

The
Castle of Montabino;

OR THE
ORPHAN SISTERS:

AN ORIGINAL ROMANCE.

By S Wilkinson,
Authoress of the Gothic Cell, Belfont Priory, Lilly of
Navarre, Nuns of St. Mary, &c. &c.

LONDON:
PRINTED AND SOLD BY DEAN AND MUNDAY,
35 THREADNEEDLE STREET.

Price Six-pence.

The
ORPHAN SISTERS

The sky was serene and unclouded, the moon shone with resplendant lustre, and gave fresh beauties to the swift flowing Arno. Emillia and her sister Theresa, once more ventured to the antique casement of the late Countess's dressing room, which commanded a full view of the above river, by which the south side of the Castle Montabino was washed, and only partially defended from its slow but yet subduing ravages, by a rugged cliff which bounded the foundation. The Arno takes its rise amidst the Appenine mountains, runs west through Tuscany, passes by Florence, and falls into the Mideterranean sea, below Pisa, two leagues from which the edifice that at present sheltered our lovely sisters was situated.

Theresa's arm rested on the harp belonging to her deceased aunt which had not yet been removed, though numerous articles of value had been conveyed from Montabino the very day subsequent to her funeral. Emillia held in her hand a basket of flowers, under which fragrant concealment, lay a letter intended for the mysterious party who

had of late avowed themselves friends to these interesting orphans. The clock struck eight—half an hour more elapsed, and the sisters were uneasy.—‘They will not come,’ was mutually exclaimed, with a heart piercing sigh—‘and our castles of hope will turn to the caverns of despair.’

At this instant the boat appeared in sight, and was swiftly rowed beneath their window. There was, as usual, three gentlemen in great coats, with high collars and hats flapped over their faces, a lady in a pelisse and deep veil, the boatman, and a young lad who seemed an attendant, though his hair was noble and commanding; a Newfoundland dog, for the first time was an appendage, and he rested his head on the knees of one of the Signor’s, who frequently patted him. —A transparency was as usual, unfolded, and a light placed behind it —The words were ‘We hope you have prepared the promised answer —and will accept our protection—dangers thicken,—haste, lest delay should overwhelm you, and you both fall victims to the horrors unjustly preparing for you.’

Emillia instantly lowered her basket, to which she attached a considerable length of ribbon, which answered the purpose so far as to bring it even with the water, but it had descended so perpendicular from the window, that the boat could not venture for it, being so near the cliff, which had many dangerous inlets into which the current would draw a small boat, with destructive rapidity: Emillia and Theresa, who was watching the basket with equal anxiety, clasped their hands in despair, but joy and surprise succeeded; the gentleman on whose knee the faithful animal had been reposing, aroused the four-legged slumberer, and pointing to the basket, repeated some words, which the sisters was at two great a distance to hear.

The dog immediately leapt into the Arno, and the ladies had the felicity of seeing the basket delivered into the hands of those for whom it was intended. The sisters heard footsteps advancing along the gallery, they gave a signal for retreat, which was obeyed by those in the boat; and the young ladies seemed intent at perusing the titles of some books which lay scattered on a marble slab, when Dame Judith entered the room cautiously, with a taper in her hand.—‘Thanks be to heaven that I have found you here, I began to fear that you had taken it into your heads to pry further into these now desolate apartments.’—‘I hought,’ said Theresa, ‘that you would not have ventured hither for the world.—‘It was my love for you,’ replied Judith, ‘that made me struggle with my fears, I was afraid that it would get too dark for you to find your way back to your own room, and I thought you would not like to pass the night here.’

‘Not without supper, I grant you,’ said Theresa, ‘and a bed fitted up proper for our repose: or else we should like it very well; I wish the count would let us live in this part of the castle.’ ‘Mercy on me! dear lady, if the the count knew I had suffered you to set a foot on this side of the castle, I know not what would become of me.’ ‘Never fear,’ said Emillia, ‘we are obliged to you for your goodness, and will not betray you.’ ‘I do not think you would, your hearts are too good to be ungrateful to old Judith, who loves you as her own life; but we will not stay talking in this dismal place, I have placed your supper in the little low window room, where you may enjoy the cool refreshing breeze, after this sultry day.’ ‘I thank you for your kindness, my good Judith,’ said Emillia; ‘lean on my arm, and we will soon descend the stairs’”

The The two ladies and Judith had not proceeded many paces along the gallery, when a door on the right hand opened, and a tall figure muffled in a dark cloak, with a lanthorn in his hand, issued from it. The females shrieked most dreadfully; but the object that had excited their terror heeded them not, —but slowly ascended a narrow spiral staircase that led to a high turret. Judith was ready to expire, but the ladies encouraged her to hasten down the stairs as quick as possible, while they had it in their power to escape; a large door, with massy bolts, at the bottom of the great stair case, shut out the southern wing from the rest of the buildings; these fastenings were hastily secured by the trembling sisters, while Judith ridiculed those precautions, asserting that what they had seen was no mortal, but a ghost, whose progress no bolts or bars could impede. As they were crossing a small court leading to their apartments they were met by Cosmo: ‘Where have you been with the ladies, Judith?—I thought you were all lost, or some mishap had befallen you.’ ‘Pho, nonsense,’ replied Judith, ‘we have only been walking on the terrace for air.’—‘My lord Count’s orders are finely attended to,’ said Cosmo: and he withdrew muttering some indistinct threats. ‘We have made a nice evenings work of it,’ said Judith, ‘you would go to the south wing, and I am sure no good will come of it, you had better have taken my advice, but it is too late now; I shall send Sussette to attend you, so good night; I must try and divert Cosmo from any mischief he is meditating; sometimes a few good words and a bottle of currant wine will do it, and sometimes not, for Cosmo has formerly made a deal of mischief in this Castle, by tattling to my lord; and the Countess used often to say to me, it was a pity he met with so much encouragement.’

The ladies were not long at supper, and Sussette having undressed them, retired to her own bed, which was in a large light closet adjoining their room, the sisters were obliged to talk softly lest they should be

overheard. "Tomorrow night," said Emillia, "we have promised to quit the castle, and seek shelter, alas! I know not with whom." "They can have no interest in deceiving us," replied Theresa.—"I hope not," said her sister, "but I must own this evenings adventure, or rather alarm, has greatly damped my spirits for the enterprize; particularly when I think what dismal places we may have to pass through before we join our friends."

"That is all true," replied Theresa, "but death itself would be preferable to remaining in this Castle after arrival of the Count." "We can die but once, dear Theresa, and should we be so fortunate as to succeed, the blessing will be of magnitude indeed." The next day was spent by the sisters in forming two parcels of those things they valued too much to leave behind them; as for clothes they had been instructed not to pack up any, as a wardrobe would be provided for them.—Susette attended them as usual to bed. They listened attentively, till assured, by her manner of breathing, she was asleep, they arose, and procuring a light with a phosphorous match, began to equip themselves in the plainest fashion their assortment of apparel would allow; large shawls were flung over their shoulders, and their faces shaded by neat straw hats.

Each took her parcel, and being ready to depart, Emillia drew from her pocket the letter that had been shot into the window with an arrow, arranging the particulars of the plan of their escape from the castle. Two was the appointed hour for their commencing this enterprize.—In a small antichamber, next their bed room, was some curious tapestry, one of the pannels represented Jephtha's rash vow; this they was to lift up, and they would find it concealed an arched recess,—at the end was a small flight of steps, which descended into a long but very narrow passage.

The sisters lost no time in following this route; the place they had to pass through allowed only one to proceed at a time; and Theresa, who had more courage, though not so much sound judgement as Emilia, led the way with a taper: when they came to the end of this passage they found themselves in a vaulted chamber, there was a door opposite and they crossed to it; they beheld to their great surprise that a fire had lately been made on the hearth, and some straw placed in one corner for a bed. When they left the vaulted chamber there was three passages that branched in various directions, they pursued that on the left hand, and saw, by the light of the taper, that there was several niches on each side, as if they had been originally intended as a repository for statues, but was now half filled up with rubbish, fragments of stone, and pieces that had fallen from the ruinous part of the castle.

They had not proceeded far, when they heard footsteps and some voices at a distance. "These cannot be our friends," said Emillia—"they would not deviate from the plan they have so particularly marked down." "Merciful heaven!" ejaculated Theresa, "there is a light turning yonder angle!" and she extinguished her taper, "haste, and let us conceal ourselves in one of the recesses. With some difficulty they crept behind the rubbish, and waited in trembling expectation, for those terrific intruders on their peace. By the light of the lanthorn, the ladies (who could see distinctly through several places in the rubbish) immediately recognised in one of the men, the person who had affrighted them so much the preceeding evening in the south wing. The man who accompanied him appeared much shorter and very ill looking, he carried a spade in his hand. and both stopt nearly opposite to the place where the sisters had concealed themselves, whose terror was not lessened by this circumstance.

"You mean to have the child buried somewhere hereabouts, master." "Certainly, Hugo, there is not a fitter place about the Castle; but mind you tell no tales, for as only you and I are let into this secret, if 'tis blabbed, we shall know who did it, and then your repentance may come too late to save your neck."

"I thought you knew me better, Gusmond, than to speak thus; I have been trusted before, and why should I now be suspected?"

"There is my hand, Hugo;—the count is revengeful, if he suspects treachery, and I only meant a friendly hint."

"Enough,—shall I to business and prepare the grave." "No, not directly. I feel chilled, and while I fetch the corps from the turret, do you make a good fire in the vaulted chamber; you will find wood for it, and the logs that I use for chairs and tables, in the closet, at the end of the opposite passage; and there is some choice wine and bread, and ham, in the old locker: we will have our supper before we begin our job; and a choice drop of spirits, which I have in my travelling bottle. Afterwards the men proceeded on together, and the sisters crept from their uneasy situation, shocked at the discourse they had been obliged to hear, and chagrined at the delay it had occasioned them.

They groped their way along, till their progress was impeded by a wall; they now ventured to relight their taper with a phosphorus match (which only requires to be exposed to the air to have the desired effect, and the rest must be closely confined in a tin box) They found the passage turned on an angle to the right; they fled along this with a

rapidity seldom equalled, till they came to some steep and rugged steps, so decayed, that it was with difficulty they ascended them. They came to the grated door described by their friends, and the secret of opening it, by means of a spring fixed in the middle bar: they hastened through the aperture, flinging the door back, it closed of itself. They had great difficulty in clearing the thick foliage by which the door was concealed, not knowing the proper track, which was artfully contrived, and required some time to learn thoroughly,—it was then easy of access. Emilia and Theresa had their garments torn, and their arms sadly scratched, and they were extremely thankful when they found themselves freed from this perplexing labyrinth; they hastened along the road, arm in arm, but ready to sink to the earth with apprehension and fatigue; they once ventured to look back, and plainly discerned a light in the turret that fronted the Arno. “There is some strange mystery in that Castle” said Theresa. “Some dreadful one, no doubt,” (replied her fair companion.) “Heaven grant we may never return to that hateful place; but, poor Judith, she will be miserable at our absence; yet I trust the Count will not punish her for our flight, as Cosmo always locked us in for the night, they will find the fastenings have not been touched, and Sussette safe in her own apartment.

The road now struck into a wood; here they were to find a carriage, with swift horses, waiting for them—yet their tremors increased; and one of their fears was that they had, by the delay in the subterranean passage, and their struggle in getting through the trees, so far exceeded the allotted time, that their friends would suppose their retreat from the castle had been prevented, and return without them; but their eyes were soon after gratified by the pleasing sight of a travelling coach; an elderly woman, and a gentleman, whom the sisters recognised for one of them that always came in the boat. He advanced towards them, and was ardent in his congratulations on their escape from the Castle of Montabino; he then introduced the female, by the name of Beatrice, as their attendant, saying, that he thought it eligible for them to be accompanied by one of their own sex in their journey, and situated as they were, he had given the preference to a person advanced in life; and she had been well recommended for fidelity and other requisite qualifications in her station, by an amiable lady whom she had long served.

The sisters gratefully thanked him for his attention, and Signor Rupino handed them and Beatrice to the carriage; the postillions mounted their horses, and the Signor with three attendants well armed, rode close to the vehicle. They journeyed in this manner till the dawn of day, when they struck into a forest, in which they proceeded about a league, and then drove into the court yard of what had once been a

magnificent castle, but was now little better than a heap of ruins. The ladies felt some alarm at stopping here; the Signor perceived it, and soon dissipated their fears.

“We must not,” said he, “travel to day, lest we should be pursued. This Castle, from some horrid family circumstances, was many years since deserted by its owners, who, in their hast to quit the edifice, left behind the the furniture, removing only their plate, clothes and jewels; much of this was at first pillaged, till an unfortunately family, that I well knew, taking shelter in its walls, the lights they used made the people who passed through the forest believe it was haunted, and none would venture within its gates; thus the fugitives lived unmolested, till a pleasing reverse of fortune enabled them to emerge from its gloom.

Since the design of removing you from Montabino has occupied the attention of your friends, we have buried ourselves in preparing a chamber or two in this Castle where we might pass the day;—it being much safer than at an inn, as there is plenty of room to conceal the carriage and horses from observation. He conducted them to a parlour that overlooked the back grounds—a good fire soon burnt on the hearth—and Beatrice prepared some chocolate. The Signor added biscuits, and a variety of choice cakes, and they made a very refreshing and comfortable breakfast. Rupino advised them to lay down for a few hours; they gladly availed themselves of his offer, and he conducted them to the door of an upper room, that was very well fitted up for the purpose, of a temporary asylum; he then retired to an adjacent chamber, prepared for himself and attendants.

One of the men, who was not inclined for sleep, proposed to keep watch in the court yard, lest they should have any intruders on their privacy, and to wake them at a proper hour; this was agreed to by the Signor, and he promised Baptiste a gratuity if he duly performed what he undertook.

Happily for the party they had no interruption from visitors; and at six they were awakened by Baptiste, who informed them he had placed the cold meats, poultry, wine, &c. on the table where they had breakfasted. They soon descended, and the Signor, with the ladies and Beatrice, made their repast; they then went to walk in the grounds, while the servants dined. The Signor did not appear to wish to converse with the ladies on the subject of their journey before Beatrice, the sisters therefore remained in suspence, and they chatted on various topics with Rupino, who was young, handsome, and formed to please by his agreeable manners. They took some coffee at dusk, and then resumed their journey: they travelled all night with great rapidity, and

the next day was passed in an obscure cottage, when they was obliged to repose on straw, and were very uncomfortable, from the smallness of the place, and the dirt which surrounded them on every side; and they were happy when the hour of departure came. It was near five the next morning when they arrived at an elegant modern villa; they rung a bell, and several servants appeared at the gate.

“Is your lady well?” said the Signor, to a interesting young female that appeared among them.”

“Her health has been tolerable, Signor, but her agitations was extreme, lest those ladies should not return with you; she did not go to bed till three this morning, as she hoped you would have arrived before that time.

“Thanks be to heaven,” said the Signor, her apprehensions and suspense will now be converted to joy. “Then, turning to the servants, he said—“I think I scarce need repeat any injunctions of secrecy.”—“We are faithful, and would die to prove it,” was the general reply. He asked a few questions, and being informed that the Countess had ordered breakfast not to be on table till two, he proposed retiring till that hour, and Laurinda conducted the ladies and Beatrice to their respective chambers. The sisters were so much fatigued with travelling, that they were not able to converse with their usual facility; and after a few remarks, they fell into a profound slumber, from which they did not awake till the entrance of Beatrice, who came to assist them in dressing; Laurinda having supplied her with the necessary articles for that purpose. At two they descended to the breakfast saloon; Signor Rupino and the Countess were ready to receive them, the former paid them the usual compliments, in a most elegant and flattering speech, the lady spoke not- yet she cordially pressed their hands,—heavy sighs distended her bosom, and she sobbed most piteously. The Signor apologized for the Countess’s not speaking to them; he said that their presence had awakened some bitter recollections that had overcome her. She wore a thick muslin veil, and she took great care, while eating her breakfast, that no part of her face should be seen. Before their repeat was concluded, they were joined by the two gentlemen who had always accompanied Signor Rupino and the Countess in the boat; the latter whispered something to the Countess, they retired together to one of the open balconies.

When they returned, the Marquis said, retire, dear lady, to your dressing room, I will prepare these Signora’s for the interview, and no longer permit you to postpone your happiness, by the acuteness of your feelings. As soon as the Countess had withdrawn, the Marquis,

addressing Emilia and Theresa, said, "have you no recollection of that lady's form." "It recalled, said Emilia, some tender regrets to my mind, as I thought of one that is lost to us for ever."—"Perhaps not lost for ever!" rejoined the Marquis." "The grave will not give up its dead," said Emilia.

"You were then thinking of the Countess Montabino:—am I not right,?"

Emilia replied in the affirmative, and burst into tears—"she is, indeed, most like her," exclaimed Theresa, "her presence (how shall I describe my feelings) both pleased and pained me; I some moments valued her for the resemblance, and again I wished she had not been such a counterpart to my aunt, as by seeing her, it would always renew my grief for that dear lady—yet her face may not have one feature like the Countess."

"Her face," said Signor Rupino, "bears as strong a resemblance as her figure."

"Tis most strange!" exclaimed Emilia, starting, "there is some mystery in this: O! speak signor, and ease my beating heart."

The Marquis clasped her hands in his—the Count drew near Theresa—and Rupino stood anxiously regarding the scene.

"There is indeed a mystery; but a few words will explain it," said Rovedo, tenderly, "and you must collect your fortitude." "We are prepared for any thing, only end this surprise," said both sisters.

"Know then, that the count Montabino formed the horrid design of poisoning his wife!! the person engaged to perform this vile deed, shuddered at the base idea, and he resolved to save her:—by the stratagems he had recourse to, the Count was deceived, and at this moment supposes her buried with his ancestors—"but she will explain this circumstance more fully.—"She lives; she lives;" said Theresa, with a wild shriek, and fainted, while Emilia sat motionless, her hands clasped; overwhelmed with surprise and joy. Rupino rang the bell; some of the female domestics had been previously instructed to be ready, at that signal, with hartshorn and other essentials, as they did not suppose the ladies could supported themselves under such an important and unexpected disclosure. They soon revived, and were eager to be conducted to their beloved aunt, restored to them again as by a miracle.

The gentlemen supported them to the Countess's dressing room, she was seated unveiled on an elegant sofa, they cast themselves, one on

each side of her, and a scene ensued that it would be needless to attempt to describe—no pen could do it justice; therefore the readers imagination will paint what the parties must have felt, looked, and said.

It was some hours 'ere they became calm and tranquil—and it was mutually agreed to wave all explanations and family subjects till next day. After dinner and its attendant desert, the party formed a little concert of vocal and instrumental music, and the evening passed off pleasantly; at eleven the gentlemen took leave, and the fair ladies retired to repose. The two sisters felt their hearts relieved from a load of care by the explanation that had taken place—their fears of the Count's return to the castle, and the solemn assurances they had received of honourable protection, had made them cast themselves, as they supposed, on strangers, to whom the Count's treachery was known, for an asylum, and during their journey, and the first night they had passed at the villa, they had reproached themselves with being guilty of an impropriety—tho' they could not avoid rejoicing at their escape from Montabino—now to find themselves with their aunt—their proper guardian, and protected by her friends, was indeed a blessing; nor can we blame their ardent desire to hear their aunt's history; curiosity, in such a case, was praise worthy.

The morning was uncommon fine, and as soon as the ladies had breakfasted, they took their netting, and repaired to an elegant arbour surrounded by an orangerie.

The Countess, after a short preface, thus begun her eventful history.

Your mother Elgitha, and myself were the daughters of Signor Binnette, he was descended from an honourable family, long since fallen to decay, by the extravagance of some of its principals. My father, when very young, had an offer made him by a relation of his mother's of embarking in a lucrative commercial concern; he was eager to except it, hoping thereby to repair the shattered fortunes of his family—but my grandfather's consent was hard to gain; the pride of noble blood revolted at the idea of trade, and it is doubtful if his acquiescence to the scheme would have been gained had not a person, in whose hands he had vested some money, betrayed his trust, and left Florence (our native place) with a great deal of proberly belonging to others, whose confidence he had gained.

The greatest prosperity and success attended my father; he made several advantageous voyages, and, in the course of seven years his wealth accumulated far beyond his most sanguine expectations: he took care that the establishment of his parents should be elegant though void of ostentation: undoubtedly his conduct pleased them. The dutiful

attentions of Frederic, their only surviving child, must make an impression on their hearts, yet they were both frequently heard to declare, that their felicity was dash'd by the consideration that the money came through trade.

My father was in his twenty seventh year—nine of which he had been a commercial trader, when his father died, his mother survived her loss but a few months (for they had been a faithful affectionate pair, and journeyed through life's path together in the most exemplary manner) and then shared the same tomb with her much loved husband. As soon as the term of mourning was expired, my father united himself to a lady of the most amiable manners. Her fortune was small and her person plain, yet my father selected her, in preference to a number of beauties who would gladly have accepted his hand—for he was rich, handsome, and possessed a most delightful vivacity, that made his society universally counted) nor did he ever repent his choice, for each revolving year cemented their hearts still more closely together.

Their only unhappiness arose from the long absence of my father, who still continued his traffic. I was born the first year after their marriage; that love for their little Claudina was excessive, and as five years elapsed with no increase to their family they begun to consider me as their future heiress—but when I was six years old, my sister Elgitha was born. My mother had no more children, and we were most fondly beloved—but no partiality was shewn to one more than the other. I suppose I must have entered my fourteenth year when my father relinquished merchandise, selling his share in the concern for an immense sum of money: we entirely domesticated at Florence, and our manner of living was magnificent—It was generally understood that we were among the richest of coheir's in Italy. Before I had quite concluded my sixteenth year a number of suiters appeared in my train, but my heart was at ease, no one had then taught it to heave the sigh of love; many applications were made to my father for the honor of my hand, but none of the gentlemen happening to meet his approbation, he civilly dismissed them with some plausible pretext or other.

One evening, being at a splendid entertainment given by the Signora Albani, in honour of her son's coming of age, a remarkable incident happened to me—The grounds belonging to her villa were brilliantly illuminated; among the vistas of tall trees, temporary arbours were formed, in which the most fragrant flowers were entwined: at the end of each avenue was a place fitted up for refreshment, and adorned by an orchestra in which was a full hand of musicians, and some of the favourite vocal performers. Accompanied by my sister and three young

ladies, I entered one of these elegant pavillions, and partook of some cakes and ices. We had just ended our refreshments, when a song was given by a beautiful young female, in such a tender, pathetic style, that I was quite enraptured, and became insensible to every thing around me, but the harmonic strains. To my great pleasure, she was made to repeat her song—at length she retired, and I turned round, saying, Elgitha, let us return to our parents, this long absence will displease them. But to my equal pain and astonishment, I found my sister, and her friends had left me—I hastened from the pavillion, with an intention of returning to the house, but the windings of the walks and the various temporary buildings rendered that purpose difficult to accomplish.

While I was in this dilemma I met with the old Countess le Mina (with whom our family was very intimate) and her party: ‘My dear child,’ said she, ‘what makes you here alone? you ought to have some one with you.’ In a few words I informed her how I came to be thus wandering along the walks unattended. ‘Your sister acted foolishly; but we cannot make children wise; then, turning to a gentleman, whom I thought the most handsome agreeable person I had ever seen, she said, ‘Here Count is a fit opportunity for you to display your gallantry by escorting this young lady to her parents, whom she left in the card room.—The Count advanced and politely offered his services, which I readily accepted. First, (said the Countess) let me introduce you to each other, such an omission would be unpardonable, and make you appear silly when you joined the gay throng, and perhaps give rise to a few animadversions that is as well to avoid.’ This lady my Lord Count, is Claudina, the daughter of, the worthy Signor Binette, whose name and situation is too generally known in Florence to need further comment—This gentleman, my blushing fair one, is the most illustrious Count Montabino, for whose honorable protection I think I can safely answer, soadieu.’

When this loquacious old lady had left us, the count said, ‘have you long known that eccentric woman?’ I replied laconically, from infancy; for I was not much pleased at his question, nor the air that accompanied it, ‘I beg pardon,’ he replied, ‘but she has really piqued me this evening by some of her satirical remarks; for she is of that order of beings that care not what they say; yet she has a heart replete with benevolence.’

We then conversed on gayer subjects till we came to the Cassino tables, where we found my dear parents.

They began gently to chide me, but a few explanatory words from the Count turned their reproofs on Elgitha, who, with two or three

companions, had been leaning on the back of their chairs. She said they had left me out of a frolic seeing me so absorbed in listening to the sonnet, nor did they suppose any unpleasant circumstance would result from it, thinking her sister could easily find her way back to the house, but she sincerely intreated my forgiveness, which was readily granted.

The carriage was now announced to take Elgitha home, and she was to leave her companions, who were three sisters, by the way: they had been permitted to accept the kind of invitation of the Signora, on condition that they were allowed to retire at an early hour; Elgitha, who was the eldest of them, not yet being eleven years of age. My father and mother, observing they were tired at sitting, proposed to some friends with whom they had been at play, to take a promenade, and survey the fanciful decorations with which the garden was embellished. They agreed, the Count was invited to join the party, and he escorted me.

From that time the Count was a constant visitor at our house, and in a few months made proposals to my parents for a union with me, which was readily agreed to, nor did I utter a dissenting word. The settlement made on me was not in proportion to my fortune, which was very large, and paid down without reserve or restriction. We passed a few weeks with my parents, and then, accompanied by my sister, we repaired to a very elegant mansion which belonged to the Count at Genoa; we kept a deal of company, and our time passed in a vortex of what I termed folly and dissipation. From several circumstances I discovered that the Count had, by a pursuit of modern vices, greatly injured his fortune, and that his principal motive for an alliance with me was the clearing of these embarrassments by the portion I should bring.

I had been a bride six months, when the fatal intelligence of the sudden death of my father reached me, two trusty servants was sent to convey my sister back to her disconsolate mother, who longed for her presence. At this period of affliction, I would fain have gone with her, but the Count would not hear of it, nor would he allow me to invite my loved parent and Elgitha to pass the time of their mourning with us. My grief at the loss of so good a father deeply affected my spirits, but the gaiety of the Count was unfeeling, and an outrage to propriety: in short he could talk of nothing but the vast augmentation my fathers death had made to our fortune. To my great satisfaction, my mother was left sole guardian to Elgitha, and two worthy Signors of his acquaintance were the executors. I could perceive Montabino was chagrined at this arrangement, but he disdained to speak on the subject.

When the spring was pretty far advanced, the Count proposed our going to the castle of Montabino as he had business to transact on the estate. Our life here was the very reverse to what it had been at Genoa; after the visits had been paid and returned from the families adjacent to our castle, we were left almost wholly to ourselves. My husband's disposition now displayed itself: he was cruel, morose, and revengeful; to his dependents and domestics every revolving day shewed some instances of his tyranny, nor did I escape being perpetually harrassed by his temper: but this was nothing to what I had to endure in the sequel.

I will pass over the first five years of my marriage, they were only marked with the increasing ill-usage of the Count, and his dissatisfaction at my having no offspring. I had ardently wished for children, but I bowed resigned to the will of heaven. At the period I have just mentioned, Elgitha was married to your excellent father, the Marquis Vandola. There was a strange fatality attended both our nuptials—mine was marked by the death of my father—Elgitha's by that of her mother; her settlement was now divided between us: the generous Marquis settled all my sister's fortune on herself: but this was not my case, the Count seized on the last portion of my fortune with greedy avidity; nay, he even locked up in his cabinet, the jewels of my lamented parent, a moiety of which had been delivered to me, with the rest of my legacy.

I had no parents, no relations of whom he need stand in awe;—he had no more wealth to expect through my means; and his behaviour became intolerable. To my sister and her husband I complained not—I thought their interference would be productive of no good, but duels, and a train of evils to ensue. When your mother had been married three years, she died in giving birth to Theresa. The grief of the Marquis was so great that he survived her but a few months, and I was left sole guardian and executrix to his two lovely infants, and their immense fortune, nor has the Count the least power over you.” “Heaven be praised,” said both sisters, with uplifted hands,—and the Countess proceeded. “From the moment that I received you under my care, the Count never suffered me nor my precious charges to leave the Castle of Montabino, and I could perceive that he was plotting designs against our peace.

The Marquis of Vandola had left me a paper of instructions, with regard to his dear children; in particular, he wished me to consult, on any particular occasion, in which their happiness or interest was concerned, with the Count Laborie, and the Marquis Revedo; they had been his bosom friends, and he was sure they would be just to his

children, and revere his memory—nor was his prediction wrong; they are worthy noblemen, and have proved themselves an honor to the human race. During the fifteen years that you were under my protection, my life, whenever the Count visited the castle, was unsupportable, he wanted me to give up my settlement—to consign you over to his guardianship, and never to consult the Marquis Revedo, or the Count Laborie, for the future: all this I firmly resisted, in spite of his dreadful threats. He took the opportunity of the Marquis and the Counts being gone together to a hunting seat, belonging to the latter, about seventy miles distance, to confine me intirely to my chamber; I was not allowed a female servant; but Cosmo, the cross old porter, whom he knew I hated, brought me my provisions;—as for changes of linen, I had plenty in my wardrobe.

One evening, when I had been about a month in this seclusion, I felt a most unpleasant heaviness stealing over me, I walked about, but could not shake it off, and I felt alarming sensations I cannot describe: my limbs grew numb—the stupor increased—and ejaculating a short prayer, I cast myself on the bed, and soon sunk into insensibility. When I returned to perception, my surprise was great to find myself stretched on a matrass, in a kind of carriage, which you have not yet seen; but it is used by those who can afford them, for the purpose of conveying indisposed persons with the greater ease and facility, than what can be found in the common mode of travelling; two women were with me; I spoke to them, and was astonished to find that it was the Countess Laborie and the Signora Rupino, mother of the youth who has interested himself so nobly in your cause. They gave me some reviving drops on sugar. and intreated me to compose myself, and not talk till we came to the end of our journey as little as possible, as it would endanger my health. ' We stopt several times at obscure places, and on the fourth night arrived at this villa, where I have now resided eight months.

As soon as we came here, I learnt the treachery of the Count; he had found means to puruse the Marquis Vandola's will, and found, that if the sisters died before they came of age, I was their heir: but in case of my not surviving them, nothing could hinder him from seizing all within his rapacious grasp:—he deputed to Cosmo the task of poisoning me, and he declared his reward should be so great as to drown the phantom conscience. But the old man, though he had been engaged in many atrocious acts, resolved to stop short of the crime of murder: he intreated a fortnight of the Count, that he might distill a potent poison from baneful herbs, which had the valuable property of bestowing almost instant death, without distorting the features, or convulsing the limbs of its victim.

Montabino consented, and Cosmo wrote a full account of my dreadful situation, to the Marquis of Revedo and the Count Laborie, whom he knew to be my friends. He intreated them to be in the wood next the castle, on the ninth night from the date of the letter, with a travelling litter and two female servants, and he would deliver me safe into their hands.

When this was imparted to the Countess Laborie, she proposed for herself, and her widowed sister, the Signora Rupino, to take on themselves the garb of servants, and assist their friend, thinking it a secret of too much magnitude to be entrusted to any strangers; her nephew would join this friendly groupe; and they were true to Cosmo's appointment.

It appears that Cosmo gave me a strong sleeping potion; and when it had taken effect he went to the Count, and told him, that I was no more. He seemed at first rather staggered, but recovering, desired that he would send for two ignorant cottage women to lay me out. He told him that was already done; for he was aware that ablutions of cold water would be the death of me; he therefore decently wrapt a clean white muslin robe around me which drew up at the neck with a frill, he bound my head with handkerchiefs, and placed me in my coffin; the Count then came to see me accompanied by you, my dear nieces, and the chief servants."

"Too well we remember the night, my beloved aunt;

Ah! how deceitful was the Count; to what grief he pretended," said Emillia.

"When the Count withdrew, he gave orders that the apartments should be locked up, and Cosmo keep the key; as he detested the thoughts of a corpse being so much exposed to view, as was the general custom; but the real fact was, he dreaded the supposed poison being discovered: not choosing to trust too implicitly to Cosmo's assertion of the poison not affecting the frame outwardly. That very night Cosmo met my friends in the wood. He expressed great penitence for his former sins—and said he would not for the world, hurt so good a lady as the Countess; that he should hate his master for ever after this request; but he should continue to live in the castle, in hopes he might prove of service to the young ladies; he conducted them through the subterraneous passages, whence you escaped. Signor Rupino carefully made an outline of the plan, which has since proved of service. They passed through your bed room; and, as Cosmo had the key of every apartment, they found no difficulty in gaining mine, I was removed

from the coffin, and wrapped in warm blankets, I was laid on a narrow pallet, and in that manner, conveyed to the litter in the wood; the ladies and the Marquis remained with me; Laboria and Rupino returned, to aid Cosmo in filling up the coffin with heavy fragments of stone, which they found in the dismal passages, and then seared up the lead, so that no discovery could take place: they then joined us and we travelled here in safety. I forgot to say that Cosmo would not accept any reward; and he had given you both a harmless opiate, that you might not awake by the bustle, and interrupt his plan; or be needlessly terrified.

I live at present on money advanced by my kind friends, till the Count shall be made to do me justice but I am uneasy at the evident partiality the Marquis Revedo has imbibed for me: he is a widower, with one son, and an amiable man, but his passion must be hopeless: nor, indeed, has he declared it openly, his sentiments are too just for that; but now to your immediate history.

A few weeks since, Cosmo wrote me, word that he had received a letter from the Count, ordering him to prepare some poison as before, as he meant to aggrandise himself by the death of his neices: great was the sum designed for Cosmo—but he was firm in his repentance; he placed the letters, and other articles in your way, which you thought so mysterious, and which excited you to enter my dressing room, that you might look for the boat on the Arno ;— we hired a house, under fictitious names, for the time at Pisa, the rest I need not repeat, as you have been the principal heroines in the piece. Cosmo's harshness was pretended, to avoid suspicion; Judith was an hypocrite, and along with Sussette, was too friendly to the Count, to be true to you; and if she gave you a little liberty, it was to try if you had any scheme on foot to effect your escape; thus you see appearances must not be too much depended on."

As the ladies were returning to the house, they were met by the three gentlemen, the Countess Laborie, and her sister, their countenances proclaimed that they had momentous tidings to impart. "Is Lord Lorenzo returned?" asked the Countess, faintly. The Marquis answered in the affirmative—"Why then did he not come with you?" "He waits your presence in the saloon." " Ah! I guess, by this preparation, that he has something tragical to impart.

"If the wicked," said Count Laborie, "meet with a premature death, however we may lament and pity, and pray for them, we certainly cannot feel the same sensations as for virtuous."—"The Count is then no more," said Claudina. "He is not," answered Revedo, but bear up with fortitude to hear what Lorenzo says." She turned to an ashey

whitesess; but suffered them to lead her to the saloon. The Marquis's son was in a livery, and was recognised by the two sisters, as the attendant in the boat, whose manner had so impressed him in their favour. He had been sent to the castle with a plausible message from his supposed master, Revedo, but the view was to hear how the fight of the ladies had been received by the Count Montabino; but he was gone to answer for his crimes at that awful tribunal, from which he could not escape.

From his valet he learnt, that he arrived the very day subsequent to the ladies being missing: and such was his rage, that he stabbed Cosmo in the breast, before he was the least aware of his intention. The old man did not survive above fifteen minutes. 'I deserve this death,' said he, 'it is a just punishment for an ill-spent life :—But know, Count, I am not a murderer—I poisoned not your wife—she still lives! and retributive vengeance is preparing for you.'

Montabino's passion rose to such an height, that he would have trampled on the dying man, had not the servants forcibly restrained him, till Cosmo had breathed his last.

Late as it was, the Count repaired to the chapel, and descended into the vaults: he broke the outer coffin open, but the leaden one defied his power. He ordered his domestics to saw one end of:—they all refused; and he performed the office himself. Cosmo's assertions was confirmed:—He dropt to the ground—they flew to raise him up; —but before they could effect their purpose, he had plunged his poignard deep in his guilty heart.

The servants were perplexed how to act, as they knew not where their beloved lady had retired. Lorenzo did not discover his rank, but hastened to his father, that the Countess might be acquainted with the tragic catastrophe, and proper measures be adopted.

Though these tidings were imparted with all possible gentleness, the Countess and the young ladies were greatly affected, and the former was attacked by a fever, the consequence of agitation, which for some days, threatened a fatal termination, but happily, aided by a good constitution, and a skilful physician, she recovered.

The Marquis Revedo, his son (now in his proper character) and their two friends, repaired to the castle. There was plenty of witnesses to prove the Countess's existence and the legal claim to the Count's personal property was soon established; the estates, which he had greatly impoverished by selling the timber, went to his next heir. The

servants were dismissed with generous presents; the clothes of the three ladies, the plate, and the jewels, were sent to the villa, and the furniture at Genoa, and the castle was sold.—The young ladies fortunes were safe, as the Count's atrocious designs were providentially interrupted, and the Countess found herself in possession of enough to restore what her friends had generously advanced, and an independence remaining fully equal to her wishes and the purposes of her truly benevolent heart.

While the noblemen were at Montabino, they resolved to explore the mysteries of the Southern Turret, they ascended the stairs, accompanied by the late Count's steward, and valet.

The door was fastened; and the domestics remarked that they did not think it possible any one should reside there. "We have good reason," said Rupino, "to imagine that there is some victim of Montabino's tyranny here." The door was presently forced, and they entered the room; a faint shriek issued from the bed,—and a feeble voice exclaimed. "What, you are come to end my miseries ;—two of my innocents are gone since I came to this hateful place; the third is near expiring! O, slay her with her mother,—she sleeps!—she will not feel the blow."

The gentlemen advanced to the bed, which was miserably wretched and dirty; they soothed the hapless woman, and convinced her they were friends.—With the aid of some of the female servants, Harmina and her child Rosella, were made comfortable in their apparel, and conveyed to a decent chamber, and supplied with wine, jellies, and light food, proper for their situation: some men were appointed to watch in the turret, and, at midnight, Gusmond, (the man described by the young ladies entered with a pitcher of unpalatable gruel, and some hard crusts of bread. He was immediately secured; notice was given to the noblemen; and he was recognised, by the steward, to be a woodcutter, who rented a cottage on the estate, who, with his wife, was reckoned a morose old pair. She was instantly sent for to the castle, and committed to close confinement.

At the request of Revedo, a magistrate attended the next morning, to hear what Harmina should relate, and examine the two delinquents.

Harmina was much better, through the tender care she had experienced,—and the thoughts that her dear little Rosella might yet be spared her, was a cordial balm to her spirits; she was too weak to support herself up, she was therefore seated in an easy chair, surrounded by cushions, when the magistrate made his desired visit, attended by his necessary assistants, The nobleman and all the ladies

were present, with the exception of the Dowager countess, who by her own request, was not one of the witnesses of this extraordinary scene, as she felt her spirits unequal to the task of hearing any further proofs of the Count's delinquency.

Harmina, when the examination was about to commence, became greatly agitated, and shed a profusion of tears; she appeared to struggle between feminine pride and apprehension.

Every one present strove to inspire her with confidence, and speak peace to her mind; assuring her that now the Count was no more,—there was none to harm her; but on the contrary, they would exert themselves to place her in a situation congenial to her wishes, and be liberal protectors of her lovely interesting child.

Harmina was all gratitude, and thus encouraged, she stated in answer to the questions put to her.

That she was the daughter of one Nicholas Pignati, a working jeweller and silversmith, at Genoa,—a man of respectable character, but low in circumstances, on account of the large family he had to bring up, and various losses that had befallen him in trade.

Harmina was the eldest of five daughters, and had received an excellent education, and that of a superior kind: this instance of liberality in the parents, in fact took its rise from an economical idea; at least one they had cherished as such, though there are several instances in which such plans have proved abortive; often fatally so.—This was to give their eldest a complete and expensive education, that would enable her to be sole preceptress to the younger children, and finally procure for herself a genteel establishment in life: for this purpose she was kept till her sixteenth year at one of the first seminaries Genoa contained; this was attended with an expence they were scarce able to maintain, but their hopes were bouyed up by the expectations arising from the future benefit of their good management. At the stated period, Harmina was fetched home to her father's house, to commence her destined task of teaching four little girls, considerably younger than herself; three brothers having received their birth in the interval that past between the age of Harmina, and her next sister.

During her stay at the seminary, her dress had been on a level with the ladies there,—such ornaments was now deemed too expensive, and inconsistant with her humble rank in life; plainer apparel was provided and the finery laid by for holiday suits. This gave Harmina much offence, but she found that neither her intreaties nor complaints were in

this instance regarded.—Her educating the children, making the clothes for them, and linen for the family, and other attendance required of her, was executed with the utmost disgust and unwillingness, though she strove to conceal these sentiments from her parents, lest an entire display of them might raise their vigilance, to elude a scheme she had formed in her mind, and which she resolved to carry into effect the first opportunity that presented itself.

Through bribing one of the maids at the seminary from the fidelity she owed the lady that employed her, the scholars procured romances and novels, and for want of a person able to select them, they read, indiscriminately the good and the bad; and unfortunately, many that had a pernicious tendency.

Harmina, displeased With her home and every surrounding object, and accustomed to a life of elegance and ease, resolved to free herself from what she termed immuring her best days in abject slavery; she had read, nor did she for a moment allow herself to suppose it fiction, of several young ladies, who had spirit enough to emancipate themselves from similar situations, and seek a better fortune.

Her father was called on business to some miles distant from his home, where he expected to remain a week. Harmina took advantage of his absence to leave the comparatively humble, yet respectable and virtuous, roof that sheltered her! She prepared a parcel of her best clothes, her trinkets, and other valuable articles, nor did she scruple to make free with a sum of money belonging to her truly amiable mother, which was deposited in the room where she slept.

During the first hour of the morning, when all was hushed around, Harmina left the house ;—the moon shone with chaste lustre, reflecting as it were, a silver light on every surrounding object;—all was silent, not a zephyr wanted among the trees, or rippled the waves of the winding streams. Harmina was daunted at first, she thought of perils till now inconsidered;—for a few moments she debated whether she should return or go forward in pursuit of adventures; unfortunately she decided on the latter; inspired by the hopes that she, should, like the heroiness, she had read of, soon meet with generous protection. By seven in the morning, she had proceeded, many miles from her home—she was faint, tired, and thirsty, she went into the next arborge and procured some coffee, and then hired a vehicle to convey her thirty miles distant, when she reckoned in being safe from pursuit. It must be near eight in the morning before she was first missed:—some hours would elapse before the certainty of her having eloped would be confirmed—added to this, they were ignorant of the route she had

taken, nor had they the least clue to guide them: she also dwelt on another circumstance that tended to confirm her in the idea of her being safe from molestation, in the romantic flight she had taken; this was the confined circumstances of her parents who could not afford to spend much in endeavours to trace her.

When Harmina at length gained the wished for distance, she took a decent apartment at the house of a creditable widow woman, under the fictitious character of an orphan, whose father having expired suddenly in embarrassed circumstances, his creditors had seized on the whole remaining property, with the exception of a few pounds which they had given her, and a small bundle of her best apparel; under these given circumstances, she explained the nature of her abilities, and enquired for a situation in which they could be made of service to an employer. To her amazement she did not succeed—no invitations to visit the neighbouring gentry no admirers!—no young men of fortune, ready to sacrifice friends and family, to cast themselves at her feet.—In short, nothing like what her romantic studies and more romantic mind had led her to expect. Some on hearing the tale she had invented, pitied her; others seemed to doubt her veracity, and plainly hinted their suspicions, that she was a young adventurer; others judged still worse;—but none liked to employ a young person in their house, who was to fill a superior station, and have the guidance of young people, to whom any mystery was attached.

Harmina remained at this place till her money was nearly expended, and want began to make its unwelcome approaches towards our self-deluded heroine; happily for her, she was visited by self conviction, and true repentance for the crime she had committed, in bringing anguish and corroding solicitude to the breasts of her worthy parents, and dear brothers and sisters, whom she now looked on with sincere affection, and a wish for their society. She determined on going home, and intreating forgiveness from those she had so deeply wronged. Her stock of money was so short as to render it impossible for her to hire any kind of conveyance, there was no other recourse than to travel on foot, and that in the cheapest manner possible.

She had proceeded on twenty miles in safety, when her way lay through a lone wood, at the extremity of which there was an arborage, where she knew a lodging could be procured at a cheap rate, as it was usually resorted to by the more necessitous travellers; evening began to approach but Harmina flattered herself that, with a little exertion, she could gain the inn before it was completely dark: in this she had calculated wrong; the road was much longer than she had supposed it; and she had not proceeded much more than half way, when the shades

of night completely surrounded her; the path was intricate, edged by stumps of trees, fibrous roots, and brambles, that it was with difficulty she proceeded. At length she beheld a faint and glimmering light, and felicitated herself on the prospect of soon gaining the inn, where she intended to rest for the night, and procure some nourishment, to recruit her almost exhausted strength; this thought raised her spirits, and she redoubled her speed. Alas! ill fate! her progress was soon impeded :—two ruffians darted from amidst the bushes, and demanded her money and the parcel she carried in her hand; in vain she described her situation and intreated mercy, they were deaf to her prayers;- and left her without the smallest trifle of money, or a change of clothes. Overwhelmed with fear, and grief at her loss it was with difficulty she reached the inn, and no sooner did she arrive there, than she fainted.

Her youth, beauty, and distress, attracted the attention and pity of everyone present but more particularly interested Fernando, a servant of Count Montabino's, who had been to a distant town on business for his master. At his desire the hostess accommodated Harmina with a supper and a bed, and breakfast the next morning; for which he paid, and as he was then proceeding to Genoa in a chaise, he invited her to be the companion of his journey.

Fernando was a man of the most excellent character: he acted thus from pure and disinterested motives. Her was past the meridian of life, and had been married; he knew what a father's feelings must be for the loss of a daughter, judging by his own paternal tenderness. He gently blamed Harmina, while he listened to her narrative, which she delivered with a strict attention to truth, without the least attempt to gloss over her own failings; nor did he ever leave her till she was safe in the arms of her surprised and delighted parents, who after the burst of indignation was over, received her into their embraces, and sealed her pardon with an affectionate kiss: the explanation they received from her was such as spoke comparative comfort to their bosoms, and fell far short of their fears, as they had naturally suspected that she had eloped with some vile seducer.

That she might not repent her returning home,—and to keep her steadfast to the goodness she now professed they strove to make her as comfortable as their circumstances would possibly allow, and her past folly was never mentioned in her presence.

A twelvemonth elapsed in the most desirable felicity: Harmina strove to please her parents and sisters, and they were delighted with her, when, to their utter astonishment, Harmina again left home! nor could they gain any tidings of her; and they resolved to banish, as much

as possible, from their mind, all traces of a girl who could act with such cool and systematic ingratitude, towards her parents.

To account for Harmina's second flight, it is requisite to look back to the period in which the good Fernando escorted her back to her native home.

One morning, at the Castle of Montabino, as he was attending on his lord, the Count, in the dressing room, Fernando happened to mention the jewellers daughter at Genoa, in a manner that excited the curiosity of that nobleman, who made his servant relate the particulars of his meeting with her, the account she gave of herself, and the subsequent events. Having heard this, he would insist on, reimbursing, with some extra addition, the expences Fernando had been at on her account.

The description that Fernando had innocently given of the beauty of Harmina, had inflamed the Count, (who regarded seduction at the most but as a venial offence) with a strong desire to see her, and form his own judgment of her attractions; the misplaced pride and excessive weakness that had forced her from her home, he regarded as favourable to the designs he had formed, designs which he carefully concealed in the recesses of his own bosom; and, as he never mentioned her name to Fernando, that honest man had no suspicions of his lordships intention, or he would have bitterly regretted his undesigned imprudence, in ever mentioned her to his lordship; and would have regarded it as a duty incumbent on him, to have apprised the parents of Harmina, and warned them of impending danger.

Business of the utmost importance relative to his estates, obliged the Count to defer seeing Harmina for several months ;—at length, forming a plausible pretext for absenting himself from the castle, without saying to what place he was going, he repaired to Genoa, with one man servant, whom he could trust to keep the necessary concealment.—He hired apartments near the house of Harmina's father, and passed for a single gentleman of moderate fortune; but dependant on the caprices of a rich old uncle for any further advancement in life.

It was no difficulty for him to introduce himself to the dwelling of Harmina:—he ordered some various articles of jewellery; and contrived that they should be of a new and difficult pattern, that he might often frame an excuse for calling to see what progress was made; on these occasions his liberality to the younger children made him a great favourite with the family; oftentimes, under pretence that he was solitary in his apartments, he would set and take his coffee with them; they admired his condescension; but saw nothing alarming nor

particular in it :—the distance between them was not much—their profession was genteel, and he was but a private signor. He paid in their presence, no attention to Harmina differing from the rest of the sisters, and they suspected not the viper they had admitted to their fire side.

He had, with peculiar art and address, found means to have private interviews with Harmina, whom he too readily moulded to his purpose: all the good resolutions she had adhered to, since her return home, vanished like the snow on the mountain top, warmed by the cheering influence of the sun. He protested that he dared not marry, even privately, till after the decease of his uncle, as he had forced from him a vow to that effect. To make amends for this, he promised to place Harmina in an elegant retired situation, where she should be safe from the pursuit of her friends, and loss of reputation; as he would the moment his uncle was dead, espouse her—and then make the world believe that he had been married to her for some years past;—though the certificate he would have to produce to some particular persons, would indemnify him from losing his estates, by transgressing his uncles will.

Harmina consented; and in an evil hour left her home!—her fond parents!—and brothers and sisters, who adored her. She was taken to an elegant villa about twenty miles from the Count's castle, with two maids and a boy to attend on her. —The Count, under pretence of being frequently obliged to stay with his uncle, did not visit Harmina more than once in a month, when he used to stay for a few days with her, and the affectionate behaviour he constantly used completely banished every idea from her breast, of the signor using any artifice towards her; for as the Count Montabino, she knew him not.

They had lived together—(at least in the manner above stated) four years and a half, during which time Harmina had borne him three children: when all fancied happiness fled to return no more.

Harmina according to the request of her lover, had declined visiting or receiving any visit from persons residing near the villa, till accident placed in her way a lovely young woman, who had fled from her friends, to avoid a marriage with one she detested. Harmina knew what it was to want a home: and, on hearing the fair stranger's history, invited her to share her dwelling, and assist her in the tuition of the children; —at the same time, making her the confident of her own adventures.—At the first visit of the Count, after this new formed friendship, Finetta, the young guest, was intreated to confine herself to an upper apartment, 'till Harmina could lay hold on a proper

opportunity to declare to her lover the step she had taken, and reconcile him to the propriety of it, on the score that it was eligible for her to have a female companion, to assist her in the tuition of the dear little ones.

On the first day of the Count's visit, he went out in the evening to take a walk with the eldest child; Finetta hastily run down to the Parlour—"Gracious heaven! dearest Harmina, said she, you was not canded in what you told me, or else you have been grossly deceived; your lover is the Count di Montabino, our dwelling is not a mile from one of his castles."—Harmina fainted: on her recovery, she was soon convinced of the deception:— all her hopes of future grandeur was vanished like a dream—she was the mistress of a married man!—and she had virtue enough to look on such a situation with horror.

On the Count's return she convinced him the deception was ended; violent in her own cause, she vowed to return to her father, with the little babes, and cast herself on his mercy, cheerfully submitting to the hardest labour, than continue in a life of infamy which there was no hopes of retrieving. The Count sullenly withdrew, and, in a few moments quitted the villa. Harmina gave Finetta a purse of money, and regretted the necessity there was for her leaving the villa. On the third day she took the road for Genoa, with her babes; but was intercepted by order of the Count, and conveyed to the southern turret of the castle of Montabino, highly exasperated against her, as he thought she ought to have cheerfully submitted to any plan he thought proper.

The week subsequent to the supposed death of the Countess—(of which event Harmina was not apprised) the infant at her breast, expired suddenly, and was taken away in a box by Gusman. A little boy, two years old lingered some months, deprived of air and exercise, and then died: he was buried the same night the sisters left the castle. Their provisions had always been scanty in the turret; but, for the last fortnight it was so much lessened, that Harmina and her child would soon have perished, but for the providential assistance they received.

By the confession of the vile Gusman and his wife, it appeared, that they had the care of these poor victims, for which the Count remitted them a monthly sum: and another for provisions: of the latter, these wretches kept more than one half, and the poor deluded creatures sufferings were extreme, and far beyond what the Count intended—On his death, not knowing how to dispose of her, and fearful of granting her liberty, they literally designed to starve her gradually out of existence.

They were condemned to imprisonment for life: Harmina's friends were apprised of her situation, and returned their solicited pardon: on her recovery, she was placed in a convent, by her own request ;—and the Countess Montabino pensioned her little daughter Rosselia, as a boarder under the same roof with her unfortunate mother; with a promise, religiously adhered to, of seeing her well settled in life, when she came of age to leave the convent.

A twelvemonth having elapsed since the Count's death, the Marquis received the hand of the amiable widow, now in her thirty eighth year; she was still remarkable for beauty, and her manners were fascinating. —In her second marriage, she found the felicity wanting in her first; they had one daughter, whose virtue completed their felicity. The signor Rupino espoused Emillia: and two years after, Theresa was united to the amiable son of the Marquis of Revedo; and the marchioness presented them the villa with all its elegant embellishments, for their residence.

The two sisters lived long in connubial happiness, and bonds of affection for each other; bonds that were never broken, till death dissolved the tie. Their lives were exemplary, and their story shews that virtue will meet its reward, and vice its punishment.

FINIS.