

THE  
MIDNIGHT BELL;  
OR THE  
*ABBÉY OF St. FRANCIS.*

AN ORIGINAL ROMANCE.

BY

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*The Midnight Bell, &c.*

DARKNESS had spread her sable mantle over the earth, as Ethelwina, conducted by her uncle the Baron de Valberg, in his carriage, passed by the borders of a wood, in their way to the Abbey of St. Francis, in the Province of Lorraine. At a distance she heard the solemn tolling of a bell; it drawing near midnight, caused her great alarm, for she well knew that the principal part of the Abbey had long been a pile of ruins, from the unrelenting hand of time; and that only one old female domestic resided there. Valberg stared on Ethelwina with extreme astonishment, blended with terror; for he had often heard it mentioned that a loud sounding bell tolled at midnight in the Abbey of St. Francis, but would never credit the assertion, though numbers had declared it to be the truth; but the stern purpose of his soul could not be changed. The terrified Ethelwina wept at the appalling sound, which thrilled with horror through every vein, and casting herself at the feet of her uncle, weeping and trembling, she implored him not to seclude her in a place so horrid. But her supplications were in vain; they seemed to add additional force to the stern will of the Baron de Valberg, who again repeated his original resolution, and he swore she should never be released from the dreadful Abbey till she became the wife of his friend the Marquis Combalstein. Finding all arguments vain, she ceased to urge her request; for she beheld her uncle's eye, and austere countenance, full of cruelty, and dreaded a further opposition to his will. She rose from her beseeching attitude, and observed a solemn silence, as she found nothing she could say would remove the stern purpose of his hard heart. And though her heart, naturally timorous, had always dreaded the Abbey, from the various strange reports of that place, the Baron had taken advantage of her fears, and fixed on that solitary abode to force her, if possible, to accede to his wishes; believing she would accede to any thing rather than be doomed to inhabit that dreary mansion. Ethelwina had made her last effort to soften his obdurate heart; she had an extreme dislike to the Marquis Combalstein, whose rude and disgusting treatment she had often experienced.— But now all hope was lost; and she regarded that place as an asylum of which the very mention was before attended with horror. In a few moments the carriage stopped at a small private door of the Abbey, (for the great door had not been opened for several years) which was opened by an old woman, whose appearance with a lamp in her hand, did not give comfort to the wretched Ethelwina, who tremblingly gave her hand to the Baron to assist her in alighting. During this interval the loud sounding bell tolled unusually sonorous, as if to mourn the arrival of the lovely victim of tyranny and persecution. Ethelwina, overcome with terror, sunk in his arms in a fainting fit, and he conveyed her into the apartments of Madame Claron, the housekeeper, though his soul seemed evidently oppressed with horror. Ethelwina being recovered, "I have not much time" said de Valberg, "to waste on this stupid baby of a girl, who, in opposition to my will and interest, refuses an alliance with one of the most powerful noblemen in the kingdom; my promise is given and I mean strictly to fulfil it. You, Madame Claron, have received your instructions. I charge you, if you value my favour, scrupulously to attend to them; only this have I to add; let the purple chamber be her dwelling—my reasons I will in future explain.—And you, Ethelwina, know that the price of your liberty is to comply to my wishes; till then you are a prisoner here; and when you find yourself inclined to obey me, I will come and release you." He then turned from her; Ethelwina, seeing him about to depart, rose to endeavour once more to alter his

stern resolve, but she found herself unequal to the task; she sunk on a chair overcome with grief, and saw him depart without being able to utter a syllable to prevent him.

Madame Claron did all in her power to soothe the charming girl, but without effect; Ethelwina had conceived a great dislike to her; for her uncle had painted her in the most dreadful colours; and the words of the Baron, "You, Madama Claron, have received your instructions," powerfully engrossed the mind of Ethelwina, as she firmly believed her to be a creature of the Baron of Valberg's, capable of assisting him in all his atrocities. Ethelwina desired to be conducted to the room her uncle had ordered, as she was in want of rest, and very unhappy. Madame Claron attended her to the purple chamber, and when they entered it, Ethelwina felt sensations that nearly overcame her, had it not been for the attentive kindness of Madame Claron, whom Ethelwina perceived with surprise, to have shed tears.

The apartment was extremely superb; the bed, the chairs, the window curtains, the hangings of the room, were all of purple velvet, fringed with gold, and every article in the noble apartment corresponded with the same richness. Ethelwina cast her eyes around her and sighed, while her swollen heart was ready to sink with terror, as she undressed and prepared to retire to bed, she thought she perceived Madame Claron deeply affected, who, on the moment she caught Ethelwina's eye, turned away, and pretended to trim the lamp, while a heavy sigh escaped her; this astonished Ethelwina, whose dread increased, for she fancied Madame Claron's instructions were perhaps to put a period to her existence, and therefore, unable to bear a longer silence, she said, "Ah, Madam, you weep, you sigh; you see before you a miserable unfortunate, and yet perhaps consent to be my uncle's agent in all his cruel designs; but I forgive you, you are dependant on him; I do not wish you to forfeit his favour, but you might perhaps pity the unfortunate orphan whom he pursues with unrelenting severity."

"I do pity you," said Madame Claron; your unmerited ill-treatment excited my tears. True, my instructions are very severe, but my heart received an additional pang, when the cruel baron ordered you to be confined to this apartment, where——" and she hesitated—— "Where what? exclaimed Ethelwina, starting up. "I suppose" replied Madama Claron, "you have heard of the dreadful fate of your unfortunate mother, the Baroness de Valberg"— "Once" said Ethelwina, "a servant of my uncle's hinted some sad mysterious tales concerning her, but my uncle overheard him, and he was sent to a foreign country as a soldier, and something ever since that time has struck me that what he said was true; and my uncle to conceal some improper transaction, tore the poor fellow from his native home and dear friends."

"Alas! Perhaps indeed," said Madame Claron, "my orders concerning you did not inspire me with that uneasiness his late words did, when he ordered you to be confined to this chamber. Wicked man! here he knows your mother, the beautiful Henrietta, was murdered!" "Murdered!" exclaimed Ethelwina, starting from her seat with horror, "is it possible that you are really acquainted with the awful truth? What a miserable wretch has the Baron made me; O, Madame, if you really possess that pity for my forlorn state your words seem to

pronounce, I beseech you, tell me what you know of my mother.” “It is now too late,” said Madame Claron, with a heavy sigh, “you had better retire to rest,—my orders are not to speak to you, or give you any information, but I am sorry for your distresses; I will take an opportunity of having some further conversation with you.” Madam Claron then bade her good night, and quitted the chamber very abruptly, leaving Ethelwina overcome with astonishment and grief.

Ethelwina hastily undressed herself and went to bed, her troubled spirits and agitated body wanted repose, and she tried to court the friendly aid of sleep, to chase away a number of terrifying ideas from her mind, but vain was the effort, sleep fled her pillow, and Ethelwina passed a restless night. She sighed at a recollection of her unmerited misfortunes, and she fancied the sigh was repeated; she started up, being almost certain the sigh could not be fancy. Again she heard a sound, as if uttered by some one in deep affliction: while she was attentively listening to ascertain whether it was repeated, she thought she saw a tall figure glide backward and forward, and at last seemed to go out at the wainscot; alarmed at a sight that chilled her timorous heart, and unknowing what to do, she threw herself down on the bed; and covered herself with the clothes; terror took away every sense, and overcome with the most afflicting apprehensions, she remained till day light broke in at the casements. The welcome return of day chased away some of her dread, and she had leisure to reflect on her uncle’s conduct, and from the manner of Madama Claron, she had been made to dread her; and Ethelwina firmly believed Madame Claron was a person so entirely devoted to her uncle’s interest, that she had taught herself to hate the very sight of her. Madame Claron’s behaviour the preceding night, had driven some of those unfavourable ideas from her mind, though she still felt a terror at the thought of being what she thought a prisoner. When she arose she proceeded to examine that part of the chamber where the person who so greatly terrified her in the night seemed to vanish, but there was no appearance of any door or opening, which added to her surprise; she also on trying her chamber door, found it fastened, which convinced her her former idea was right, and that she was a prisoner, and her full heart found relief in tears. While she sat down revolving in her mind the various ills she was doomed to suffer, as also to wait till Madama Claron thought proper to attend her, and bring her some provisions, of which she really stood in need, for she had not tasted any thing during the whole of the preceding day.

Before I proceed any further it will be necessary to acquaint the reader with the Baron de Valberg’s motive for treating his niece in so strange a manner. Gustavus de Valberg was the second son of the Baron the Valberg; Adolphus the eldest inherited his father’s title and virtues, and was universally beloved. Gustavus possessed none of those exalted sentiments, which were the inmates of Adolphus’s breast, on the contrary he strove to impress a terror on the heart of every beholder, by a very morose manner of behaviour: ambition and avarice were the most predominant passions of his soul; and he often upbraided fortune in not bestowing on him the title of Baron de Valberg. Adolphus at the age of twenty-two married a very amiable young lady, by whom he had a daughter, Ethelwina, (the subject of this History) the Baron dying soon after his son’s marriage, the title devolved on him, but he did not live long to enjoy it, for he soon went into a deep decline, and died when his infant daughter was

only five months old, leaving his lady a most disconsolate widow, and Ethelwina to the guardianship of his brother. Gustavius now possessed himself of his brother's title, though in reality his fortune and title descended to Ethelwina, which occasioned Lady de Valberg to remonstrate with them on the usurpation. This highly offended Gustavus, and he made a solemn vow not to be called to account by a woman; his next step was to have Ethelwina separated from her mother under pretence that his brother had left the child to his care; this lady de Valberg strongly objected to, but without succeeding in her wish of retaining her daughter, for the Baron tore her away, leaving the lady frantic with affliction.

The chateau of the Baroness was another principal inducement for him to treat the Lady ill. He was determined to have it, let the event be what it would, and having been informed that his sister-in-law expressed great diapprobation at his conduct, he formed the plan of having her seized as she was one evening returning from a visit, and conveyed to the Abbey of St. Francis, an ancient seat long since gone to decay; the Baroness was imprisoned several weeks before she knew that her captivity was owing to the Baron's order; she saw but two persons who brought her provisions, but never spoke to her concerning her affairs. At the expiration of two months, the Baron went to the Abbey with a writing, which he desired her to sign, if she wished for liberty; the purport of the paper was a renunciation of the title and estate of de Valberg to him, setting aside her daughter's claim, and her own portion, for which he would allow her a yearly salary of 500 louis, for the support of herself and child, and that she might retire to what part she thought proper for a residence; but on the contrary if she refused, he should condemn her to perpetual imprisonment, and bade her be quick in deciding.

The Baroness was not long in determining—she saw through the villainous designs of the Baron, and positively declared she would support her rights, and those of Ethelwina, as long as she lived, spurring his infamous proposal with the contempt it so justly deserved. And she desired he would send her daughter, to be a sharer in her confinement, as she plainly saw all her earthly comfort must derive from the company of the child. The Baron sternly denied; declaring she should never see Ethelwina more—and he hastily quitted the apartment, leaving Lady de Valberg petrified with amazement and horror. Three nights after this event, the Baroness was found dead in her bed. Some person or persons had gained admission at a private door of the Abbey, and pursuing their way to the Lady's chamber, left her covered with wounds. Madame Claron was, at the time, housekeeper at the Abbey. She immediately sent word to the Baron, of what had happened; and he ordered her to have the body buried, with suitable honors to her rank—and desired Madame Claron to give the necessary orders for the funeral, as he could not attend.

After this event, which freed him from one of his opponents, the Baron appeared to be very happy.—Ethelwina was brought up in his castle, but he never shewed any signs of regard for her; on the contrary, his severe manner and address, always struck a terror to her heart, and vain were all her efforts to please him. The Baron was never married, but he passed his time in the most licentious pursuits: he became a professed gambler, and scarce ever spoke a good word of, or to any body. Thus Ethelwina grew to be eighteen years of age, and

from the stern and remote manner in which she had been brought in, being very seldom allowed to be in her uncle's company, she had never yet seen the man that had made the least impression on her heart.—About this time the Baron lost great part of his estate at play, to the Marquis Combalstein; who having two or three times, seen Ethelwina, became enamoured of her. He proposed to the Baron, that if he could prevail on his niece to give him her hand, he would not desire the payment of the debt. This offer was too advantageous to be rejected, and he promised the Marquis the fair Ethelwina.

Before the Baron acquainted his niece with the proposal, he ordered every thing necessary for the celebration of the wedding—and Ethelwina wondered what all the bustle was about; but when a very elegant new dress of white satin and silver, was brought her, she was informed of the unwelcome intelligence. She flew to her uncle, and throwing herself at his feet, with tears besought him not to sacrifice her happiness to a person, for whom he felt no other sentiment but the most invincible dislike. The Baron insultingly smiled at the mention of happiness and dislike; he was a stranger to the tender feeling of the heart, and did not consider Ethelwina had any right to be consulted; and he gave his thoughts on the subject in so free and rude a manner, that the tender Ethelwina could no longer suffer her ears to be wounded with sentiments so contrary to her feelings, and the affection she persisted ought to exist in the married state; and while the Baron vowed she should be the wife of the Marquis, Ethelwina positively declared she never would give her hand but where she could give her heart. She then retired to her chamber, to give vent to her sorrows, at the sudden arbitrary commands of the Baron.

The Baron plainly saw that he must act with caution, or all would be lost; he was not prepared with the sum for payment, and he meant the debt to be discharged by Ethelwina; but as avarice grew no bounds, so a new thought struck him, for he thought he had now an opportunity of arriving at the summit of his wishes, the title of Baron de Valberg; for which reason, he determined to tell the Marquis that Ethelwina had no objection to the marriage, but that if he loved her as he professed, he must comply with her request of signing the right and title of de Valberg, to her uncle, and on no other condition would she listen to his love. The Marquis was glad there was no other objection, he being very rich and anxious to receive the beautiful Ethelwina, no longer hesitated, but wrote a resignation of Ethelwina's claim immediately, according to the words dictated by the Baron, which was to be delivered to the Baron on the day of the Marquis's marriage. Thus was the lovely maid to be sacrificed to her uncle's ambition and tyranny. The Marquis was of all men the greatest aversion to Ethelwina, she had heard the servants mention so many disgusting traits in his character, that filled her with the most afflicting concern when she heard that she was to be his wife. He was far advanced in years, and had all his life lived in a most profligate manner, associating with the most abandoned females, a great gambler, a scoffer at religion and morality; he possessed neither gratitude nor generosity, and could see the most afflicting distresses in various shapes, without feeling the least moved; she knew that if she mentioned not feeling any of those affectionate sentiments, from which domestic happiness should flow, the Marquis who never felt any thing of the kind, would laugh at her ridiculous and romantic notions, therefore it would be of no use to speak to him. At length the fatal day arrived, and when the Baron

insisted on her performing her part of the engagement, she positively refused; numerous were the arguments the Baron urged, but they had no effect, and after an altercation of some hours, she obtained a week longer to reconcile herself to her destiny, to the great disappointment of the Marquis; but Ethelwina, who never meant to fulfil the contract, visited her uncle next morning, and renewed her prayers to set aside the intended marriage. The Baron now appeared to coincide with Ethelwina, and in his turned desired to consider of the affair till eight o'clock; Ethelwina flattered herself de Valburgh's heart was softened, discarded every injurious doubt, making herself happy in idea till that time, when she heard her uncle knock at her chamber door, which on opening, she perceived he was accompanied by the Marquis, who left the Baron to say what he thought proper to his niece. Terror seized every faculty at the sight, he left no room for words, but immediately vowed, that unless she consented to marry the Marquis, and agree to the generous propositions which he had offered, she should be shut up for life in the ruined Abbey of St. Francis. Ethelwina, who had often listened till almost thunderstruck at the horrid account of that place, sunk into a terrific trembling at the mention of his purpose, but feeling no kind of tenderness whatever towards the Marquis, declared she would prefer the desolated Abbey, than to be the wife of the Marquis Combalstein.

The Baron left her in the greatest anger, and she did not see him till the clock had struck ten, when he called and informed her the carriage was waiting to convey her to her future residence he mentioned, the Abbey of St. Francis, which chilled Ethelwina's soul with horror. In vain she intreated, wept, prayed, if only for one day, the inflexible Baron insisted on immediate compliance, and would not quit her chamber till she had decided, which was in preference of the Abbey; and then he stayed till she collected a small parcel of wearing apparel, during which he vented the cruelest epithets on the unfortunate object of his tyranny.

As Ethelwina descended the stairs, she beheld the Marquis, but the sight of him was too much for her to support, and she turned her head away, certain that from the abandoned character which she had heard he had possessed for many years, that her life with him must be miserable. Seated in the carriage by the side of the stern de Valberg, they arrived at the Abbey of St. Francis, without any other occurrence that what has been related.

Ethelwina, who anxiously awaited the arrival of Madame Claron, counted every slow paced moment till the hour of ten, when she heard her approaching. Ethelwina, whose heart was full of the strange figure she had seen in her chamber, made several enquiries, but Madame Claron could give no information of who or what it was, as the Abbey was inhabited by no one but herself: a solemn melancholy possessed the features of the unhappy Ethelwina, which prevented her partaking the breakfast which Madame Claron had provided, and she sought for an explanation of the mystery of the night, in the expressive countenance of the housekeeper, which betrayed some confusion; after a little hesitation Madame Claron seemed to commiserate the misfortunes of the ill-fated girl, and she asked her if she would like to take her meals in her (Madame Claron's) room, as she was welcome, though such an indulgence would, if known, highly enrage the Baron, who had commanded her never to let Ethelwina quit her own chamber. Ethelwina thanked her profusely for the kind offer, and

accepted it; and when she accompanied Madame Claron to her own sitting room, a very neat room, she could not help expressing various remarks on her uncle's harsh conduct, which drew from the pitying bosom of Madame Claron the following words, "Wonder not, my sweet girl, that you find here some one who compassionates your sorrows; my husband was the friend of your father, and died about the same time; my property was, by an unhappy bankruptcy, destroyed, which reduced me to accept the offer of your uncle to be housekeeper of the Abbey of St. Francis; my friendship for your mother made me hope that by some unforeseen event, I might be of service to her, as your uncle had treated her very ill; my ardent desires however were frustrated, yet it seems to please heaven to allow me to soften the miserable hours of her unfortunate imprisoned child." Ethelwina looked on Madame Claron, and tears of thankfulness rolled down her lovely cheeks, and prevented her reply, whilst Madame Claron suddenly left the room and Ethelwina, to partake in that which was so plenteously provided. She much wondered at the kindness of Madame Claron, of whom she had once conceived so ill, but believed it to be one of those surprising events of providence in favour of the unfortunate, and with these reflections her mind became composed.

Various were the ideas which floated in the mind of this unhappy girl, and occupied it at intervals during the day till Madame Claron returned; her kind offers had much surprised Ethelwina, "My dear girl," said she, when she entered her chamber, "I sincerely commiserate your afflictions; and although it is opposite to the wishes of the Baron, I cannot help applauding your resolution. The Marquis is a most detestable being, habituated to every vice, and a stranger to every good action; he has a servant who is as base as himself, and is the pander of his master's pleasures; he was never known to entertain an affection for any one, but has been the ruin and cause of misery to numbers. And I hope no threats will compel you to do that which will be detrimental to your future peace; time may soften your sorrows, and release you from oppression. Your appearance has caused a great concern in my heart, and be assured I will forewarn you of every approaching evil that comes to my knowledge; and as your friendless state makes you dependant on the Baron, strive to conquer useless regrets, and rely on the will of providence for your future destiny. During your stay here you are welcome to come and sit with me; it may amuse your melancholy hours; and you will have no reason to dread meeting the Baron, for he never comes here without previously informing me; and if he should, there are places sufficient to conceal yourself, till you regain the purple chamber; for it would be almost death if he knew I indulged you in such a liberty; as he has commanded you to be closely imprisoned, but hope for the best." Ethelwina could not sufficiently express her thanks at this kind offer, and being assured of Madame Claron's friendship, she began to strive to feel content; when evening came she repaired to her chamber; and morning brought her to partake refreshment, and the company of the good Madame Claron; and Ethelwina often reproached herself for suffering one unfriendly suspicious thought to enter her mind against her.

Thus time passed away for near a month, Ethelwina had no cause to complain of her confinement; Madame Claron lived a very recluse life; she was very seldom troubled with visitors, for the Abbey of St. Francis struck a terror to all around; but when any one came Ethelwina retired to her apartment. Only one lady, who seemed on a very friendly footing



with Madame Claron, ever beheld her; this lady usually visited them every day, and Madame Claron scrupled not to relate some anecdotes concerning Ethelwina's situation. As time advanced, this lady, whose name was Beaumont, became particularly attached to Ethelwina, and when she bade them adieu for the night, they parted with reluctance.

Ethelwina in time grew quite happy at St. Francis, for she had long ceased to consider her uncle as a near and dear relation; his hasty temper always put her in terror; the only disagreeable circumstance that occurred was the solemn tolling of the bell, which, though custom had rendered familiar, always struck an awe upon her spirits, and her enquiries concerning the cause could never be answered. Madame Claron declared it had always tolled constantly at midnight, during the time she had lived there, which was above seventeen years, and many people said it had done so several years previous thereto—it was a mystery no one could fathom.

Ethelwina being anxious to learn if she could discover the real cause of the bell's tolling, determined to quit her chamber after she had bid Madame Claron adieu for the night, and as the moon shone very bright, was in hopes of exploring some parts of the abbey, that might lead to explain the mystery; accordingly she ventured into the Abbey garden, which was in the center of the cloisters, and in the middle stood a stately tomb, but who can describe the agitation of her feelings, and the various afflicting thoughts that swelled her tortured bosom, when on the tomb she beheld the inscription, and her father's name! After gazing a few minutes in the greatest astonishment, she turned from the object that created those dreadful emotions. The moon shone extremely bright, and she directed her steps across the pile of building, till she came to the great arched gateway, over which stood the tower: while she stood viewing the beauty of the noble gothic arch, the hour of midnight struck, and immediately the awful bell heavily sounded. Ethelwina looked fearfully round, but could perceive no one; she then left the gateway and walked through the cloisters, ruminating on the mysterious occurrence of the bell. In about ten minutes it ceased, and Ethelwina thought she beheld a form clad in white, gliding between the cloisters on the opposite side; she stood still to behold the spectre, and it seemed to vanish in the centre of the cloisters. Ethelwina now began to tremble with dread, and was hastening across the garden to reach the back door, when, just as she approached the tomb, the same mysterious form issued from thence, and slowly glided by her, which gave her spirits such a shock, that she was obliged to clasp hold of a cross that stood near her, to save herself from falling. When she was a little recovered from this alarm, she cast her eye on the tomb: it seemed a noble pile of marble, with no place to admit any one: Ethelwina quickened her pace, and arrived safe in her chamber, determining to discard every idea of searching for the cause, as she really trembled with terror; and when she arrived in the purple chamber, the mysterious spectacle was walking there, but soon disappeared to her astonishment through the wainscot, where she beheld a similar circumstance the first night of her being in the Abbey of St. Francis. She secured the door and oppressed with horror, threw herself upon the bed without undressing, and passed a night of great inquietude. When morning came she hastened to Madame Claron's room, who could not help taking notice of her uncommon dejection; Ethelwina complained of the head ach, and avoided explaining the real cause, in the afternoon they had a visit from Madame

Beaumont, who seemed much concerned to find Ethelwina unwell; Madame Beaumont did not quit them till after ten o'clock, and while she was taking leave of the inhabitants of the Abbey, a loud knocking at the gate led Madame Claron to fear the sudden arrival of the Baron, and Ethelwina flew to conceal herself, while Madame Beaumont waited near the apartment of Madame Claron, the latter called loudly to know who was there, and was answered by a deep groan, at length some one called, "for the love of heaven give some assistance, or death must quickly ensue."

Madame Claron, willing to assist the unfortunate, and forgetting her own danger, immediately opened the door, and found a young gentleman faint and bleeding, supported in the arms of another, with a drawn sword in his hand; they were admitted, and Madame Claron was informed they had been attacked on the way by robbers, who had stripped them of their cash, and they narrowly had escaped with their lives; assistance being necessary, Madame Beaumont and Ethelwina soon joined them, and after examining and bathing the wounds of the young gentleman, whose name was Delville, found it necessary to prepare a bed for him, as it was impossible he could be removed that night; the person who was with him proved to be his servant, and he waited to attend on him; Madame Claron gave hopes that rest and care might make him so far recovered as to be able to remove in the morning, for they were eight miles from any town, and the nearest house was a small one about half-a-mile off, occupied by Madame Beaumont. "I am sorry to say it is so," replied the servant, "for at Lusigni my master resides,—he is on his travels, and therefore we are only at an hotel; but venturing hither was occasioned by hearing the people of the house mention the tolling of the bell at the Abbey of St. Francis; my master would not give credit to the idle tale, and was resolved to come to the Abbey to hear it; just as we arrived at the extremity of the ruined wall, three men started upon us with drawn swords; we were obliged to defend ourselves, they robbed us of all we had, and we were compelled to fly for assistance to where we saw a light, and have to thank you for your kindness." Madame Claron expressed her sorrow, and Delville was put to bed; she gave him some wine, which seemed to revive him, and hinted her fears lest her receiving a stranger into the Abbey should come to the knowledge of the Baron; the servant assured her he should take all possible care to keep it a secret, and at midnight the ladies bade them good night. Madame Claron prevailed on Madame Beaumont to sleep with her lest she should meet with the robbers on the way home. Ethelwina retired, and soon after the midnight bell tolled louder than it had done since the night of her arrival at the Abbey; her heart was on the alarm for the unfortunate stranger, and she prayed for his recovery.

When she entered the room in the morning, she beheld Madame Claron seated with Delville and his servant just going to breakfast, he was much recovered, though he looked pale; he rose to receive her, and returned thanks for her kind attention to him the night before. A rosy blush overspread her countenance, and she felt her heart ill at ease, for Delville in one moment had taken possession of it; but in return she was mistress of his, for he beheld her with eyes of ardent love—she congratulated him on his amendment, and after breakfast she withdrew to weep unseen, for she found that Delville was the only person on whom she had bestowed a favourable thought, and she knew impossibility of ever being his. While she sat lost

in thought, the servant departed to ease the minds of the people where they lived, on account of their absence during the night; but as Madame Claron feared the walk would be too fatiguing for Delville, he was easily prevailed upon to continue till the next day, the more especially as he hoped to have the happiness of the fair Ethelwina's company. He enquired of Madame Claron if she was her daughter, to which she answered in the negative, and gave him some account of her situation upon his promise of secrecy, for she had a great regard for the unhappy girl, and could not refrain lamenting the sacrifice she was doomed to be made to her uncle's ambition and avarice—this intelligence sunk deep into the breast of Delville, who felt the most tender concern on her account, and his heart longed to call her his. To see Ethelwina with indifference was impossible, he wished for her return, and soon determined on rescuing her from the fate designed her, if she would accept the offer he meant to make of his hand and fortune.

During the afternoon he had an opportunity of conversing with the mistress of his soul, and he found her manners so truly amiable, that he with difficulty could conceal the sentiments of his heart, which he thought necessary for a few days, till he could perceive whether his company was agreeable to Ethelwina.

Madame Beaumont joined the party towards evening, and could not help observing the marked attention of Delville towards Ethelwina, and fancied the young stranger was not indifferent in her eyes.

After Delville had retired to the chamber he slept in the preceding night, and Madame Beaumont was about to depart, she joined Madame Claron in rallying Ethelwina on the conquest of Delville's affections, and asked, her if she thought she could prefer the handsome young stranger to the Marquis Combalstain. Ethelwina blushed and replied, "The kindness which I have so unexpectedly received from Madame Claron, committed, as I am, a prisoner to her care, demands that I should answer with sincerity, and by Madame Beaumont's inquiries I am led to suppose she would not think it improper if I preferred the stranger." "I admire the preference, said Madame Beaumont, pressing her hand, "and if he should declare his sentiments, and ask you for his wife, I should feel happy, for I see no other remedy to save you from the Marquis." Ethelwina smiled, and bidding them good night, hastened to her chamber, where the remembrance of the young stranger engrossed all her thoughts, and banished sleep till the dawn of day. Delville also passed a restless night; the image of the charming Ethelwina could not be banished from his mind, and he resolved, as soon as he met her in the morning, to declare his passion, and flattered himself his suit would not be rejected.

Delville at an early hour arose, and had a long conversation with Madame Claron, concerning her fair charge, and to her he first expressed the sentiments of his heart, and received permission to pay his addresses to Ethelwina, who did not appear till near noon, when he took the opportunity of confessing his passion. Ethelwina pleaded the will of her uncle; but Delville declared he thought she had no reason to obey him, who had determined the destruction of her happiness, for the sake of enjoying her title and fortune, which he understood was to be resigned to the Marquis. She hesitated, for the truth of the Baron's

designs had never been known to her, and she wondered how Delville became acquainted with the circumstance; however she replied to his enquiries by assuring him that all men hitherto were totally indifferent to her, and that he alone possessed her esteem. He then desired permission to visit her at the Abbey, which was granted, if Madame Claron thought proper.

In the afternoon the conversation turned on the circumstance of the bell, and Delville said if he remained there another night, (which he fancied he must be indebted for, as he felt too unwell to walk home, and did not wish a carriage to be brought, lest Madame Claron should receive any injury for the kindness she had bestowed on him) he would convince himself whether there was any grounds for believing the tolling of the bell to be supernatural. Madame Claron advised him to renounce such a thought, while Ethelwina trembled, for she recollected the figure in the cloisters, the same which rose out of the tomb, and which she had twice seen in her chamber, and she dreaded his temerity; his servant who was present encouraged him in the desire, saying he had discovered a way into the garden, and would be there to meet him; Madame Claron trembled at the idea, and begged to be shewn the opening that led there, and the party attended her. She was much surprised to find at the extremity of the garden a large aperture in the wall, seemingly new made, and, with the assistance of Delville and his servant, placed some boards against it: the servant suggested that the breach in the wall must be by design, and therefore it was necessary to watch that night, lest any accident should happen by robbers, who might take advantage of the lonely situation of the Abbey, for near that spot the three men attacked his master and himself. After a short hesitation, Madame Claron said he had better remain with his master, and if any evil was threatened they would be in less danger together.

They had scarce returned to the sitting room, when the whole party was obliged to fly to the separate apartments each occupied, by the sudden arrival of the Baron de Valberg's carriage and four. Madame Claron received him, and answered his enquiries concerning her charge. "I am astonished" said he, "she does not answer to my determination; I expected her compliance long ago; the Marquis will be put off no longer; the solitude and horrors of this place I thought would have made her immediately consent; but near two months has passed, and she has neither complained, nor agreed to my resolves,—I will see her,—if she continues regardless, I must try other means." Madame Claron conducted him to her, and Ethelwina tremblingly received him; he began by venting on her the most cruel reproaches, and vowed that within three days she should return home, and be married to the Marquis. The soul racking thought overpowered her, and she wept as she covered her face with her hands to conceal her grief from him, who had neither pity nor feeling. He walked about the chamber, examining every place, and finding fault with every thing that came in his way, and after desiring her to return to his castle, and comply with his request on the evening of the third day; he left the apartment, scarce deigning to speak to Madame Claron any more than that Ethelwina was to return home in three days, as he found her still opposite to his wishes,—he then departed.

Madame Claron was much distressed at this command, and her eyes followed the carriage, as the horses swift as lightning, flew up the hill, and was soon out of sight, she soon summoned the fugitive party to the parlour; Madame Beaumont wept, Delville and his servant looked much distressed, for each had heard the stern threat of the Baron; Ethelwina did not appear, which caused Madame Claron to visit her, and found her oppressed with grief, and determined not to leave the purple chamber: Madame Claron's return to the party drew from Delville a declaration that if she consented to a marriage with him, he would prove her lawful protector; Madame Claron assured him she doubted Ethelwina's compliance on so short an acquaintance, and they with great difficulty prevailed on her to return to the parlour, where a stupefaction at the anticipation of future evils seemed to have troubled her brain. All that Deville could urge of affection or hope had no effect, Madame Beaumont begged her to be resigned, and trust to heaven: Madame Claron was lost in a variety of conjectures, and night drew on when Madame Beaumont bade them adieu: the wretched Ethelwina repaired to her apartment, where she gave herself up to grief, and did not retire to rest till the tolling of the midnight bell informed her of the hour, when she threw herself on the bed without undressing.

Within a quarter of an hour of midnight, Delville, distracted with the sudden determination of the Baron, and alarmed for the fate of Ethelwina, wandered forth into the garden, he cared not whither—at that time he forgot the cause he designed, of searching the mystery of the midnight bell, and intirely occupied with thinking of Ethelwina, walked across the garden towards the great gateway; here the thought of losing her for ever heightened his distress, and his servant in vain strove to console him: finding a recess in the place he sat down with Eustace beside him, and gave a loose to the thoughts that oppressed him. The bell began to toll, which roused his attention, he sat listening till it ceased, when by the glimpse of the moon, he observed two persons wrapped up in dark cloaks, come and stand under the gateway, whose conversation he and Eustace overheard, and proved to be as follows:

“Are you certain that the door of the chamber is unfastened?”

“How can it be otherwise? I unfastend it myself, yesterday,” was the reply. “You may easily take her down the secret stairs, or if not, if you were all night in her chamber she would be glad to agree to the marriage, to save her character.”

“But how shall I know which is the purple chamber?” “Oh,” replied the other, “nothing so easy.—Observe yonder door—by some strange neglect, faithful to our wishes it stands open. On the left hand, soon after you enter the passage, you will find a broad flight of stairs; ascend them, they will lead into a long gallery, at the end is a rich painted window, on the right hand close to it you will find a door which enters into a concealed part of Ethelwina's chamber. Now I rely, Marquis, on your promise, the resignation of the title of de Valberg, and half her fortune.”

“There are the papers,” said the other, presenting something, “and if they are incomplete, call on me in the morning.” They then parted.

Delville was alarmed at the apparent destruction of Ethelwina, and was anxious to follow the persons, who moved towards the door which he had left open, while Eustace watched the motions of the person who lingered about the cloisters. And as he followed the disguised person unperceived along the cloisters, a female form habited in long white vestments, caused the person he followed to start. "Murderous villain!" exclaimed a voice, "how darest thy wicked steps to tread this seat of treachery and blood! The blood of de Valberg and Henrietta call aloud for vengeance, but the measure of thy crimes are full, and Ethelwina, poor hapless orphan, becomes the victim of thy unsatiate ambition and unprincipled treachery."

This saying, the person whom Eustace had followed, sunk senseless on the ground, while the mysterious spectre stalked towards the tomb and disappeared.—Eustace was much surprised, but looked to the fallen victim, who scarcely breathed. Finding a small room near the end of the wall where Madame Claron had endeavoured to repair the breach, he drew him into it and closed the door, which had a key on the outside; and when he looked at the broken wall, found all the boards removed which Madame Claron had placed—this made Eustace believe the person in custody was the offender; he then hastened to his master lest he might want assistance. At the door his ears were assailed by groans and shrieks, and as he ascended towards the painted window found his master engaged with a man who sunk beneath his powerful sword, in a room near it, just as he arrived—Ethelwina at that moment threw herself against him, exclaiming, "Oh, if you have pity, save me from this dread, this—!" and she sunk in his arms. Eustace led her back to a seat, while he looked to his master. "I am well," said Delville, "I have saved Ethelwina, thank heaven; her opponent is unable to distress her more; let us secure him." At this moment a noise was heard at Ethelwina's door, and the voices of Madame Claron and Madame Beaumont were heard, the door was opened, and they appeared with lights, while terror transfixed every countenance—they flew to assist Ethelwina, while Delville gave an account of what had passed under the gateway of the Abbey, which induced him to come to her chamber. Upon examining the wounded man, who still bled, Madame Claron saw it was the Marquis Combalstein; he instantly confessed the whole of the proceeding, as he believed himself dying—the Baron had brought him to the Abbey, regardless of the misery of Ethelwina, and having declared her aversion, instigated him to enter her apartments while she slept, believing that when she awoke and found the Marquis in her bed, she would be glad to consent to the demands of her uncle, who having lost all his fortune by gambling, received a promise from the Marquis, that upon the marriage of his niece, the Baron was to enjoy the title and half the estates.—Here he fainted, and was conveyed to another room, while every assistance was given that was in their power to restore him. Ethelwina was conveyed to Madame Claron's room, and continued under the care of Madame Beaumont, while Madame Claron with Delville, followed Eustace to where the Baron de Valberg was secured—as they entered the place, he exclaimed, "Save me! save me! from the dreadful spectre of Henrietta!—Oh! torture me no more, I will confess all."

Delville assured him he did not wish to trouble him, but begged he would be composed, and remove to the Abbey. "Never, never," he cried, "What! where Henrietta, my brother's wife, was murdered? No, never more can I enter that shocking place." "My Lord,"

said Madame Claron, “your surprise me, I have known you mourned the unfortunate Henrietta, but your words petrify me—was she really murdered?” “By my command,” he replied, “I had her imprisoned in the purple chamber, (where I knew any one could enter unknown to you) which has two doors; one I opened (as I did this day when I visited my niece, purposely to leave no obstacle to the Marquis’s designs,) to let in a midnight assassin! she died by his hand! in yonder tomb, the tomb of my brother, she was buried, and from that tomb I saw her arise and reproach me for my conduct—nay, I am sure the man that was with me, heard it also,” “I did,” replied Eustace. “There is an end of all then,” he replied—“the marriage of Ethelwina with the Marquis was the only means whereby my ill gotten fortune could be restored.—My brother suffered by a slow poison, which was supposed to be a decline—I usurped his title, murdered his wife, and was about to sacrifice his child to avarice and ambition! but fate steps between—I must no more triumph in wickedness. When you left me, (addressing himself to Eustace) despair and horror seized me; I have always carried poison about me, and dreading the truth must soon be revealed, I swallowed it, to prevent the power of justice; now may Ethelwina triumph, for her oppressor is no more,—behold the reward of the wicked!” and he immediately expired.

After this scene of woe, they returned to the Abbey, where they found Ethelwina enfolded in the arms of Madame Beaumont; a gentle smile suffused her cheek as Madame Claron, Delville, and Eustace advanced. “This eventful night,” said she, “had restored to me my mother; I shall be happy now, let all the world frown on me besides.” Deville besought Madame Beaumont to reveal the mystery which she immediately began. “After the death of my husband he was brought to the Abbey to be buried, and was interred in the tomb in the centre of the garden; his cruel brother took Ethelwina from me, assigning his reasons were by order of my husband; soon after he had me brought here, where I remained two months before I knew by whose order I was confined, for I only saw the men that brought me, and they refused to answer my inquiries. At length the Baron arrived, and brought a writing which he insisted I should sign; it was a renunciation of Ethelwina’s right and title, setting aside my claim to my portion, for which he meant to allow us 500 louis a year, and for me to retire where I pleased; I spurned the proposal with disdain, when he told me I should never more see my daughter, and if I persisted in refusing, I should end my days in imprisonment, I told him I preferred it, rather than the heiress of de Valberg should become a beggar—and he left me, petrified with horror at his villainous intentions: three nights after I heard some one opening a door which led to my room, (the purple chamber) fortunately I had retired out of bed to a closet for some water, as I was very thirsty; from thence I saw the men that brought me there, enter a part of the room where I did not remember seeing any door, they run to the bed, and plunging their daggers into it, declared that Lady Henrietta was dead, and they should receive a great reward from the Baron. A few heavy sighs escaped me at the discovery of his villainy, and made me fear my retreat would be found out; however they went away, and I soon saw the place by which they gained admittance, and secured it on the inside, when I sunk almost lifeless on the floor, at the miraculous escape. As the door of the chamber was fastened, I determined to go out at this secret place the next day, hoping to gain my liberty; I descended the stairs, and having passed through a number of apartments, I saw a door open, I was afraid to venture near it least I should meet the men, but to my extreme surprise and joy,

I found Madame Claron, an old friend of mine, and then I found that I was in the Abbey of St. Francis; her astonishment may be imagined when I informed her of what had passed. By her advice I continued there, and in two days she informed the Baron that finding a door open in the purple chamber, she had entered it, and to her astonishment found the Baroness murdered in her bed, and covered with wounds. She soon received an order for me to be buried in my husband's tomb. And as I had been debarred the company of Ethelwina, she prevailed on me to remain at the Abbey, and let the Baron believe I was dead, flattering ourselves that time would restore our rights, and we might watch over the growing years of my dear girl.

I made no scruple of converting some jewels into money for my support, as the Abbey and its contents were my husband's property, by which means Madame Claron had not a burden, which her small income would not enable her to support. Fearful of the Baron's arrival, we formed the plan of ringing the great bell at midnight; and lest any intruder should invade our retreat, and discover me, the tomb of my husband is opened by a small spring, where I could retire any time, and where I have passed many hapless hours, weeping his hard fate, and that of helpless Ethelwina; anxious to behold her, I ventured into her room the first night of her arrival, and so I have several times since by the secret door, as I wanted to discover myself. Thus, sir, you see the person who has struck terror in the bosoms of half the province; for there is few but what have heard of the loud sounding bell of St. Francis. And thus, after seventeen years have elapsed, do I receive my daughter, and find the usurper of our rights destroyed by his own villainous projects.

Delville was happy in being the protector of Ethelwina, for had it not been for him the Baron and Marquis's designs would in all probability have been carried into execution. Early in the morning the Marquis was sent away to his home in a hired carriage, and soon after recovered. Lady Henrietta, her daughter, and Madame Claron, left the Abbey for the family mansion, long usurped by the Baron.—Delville obtained leave to pay his addresses to Ethelwina. The Baron was buried with suitable pomp, and Eustace rewarded for his care with a thousand louis.—Madame Claron was also amply provided for:—and soon after the marriage of Delville (who proved to be the young Marquis of Cambray) and Ethelwina took place, who returned unfeigned thanks to heaven, for her preservation, and lived to bestow happiness on all the country round.

FINIS.