

THE
Castle of Oravilla:
OR, THE
ROMANCE
OF THE
BROWN MOUNTAINS.

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“Though plung'd in ills, and exercis'd with care,
Yet never let the human mind despair;
When press'd by dangers, and beset by foes,
The gods their timely succour interpose;
And when our virtue sinks, o'erwhelm'd with grief,
By unforeseen expedients bring relief.”

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CASTLE OF ORAVILLA.

IN one of the most unfrequented parts of the Sierra Morena, or Brown Mountains, (and near to the banks of the famed Guadalquivir,) stood the Castle of Oravilla, situated on the projection of a rock, and had formerly been used as a fortress, to prevent the incursions of the Moors, who had committed dreadful ravages in those parts.

No longer necessary as a place of strength, it had been suffered to fall into decay, till the brave and wealthy Don Diego Medajos, having rendered his monarch a signal service, had the Castle bestowed on him, and was created a Marquis, by the title of Oravilla.

Pleased with the possession of a place so admirably situated for a hunting-seat, he had the principal apartments put in a state of thorough repair, and the interior modernized as much as their form would admit.

The north wing, that looked towards the Guadalquivir, was, however, left to the ravages of time, and entirely disused by any part of the family.

A tradition, seriously credited among the goatherds, and other peasantry of the adjacent mountains, asserted that Zayida, a noble Moorish lady, who had been torn from her husband and family, and dishonoured by the then Governor of the Castle of Oravilla, had, committed the dreadful crime of suicide, by plunging a dagger, that had been inadvertently left in the way, into her own breast, from a firm determination not to survive the base injuries she had been compelled to bear, and to convince the brutal tyrant that honour was more precious to her than existence.

It is not improbable that this part of the tradition might be true; but the termination of it could only be credited by those persons, whose minds were enslaved in the trammels of superstition.

This was, that the deceased form of the lovely Zayida was supernaturally inspired, and nightly haunted the north wing of the castle, from whence, at the dawn of morn, it precipitated itself into the Guadalquivir, where the body had been thrown after the death of the fair Moor.

The Marquis of Oravilla, neglecting to have the north wing repaired, seemed to the peasantry to give authenticity to their tradition; they supposing that he durst not let any part of his family inhabit it, for fear of the spectre. In this they were mistaken: he did not believe the report; but thought it an unnecessary expence to repair a place which, from its situation, he had no predilection for.

The prospects from its windows was wild, gloomy, and terrific; and the roaring of the waters that washed its base conveyed a monotonous awful sound.

When the Marquis made his first entrée to the Castle of Oravilla, after the necessary repairs, he brought with him a lady rather past the meridian of life, but of a most comely presence, and inclined to the *en bon point*. Her fine dark eyes seemed to have a languishing air that bespoke a tranquillized sorrow.—For some months she regularly walked on the ramparts of the castle at stated hours of the day, but never descended to the court yard or the other grounds of the edifice, or went out in the carriage. Indisposition was the cause reported by the domestics, as they said their mistress had not the least restraint put on her conduct by her husband, the noble Marquis di Oravilla, but regulated her actions according to her own wishes. She had no children, kept no company, and led a life of the strictest seclusion. No ladies were invited to the castle; and on those days that the Marquis had company of his own sex, this lady appeared not, but confined herself wholly to her own apartments.

On a sudden the lady's death was announced, a magnificent coffin prepared, and her funeral took place by torch-light in the vault under the chapel of the castle, where the remains of the ancient possessors of the edifice were deposited.

The Marquis di Oravilla was at that time absent from the castle, and attending on his monarch, in whose favour he still ranked high. Sebastino, the steward of the Sierra Morena residence, immediately dispatched an express to Madrid, to apprise his lord of the death of the Marchioness, and in the interim of time the domestics were put into decent mourning, and masses were said for the repose of her soul at the convent of St. Catharine's, and the monastery of St. Jaques, both of which religious houses were situated among the Brown Mountains, at a small distance from each other, and about a league from Oravilla.

This performed, the steward waited to receive orders from the Marquis in forming any arrangements that might now be thought necessary, in consequence of the decease of his lady.

An answer arrived at the expected time; but the Marquis did not, as Sebastino expected, intend to visit the castle; some years, he said, might elapse first. The steward received a paper, filled with instructions, and a large sum of money, out of which he was to present a benefaction to each of the religious houses, for their holy zeal in the repetition of masses for the deceased Marchioness.

In consequence of his lordship's orders, several of the domestics were discharged; but Isabella, who had been the chief attendant and much valued servant of the late lady, remained in the castle, and took the superintendance thereof, being married to Sebastino in less than a month after the Marchioness's death. This indecent haste excited much surprise in the few adjacent persons who were apprised of the circumstance, and their admiration was further called for, by viewing the splendor of dress which the steward's wife assumed, which she accounted for by boasting that the Marquis had made her unlimited possessor of all the magnificent wardrobe of her late lady, reserving nothing to himself but her jewels, which had been left at their residence in Madrid, on their journey to Oravilla.

In a short time the domestic establishment of the castle consisted of only five persons, which comprised the steward and his wife; most part of the edifice was shut up, and admittance was invariably refused to those strangers, whom necessity, or a wish to view the ancient fortress, brought to its gates, on the plea that such admission had been expressly forbidden in the written orders of the Marquis, and it was not for his chosen and highly-favoured servants to disobey a mandate for which it was most likely weighty reasons were entertained by the noble owner of the castle.

Three years elapsed in this order of affairs, without any circumstance transpiring worth a record in the annals of the family of Oravilla, unless we may reckon the reports of the peasantry, who declared that the spectre of Zayida, the Moorish lady, was still a visitant of the castle, and remained most part of the night on the battlements of the building, playing on the guitar, but ever disappeared with the dawn of morn. Lights were frequently seen in the northern part of the castle, and none of the peasants, unless impelled by dire necessity, would venture near the castle.

At the expiration of the three years before mentioned, the Marquis came to the castle, with a large train of attendants, and several visitors; among the latter was an elegant interesting young lady, named Victoria, the orphan daughter of the Duke de Ramirez, who was to be married, without delay, to the Duke de Oravilla: she was accompanied by her guardian, Don Manuel, and Lucretia his lady, who it seems was the contriver of this alliance, from base and interested motives, which they durst not openly avow, but concealed with the most sedulous care, making an ostentatious parade of their tender and considerate behaviour to their dear ward, and a studious regard to her interest.

The lady Victoria was very averse to the idea of becoming Oravilla's bride; but her compliance was at length extorted, and in an evil hour, when every good angel slumbered, she gave her hand to the Marquis. The abbot of the monastery of St. Jacques performed the ceremony; scarcely had he closed the book, when the agitated fair one heaved a deep sigh, and fell senseless on the steps of the altar before any one was aware of her situation, and received a contusion on her lovely forehead, which bled profusely.

All the prepared festivities were suspended, and the unfortunate Victoria was conveyed from the chapel of the castle to the bridal chamber. The ladies remained with her; but the Marquis and the gentlemen retired to a distant saloon, to drink a health to the recovery of the lovely Marchioness de Oravilla.

Midnight arrived, and the guests retired to their respective chambers: Donna Lucretia, and Isabella the steward's wife, sat up with the fair invalid, attended by some of the female domestics. The Marquis was frequent in his enquiries for Victoria; she passed a dreadful night; her wound, though skilfully dressed by one of the monks, was very painful, and she had frequent relapses of her fainting fits.

A fever, attended by delirious intervals, succeeded; and for a whole fortnight Victoria lay, as it were, suspended between life and death: all the visitors had left the castle, with the exception of the bride's guardian and his lady.

Victoria was at length restored to comparative health, though her frame was yet weak and languid. But, alas! the Marquis and Don Manuel, with his lady, were shocked at discovering that the intellects of the bride were disordered. No outrage marked her actions, but a profound melancholy absorbed her senses in complete idiotism. This Carlos, the good monk that attended her, declared to be in a great measure owing to the contusion she had received on her head, and confirmed by the subsequent fever that had attended on the wound.

Carlos recommended quietness, and every tender method to be resorted to, but gave very faint hopes of her recovery, to the great chagrin of the Marquis, who bore his disappointment with a very ill grace, for there seemed more of self-love in his complainings than pity for the fair maniac.

At length he departed for Madrid with Don Manuel, leaving Victoria to the management of Donna Lucretia and Isabella, as the former, at the earnest entreaties of the Marquis, consented to stay at the castle till his return, which was not expected for six succeeding months.

Contrary to all expectation, in less than half that period Victoria recovered her reason, and her mental faculties shone forth in all their wonted energy and lustre. The Marquis was delighted at this intelligence, and hastened the settling of his affairs at Madrid, so far as to allow of his return to the castle five weeks sooner than the appointed time, with his friend and associate Don Manuel.

If Victoria did not receive her wedded lord with that shew of affection gratifying to a bridegroom, yet there were no symptoms of aversion apparent in her behaviour; a pleasing composure marked her countenance, and she partially joined in the conversation that ensued.

However, as night approached, she seemed agitated and tremulous; this was easily accounted for, as behaviour fitting for a modest bride, and as such was suffered to pass without particular notice.

Once more the bridal chamber was prepared, and Victoria was attended to her couch by Donna Lucretia, who withdrew, and informed the Marquis that his lady was in her own apartment.

Words are too weak to describe the confusion that in a short time agitated the inhabitants of the castle: when the Marquis entered his chamber, the bride was flown; she had left her bed—nothing of her wardrobe was missing but a wrapping gown of course flannel. Every apartment was searched, every avenue investigated, even the cottages of the goatherds did not escape examination. A miserable inn, about a league distant, was

visited without success; not a trace of the maiden bride was to be discovered, and it was at length conjectured that she had been seized with a return of her mental malady, and had committed the dire act of suicide.

In vain the Guadalquiver was searched; no corpse could be discovered, and all was incertitude and distress.

The Marquis and Don Manuel were almost frantic at an event that rendered their plans abortive. Three months their search continued without success, and was at length wholly abandoned as hopeless. Once more was the castle of Oravilla abandoned to a few domestics, and the party returned to Madrid; Don Manuel to his own house, and the Marquis to a stately family mansion near the Escorial. The latter soon laid his case before the sovereign, and it was decreed that he should keep possession of Victoria's fortune till her fate was ascertained. If her death was proved, the chief part of her property would go to her next heir, who was a very distant relation of the deceased Duke, her noble father.

For a while we will leave them at Madrid, and return to the Castle of Oravilla, where strange events had been passing.

The lovely Victoria had been very unhappy in the guardians her father had chosen for her. Don Manuel and his wife were artful, rapacious, and contriving; in every transaction they had an eye to their own interest, sacrificing every finer sentiment of the heart to the shrine of ambition. They had led the widowed duke to consider them as the best of human beings, and, on his death-bed, he signed a deed, by which his infant heiress and her immense fortune, were delivered over to their unlimited controul, till she attained the age of twenty-one; nor was she to marry within that period unless she first received their express consent; if she was rash enough to disobey this mandate, the forfeiture of one third of her wealth was to be claimed by her guardians for themselves and heirs.

To possess this splendid addition to their wealth was earnestly desired by Don Manuel and his lady. For this purpose they contrived (without openly seeming to do so) to introduce to the notice of their fair ward such young cavaliers, whose fortunes or connections might furnish them with a pretext of withholding their consent to an alliance, if solicited. But Victoria possessed sense; her elegant discriminating mind was not so easily caught, and the attention of these cavaliers served only to create disgust; hence she ever retired from their society with heartfelt pleasure.

She had just attained her eighteenth year, when she became acquainted with Alonzo, a powerful grandee, high in favour at court; a reciprocal attachment ensued between these amiable young persons, and they looked forward with delight to a union that should render their domestic bliss permanent.

Alonzo was three years older than the lovely Victoria; he had an independent, and, indeed, what might be stiled a noble fortune, left him by an uncle; but he was not to receive it till he was twenty-four, at which period he intended to marry. This exactly suited the circumstances of the fair Victoria, as she would then be emancipated from the

controul of Don Manuel and his lady, and be at liberty to bestow her hand and fortune on the amiable youth who was already in possession of her pure and undivided heart.

Don Manuel and the lady Lucretia were overwhelmed with sorrow when this intelligence reached their ears, which it did by means of a false friend, in whom Alonzo unfortunately placed an unlimited confidence. It was an arrangement which threatened the destruction of their avaricious hopes and prospects; but they knew not how to counteract it, as the prudent circumspection of the young people had made them resolve on a state of celibacy, till the period should arrive that left them free to choose for themselves.

While they were deliberating how to obtain that by artifice which force could not effect, a new train was given to their thoughts by a visit from the Marquis di Oravilla. He had seen Victoria at a ball given by the Marchioness di Florenza, and became enamoured of her beauty, which, with the nobleness of her birth, and elegance of manners, seemed to his view to form her as the exact fair one whom he should wish to take for a bride.

Under this idea he waited on Don Manuel, and made formal proposals for an alliance with Victoria.

They candidly informed him of the state of their ward's affections, and did not hesitate to express their dislike of the arrangement she had made with Alonzo. His chagrin at this account is not to be expressed: it was unbecoming and violent, and he swore by his favourite saint not to easily yield the palm of victory to the youthful Alonzo.

By the permission of Don Manuel and his lady, the Marquis had an interview with the lovely Victoria. In vain he urged his suit, made the most ardent vows, and had recourse to the most adulating flattery.—Her replies were decisive, nor allowed him the least room to hope. She did not name the object of her love, but at the same time she gave him to understand, that she was irrevocably engaged to one highly worthy of her affections. The Marquis did not listen to this candid statement of facts in the manner becoming a man of honour, who, in such a case, would have taken leave with a polite resignation to the decree: however his feelings might be hurt, Oravilla's behaviour was quite the contrary, complaining of Victoria's cruelty, and execrating his rival.

Victoria found herself much relieved by his departure; his conduct had agitated her gentle bosom, and though she had kept up a becoming dignity of behaviour in his presence, he was no sooner gone than she hastened to her chamber, to give ease to her overwhelmed heart by a flood of tears.

She imparted to her guardians what passed, and candidly said, that had she not been pre-engaged, Oravilla was not a man who would ever engage her affections; neither his age, person, or deportment, being consonant to her taste. They made no comments on what she said; Victoria hoped to see the Marquis no more as a visitor, and determined to avoid him in public as much as common politeness would admit. The next day, when she descended to the drawing-room, previous to dinner, her surprise and indignation was

excited on being presented to the Marquis di Oravilla, and informed that he came there in compliance with a direct invitation from Don Manuel.

It was now too late to retreat, or she would have retired to her chamber.—She passed an unpleasant day, but kept an anxious guard on her behaviour, that she might avoid, even by an indirect word or look, giving the least reason for them to construe it into a symptom of encouragement.

The Marquis became a frequent guest at Don Manuel's; and Victoria, to avoid him, constantly took her meals in her own chamber, in spite of the remonstrances of Lady Lucretia.

"You are at liberty, madam," said Victoria, "to entertain at your table such guests as you and Don Manuel shall think proper to select, but I am not obliged to make one of the party, when circumstances render the solitude of my own chamber more agreeable to me: the handsome sum allotted for my board may surely allow me that privilege."

Victoria remaining so obdurate, and her heart determined on Alonzo, the Marquis determined, with his co-adjutors, on a new plan of proceeding.

Victoria was completely deceived. Oravilla no longer visited at Don Manuel's, nor did they meet in public. The young lady therefore imagined that the Marquis had abandoned all thoughts of persevering in such a hopeless pursuit.

Don Manuel and his lady now adopted the very reverse of their former conduct; Alonzo was repeatedly invited to their house; and, under one plausible pretext or other, left whole hours in uninterrupted converse with Victoria. Lady Lucretia pretended serious regret at having ever introduced the Marquis di Oravilla to the presence of her ward, and took on herself such a mode of conduct as lulled the enamoured pair into fancied security, and led them to suppose that there was no obstacle in the path they had laid out for the completion of their mutual happiness.

Alonzo was obliged to go to a distant province to attend on a dying relation, according to a written request. He took an ardent and rather an affectionate leave of Victoria, though under the idea of soon meeting again, and sat off on his journey, attended by two grooms. Five weeks elapsed, and Alonzo did not return. Victoria thought some particular event might have happened to retard him; she therefore waited with as much patience as she could command, though excessively chagrined at the silence of Alonzo. Dreadful intelligence reached Madrid! Alonzo and both his attendants had been murdered in a forest near Salamanca, when on their return, supposed by banditti, as their persons had been stripped of every thing valuable.—They had been found by some forresters, who conveyed them to the nearest inn. Don Alonzo and his retinue had frequently used that house; his liveries were well known, and the grooms were recognized, as was their unfortunate master, by those circumstances and his dress; for his visage was so much disfigured by wounds, that not a trace of his former features remained, and the once handsome and prepossessing countenance of him that was reckoned among the flower of

Spanish nobility, now presented a most hideous spectacle, from which the human eye turned with disgust.

Victoria received the unwelcome intelligence of this dire stroke of fate when she was in public company.—She fainted, and was conveyed to Don Manuel's, in a state that would have melted the most savage heart to pity, had they not been predetermined on her misery.—As soon as the first agonies of her grief had subsided, she was struck with an idea that the report was not true, but had taken its rise from some machinations of Don Manuel and the avowed rival of her adored Alonzo; nor did she hesitate to declare her suspicions to the Lady Lucretia, who immediately quitted the apartment with an haughty air, which manifested how much she was piqued by what Victoria had said on the subject.

Victoria did not see Lady Lucretia any more that day; but on the morning of the next she entered the apartment of the still weeping fair one; and, after a short preface, informed her that the corpse of Alonzo had been conveyed to Madrid, in a covered litter, to the house of his afflicted father Don Isidore de Velasqua; "therefore, Signoretta Victoria," added she, with a taunting accent, "as you think fit to doubt the veracity of what we have asserted, an opportunity is afforded you of removing your incredulity; you may be a witness of the fact, if such a sight can be agreeable to a lady of your delicacy."—"I *will* go," said Victoria, with marked emphasis. "If, which I now fear, the dire report is no fiction, I can at least have the melancholy satisfaction of weeping over the corpse of my murdered lover."

"Fine heroism, truly," muttered Lucretia, loud enough to be heard. "Come, put on your mantle and veil, and let us hasten to Don Isidore's; the sooner the terrific visit is over the better, in my opinion, since you really wish to go."

When Don Manuel's carriage stopped at the porch of Don Isidore's, Victoria trembled so violently, that it was with difficulty she alighted, though assisted by her guardian and Lady Lucretia.

The domestics of Don Isidore beheld the lovely visitor with astonishment, and their admiration increased when they learned the purport of her coming there, and prayed to heaven that it would be pleased to shower down its choicest blessings on the head of the lovely mourner, and restore peace in her bosom, by teaching her, gradually, a gentle resignation to its awful decrees.

Lady Lucretia declined, under the pretence of timidity, to enter the apartment where the deceased lay, and Victoria was supported into the room by the female servants of the household of Don Isidore, where she became too fatally convinced that it was no false report: but, alas! her dear Alonzo had fatally perished! A gold ring on the little finger of the left hand, which she had given him as a token of her love, had escaped the rapacity of the plunderers, and fully identified the mangled corpse to be that of her late lover.

As she gazed on this little token, her emotions overcame her, and, with a piercing shriek, fell to the floor before her attendants were aware of her situation. The alarm this occasioned reached the ears of Don Isidore, who immediately entered the apartment that contained his murdered son and the inanimate Victoria.

He tenderly raised her in his arms, lamenting, with tears, the cruel fate that, by depriving him of Alonzo, had also prevented his being allied to the amiable Victoria in the character of father-in-law.

He had her conveyed to a chamber and put to bed; nor would he yield to the wishes of Donna Lucretia who was very earnest in her arguments for the immediate removal of her fair charge, though her attendants thought it prejudicial to her health, from the very weak state she was in through agonizing grief; she was therefore obliged to remain with her ward for three days at Don Isidore's; for that period elapsed before Victoria was able to bear the motion of a carriage.

Previous to her quitting the house, Don Isidore requested a few minutes audience with Victoria and Lady Lucretia, when he thus addressed the former:

"My dearest young Lady, it is more than probable we shall never meet again. I am going to leave Madrid, for a retirement at some distance from this city; the bustle of the capital not being in the least consonant to my present feelings; and, were I to remain here, I should avoid your presence; the sight of you would remind me of my lost son, and you would experience the same feelings in beholding me; let us therefore pray for each other's happiness (if we ever can again partake of *happiness* after our mutual loss) without a wish to meet. You are young, and have much to hope for; I am old and feeble; and in losing Alonzo, lost the only prop that supported my age."—At this part the feelings of the good old gentleman was so powerful, that he found it impossible for him to proceed, and the tears chased each other down his furrowed cheeks, as he slipt into Victoria's hand a very small but elegant diamond cross, of most curious workmanship; and pressing her fingers to his lips, hurried from the room.

Lady Lucretia and Victoria then descended to the carriage, while the hall of Don Isidore was lined with servants, who audibly prayed for the future peace and happiness of the young lady, to the great envy and mortification of her companion, who was highly piqued at not being included in the encomiums passed on her ward, whom in fact she secretly hated for her youth, beauty, and superior merit; nor would she, but for interested views, and the superior stile the yearly allowance fixed for Victoria enabled her to live in, have allowed of Don Manuel's ward residing under the same roof with herself.

Several weeks elapsed after Victoria's return to Don Manuel's before she was able to receive the visits of condolence of those ladies, with whom she had been on terms of serious friendship or intimacy.

Alonzo had not been deceased more than three months, when Victoria was pained severely, by the Marquis di Oravilla renewing his suit, with the avowed sanction of her guardians.

But she remained inexorable to all the entreaties the Marquis could use, or his friends urge, in behalf of the wished for alliance.

Victoria, in reality, had no wish to enter into a matrimonial life, now her dear Alonzo was no more—celibacy was her choice. But could she ever be brought to alter her determination, it was not the Marquis di Oravilla who had in her eyes attractions to effect the change, nor would she ever have given her consent to become his bride, had not the most cruel and artful stratagem been put in practice against her peace.

One evening, to avoid the importunities of the Marquis, which were, as usual, warmly seconded by Don Manuel and his lady, Victoria retired to her chamber at a much earlier hour than usual; she took up a book, which she had lately purchased, and sat down in order to beguile the lingering time, by a perusal of its contents, which was on a highly interesting subject; but, a sudden head-ache, accompanied by a confused dizziness, prevented her from proceeding in this harmless amusement, and she rung for her maid to undress her, and immediately retired to bed, but courted repose in vain.

The clock had just proclaimed the twelfth hour of the night; and from the unbroken silence that reigned throughout the mansion, Victoria supposed that all its inmates were retired to their respective chambers.

A few minutes more elapsed, and Victoria was highly alarmed at hearing some one open the door of a large closet, that was at the other end of the apartment, and, with distinct footsteps, approach the bed; but the form of this dreadful intruder the darkness did not allow her to distinguish; yet she was certain that it must have been for no *good* purpose, but the *exact* reverse, that any individual should have been concealed in her closet till she had retired to rest. Almost frantic with apprehension, she sprang from the couch, and seizing a morning gown, slipped it on. A bell-pull was by the bedside; Victoria darted to the well-known spot, and found to her (if possible) increased terror, that the line was taken away. It was there when she summoned her attendant to undress her, and it was now clear that a treacherous plot had been laid against her, of which her own maid must have been a party concerned.

The object of her terror, it was evident, had been seeking for her in the bed; and now continued groping for the lovely girl about the spacious apartment.

Victoria crept, with the utmost caution, to the opposite side of the room, from whence the sounds proceeded, and soon found, by laying her hand on a harp that stood in the chamber, that she was near the door that opened into the gallery which led to Don Manuel's apartment. Hope revived in her agitated breast, and she prepared, with tremulous haste, to open the door and effect her escape.

She had scarce set one foot in the gallery, when she found her progress arrested by some one rudely clasping her round the waist, and forcibly attempting to draw her back into her chamber.—Victoria uttered the most piercing shrieks, and with a violent effort (though she could not wholly force herself from the ruffian's grasp) she prevented him forcing her from the gallery, still continuing, in shrill accents of terror, to implore Heaven to send her aid, till the door of Don Manuel's chamber opening, and Lady Lucretia coming forth, gave a seasonable relief to the exhausted Victoria.

She eagerly availed herself of the light that lady carried, to observe, if she knew the person of this midnight assailant; she therefore turned hastily round, and beheld the Marquis di Oravilla. A convulsive murmur issued from her pallid lips, and she fainted.

When she once more opened her eyes to life, which adverse events had rendered hateful to her, she found herself laid on her own bed; the Marquis, Lady Lucretia, and the woman, who was her own immediate attendant, and whom, from the circumstance of the bell-rope being cut, she justly (in her own mind) accused of treachery, were standing by her. Another relapse had nearly been the consequence of her beholding Oravilla so near her, and apparently on good terms with the wife of her guardian; but the timely application of a few cordial drops, which Lady Lucretia administered, restored her to comparative calmness, and she asked, with as much *hauteur* as she could assume, "What excuse the Marquis could possibly have to make for such an unparalleled insult as the one which had led to her present situation."

Oravilla answered not; but poor Victoria was petrified on hearing Lucretia exclaim, "Degenerate girl! silence best becomes you. I am not to be duped by such artifice. Too well you know that, by your own appointment, the Marquis has passed several hours in your chamber. I overheard you conversing with some one, and approached your door to listen, that I might discover who the person was with whom you were thus, in defiance of female propriety and decorum, entertaining . You doubtless heard my steps, and then artfully began to exclaim with well counterfeited terror, that you might appear innocent, and Oravilla guilty of the most flagrant trespass, when, on the contrary, he is no further culpable than yielding to an assignation made by a too forward girl, in consequence of some intreaties the Marquis made, with no other view, at first, than to try the boasted virtue of the haughty Victoria."

Victoria, notwithstanding the native softness of her temper, could not hear this scandalous falsehood without expressing violent indignation, and accusing Lady Lucretia and the Marquis of joining in a base design to destroy her honour and reputation. All she said was in vain; for, alas! there was no one to support her cause, or vindicate oppressed innocence.

Don Manuel entered the chamber, not to speak peace to the heart of his ward, but to take part with her oppressors. He treated her with the utmost indignity, and strenuously insisted on the guilt of the afflicted fair one, who, perceiving that neither arguments nor affirmations of her innocence had any effect, gave a deep sigh, and then preserved a

melancholy silence, though at the same time she fervently prayed to heaven for its aid and benign influence.

Don Manuel now began to expostulate mildly with the Marquis, on his taking the advantage of Victoria's weak compliance to admit him to her chamber, and proposed, as an accommodation of the unhappy affair, that the Marquis should espouse Victoria, as soon as the writings, relative to the settlements, &c. should be completed.

To this the Marquis readily agreed. Victoria heard the arrangement with horror, and opened her lips to assure them, that she would never consent to be made the victim of such a base stratagem; adding, that the conspiracy was too glaring to admit of a doubt that they were equally concerned in the atrocious scheme.

The trio indicated much offence at these accusations; and having whispered for a few moments, left the room, and locked the door on the hapless Victoria. A light remained burning on the dressing-table, and she availed herself of that circumstance, to effectually fasten the doors from any more intruders during that night: and then, kneeling down, addressed her orisons to Heaven. Conscious innocence gave peace to her guiltless bosom; and, worn out by grief and fatigue, she soon sunk into a gentle slumber, out of which she did not awake till the shrill discordant voice of Lady Lucretia, intreating admittance, aroused her, and she found by her watch that she had far exceeded her usual hour of rising.

Lady Lucretia had brought with her Victoria's breakfast; and she informed her, that she was to remain a prisoner in her chamber, till she consented to marry the Marquis; but on her persisting to refuse him, the circumstance of his being seen in her apartment, on the preceding night, should be blazed about in every circle, and her name rendered infamous.

This, and other threats of a similar nature, so intimidated the gentle Victoria, who dreaded nothing on earth so much as scandal, however undeserved, being attached to her person, that in an evil hour she consented to become the bride of Oravilla.

Lady Lucretia had made her believe that the servants, in the midst of the bustle, had observed the Marquis in her apartment; and, to silence any reports they might raise to the prejudice of Victoria, Don Manuel and herself, joined with Oravilla, in distributing money among them, and declaring that the Marquis had, for some weeks past, been privately married to the young lady; but on account of the recent death of Alonzo, they did not wish that circumstance to be publicly known. "Thus, you see," continued that artful woman, "I and Don Manuel have done the best for you that the untoward predicament you placed yourself in would allow."

"God knows my innocence!" said the weeping Victoria, "but I am unable to contend against my oppressors; settle every thing as you please, I will be a passive victim; my only hope is, that death will soon free me from an existence which the death of Alonzo, and my forced marriage with the Marquis, will render hateful to me. One only favour I

have to ask; let not Camilla, my treacherous maid, on whom I have heaped unnumbered favours, ever presume to enter into my sight.

To this Lucretia assented; and the same day writings were presented to Victoria, relative to her marriage with the Marquis, which she signed with a reluctant hand and aching heart.

The marriage was to take place at the Castle of Oravilla, to which place several visitants were invited to accompany them.

Though the affair was not yet publicly announced, very few of Victoria's friends were admitted to see her; and even they Lady Lucretia took particular care never to leave alone with her ward, lest by Victoria's communications of the grievances under which she laboured, the feelings of her friends should be interested, and their expected victim snatched from their mercenary grasp.

On the day appointed they set out for the Castle of Oravilla; Donna Lucretia saying, that the nuptials were appointed to take place at that remote mansion, that the domestics might not find out that she had made a false assertion with respect to the private marriage of Victoria, and that they should only have hired servants during the journey.

Poor Victoria heard all in silent anguish, and the nearer the day of her nuptials approached, the more reluctance she felt at becoming the bride of Oravilla; but the settlements were signed, and she knew not how to retract, even if she could assume fortitude enough to defy the machinations of the Marquis and his coadjutors.

No sooner was the marriage ceremony performed, that she fainted, and a violent indisposition ensued, as has been previously related: the cause of her mysterious disappearance now remains to be explained.

One night Donna Lucretia, and the rest of the persons that attended in the chamber of the fair invalid, weary with setting up and watching, seized the opportunity of Victoria's having a few favourable hours respite from the delirium that too frequently attended on her fever, to refresh themselves by repose, in an adjoining room, having the doors of communication open, that they might hear any noise if the lady awakened.

It chanced that Victoria's slumber was short; but she was perfectly calm and sensible. The thoughts of her marriage lay heavy on her mind, and she eagerly availed herself of the opportunity of being alone, to ease her heart by a copious flood of tears, which proved a most seasonable relief. While she was thus indulging her melancholy, what was her surprize, and even terror, when she beheld one of the opposite pannels slide cautiously back, and a lady habited in a dark robe, enter the chamber; and having ascertained that there was no witnesses of her behaviour, she approached the bed, and took one of Victoria's hands between her own, saying, in sweet accents, "Do not be alarmed, my dear lady; I am no supernatural being, but an earthly one, who has risked the most dire consequences to herself, in hopes to be of service to you."

These words revived Victoria a little, and enabled her to reply in terms that explained both. Her curiosity and gratitude was excited in no common degree. "Peruse this paper," said the unknown lady, placing a folded note in the hands of Victoria with the utmost caution; "its being discovered might prove fatal to us both. Attend to the advice therein contained, as you value existence; and I will avail myself of the first opportunity that offers to see you again."

Here the mysterious stranger stopped; and Victoria was about to reply, when a noise in the next room was heard, and the lady immediately hastened through the aperture, which she closed after her.

Victoria had just time sufficient allowed her, by fortunate chance, to conceal the paper, and counterfeit sleep, before Lady Lucretia and Isabella entered the room, and seemed surprised at finding their patient in a quiet slumber, when they had conceived an idea that they had heard a bustle in her chamber. They however concluded that they had been mutually mistaken; and that the noise had proceeded from a more distant part of the castle.

Victoria was fearful of venturing, during that night, to peruse the paper she had thus unexpectedly received, lest she should meet with an interruption which might prove full of danger to herself and her unknown friend. But the next day she met with a favourable opportunity to make herself mistress of its contents, which gave her no small surprise, and opened to her view a new train of ideas.

The mysterious note ran thus:

"Treachery has been practised, my sweet lady; but be calm and silent; tranquilize your mind to hear of strange events, *events* which, I trust, will, at a future period, restore you to happiness. The Marchioness di Oravilla, Leonora, daughter of the Chevalier de Sargens, is still living. She is the person who brought you this paper. The Marquis therefore cannot be your husband: but, if it is consistent with your honour that he should be thought so, (you will doubtless understand to what I allude,) the secret shall be kept inviolable; and I will sacrifice my own rights to establish your pretensions. Alonzo is not dead, but a captive in the vaults of this gloomy castle. The corpse you saw was not his, but the body of one of Oravilla's grooms, who fell in the attempt to execute one of his master's projects. He was then dressed in a suit of Alonzo's apparel, and ornamented with the ring, which was forcibly taken from the person of that nobleman, and the face of the deceased was then hacked to pieces, that the fraud might not be discovered.

"In a short time you shall receive a more accurate account of this dire machination. Let me conjure you (if it is not, as I have every reason to suppose, too late to give you this caution) to avoid consummating your nuptials with Oravilla. Free yourself from such a worthless character, and reserve your lovely person for Alonzo, whom, I hope will, with the divine permission, effect his escape, and obtain your liberation. But this must be done with the utmost caution: stratagem may be successful, but force cannot avail.

"Your accusing Oravilla of the deceptions and cruelty he has practised, will only urge him on to acts of greater outrage. For, alas! with horror I relate, that I am certain he would not hesitate to pursue any method, however dreadful, that would forward the completion of his lawless wishes.

"When you recover your health, I would advise you to counterfeit an inanity of mind; this will be accounted for as resulting from your fever, and will give you a favourable respite from the attentions of the Marquis, till something can be done, in order to extricate us from the perils with which we are surrounded. Destroy this paper, but retain in your mind the injunctions of the Marchioness Leonora."

Victoria immediately obeyed Leonora's mandate of destroying the paper, exclaiming, while she watched the flames devouring the precious scrawl that had assured her of the existence of her lamented Alonzo, "*Retain in my mind your injunctions!*" Yes, most amiable but infortunate lady; the sense of your words will never be erased from my brain, while life's vital current warms my heart.

Victoria, aware the dissimulation only could save her, acted her part with caution; and Oravilla left the castle for Madrid, supposing his wife to be under the influence of a serious degree of melancholy insanity; the physicians who attended her differing in their opinion, whether or not it was a confirmed malady.

From the time of the Marquis's departure, Victoria gave evident symptoms of recovery, which, however, took place very slowly, and it was nearly three months before she was able to leave her chamber.

During this period she received but three visits from the Marchioness Leonora, who gently reproached her for having flung off the innocent deception practised in regard to the sanity of her mind, as she was fearful her being pronounced in possession of her senses, might make the Marquis return from Madrid long before the time he appointed on leaving the castle. This Victoria, who was glad to fling off deception as soon as she was able, had not thought of. But the mention of such a circumstance, which was certainly not improbable, gave birth to the most uneasy sensations, and she eagerly intreated the farther advice of Leonora. No prospect of deliverance yet appeared, for Alonzo remained a solitary captive.

The Marchioness promised an early visit to Victoria, that they might plan some effectual mode of relieving themselves from the melancholy situation in which they were placed by the tyrannical owner of the castle, and the hapless fair one promised to pay implicit obedience to the sage counsels of her friend. Alas! Oravilla arrived at the gloomy mansion the next day, wholly unsuspected by the surprised Victoria, though not so to the Lady Lucretia, who had, unknown to her fair charge, held a constant correspondence with the Marquis and Don Manuel, who now accompanied him to the castle.

Our heroine was now driven to the very brink of despair. It was impossible to counterfeit a relapse so suddenly. As soon as she could escape from the ardent enquiries of Oravilla after her health, she fled to her own apartment, and made an attempt to open the sliding pannel, in hopes she might be able to meet with Leonora, and impart the danger which involved her: but it resisted all her efforts; and the entrance of Lady Lucretia, who came to seek her, obliged Victoria to return to the saloon, where dinner was soon afterwards served in.

The horror of Victoria's situation almost maddened her in reality. She was not the legal wife of Oravilla, but durst not avow her knowledge of that circumstance, though she was now trembling on the very brink of dishonour. Alonzo lived, and she feared to be lost to him for ever—for he was not free to save her.

Such was the watchfulness of Lucretia, that Victoria never was left one moment to herself, till the former attended her to the bridal chamber, which was remote from the one Victoria had occupied with the sliding pannel, being a state one, hung with violet-coloured velvet and silver fringe, and only parted from the north wing by a small gallery hung round with ancient armour.

The moment Victoria was left by herself, she thought of the story she had heard of Zayida, the lovely Moor, and her self destruction.

She shuddered at the idea of suicide; but such was the wretchedness of her fate, that she determined to precipitate herself into the Guadalquiver, in preference to being compelled to resign her person, to the arms of Oravilla. Impressed by these thoughts, she left her bed; and casting a thick shawl around her, rushed with precipitation to the northern wing of the castle, and passed on wildly through several of its gloomy and almost isolated chambers, with no other light than what the moon afforded through the Gothic casement of the thick framed windows.

She had just entered what appeared to have been a noble banqueting room, when she was convinced that she heard footsteps not far behind her. "I am pursued," softly sighed Victoria, and gave herself up for lost; at the same time she stepped behind a large worked screen, which opportunely stood near her, but with very faint hopes of concealment. Instead of a number of persons in search of her, as she expected, one man alone entered the room, bearing a couple of covered rush baskets, and a small lantern.

He passed on, and Victoria perceived he was not in quest of her, but employed on some mysterious affair that required the silence of the night. A sudden thought occupied her mind, and she cautiously followed through what seemed to her a labyrinth of turnings, windings, and descents, till they came to some spacious vaults. He entered a small arched door; Victoria still followed, but retreated back, and concealed herself behind an adjacent angle, on perceiving that the man was placing provisions on a table belonging to what seemed a well furnished apartment. When he came forth he pulled the door to, without locking it, and then pursued his way along a passage that branched out into an opposite direction from the one by which they had entered the vaults.

Victoria hesitated a moment, and then advancing courageously forward, entered the vault the man had quitted, and found her fond hopes realized. It was the subterraneous abode of the Marchioness Leonora, who lay within an arched recess, on a lowly but rather elegant couch, wrapped in the arms of sleep.

Victoria took her hand and kissed it. The motion awakened the lady, who started up in tremulous alarm; but perceiving who was her nocturnal visitor, her terror gave way to surprise, and she eagerly enquired how Victoria had found her way thither, and the cause of her coming. This was explained in a few words; and Leonora informed her, that the sliding pannel in the chamber, she believed, was unknown to any one but herself, as she had discovered it since her confinement. She had crept through a remote vault, and in the way to the stairs, by which you ascend to that aperture, was an arch not a yard high, through which you had to creep, having first removed some loose fragments of stone which lay before it, and concealed their entrance.

"On the first flight of stone stairs (continued Leonora) is a small square chamber antequely furnished, yet replete with every useful article. It appears to me to have been fitted up as a prison for some unfortunate person, by some former ruler of the castle; but I have every reason to believe that this secret place is unknown to any of the present inmates of the castle.

"From the time I first discovered you, my dear Victoria, I busied myself in cleaning and airing the secret chamber, and making every thing as comfortable as possible, in case you should be forced to seek a retreat with me, a measure I meant to impart to you at our next interview. It has happened unexpectedly; but yet, thank Heaven! I am not unprepared. I would advise you to repair to the secret chamber without delay. Take with you this lamp and warm wrapping gown; you will find some wine and dried fruit in the chamber, for I have, for some time past, reserved what I could possibly spare from my own allowance. I will accompany you as far as the arch, but I dare not venture farther with you, as it is possible the vaults will soon be searched, to see if you have by any means directed your flight thither, though I think they will scarcely harbour such a suspicion; yet it is best to guard against an event that would be fatal to us: you cannot miss your way, and the secret chamber is the first door you come to."

Victoria passed an uneasy night; her lamp burnt out, and she was left in total darkness, till Leonora visited her, when she heard that a search had been made in the vaults by Oravilla, and that he had retired, convinced that she was not there. Leonora then led her fair companion to a vault, secured by a strong grated door; a lamp was burning in the interior of the dungeon, and looking through the bars, she perceived a young man chained to the wall:—it was Alonzo who thus lingered out his existence!

They could not approach each other, but they mutually wept, and thanked Heaven for its kindness in allowing them to meet once more; and they then consulted with Leonora on the best method they could pursue to regain their liberty. Many schemes were devised, and at length one was adopted, which, though desperate in itself, and teeming with

danger to Victoria, seemed more probable than any other to be carried into execution with success. Victoria took an affectionate adieu of Alonzo, and returned to the secret chamber with Leonora. When they were seated, the latter said—"Though you have not expressed so much, you doubtless have a desire to know how I became a prisoner in this gloomy place, and reside here without ever attempting my escape, though I certainly might have tried the same plan which I have pointed out for you to pursue; but a few words will explain this seeming mystery. It has been my misfortune to outlive Oravilla's liking: I am a few years older than himself, and I fear mercenary motives at first prompted him to espouse me, though he behaved, for several years, with complacency towards me. I brought him no children; and this circumstance created a disgust, as on his having heirs depended a great accumulation of wealth to the family of Oravilla. Every day increased his hatred towards me, who certainly was an innocent offender, for I had then a most sincere affection for him. He brought me to this castle, and treated me in such a harsh manner, as brought on me a lowness of spirits, and so emaciated my frame, that I soon had not sufficient strength to quit my own apartment. My death was reported; a mock funeral took place; and I was assigned to this dungeon by the contrivance of Sebastino and his wife, the ungrateful Isabella; Oravilla, who employed them, being purposely absent. I was informed that my death was determined on, if I would not take an oath not to betray Oravilla; but if I vowed secrecy, my life should be spared, and my confinement made as tolerable as circumstances would allow.—I took the proposed oath, but with this reservation, that I should think myself absolved from it, if my cruel husband ever made the least attempt on my existence. I had not been here long when I found out the secret staircase, and the pannel; by this means I gained access, though always cautiously used, to every part of the castle, and had the opportunity of overhearing, by Isabella's conversation, every scheme of Oravilla, in regard to you and Alonzo, who has long been a captive here, and a melancholy sharer of my confinement, though his fate was harder than mine, by being enclosed in a dungeon; yet that did not deprive us of conversation. Last night I discovered that Oravilla again meditates my death; so my vow is now as the winds."

The next night, in pursuance of the plan agreed on, Victoria dressed herself, as nearly as the wardrobe of Leonora would admit, to resemble Zayida, the fair Moor; and, with a lamp in one hand, and a dagger in the other, passed through the secret pannel into the interior of the castle. The family were all gone to bed, and she passed into the outer hall without interruption; the porter, whose turn it was to watch, beheld the seeming apparition with such an extremity of terror, that he fainted, and Victoria obtained free egress from the castle. She then enveloped herself in a thin brown mantle, and hurried on, avoiding the cottages, till she came to a lowly posado, where she hired a guide for Salamanca, and, after innumerable difficulties, arrived safe at the house of Don Isidore, the father of Alonzo, in Madrid, and made him acquainted with all the mysteries of the Castle of Oravilla. After returning thanks to Heaven that his son was living, the good old Signior repaired to the king, and laid before him a statement of these facts. A guard was ordered to fetch Oravilla, and Don Manuel and his lady, to Madrid, and to rescue the prisoners. All this was to be done with precipitation and caution, lest Oravilla might deprive the latter persons of existence.

It was proved on the trial that took place, that Don Manuel and Lucretia were confederate of the Marquis in the concealment of his legal wife and Alonzo; and received a large sum of money for aiding him in his stratagems against Victoria. The latter were banished from the Spanish dominions, and the Marquis doomed to death; this sentence, by the generous intercessions of Leonora, Victoria, and Alonzo, was converted to perpetual imprisonment for the Marquis, who survived his disgrace but a twelvemonth. Victoria became the happy bride of Alonzo; Don Isidore and the Marchioness continued to reside with them in that peace, content, and elegant refinement, which illumine existence, and render it a blessing to the possessors.

THE END.

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