonella from beginning to end. She described her journey, her recovered legacy, her wounded heart, and finally her new conquest, an apothecary’s assistant whom she now praised as the most charming man of the age. She wrote that she had married him, that she would soon be in Madrid, and that on Tuesday night she would have the delight of presenting her dear husband in person. Antonia could not rejoice greatly in such a marriage, but Leonella’s quick return seemed a real mercy. “At least I shall again be under a relation’s care,” she thought. “Whatever my aunt may be, she is not a stranger.”

So she looked toward Tuesday night with impatience. When at last it came, she listened anxiously every time wheels sounded in the street below. Again and

again a carriage rolled near, and again and again it passed on without stopping at Jacintha's door. The evening grew late, but still Leonella did not appear. Antonia said, "I will not go to bed till she comes." Jacintha answered, "Then neither shall I," and Flora said the same. Thus the three women remained together, each trying in her own way to make the hours shorter and each failing.

Nothing would go well that night. Antonia took up her guitar and touched the strings, hoping that music might quiet her spirits, but the sound only made her more sad, and she soon laid it aside again. She then sat down to her embroidery, yet the silks were tangled, the thread broke again and again, and the needles slipped from her fingers as if they had life and malice of their own. "Everything is against me tonight," she said at last with a faint, tired smile. Flora answered, "No, señora. The night is only too long. Morning will make all this look smaller." But Antonia shook her head, listened once more toward the street, and waited on in growing uneasiness for the aunt who still did not come.

Part 17

As Antonia moved slowly about the room, her eye fell upon the door which led into the chamber that had once been her mother's. The sight of it drew her at once away from the dull troubles of waiting and toward a sorrow that was deeper and more solemn. "My mother's books are there," she said softly to herself. "Perhaps I may find something to keep my mind occupied until my aunt arrives." Taking up the taper from the table, she passed through the little closet and entered the silent room.

The moment she crossed the threshold, her sadness grew heavier. This was the first time she had come there since Elvira's death, and every object seemed to speak of loss. The bed stood bare and cold, the hearth was dark, and in the window a few plants drooped and faded from neglect. Antonia set down her light and sank into a great chair in which she had seen her mother sit a hundred times. "I shall never see her there again," she whispered, and tears rose at once to her eyes.

She remained a while in that chair, giving herself up to grief, but at last shame

at her own weakness made her rise. “I came for a book,” she thought. “I must not sit here and only grow more unhappy.” She went to the shelves and examined them one by one, yet for some minutes found nothing likely to amuse her. At length she came upon an old volume of Spanish ballads. She opened it at random, read a few lines, and felt curiosity take hold of her. So she returned to the chair, trimmed the taper, and began to read more steadily.

The ballad told of Alonzo the Brave and fair Imogine. He had gone to battle in a far country, and before he left, she swore that whether he lived or died, she would never take another husband. Yet in time she forgot him, listened to a rich baron, and became his bride. At the wedding feast, when laughter and music were loudest, there appeared beside her a dark and silent knight. When he lifted his visor, it was not a living face that looked upon her, but a dead one, a bare skeleton’s head. Then he cried, “Remember Alonzo the Brave! God grants that I should come to punish thy falsehood, claim thee as my bride, and bear thee away to the grave.”

The tale ended in terror. The false bride was carried down into the earth, and afterward, at certain nights in every year, she was said to return in her white wedding dress, while ghosts drank blood from skulls and danced about her. The story was the very worst thing that Antonia could have chosen at such an hour. Since childhood she had listened too willingly to tales of spirits and warnings from the dead, and though her mother had often laughed them away, their power had never wholly left her. Now, with midnight near, grief in her heart, and stormy weather around the house, the old fears rose stronger than ever.

The wind howled outside, rain beat against the windows, and now and then the taper flared wildly and then sank again, as if on the point of dying. No other sound disturbed the room. Antonia tried to rise, but her limbs shook so much that she could scarcely stand. She attempted to call Flora, who was not far away, yet her voice failed her, and the cry died weakly in her throat. For some moments she sat listening to the storm and to the beating of her own heart, until little by little she began to recover herself and prepare to leave the room.

Just then she thought she heard a long low sigh close beside her. All her

courage left her again in an instant. She half rose from the chair, stretched out a trembling hand toward the taper, and then stopped and listened. Nothing followed. “Was it only the wind?” she asked herself. “Or did I truly hear it?” Before she could answer her own question, another sound reached her, fainter still, but clearer. Someone, or something, seemed to be moving at the door.

At first it was only a whispering noise, as if a dress brushed lightly against the wood. Then the latch was raised very softly, and the door moved backward and forward with slow caution. Terror now gave Antonia the strength which calm had denied her. She sprang from the chair and hurried toward the closet door, thinking to reach Flora and Jacintha in the next room. But before she had gone half the distance, the latch was lifted again. She turned in spite of herself. Slowly the door opened, and on the threshold there stood a tall thin figure wrapped from head to foot in a white shroud.

The apparition moved with measured solemnity toward the table. As it came on, the dying flame of the taper burned blue and cast a melancholy light over the room. Above the table hung a little clock, and the hand stood at three. The figure stopped beneath it, raised one arm, and pointed to the hour, while with fixed attention it looked full at Antonia. She could neither fly nor cry out. She stood motionless in the middle of the room and watched it as if a spell had fallen upon her.

The figure remained thus for some moments. Then the clock struck. When the last sound had died away, the stranger came a little nearer, and in a voice faint, hollow, and sepulchral said, “Yet three days, and we meet again.” Antonia shuddered from head to foot. “We meet again?” she repeated at last with the greatest difficulty. “Where shall we meet? Who are you?” The figure pointed downward with one hand and with the other slowly lifted the cloth from its face.

“Almighty God! My mother!” cried Antonia. She gave one terrible shriek and fell senseless to the floor. Jacintha, who was at work in a neighboring room, heard the cry and ran in at once, for Flora had only just gone downstairs to fetch fresh oil for the lamp. Great was the good woman’s surprise when she found Antonia stretched on the ground without motion. She raised her as well as she

could, carried her to bed, and used every simple means within her knowledge to bring her back to herself. At length Antonia opened her eyes and looked wildly around.

"Where is she?" she cried. "Is she gone? Am I safe? Speak to me! Oh, speak to me for God's sake!" Jacintha, astonished and frightened, answered, "Safe from whom, my child? What have you seen?" Antonia clung to her and cried, "In three days! She told me we should meet in three days! I saw her, Jacintha. I saw her only this moment." "Saw whom?" asked the old woman, now trembling herself. Antonia answered in a whisper broken by terror, "My mother's ghost."

At those words Jacintha's courage entirely failed her. "Christ Jesus!" she screamed, and, letting Antonia fall back upon the pillows, she fled from the room in complete confusion. On the stairs she met Flora coming up with the oil. "Go to your mistress," she cried. "Here are dreadful doings. My house is full of dead women and spirits, and I want none of them. Go your way to Donna Antonia, and let me go mine." Then, without veil, shawl, or any thought except escape, she rushed out into the rainy street and ran straight toward the Capuchin abbey.

Flora found Antonia in a far worse state than Jacintha had left her. She recovered only to fall again into fainting fits, and in her short intervals of consciousness she spoke of her mother, of three days, and of some meeting beneath the earth. A physician was sent for immediately, and while waiting for him, Flora undressed her mistress and laid her carefully in bed. In the meantime Jacintha, heedless of the storm and trembling almost as much from imagination as from the cold, reached the abbey gate and rang so loudly that the porter thought some great disaster had happened.

Ambrosio was at that moment with Matilda, and the two were still searching for a way to reach Antonia. The monk had already learned from Flora's refusal that no direct attempt would succeed. So when the lay brother announced that a woman named Jacintha Zuniga begged to speak with the superior, he was at first impatient and ordered that she be sent away. But Matilda said quietly, "See her. She is Antonia's hostess and may be useful to us." He obeyed, and they went together to the parlor, where Jacintha at once fell on her knees and began to pour

out her story in a torrent of fear, complaint, and useless detail.

"Reverend father," she cried, "I am the most unfortunate woman in Madrid. First my lodger dies, then her ghost begins to walk, and now the poor daughter has seen it with her own eyes. If something is not done, I shall lose my house, my sleep, and perhaps my life. The spirit came in white, father, and frightened the girl out of her senses. It was Donna Elvira herself, I am sure of it. Pray come at once, sprinkle the house with holy water, lay the ghost in the Red Sea, and save an honest woman from utter ruin." Ambrosio listened with more interest than he wished to show. Here at last was the opening for which he had been waiting. He knew that if he went, he could no longer hide so carefully behind the name of Father Jerome, and that such a visit might lower in some degree his reputation for austere retirement. Yet the chance of seeing Antonia again overcame every weaker scruple. His hunger to reach her was stronger now than fear, shame, or prudence.

Part 18

Ambrosio's hesitation vanished the moment he heard that Antonia lay in convulsions. "In convulsions?" he cried. "Why did you not tell me that first? Lead on, good woman. I will follow you at once." Jacintha begged him first to take holy water, and he obeyed without argument. She was so comforted by seeing the vessel in his hand that she crossed herself three times and said, "Now I breathe again. If all the ghosts in Spain rise tonight, I do not fear them while I walk beside your holiness." Without losing another moment, they hastened together toward the Strada di San Iago.

When they reached the house, Antonia was indeed in a dangerous state. The fright had shaken her whole frame so violently that for the first hours the physician thought her life in real danger. Flora moved about the room in silence, pale and watchful, while Jacintha stood wringing her hands and repeating in a low voice, "It is the ghost. I know it is the ghost." At last the physician declared that the worst seemed past. "She must be kept perfectly quiet," he said. "That is the chief point. I will send a draught to calm her nerves and bring sleep. If she can rest, she may

recover.”

The sight of Ambrosio seemed to soothe her even before he spoke. Elvira’s warnings had been too incomplete to tear him from Antonia’s heart. She knew only that her mother had wished her to be careful, but she did not clearly understand why. Now, in the midst of terror, sorrow, and weakness, she turned again to the monk as if his very presence promised safety. She stretched out a trembling hand toward him and said, “You have come. I knew you would not leave me alone in this misery.”

Ambrosio bent over her bedside with all the gentleness he could command. “I am here,” he said. “Be calm, Antonia. Nothing shall harm you while I remain near you.” She answered eagerly, “Then you do not think me mad? You do not think I have invented all this?” He took her hand and replied, “No, I think you frightened, exhausted, and too ready to trust the shadows of night. Tell me everything exactly as you saw it, and then let us judge whether it came from heaven, from earth, or only from a troubled mind.”

She related the whole adventure again, every circumstance standing bright and dreadful before her memory. She described the room, the hour, the white figure, the pointing hand, and the voice that had said, “Yet three days, and we meet again.” When she came to the lifting of the cloth and the sight of her mother’s face, she shuddered so violently that Flora stepped forward as if to stop the story. But Ambrosio said softly, “Let her speak. What is hidden grows larger in the mind.” Then, when she had finished, he answered with studied calm.

“Listen to me carefully,” he said. “You had passed the evening in grief. You sat alone in a room full of painful memories. You read a tale of death, false brides, and wandering spirits. The wind was loud, the hour late, and your imagination already awake and fearful. Is it strange that your fancy should shape all these things into one terrible vision? No, Antonia, it is sorrow that has deceived you, not your mother returned from the grave.” She looked at him with anxious eyes and replied, “I wish I could believe that. But it was too clear, too real. I heard the voice. I saw the face.”

“The mind can hear and see very strongly when fear rules it,” said the monk.

“If every dream, warning, and midnight shape were true, the world would be full of spirits and no one would dare close his eyes after sunset. Do not make yourself ill by honoring a lie with belief.” Antonia answered, “You speak wisely, and I am calmer when I hear you. Yet in my heart the fear remains.” He pressed her hand a little and said, “Then fight that fear. Do not feed it. Pray, rest, and let your reason govern what your nerves now disturb.”

His words comforted her, though they did not persuade her. She turned her head upon the pillow and said in a low voice, “I will try. Only do not refuse to come again tomorrow. While you are here, my thoughts seem less dreadful.” Ambrosio replied at once, “I will return. You shall not ask me in vain.” Antonia thanked him with simple warmth, but Flora, who had listened to every word, liked neither his readiness nor the expression which more than once had escaped him when his eyes rested on her mistress. She stood near the bed the whole time and did not once allow him to remain unwatched.

Ambrosio felt that watchfulness too clearly. Each time he forgot himself for a moment, Flora’s presence recalled him. He saw that she suspected him, that she measured his looks as well as his speeches, and that she would never willingly leave him alone with Antonia. This sharpened both his desire and his anger. Still, he showed nothing outwardly. He spoke with gravity, gave the physician full praise, advised quiet, and at last prepared to depart. Antonia followed him with grateful eyes, while Flora took the lamp and said, “I will light your reverence downstairs.”

As soon as they reached the lower floor, Jacintha met them and begged in a broken voice that masses might be said for Elvira’s soul. “She cannot be at rest,” the old woman cried. “Not after appearing in that dreadful fashion. Promise me, father, that prayers shall be offered for her, or I shall never dare to sleep again.” Ambrosio answered readily, “I will remember your request.” But Jacintha was not yet satisfied. Catching his sleeve, she added, “And you must keep your other promise too. You must pass tomorrow night in the haunted room. If you leave me alone with that poor lady’s spirit, I shall die before morning, and then two ghosts will be walking in the house instead of one.”

He had wished for exactly that permission, and yet he affected reluctance. “My good woman,” he said, “you ask what is needless. There is no ghost in your house but the one your terror has created.” Jacintha shook her head violently. “Tell that to wiser people than me,” she replied. “I know what I know. You shall stay, father. I will not be put off.” Flora watched this exchange in silence and thought, “He resists too easily. He wants to remain here.” At last Ambrosio yielded and said, “Very well. Tomorrow after matins I will come and examine what can be done.”

When he returned to the abbey, the first thing he did was to seek Matilda. He repeated every part of the adventure, including the ghostly warning and Antonia’s fixed belief that she would die in three days. For a little while he spoke almost like a man still capable of fear. “Suppose the prediction should be true,” he said. “Suppose I lose her before she is mine.” Matilda laughed at both his terror and his tenderness. “You are frightened by a sick girl’s vision and an old woman’s foolish tongue,” she said. “Antonia saw nothing but the child of her own grief. As for Jacintha, she would swear that a cat on the stairs was a devil if the candle burned blue beside it.”

Then her tone changed, and she leaned nearer to him. “But if fear has opened the door, use the opening. You say the girl trusts you more than ever and the hostess begs you to sleep in the house. What better chance can desire ask?” Ambrosio answered bitterly, “A useless chance, while that watchful slave Flora follows her like a shadow.” Matilda was silent for a moment and then said slowly, “Then we must remove not Flora, but wakefulness itself. Listen to me. In the laboratory of Saint Clare there is a closet. On the third shelf to the left stands a bottle by itself. It holds a green liquor. Take some of it when you are unobserved, and Antonia will sleep so deeply that no noise, no cry, no struggle will wake her before the time we choose.”

Ambrosio looked at her with burning eagerness. “And no harm will come to her?” he asked. Matilda smiled, but the smile gave him little comfort. “No harm that need trouble your conscience,” she said. “A few drops will make her seem dead for many hours, nothing more.” He was already half conquered. Desire had

grown stronger than caution, and the memory of Antonia's beauty, made more dangerous to him by sorrow and weakness, now overpowered the last remains of doubt. "I will do it," he said. "Tomorrow I will visit Saint Clare." Matilda answered, "Go then, and fail in nothing. Fortune seldom comes twice to a man who hesitates the first time."

Part 19

No sooner had Matins ended than Ambrosio set out for Saint Clare. Outwardly he looked calm, humble, and entirely grave. Inwardly he was full of restless desire and fear. The prioress received him with delight and thought his visit a great honor to her convent. "This house is blessed today," she said. "The holiest man in Madrid has crossed our threshold." Ambrosio answered with well-practiced modesty and said that charity had forced him to leave his beloved solitude, since many sick penitents needed comfort and could not come to the abbey.

The prioress praised his zeal, called Madrid fortunate, and led him everywhere with endless politeness. She showed him relics, chapels, painted images, and all the little treasures of the house. Ambrosio listened, bowed, and spoke as if every object interested him, though in truth he cared for nothing except the laboratory. At last they reached it, and there his pulse quickened at once. He found the closet, saw the shelves, and in the very place which Matilda had named stood the bottle with the greenish liquid.

Chance favored him. The prioress was turned aside for a moment by some trifling matter among the nuns, and while her attention was elsewhere, Ambrosio drew out his small phial and filled it. It was done in a breath. When he turned back again, his face was as smooth as before, and no one suspected what had passed. He remained long enough to avoid notice, partook of a slight collation in the refectory, and then left the convent, well pleased with the success of his deceit and with the thought that Antonia was now nearer than ever to his power.

He did not go to her house till evening. Jacintha welcomed him with joy and

repeated all her foolish thanks and fears. Antonia seemed somewhat better, though still weak, sorrowful, and full of the prediction of the ghost. Flora remained at her mistress's bedside with the same silent distrust as before. Ambrosio affected not to see that distrust, and spoke with measured calm of patience, prayer, and sleep. While they were thus engaged, the physician entered, and because the room had grown dark, lights were called for and Flora was obliged to go downstairs herself to fetch them.

That short absence gave the monk exactly what he needed. The physician sat near Antonia and questioned her about her pulse, her dreams, and the state of her nerves. His attention was wholly fixed upon his patient. Ambrosio moved silently toward the table in the window-recess, drew out the phial, and let a few drops fall into the draught prepared for the night. Then he replaced everything and returned to his seat. When Flora came back with lights, the room seemed in perfect order, and neither she nor the physician had the slightest suspicion that death itself appeared to stand ready in the cup upon the table.

The physician declared that Antonia might safely leave her chamber on the following day if she slept well that night. "Let her take the same draught as yesterday," he said. "It has already done her service." Flora answered that it was ready, poured it into a cup, and gave it to her mistress. At that moment Ambrosio's courage failed him. A terrible thought entered his mind. "What if Matilda has deceived me?" he asked himself. "What if jealousy has given me poison instead of sleep?" He half rose from his seat, almost ready to dash the cup from Antonia's hand. But he had delayed too long. She had already swallowed the medicine and returned the empty vessel to Flora.

Nothing remained now but waiting. Never had a few minutes seemed so cruelly long. Antonia spoke once or twice, then pressed her hand to her forehead and said, "This medicine is stronger tonight." Flora looked at her with concern and answered, "Perhaps it will only make you sleep sooner, señora." But presently Antonia's voice changed, her breathing grew hurried, and she clasped Flora's arm with sudden violence. "Stay with me!" she cried. "Something is wrong. My head burns, and yet I am cold." Even as she spoke, a shudder ran through her whole

body.

The convulsions began almost immediately after. Flora screamed for help, Jacintha came running, and the physician, who had not yet gone far, was called back in haste. Antonia writhed upon the bed in a manner dreadful to behold. Her hands closed and opened wildly, her limbs shook with terrible force, and from time to time she uttered broken cries, not of clear pain, but of confusion and mortal fear. Flora tried to hold her, weeping and praying at once. Jacintha wrung her hands and cried, “The ghost has done it! I knew the ghost would finish her!” Ambrosio stood near them in speechless agitation, looking now at Antonia and now at the physician, as if the answer to his own fate were written on both their faces.

The physician used every means that art suggested, but the violence of the fit seemed beyond his skill. At length the struggle began to lessen. The motions grew weaker, then slower, then ceased. Antonia lay motionless upon the bed. A deadly whiteness spread itself over her face. Her lips lost all color, her pulse sank lower and lower, and the physician bent over her in silence while Flora watched him with clasped hands and Jacintha hid her eyes. At last he placed his hand upon her heart once more, then raised his head gravely and said, “She is gone.”

Flora broke into a cry of grief that seemed to come from her whole soul. She fell on her knees beside the bed, kissed Antonia’s cold hand, and called upon her by every tender name that love and service had taught her. Jacintha’s sorrow was noisier and more confused, but not less sincere. “First the mother, and now the daughter!” she sobbed. “This house is under a curse. I shall never prosper again after sheltering such misery.” Ambrosio alone said little. The sight before him, though it promised him future triumph, filled him for the moment with horror. He was still uncertain whether Antonia slept or had indeed died, and this uncertainty made every instant dreadful.

Yet before long self-interest conquered every softer feeling. He reflected that if the potion had done its office rightly, she must be treated as dead by all around her, and that delay might ruin all. Therefore he forced himself to appear composed and useful. He spoke of resignation, of the will of heaven, and of the need to

prepare all things quietly and decently. He offered his own services for the funeral with a readiness that seemed charitable and holy. “In such affliction,” he said, “you should not be burdened with care. Leave these sad duties to me. The vaults of Saint Clare are near, retired, and proper. I will myself see that all is done with respect.”

Flora was too crushed by grief to oppose him, though even then something in her heart shrank from his interference. Jacintha, on the contrary, caught eagerly at any help that spared her trouble and terror. “Yes, yes, reverend father,” she cried. “Do everything. I am only a poor foolish woman, and my head fails me in such scenes.” The physician, who saw nothing suspicious in the monk’s conduct, approved the arrangement and advised that the burial should not be needlessly delayed. So it was settled that Antonia, whom all believed truly dead, should be laid in the vaults of Saint Clare.

Thus the snare closed round her. Flora watched beside the body through that miserable night, bathing her mistress’s brow with tears which could no longer refresh it, while Jacintha now prayed, now lamented, and now crossed herself whenever the house gave the slightest sound. Ambrosio returned to the abbey with a heart divided between triumph and dread. “Tomorrow,” he said to himself, “she will be carried where no human eye can protect her.” But even while he exulted, another thought would force itself upon him. “What if Matilda has lied? What if I have not hidden Antonia from the world, but murdered her?” Between these two fears and hopes he passed the night, waiting impatiently for the funeral that was to place the helpless girl forever, as he believed, within his reach.

Part 20

On the following day, Antonia was buried with every appearance of decent sorrow. The people who had admired her beauty pitied her early death, and Jacintha wept loudly enough for them all. Flora wept more quietly, but with far deeper grief, and would scarcely leave the coffin till force and kindness together drew her away. Ambrosio himself took care that the body should be laid in the

vaults of Saint Clare, and his solemn voice, his lowered eyes, and his grave compassion deceived every person who saw him. Yet beneath that holy face there worked a fear so violent that at times he could hardly trust his own steps.

He waited till night with an impatience that was almost madness. Again and again he asked himself, “Did she truly die, or does she only sleep?” and no answer came. When the convent and the city had grown still, he descended alone to the sepulchre and opened the coffin with trembling hands. At first the sight within seemed to strike him motionless, for Antonia lay before him pale, cold, and without breath, like one already given to the grave. But as he bent nearer, he saw at last a faint motion at her lips, and then he knew that Matilda had not deceived him.

He carried her from the coffin into a hidden dungeon near the vaults and laid her upon a couch prepared there before nightfall. For a long time she remained senseless, while he watched her with burning eyes and with a heart divided between desire and horror. At length her breathing grew stronger, her hands moved, and little by little she opened her eyes. She looked around her in wild confusion, saw the tombs, the narrow walls, the lamp burning dimly, and then fixed her gaze on the monk who stood near her. “Where am I?” she whispered. “What dreadful place is this?”

Ambrosio came nearer and said, “You are safe, Antonia. Fear nothing, if you can trust me.” At those words memory returned, though darkly and by degrees. She remembered the drugged sleep, the cries, the weeping round her bed, and then only blackness till this fearful waking. “Safe?” she repeated. “No, I am not safe. Why am I here? Why do I not see Flora? Why is this room among graves?” Then, seeing from his face that no good answer would come, she started up and cried, “Merciful God! What have you done?”

He tried to soothe her with gentle words, but they only made his purpose clearer. “Listen to me,” he said. “The world believes you dead, and for a time that belief must remain. It was the only way to save you from greater evils.” Antonia drew back from him with horror and answered, “You speak of saving me, while you have stolen me from my bed, my friends, and the light of heaven. Take me

back. Let me go this instant, or I will cry for help till these graves answer me." Ambrosio caught her hand and said in a lower, fiercer voice, "No one will hear you here."

That answer showed her all. She fell on her knees and clasped her hands. "If ever you had pity," she cried, "show it now. I am alone, unhappy, and utterly in your power. Let me return to the world, and I swear that no word of mine shall injure you. I will leave Madrid tonight. I will hide myself wherever you command, only do not keep me in this terrible place." He listened, moved in spite of himself, and for some moments he truly hesitated.

"If I let you go," he said at last, "how shall I explain your return from death? How shall I answer all the questions which will rise the moment you appear? Even if you keep silence, others may force the truth from your innocence." Antonia answered eagerly, "Then invent what story you please, and I will repeat it. Say that I was taken from my grave by some mistake, that I wandered, that I was hidden, that I was ill. Say anything, only set me free." Compassion, shame, and the wish to lessen part of his guilt worked strongly in him then, and he was near consenting.

But before he could speak again, Antonia, still weak from terror and long suffering, swayed toward him, and the sight of her beauty so near, so helpless, and so unprotected inflamed all the worst passions in his soul once more. What pity had softened became again violent desire. He forgot her tears, her prayers, and every promise of mercy. She saw the change in his face and tried to fly, but the dungeon gave her no escape. "Do not touch me!" she cried. "For God's sake, do not touch me!" He answered only with wild and broken words, seized her in his arms, and treated her with a brutality from which even her cries could not hold him back.

When the crime was done, his madness passed, and hatred of himself awoke in its place. He started away from her as if she had burned him. Antonia lay upon the ground, weeping without strength, while he walked the dungeon like a desperate man and struck his hands against his breast. "What have I become?" he cried. "A hypocrite, a ravisher, an assassin. It is your beauty that has undone me."

Antonia raised herself faintly and answered through tears, “Mine? No, Ambrosio. It is your own wicked heart.”

Those simple words pierced him more sharply than reproaches. He turned upon her with fury and cried, “And will you not accuse me before heaven and earth? Will you not stand before God with that pale face and those wounded eyes and call for my destruction?” Antonia, thinking him mad, sank down again and said only, “Spare me. I have suffered enough.” Then his rage changed once more, and he spoke with a gloomy calm more dreadful than violence. “You cannot leave this place,” he said. “The world must still believe you dead. Here you must remain, hidden from every human eye.”

Antonia renewed her prayer more urgently than before. She promised silence, flight, concealment, anything that he might demand, if only he would not bury her alive among corpses and darkness. Her words shook him. He saw clearly that he had already ruined her beyond repair, and that to keep her there was only to add one cruelty more to many. “Perhaps,” he said slowly, “perhaps I may still find some means of restoring you without ruining us both.” Antonia caught at that faint hope and cried, “Yes, yes, think only of that. I will obey you in everything. I ask only for liberty.”

At that very moment hurried footsteps sounded outside, and the dungeon door flew open. Matilda rushed in, pale and full of alarm. Antonia gave a cry of joy at the sight of another human creature, but the joy died as soon as she saw that Matilda looked on her without either surprise or pity. “What is to be done, Ambrosio?” Matilda cried. “We are lost if we remain here. Saint Clare is on fire, the prioress is dead, and the people are in full riot. Worse still, Lorenzo de Medina and officers of the Inquisition are searching the vaults below. If this girl is found with you, all is over.”

Ambrosio turned white. “The Inquisition?” he said. “Lorenzo here?” “Yes,” answered Matilda, “and they come nearer every moment. The only safety lies in silence and swiftness.” As she spoke, she drew a dagger and darted toward Antonia. “Thus I remove the danger,” she said. But Ambrosio seized her arm and wrested the weapon from her hand. “No,” he cried. “She has suffered too much

already." Matilda looked at him with proud scorn and answered, "Then keep her alive and let her destroy you."

While they spoke, Antonia had listened with desperate attention. The moment she heard Lorenzo's name, she resolved to risk all on one final effort. The dungeon door stood open. Before either of them clearly guessed her purpose, she sprang past the monk and fled into the passage with all the speed that fear and hope could give her. Ambrosio followed instantly. Though weak and wounded, she ran like one inspired, and soon heard the sound of men and torches drawing near. "Help!" she cried. "Help, for God's sake!" Then the monk caught her by the hair and tried to drag her back, but she threw her arms round a pillar and screamed still louder.

The voices came nearer. Ambrosio, blind with fear of discovery, forgot every human feeling in one dreadful instant. Holding the dagger still in his hand, he struck her twice in the breast. Antonia sank at once, and he had only time to abandon her and fly before torches flashed upon the walls and men rushed into view. Don Ramirez was first among them. He saw the bleeding girl, saw a man fleeing from her side, and gave chase with several archers, while Lorenzo remained behind. They raised the wounded stranger, and as her fair hair fell back from her face, Lorenzo cried out in horror, "Antonia!"

She knew him at once, though death was already upon her. He clasped her in his arms, covered her hands with kisses, and cried, "Speak to me! Tell me who has done this, and whether there is any hope." She answered in a faint but peaceful voice, "Do not grieve so wildly. I am beyond all human help now, and perhaps that is mercy. Had I lived, I could never have been your wife. Shame and sorrow had already taken that hope away. Let me at least die hearing that you loved me." Lorenzo, broken with anguish, replied, "Loved you? I love you now, I shall love you always, and no other woman shall ever be to me what you are."

A heavenly brightness seemed to pass for a moment over her face. "That is enough," she whispered. "Then I do not die unloved." She tried to comfort him even then, speaking of patience, of prayer, and of meeting again where pain could not follow them. Her voice grew weaker with every word, yet still she looked at

him with tenderness. Then suddenly the convent bell sounded in the distance and struck three. Antonia started, raised herself with strange strength, and cried, “Three o’clock! Mother, I come!” The next instant she fell lifeless from Lorenzo’s arms.

Part 21

For some moments after Antonia’s death, Lorenzo seemed to lose all power of thought. He still held her in his arms, still called her by name, and still begged her to answer, though her last breath had already gone. Don Ramirez returned almost immediately, but alone. “He has escaped for the moment,” he said with grief and anger. “The darkness, the winding passages, and the confusion above have saved him. But by heaven, if he is still in Madrid, he shall not escape forever.” Lorenzo heard him as men hear a voice in a dream, yet gave no sign that he understood.

The officers raised Antonia’s body with all the tenderness that such a scene allowed, and Lorenzo suffered them to lead him away rather than followed them by any act of his own will. Above ground, the night was still wild with terror. Saint Clare was burning, the people were still running through the streets with torches and cries, and all Madrid seemed shaken by horror, rage, and rumor. Some spoke only of the murdered Agnes, some of the dead prioress, and some of the saintly Ambrosio, who, they said, had strangely disappeared when his presence was most desired. But Lorenzo heard none of it clearly. One grief had swallowed all others.

The Duke came to him as soon as he learned what had passed, and his own firmness nearly gave way at the sight of his nephew’s despair. “My child,” he said, taking Lorenzo by the hand, “you must come away. This place can only deepen your misery.” Lorenzo answered at last, but only to say, “Leave me with her. She was dying, and I could not save her. Do not force me from her yet.” The Duke, seeing that gentleness alone could move him, remained beside him till necessity at last compelled them both to depart, and before morning Lorenzo lay upon a bed of sickness, worn down less by bodily fatigue than by the violence of his grief.

Yet that dreadful night had not given only death. The unknown captive whom Virginia had claimed from the sepulchre still lived, though faintly and with little promise of recovery. She was borne to the Palace de Villa-Franca upon a litter, and Virginia, joined by her mother, watched over her with a pity as active as it was sincere. More than once the poor sufferer seemed on the point of dying; then a groan, a slight motion of the hand, or a trembling breath gave hope again. “Do not leave her,” said Virginia to the women about her. “She has suffered too much in darkness and solitude. If life remains, let it return to kindness.”

At length the prisoner opened her eyes, though only for a moment, and looked wildly round as if the light itself pained her. “Where am I?” she whispered. “Do not carry me back. Mercy, mercy!” Virginia bent over her at once and answered, “You are safe. No one here will hurt you. Speak to us when you are able, and trust those who wish only to comfort you.” The poor girl tried to answer, but weakness overcame her, and she sank again into a quiet more hopeful than the terrible stillness from which she had first awakened.

When the physicians judged that she might bear a little questioning, Virginia approached her once more and said with all possible gentleness, “Tell me only your name. No more is needed now.” The stranger hesitated, shuddered, and then said in a broken voice, “Agnes.” At that word the whole mystery was clear. The rescued captive was Lorenzo’s sister, thought dead, buried in the secrecy of the convent, and saved at last from a living tomb. “Agnes!” cried the Marchioness. “Then heaven itself has brought you out of the grave.” Virginia pressed her hand and said, “Yes, Agnes, you are among friends. Rest now, and let us rejoice for you.”

The news was carried without delay to the Duke, and from him to Raymond, who still lay between life and death under the weight of false bereavement. The Duke prepared him as carefully as he could. “I bring you happiness,” he said, “but you must receive it quietly, or it may kill you before you can enjoy it. Agnes lives.” Raymond first stared at him as if he had not understood. Then he half rose in bed and cried, “Lives? Do not deceive me, my lord. If there is pity in you, do not deceive me.” The Duke repeated the assurance, and the transport which followed

was so violent that for a moment all around him feared that joy itself would prove more dangerous than grief had done.

Once that first storm had passed, peace did for Raymond what medicine alone had failed to do. Hope steadied his pulse, certainty gave strength to his heart, and the sight of Agnes, when at last she was able to visit him, seemed to call him back from the edge of the grave. She came to him pale, altered, and still marked by suffering, yet to him she had never seemed so dear. “You are safe,” he said, taking her hand with reverence rather than passion. “That one word makes the whole world new again.” Agnes answered with tears, “And you have loved me faithfully even through despair. I know now what that faith has cost you.”

Their happiness, however, did not at once spread itself equally over all who stood near them. Raymond recovered with surprising speed, but Lorenzo sank deeper under his sorrow. Antonia’s fate, so sudden, so cruel, and so hopeless, lay upon his soul like a weight that neither friendship nor reason could lift. He became thin, silent, and indifferent to everything around him. Food was offered to him almost by force, and sometimes he turned from it with disgust, saying, “Why should I care to live? She whom I loved is dead, and the very manner of her death has made memory itself a torment.”

Agnes alone could sometimes soften this despair. She had known suffering too well not to understand his, and she brought to his bedside that tender patience which belongs to those who have themselves looked into darkness. “Brother,” she would say, sitting beside him in the evening, “do not wound Antonia’s memory by destroying yourself for her sake. She loved you too truly to have desired that.” Lorenzo would answer sadly, “You speak as an angel might speak, Agnes, but grief is not so obedient as reason. I hear you, I thank you, and yet my heart remains where it was.” Even so, her presence soothed him when all other company wearied him.

Virginia, under her mother’s protection, was now sometimes admitted when Agnes sat with him. She spoke little at first, and never without delicacy. If Antonia’s name arose, she did not shrink from it, but mentioned her with a compassion so sincere and a respect so gentle that even Lorenzo could listen

without pain too sharp to bear. One day, seeing tears in his eyes, she said softly, “Do not think that I speak of her lightly because I did not know her well. A fate so sad belongs to every generous heart that hears it.” Lorenzo looked at her more attentively than before and answered, “You do her justice, señora. That is enough to make me grateful.”

Thus time, which had at first seemed only another enemy, began little by little to change the face of things around him. It could not restore Antonia, but it could bring near those who truly wished to comfort him. The Duke observed with satisfaction that Virginia’s visits never failed to leave his nephew calmer than they found him, and the Marchioness noted with equal pleasure that Lorenzo’s eye now followed her daughter with a gentleness which had not been there before. Nothing was said openly, and no one hurried what only time could do. For the present, it was enough that grief no longer stood quite alone at Lorenzo’s side.

Part 22

One evening Lorenzo seemed calmer than he had been for many days, and all who loved him were quick to notice the change. Agnes sat near him, with Raymond beside her, while the Duke, the Marchioness, and Virginia formed a quiet circle round the couch. After some common talk had passed, Lorenzo turned to his sister and said, “Agnes, you have told me much, but not all. I know how Saint Ursula defended you before the crowd, and I know how you were found at last. But I do not yet know by what dreadful path you came from that poisoned bed to the dungeon where we discovered you. If the story pains you too much, say so. If not, tell it now.” Agnes looked at him sadly and answered, “I kept silence only because I feared to bring back thoughts too closely joined with Antonia’s fate. But since you ask it yourself, I will obey.”

The others had already heard the tale, yet their interest in her was so warm that no one wished to spare himself the pain of listening again. Agnes folded her hands upon her lap and remained silent for a moment, as if collecting strength rather than memory. Then she said, “You know already how the prioress hated me,

how Saint Ursula warned me, and how I was forced to swallow what I believed was poison. What you do not know is what followed." Her voice shook at first, but soon grew steadier. "When I thought death had come, the worst part was not pain. It was despair. The prioress stood over me and spoke of judgment, hell, and eternal punishment till the very last sounds I heard before I lost my senses were her curses."

"When life returned," Agnes continued, "I did not at first know whether I was still in this world or had already entered another. My head burned, my thoughts were broken, and all around me was darkness, damp, and a silence so deep that it seemed to press upon my chest. I tried to rise, but I had hardly strength enough to move my hands. By degrees I understood that I was not dead, but buried alive from human sight. They had carried me to a secret dungeon and left me there." Lorenzo covered his face for a moment, and Agnes, seeing his sorrow, said more gently, "Do not look so, brother. That part is over now."

"At first," she said, "I still hoped that this imprisonment would last only a few hours, perhaps only till some cruel examination had been prepared. Then my eyes grew used to the darkness, and I saw the place more clearly. It was a narrow underground room, wet with foul air and shut away from all comfort. On one side stood a little table, with some coarse bread and a pitcher of water upon it. On another was a miserable couch. There was also a crucifix against the wall, and near it a rosary which I had dropped from my hand when terror first seized me. Those poor objects seemed to say, 'Here you must live, and here perhaps you must die.'"

She paused, and then her voice sank lower. "But I was not alone. For some little time I did not understand what lay against me, wrapped in cloth and pressed near my breast. When I did understand, I wished for a second death. It was my child." Virginia, who had turned pale, let a tear fall silently, and Agnes went on. "He had not lived long after his birth, if indeed he had truly lived at all. I had no power then to examine closely or even to think steadily. I only knew that what should have been my comfort was become my misery, and that I had no hands near me but my own to hold him, no human voice but mine to pray over him, and

no witness to my grief except God."

"Many times," she said, "I tried to persuade myself that all would yet be changed. I said, 'Saint Ursula knows my danger. Bertha and Cornelia love me. Raymond will not forget me. Lorenzo, if he is once informed, will force these walls to open.' Then another thought answered, 'No one knows where you are. To the world you are dead. Even your enemies are safe because they have hidden you under the very ground.' So hope and despair fought within me, and each left me weaker than before." She looked at Lorenzo and added, "That struggle was almost harder to bear than hunger."

"Hunger came soon enough," she continued. "The bread was little, the water less, and no other help reached me. Hours passed, then a whole day, then more than a day, and still no one entered. I spoke aloud merely to hear a human sound, though it was only my own poor voice. Sometimes I cried, 'Help! help!' Sometimes I said, 'They will come tomorrow.' Later I could only whisper, 'No one comes. They have forgotten me.' The child lay in my arms all that time, and I had not strength even for the mercy of laying him apart."

Agnes then drew a long breath and said, "At last suffering made my thoughts strange. I grew cold and feverish by turns. The damp entered into my bones. My throat burned, and I would have given all the wealth of Spain for one cup of clear water. The pitcher stood empty before me, and every time I stretched out my hand toward it, I knew beforehand what I should find. Yet I looked again and again like a fool who still hopes for a miracle after hope has died. Then I would fix my eyes upon the crucifix and say, 'They call themselves servants of heaven, but heaven cannot think as they do.'"

"In those moments," she said, "I prayed more truly than I had ever done in peace. I was no longer asking for happiness, or love, or rescue. I asked only that if I must die there, my death might not be one of madness and rebellion. I wished to die with some patience, if patience could still be found in such misery. Yet even while I prayed, nature cried out against the grave, the darkness, the thirst, and the loneliness. More than once I thought I heard steps, and each time my heart leaped up so violently that the disappointment afterward almost killed me." Raymond

had bowed his head by then, and one could see from his face that every word went through him like a wound.

"Then," said Agnes, and for the first time a faint light came into her expression, "help did come. I heard a real footstep at last, though at first I hardly dared believe it. I thought, 'This is one more trick of weakness.' But the sound grew clearer. I dropped my rosary, raised my head, and cried out with what little strength remained, 'Who is there? Do not pass me by! If you are human, speak!' A man came nearer, yet the wall and darkness hid him for a moment. I feared he might vanish like the others I had imagined. Then he stepped forward, and I saw that it was you, Lorenzo."

Lorenzo took her hand quickly and pressed it to his lips, but Agnes continued before he could speak. "I remember your face bending over me with horror and pity together. You did not know me at once, so changed was I by suffering, and I was scarcely able to know you through my own weakness. Yet when I heard your voice say my name, I felt as if heaven itself had opened in that dungeon. I tried to rise and could not. I tried to put the child from me and could hardly move my arms. You saw everything then, and though your courage was great, even you turned pale at the sight." Lorenzo answered in a broken voice, "Do not tell that part. I see it still."

Agnes obeyed him in part and softened what followed. "There is little more to say," she said, though all knew there was much more. "You called others to your aid. Virginia, whose gentleness I shall bless while I live, forgot her own fear in trying to help a stranger. The nuns who had fled the mob gathered round me in pity. Strong hands carried me from that living grave, and kinder hearts than I had ever hoped to find received me when I was brought into the light again. After that, memory becomes mercifully broken. I remember care, tears, voices that were tender, and then, after long weakness, I remember learning that Raymond lived, that you lived, and that I had not been abandoned by all the world."

She was silent for a little while after finishing, and no one in the room was ready to speak. At length Lorenzo said, "Sister, I asked for this story believing it might draw me from my own grief. Instead it has made me ashamed of every

complaint that escaped me. You suffered more than I knew any human creature could suffer and yet sit here now with gentleness still in your heart." Agnes answered quietly, "No, brother, do not call it shame. Grief is not measured by comparison. We each bear what is laid upon us." Virginia then looked at Lorenzo through tears and said, "Your sister speaks like herself always. Sorrow has not made her hard, and that is the greatest victory sorrow can lose."

Part 23

Agnes ended her account with modesty rather than with self-defense. She had spoken openly, yet without bitterness, and when she turned to Raymond, there was both shame and trust in her eyes. "I have not hidden my errors," she said softly. "I know that I was imprudent, and I will not pretend to be innocent in everything. But since fate has been kinder than my own wisdom, I rejoice in what heaven has permitted. Ask only this of me now, Raymond: judge my faults with mercy, and you shall find in me a wife whose conduct will be better than her fears." Raymond answered her with deep tenderness, and Lorenzo, taking his friend's hand, told him gladly that he was proud to call him brother.

Nothing now stood between Agnes and an honorable union. The Pope's Bull had fully released her from every religious bond which others had forced upon her without her true consent. The marriage was therefore arranged without delay, and Raymond insisted that it should be celebrated with all the splendor which his name and fortune allowed. Madrid attended, admired, and approved, for Agnes, after suffering so much, seemed made more beautiful by recovered peace. Theodore could scarcely contain his joy, and moved everywhere with shining eyes, as if his master's happiness were his own personal triumph.

When the ceremony and the public duties that followed it were completed, Raymond prepared to return with his bride to his castle in Andalusia. Lorenzo accompanied them, and so did the Marchioness de Villa-Franca and her lovely daughter Virginia. Before leaving Madrid, Raymond tried in some measure to repair the neglect which Elvira and Antonia had suffered from his house. He made

careful inquiry into all that concerned them, and when he learned how much Leonella and Jacintha had done, in their different ways, for the unhappy mother and child, he rewarded them generously. Leonella was delighted beyond measure by the attention of such noble persons, while Jacintha declared to every hearer that ghosts, monks, and all other terrors together had not made her repent the day when she first opened her door to Elvira.

Agnes also discharged every debt of gratitude with a warm and faithful heart. Mother Saint Ursula, to whom she chiefly owed her liberty, received through her influence one of the most honorable and wealthy positions open to a woman of her condition. Bertha and Cornelia, unwilling to leave their friend, were placed where they might remain near her and live with security and respect. As for the cruel nuns who had supported the prioress in persecuting Agnes, their fate had already spoken loudly enough. Some had died in the flames or under the rage of the people, and those who remained were sent far away in disgrace, there to consume their lives in obscurity and regret.

Nor was Flora forgotten. When her wishes were asked, she answered at once, “I desire only to return to my own land.” A passage was therefore secured for her to Cuba, and she departed loaded with presents from Raymond and Lorenzo. She took leave of Agnes with tears, kissed her hand, and said, “If I have served you well, señora, it is because I loved those whom I served.” Agnes embraced her with true affection and answered, “No, Flora, you served me well because you were faithful when others were false. I shall remember you while I live.”

These acts of justice and gratitude being finished, Agnes was free to pursue a plan still nearer to her heart. Lorenzo and Virginia were now constantly together, and every day made Virginia dearer to him. He admired not only her beauty, but her quiet understanding, her graceful manners, her many accomplishments, and the sweetness of a temper which seemed formed to bring peace to troubled minds. Virginia, on her side, made no secret of the preference she felt for him, though she showed it with delicacy and modesty. She never forced herself upon his notice, yet she never failed to please him when chance, or rather loving care, placed her near him.

Still, the feeling which now grew in Lorenzo did not at first resemble the eager passion he had once felt for Antonia. That image, so lovely and so tragic, still lived in his heart and for a long time kept every other affection from taking full possession of it. Yet when the Duke at last spoke to him plainly of Virginia, Lorenzo did not reject the proposal. “I cannot give her the same first fire of love,” he said one day with sadness, “but I can give her esteem, gratitude, and a heart that wishes to be worthy of her.” The Duke answered, “That is more lasting than fire, and she deserves all the happiness that patience and goodness can win.”

So Lorenzo offered himself to the Marquis de Villa-Franca and was accepted with joy. Virginia became his wife, and she never gave him cause to repent the choice. Day by day his esteem deepened into warmer affection, and her unchanging effort to please him never failed of its reward. Little by little Antonia’s image, though never dishonored, grew less sharp with pain, and at last Virginia reigned alone in a heart which she had long deserved to possess. Thus the later years of Raymond and Agnes, and of Lorenzo and Virginia, were as happy as mortal years can be. Having already suffered the worst that grief could inflict, they found later sorrows light in comparison, and after weathering fate’s fiercest storms, they learned to meet gentler troubles with calmness.

But while peace settled on those whom misfortune had at last spared, Ambrosio was entering the final depth of his ruin. He was now in the prisons of the Inquisition, where darkness, silence, and despair pressed on him together. The charges against him were many and dreadful. He was accused not only of the rape and murder of Antonia, but also of sorcery, impiety, and traffic with infernal powers. The strange mirror found in his cell, together with the books and instruments discovered among Matilda’s belongings, seemed to justify every suspicion. His former power over the minds of the people, once called holiness, was now explained as witchcraft.

His trial was hurried forward, because the Inquisitors wished to display so famous a criminal at the next great ceremony of public punishment. They questioned him repeatedly and urged him to confess. Ambrosio, though trembling inwardly at the thought of death and what might follow it, denied everything in a

strong voice and tried to appear firm. Matilda also denied much at first, though her courage was less steady and fear could be seen in every movement of her face. At last, when threats had failed, the judges ordered that Ambrosio should be tortured.

Human cruelty exhausted itself upon him. He endured pains so violent that his whole body seemed one wound, yet guilt made him fear death still more than torment, and that fear gave him strength to persist in denial. His sufferings were therefore increased, and only when insensibility mercifully seized him was he carried back to his cell. Then Matilda was called and shown the monk's condition before she herself was put to the question. The sight broke her resolution at once. Falling on her knees, she confessed that she had dealings with evil spirits and that she had been present at Antonia's murder, though she still declared Ambrosio innocent of sorcery and claimed that guilt entirely for herself.

No one believed her attempt to save him. Ambrosio had recovered enough to hear her confession, yet he was too weakened by pain to undergo a second torture on that same day. He was therefore taken back to his dungeon and told that this mercy was only temporary. "Prepare yourself," said one of the officers coldly. "When your strength returns, the question will begin again." Then the door closed upon him, and for the first time since his fall had begun, he understood clearly that his wit, his eloquence, his fame, and even his crimes themselves could no longer save him from the punishment he had brought upon his own head.

Part 24

The night before his second torture was the most dreadful that Ambrosio had yet passed. He could not sleep, and when sleep forced itself upon him for a moment, it brought only visions of flames, demons, and the bleeding forms of Elvira and Antonia calling for vengeance. Again and again he started from the ground with cold sweat on his brow and cried aloud, "Fearful is night to the guilty!" His body had been partly restored by cordials, but his soul seemed weaker than ever. He sat at last beside the dim lamp in his cell like a man already half dead

with terror.

Then Matilda appeared before him once more, no longer in a nun's dress, but splendid, adorned, and full of a terrible joy. Ambrosio cried out in amazement, "How are you free? Have our judges relented? Is there still hope for me?" She answered him with proud calm. "I am free because I have paid the price of freedom. I have given up heaven, and in return I have gained life, power, pleasure, and the obedience of infernal spirits. I came because I still love you, Ambrosio, and because I would save you too, if you have courage enough to follow me."

He recoiled at first and cried, "No, Matilda, no! I have sinned beyond measure already, but I will not sell my soul. I will not give up my last hope of mercy." She then placed in his hand a small magic book and said, "Keep it, then. I ask no more. But if your courage fails when death stands nearer, open it at the seventh page, read what you find there, and one will come who can still release you." She looked at him for a moment with a mixture of tenderness and command, and then vanished from the dungeon as strangely as she had entered it. Ambrosio was left again alone, with the book beside him and despair in his heart.

For a while he resisted the temptation. He said to himself that any torment on earth was better than eternal ruin, and that perhaps even now repentance might still find pardon. Yet the thought of the stake, of the crowd, of shame, fire, and slow death returned every moment with greater force. He imagined the archers already at the door, the chains on his limbs, the people mocking him, and the flames climbing round him while his body still lived. "No," he cried at last, "I cannot bear it. I cannot die so." At that very instant the bell began to strike midnight.

The sound broke what remained of his strength. Believing that the hour of execution had come, he seized the book, turned wildly to the fatal page, and ran over the words without giving himself time to think. Lucifer stood before him again, dreadful now in his true power, and demanded the same condition as before. Ambrosio hesitated even then, but the demon pointed to the door and cried, "They come. Sign now, or perish." Hearing the bolts drawn back and the chains shaken outside, the miserable monk took the pen at last, signed the contract, renounced

God, renounced all hope of mercy, and gave away his soul forever.

The door opened, but before the officers could enter, the demon had seized him in his arms and borne him through the air. Roof, walls, and prison vanished beneath them, and they flew over forests, rocks, and torrents till at last they rested upon a lonely height of the Sierra Morena. Ambrosio, weak with terror and sudden hope, fell at Lucifer's feet and cried, "You have saved me. Now leave me, and let me hide myself somewhere till I can repent and make my peace with heaven." At those words the fiend laughed with such scorn that the monk's heart died within him. "Repent?" he said. "Did you not yourself renounce all claim to mercy?"

Then Lucifer unfolded the full cruelty of his triumph. He told Ambrosio that his ruin had not been forced by necessity, but chosen by cowardice. "Had you suffered death," he said, "you still might have been pardoned. Even when I came to you, your salvation was still possible. Had you resisted one moment longer, your judges would have led you out, you would have died, and heaven would yet have been open to you. You sold your soul, not to escape damnation, but to throw yourself into it." These words fell upon Ambrosio like the stroke of a sword. He saw then, too late, that fear had done more to destroy him than all temptation.

But the fiend had not yet done with him. When the monk, half mad with anguish, cursed Matilda as the author of all his crimes, Lucifer answered with bitter laughter, "Fool! You still do not know whom you accuse. Matilda was no mortal woman such as you imagined. She was one of my own spirits, sent to make your pride, your lust, and your hypocrisy destroy you. We needed only to tempt, because you were already willing to fall." Then, as if delighting most in the wound that must cut deepest, he revealed the final horror. Elvira, whom Ambrosio had murdered, was his own mother, and Antonia, whom he had dishonored and killed, was his sister.

Ambrosio gave a cry so dreadful that even the lonely mountains seemed to return it with pity. He threw himself upon the ground and tore his hair, calling upon death, madness, anything that might end consciousness. "Monster that I am!" he cried. "I have murdered my mother, destroyed my sister, betrayed heaven, and sold my soul." Lucifer looked upon him without mercy and said, "Yes. Such has

been your work. Take now the reward of your deeds.” Then, loosing his hold upon him, the fiend cast him down upon a pointed rock in the midst of a terrible ravine and disappeared.

There Ambrosio lay for six miserable days. The sun burned him by day, and the cold of night entered his bones when the heat was gone. Hunger and thirst consumed him, yet death would not come. An eagle of monstrous size descended and fixed its cruel beak in his face, tearing away one eye and then the other, while lesser birds and insects drank his blood and gnawed his flesh. Still life clung to him with hateful strength, as if nature herself had resolved that he should feel every moment of the punishment he had earned.

On the sixth day a storm arose, and the rain, long desired, came only to make his agony more complete. The torrent swelled the stream below the rock and at last shook loose his miserable body, torn, blind, and almost shapeless. He was dashed from stone to stone, carried along by the flood, and only then, when every other torment had been exhausted upon him, did death finally arrive. But death came too late to seem a mercy. For him it was only the gate through which the doom he had chosen must begin.

Thus ended Ambrosio, once called the Man of Holiness. He had begun with pride, and pride made him believe himself above common weakness. When temptation came, he fell the more violently because he had never learned humility. One crime led him to another, and each new sin seemed easier after the last, till at length he stood without shame before lust, murder, sorcery, and despair. So complete was his ruin that even when heaven had not yet wholly cast him off, he abandoned heaven of his own will.

Let all who read his story remember that no one is safe merely because others call him virtuous. The strongest guard of innocence is not pride in being pure, but mistrust of self and steady resistance to the first evil thought. Ambrosio did not fall in one hour. He was destroyed little by little, first by vanity, then by secret desire, then by repeated guilt, and at last by despair. May his example teach that however terrible sin may be, despair is more terrible still, because it shuts the sinner’s own hand against the door of mercy.