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Priory of St. Clair; OR SPECTRE OF THE
Murdered Nun. A GOTHIC TALE [Transcript]

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Priory of St. Clair;
OR
SPECTRE
OF THE
Murdered Nun.
A
GOTHIC TALE,
By
SARAH WILKINSON.

“And why do the Nuns the sweet violets strew,
“More wet with their tears than the night's chilling dew?
“Why join they the funeral train?
“O list and I'll tell you a story of woe,
“Which will urge the big tear of compassion to flow,
“And bind you in sympathy's chain.”

LEWIS.

LONDON:

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1811.

PRIORY OF ST. CLAIR
OR,
SPECTRE OF THE MURDERED NUN.

UNDER the former monarchy of France, the archbishop of Rouen, who was also stiled primate of Normandy, had the privilege once a year (on Innocent's day) to pardon a condemned criminal, let his crimes be ever so vile, on condition that the culprit took a solemn vow to amend his past life, and walk in the paths of holiness and virtue. He was then led in procession through the principal streets of the city, attended by the various religious orders, to the chapel of the Innocents, where he was set at liberty, with a suitable admonition from the reverend prelate.

This extraordinary perogative took its rise from an ancient legend, that recorded Romanus, archbishop of Rouen, to have overcome a dragon that threatened destruction to the country, with no other assistance, than what he derived from two malefactors, then under sentence of death, who of course were pardoned, and in commemoration of this event, a statute was erected in the chapel of the Innocents, representing St. Romanus slaying the dragon, and the above-mentioned deed of mercy given to the power of the archbishop of Rouen, and his successors.

Previous to Innocent's day, such criminals as wished to receive benefit from this custom, petitioned the archbishop, and as required, sent a full statement of their crime, and the excess of passion, or height of temptation, that led them to perpetrate the deed for which the laws of their country justly condemned them to suffer an ignominious death. But among the Normans thus circumstanced, there were a many who preferred the excruciating torments of the rack,

to the public exposure attending the pardon thus offered, of being led through the streets of Rouen.

In the year 1443, a remarkable case occurred, as presented among others, to the holy primate, and to a tradition accurately preserved, we are indebted for the following account.

Lewis Chabot, Count de Valvé, was a gay extravagant young nobleman. He loved the fair sex, but not in the manner they deserved to be loved, for he regarded them merely as lovely beings created for no other purpose than to soothe the cares of men, attend on them, and administer to their sensual pleasures: in short, his opinions in this point bordered on those professed by the followers of Mahomet's creed—that women have no souls. In consequence of this, he became a remorseless seducer, and many a fair one with tearful eye, and an aching heart, remembered with anguish the fatal hour in which she yielded to his perfidious vows of unalterable love.

Lewis run on this career unchecked, till he had turned the twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth, when fate decreed a serious alteration in his affairs, and proved that vice seldom goes unpunished, even in this world. The Count was one morning going to visit an intimate friend who lived at some distance; as he was crossing through the *Marché aux Veaux*, or veal market, (a place celebrated in history as the spot where the heroic Jean de Arc, maid of Orleans, suffered the tortures of a fiery death) two genteel dressed women passed him, their faces concealed by thick veils. "Hasten your pace, Emillia," said one of them, in accents that betrayed sorrow, "or we shall be too late to see the whole of the ceremony at St. Clair's Priory." "Poor Julietta," rejoined the other lady, "my heart bleeds for thee, doomed to a nunnery without thy internal consent, and with a heart wedded to a world your person seemed destined to adorn."

The ladies continued their converse on this topic. The count felt an uncommon interest take a sudden possession of his mind for the unfortunate Julietta. The visit to his friend was no longer remembered, and he entered the Priory of St. Clairs at the same time with the fair strangers.

On this occasion the galleries of the spacious chapel was thrown open to strangers. The throng was great, but the Count, by a well directed bribe (for even those who have renounced the world and its vanities, are not proof against money) obtained a front seat. The spectacle was truly magnificent; all the relicks were displayed; the pompous gifts, and the boasted wealth of the convent, the statues of the Virgin Mary, and the patroness St. Clair literally shone with jewels; the altar was equally splendid, and the pavement was covered with rich tapestry, the work of the fair sisterhood. At a short distance from the altar, on an elevated seat covered with a purple canopy, sat the Prioress; her stern visage displaying stronger traits of tyranny and ostentacious pride, than benevolence or humility.

The fate of Julietta, in being thus doomed to seclusion, however distressing to her own feelings and calling forth pity from others, was then by no means uncommon among the Norman nobility. When they had more children than they could conveniently portion, suitable to their high rank, they exalted the elder ones, by forcing the others to embrace a religious life,

in preference to the risk of the sons entering into commercial pursuits to better their fortunes, or the girls degrade the noble blood of their ancestors by marrying a plebeian.

But Julietta, youngest daughter of the Marquis St. Roche, was the loveliest of the lovely; no eye could behold her without admiration; and her noble air commanded respect.

The reluctance with which she entered on the ceremony was visible, but when it came to the final part, that the bishop placed the ring on her finger, and her lips were to seal the irrevocable vow, the fair one hesitated; but her imploring eyes meeting her father's frown, she obeyed; but no sooner was the deed accomplished, than with a faint shriek Julietta fell insensible on the steps of the altar. The concluding anthem was hurried over, and the new nun, who was slowly recovering from her swoon, was led into the inferior part of the priory, followed by the Prioress and the nuns, the former having, with a countenance that shewed rage at the incident, made a slight apology to the congregation for the interruption.

The indignation of the spectators rose to such an height, that they forgot the decorum due to the sacred place they were in; they murmured aloud, and some of the lower class burst forth into invectives (...) the Marquis and his son, and they retreated to their carriage, followed by a torrent of abuse, and some of the epithets not undeserved.

The Count de Valvé returned to his hotel fully engrossed in thought, by the image of the lovely Julietta; he would have given half his fortune, had he but seen the enchanting girl previous to the barrier her situation had placed between them; he flattered himself that he could have made such offers to the Marquis, as would have induced him to alter the destiny of his daughter: nor did he allow himself to suppose, that Julietta would have repined at the change. The Count had often made a ridicule of the marriage tie; yet he knew it was indispensable for him to enter into such an engagement, and give an heir to his family honours and titles. Julietta was the only female he had yet seen, whom he should willingly consent to take as his wife, and she was lost to him! distracting was the thought, and he impiously cursed the walls that enclosed her.

He launched into dissipation, drank, gamed, resorted to every place of entertainment, in hopes to drive the fair nun from his thoughts, but she was too firmly rooted there, and having experienced a conflict of six weeks, he mentally acknowledged the fatal truth, and some demon of darkness inspired him with the horrid project of obtaining possession of the lovely Julietta. He bribed the under gardener to convey a letter to the nun, in which he ardently expressed his passion, and solicited her favour, assuring her, that if blest with her sanction, he would leave no means untried to obtain her liberty, and retire with her beyond the reach of persecution, till he could move the Pope in her favour, and procure a dispensation.

The man was faithful to his trust, and brought an answer. Julietta strongly prohibited the Count from such an enterprize, assuring him that she should never consent to such impiety, nor perjure her soul for him; the die was cast, and she would abide by it, and endeavour, by cheerful resignation and such innocent amusements as were not prohibited by the rules of the priory, to make her days pass as pleasant as possible, and act consistent to her duty; no apostacy of her's should either disgrace St. Clair's, or her own family.

This reply had not the effect intended by the amiable nun; the libertine cursed her for refusing him, and revenge for the slight mixed with his passion, and he took a sacriligious oath to proceed with his designs against her.

He secured Alexis (the under gardener) entirely to his interest. This man, by the outward sanctity of his demeanour, and humility of speech, had gained the good-will of the prioress, who often employed him in services that were not belonging to his place, and rewarded him accordingly. In the apartments peculiarly appropriated to the superior, was a vast number of curious plants, most of them exotics; she was fond to excess of flowers and the study of botany, and many of the nobles who had relations at St. Clair's, and knew this penchant, had presented the Prioress with some of the choicest productions of this nature that could be procured.

Alexis was allowed to water and attend these plants, in preference to the head gardener, who being a much younger man, was not admitted, though in reality, could their hearts have been seen, he was the most honest of the two, and would scorn to betray his trust. (But to return from this digression.)

Alexis had therefore daily entrance into the priory, a circumstance that suited the schemes of the Count de Valve. He repeated his importunity, and his assistant gave Juliette the letter, as she was walking in a solitary part of the garden. She deigned the next day to send a reply, but it was a severe one; she threatened, if he dared again to interrupt her repose, she would present the Prioress with the letter, and betray both himself and Alexis to the consequences attending their guilty attempt.

“Haughty, cold, insensible woman,” exclaimed the enraged Count, “by Heaven I will not desist. But how can I get her into my power, without endangering our mutual safety; and I would sooner the dear girl, ill as she uses me, was in the fangs of an hungry tygress, than exposed to the rage of her haughty superior, with her hecate countenance.”

For several days and nights he revolved how he should proceed, but had not finally arranged any plan, when one morning Alexis brought him intelligence, that he had heard from a lay sister, while he was chopping some wood in the kitchen, that sister Julietta was very ill, and in great dejection of spirits, and medicines had been ordered for her, to take four times a day. He rewarded Alexis for his trouble, and bid him come at the same hour on the following morning. Julietta's low spirits and indisposition flattered the Count; she loves me, said he, but her lofty sentiments and bigotry will not let her own it; yet when I have her in my arms, and she sees there is no difficulty or danger but what I have been content to hazard for her sake, she will renounce this frigid conduct, and kindly yield to my endearing arguments.

The Count had the villany to procure a chemical preparation from potent herbs, twenty drops of which, taken in any liquid, would cause a death-like sleep for eight and forty hours; the pulse would not seem to beat, so slow would be its motion, and the whole form would have the hue and appearance of a corpse. He delivered this to Alexis in a small viol, with directions for him to watch when Julietta was absent from her cell, and pour it into her medicine. The man

hesitated. “Know, ye not, my Lord Count, that though admitted into several parts of the priory, it would be death to me to enter a prohibited apartment, among which are the cells of the sisterhood.”

“Overcome this difficulty,” said De Valvé, “watch with a lynx eye for such a moment; and here is your reward.”

Alexis promised compliance, and departed, villain like, without making a single enquiry into the nature or effect of the drug he had received, and which he was too successful in administering that same evening. Julietta felt so languid, that she requested to be excused attending at vespers; but this the superior would not allow, and with a reproachful air, accused her of feigning to be worse than she really was, that she might not perform the pious duties of her situation. Julietta replied not, but a silent tear marked her anguish, and she slowly proceeded to the chapel with the rest of the community; no one was left in that part of the edifice but two nuns, who from extreme old age was unable to leave their cells. Alexis, ever on the watch, seized this opportunity, and entered the one appropriated to Julietta. Some medicine was on the table poured out into a cup; he poured in the contents of the viol the Count had given him, and cautiously retreated back to the garden; nor had this action been discovered by any human eye; and the miscreant, absorbed in guilt at that time, forgot there was an heavenly one to take cognizance of his crime.

As they were returning from vespers, Julietta fainted, and was conveyed to her cell by some lay sisters, one of whom remained with her, and, when she shewed signs of recovery, to facilitate that desirable event, sister Martha administered the fatal draught.

Julietta revived, but soon fell into a profound sleep, and the good Martha went to inform the superior of the state of her patient.

They hoped that this slumber would prove of service to the fair invalid, and the prioress, who felt some unusual qualms of conscience for having treated the fair one too severely, or perhaps fearful she might complain to her father, who often visited at the grate, of her being obliged to repair to the chapel when so much indisposed, ordered two lay sisters to sit up with her, and father Pablos (who visited the priory in case of sickness) to be sent for the next morning, and that she should be treated with every possible care and tenderness.

But these very rare marks of her indulgence came too late, at midnight the attending lay sisters alarmed the convent with the report of Julietta's death. The prioress, and several of the affrighted nuns, hurried to the cell, and found the report too true, and a messenger was sent off to apprise the Marquis le Roche and his family of this sudden and unhappy event; and they attributing her decease to violent but concealed grief, at being forced to take the veil, severely blamed themselves for the part they had acted; they felt too much compunction to visit the corpse themselves, but deputed that office to a respectable woman who had been wet nurse to Lady Julietta, that they might be convinced no deceit had been practised, as more than one instance had lately occurred in Rouen, where a nun had contrived to elope, the superior, to avoid blame and conceal the disgrace, had reported her dead, the untruth of which was afterwards discovered.

When Alexis heard of the death of Julietta, he was conscience struck, and imprecated, when he got to a retired spot, a thousand curses on the head of the Count, as a villain who had drawn him into the commission of murder; but his next interview with De Valve, to whom he repaired without loss of time, eased his mind of that burthen, and he became again a complying tool of the Count's, ready to commit any bad act he set him on, so his rapaciousness for money was satisfied.

According to the rules of the priory, which was strictly enforced, the corpse, after the requisite ablutions had been performed, was drest, with the exception of the veil, in the nuns habit, the head being bound round with a cambric handkerchief, richly perfumed; it was placed in a coffin covered with plain black cloth, devoid of any ornament. Within twelve hours after the decease of the nun, and exactly at the twenty-fourth hour, let it fall either in the day or night, the corpse was interred in the vaults which ran under a considerable part of the ancient priory; its former entrance had been by some steps from the chapel, but these were so much worn by age, as to baffle repair, and were very unsafe, and the late prioress, as the readiest and less expensive way, had an opening made from the garden, the doors of which (there being nothing to tempt nocturnal plunderers) was only closed by an exterior bolt. The supposed corpse was followed by the superior, twelve nuns, and four lay sisters, strewing rue and rosemary, and a monk from the circisterian monastery, who came to perform the funeral rights. Alexis was on the watch, and as soon as he could do it with safety, he entered the vault, and removed the coffin lid, which was but slightly screwed, to give air to the fair insensible, lest she should in reality become what she seemed. At midnight he returned with the Count, both strictly disguised, and taking the coffin on their shoulders, they bore it between them to the Counts mansion, nearly a mile and a half distant. They were frequently challenged by the centinels, but on their replying that it was the corpse of a poor woman who had died of a putrid fever, that they were conveying to the church of St. Owen's at that hour for fear of spreading the infection, they were allowed to pass without further questions, the soldiers hastening so far as their bounds would allow with terror and disgust.

The residence of the Count de Valvé had once been a magnificent castle, comprising four stately wings, that formed a square, but his later ancestors progressively suffered it to fall to decay. The father of the present possessor had caused the front wing to be thoroughly repaired and modernized as much as possible, and it thus formed a handsome mansion. Part of another wing was made into domestic offices, and a handsome gothic chapel at its extremity, was refitted and ornamented; the rest of the stupendous pile was left to moulder in a state of complete desertion. Few of these old buildings are without their traditions of dreadful deeds: the present domestics could relate many a tragic legend of what had been done centuries back in the castle, and they were effectually prevented from entering the deserted wings by superstitious and ideal fears.

The Count therefore found no difficulty in conveying his lovely burthen into the north wing unseen, and depositing her in one of the chambers of the upper story, that had suffered the least from neglect, and into which, by the aid of Alexis, he had conveyed bed clothes, some elegant female dresses, and every article that could, at such short notice, contribute to make the apartment have an air of comfort.

Poor Julietta was laid on the bed, and left, for the Count was aware that many hours must elapse before the drug would lose its effect, and the fair one in consequence wake from her death-like deep.

Alexis repaired to the priory garden at an early hour, and entering the vaults, moved the coffins so as to hide the sacrilegious theft that had been committed, which was easily effected, being all of the same sort; and several of the sisterhood had expired within the last year, and no decay of the wood was apparent.

When the fair nun opened her blue eyes, she feebly gazed around with an air that implied vacuity of reason. De Valvé administered some restoratives, but her brain was in such a torpor, that three full days and nights had elapsed before she hailed a full return of sense, and was able to listen to the confession the Count made of the means and risk he had run to obtain her freedom. He made the most ardent professions of love and constancy, and avowed his determination to dispose of all his Norman property, and fly with her to some part of Great Britain, where their marriage could be solemnized, and they might enjoy every elegant comfort of life unembittered by any apprehensions from monastic interference or tyrannic laws.

Julietta answered with spirit, “You, Count de Valvé, have confessed your sentiments and pursuits to me; I will be equally ingenuous, I can never be your bride after the sacred oath I have taken, however reluctant I performed it. The breach of those vows would haunt me with perpetual horror, if not eventually deprive me of reason; for how could I expect to thrive in worldly affairs under the curse of Heaven? but were it not for this, and I could defy religious ties, yet know my heart is another's. Almost from infancy I have loved, and have been beloved. The Chevalier Bertrand de Thalien possesses my warmest affections. My father knew our attachment, and disapproved it; he exerted his authority, and I am his victim. My faithful lover has proposed to free me from my vows, but I was inflexible; it is therefore folly for you to suppose, even for a moment, that what I refused to my dear too much beloved Bertrand, I would grant to you. No, I would sooner forfeit existence.”

The Count was awed, his senses were bound in amazement, he knew not how to reply.

Julietta heaved a deep sigh, and resumed her discourse.

“Be generous and honourable to me, my dear Count, and I will act the same towards you; listen therefore with complacence to what I am going to propose.

“For me to return to the priory of St. Clair's, is impossible; if my narrative of facts was not believed, I should suffer dreadful punishments; was it credited on the contrary, vengeance would fall on you; heaven knows I wish it not. You have placed me in a painful predicament, but do me the justice I ask, and you have my full forgiveness and eternal secrecy. Place me as a relation of your own in some Italian convent; there are many in the vicinity of the valley of St. Gothard's: my person is very little known, from the very retired

life I led previous to my entering into the priory, and under another habit, and the name of sister Frances, there will not be the least danger of discovery.”

“Never!” replied the Count, and he sealed his negative with a dreadful oath. “You love the Chevalier—what then? you can never be his; fly with me, become my adored bride, love and unremitting tenderness on my side will gain your affections, you will be happy with me, and forget the former object of your love; children may also be granted us to cement the nuptial——”

“Hold,” said Julietta, “my resolution is firm, nor will I swerve.”

It would be tiresome to repeat all that past on this tragic subject for three long weeks; during which the Count employed his confederate Alexis to procure every article that could in the least ameliorate her situation; but her delicacy was much shocked at the manner of her seclusion; in the power of a gay young nobleman, who still persisted in his endeavours to gain her love, and deprived of the benefit of a female attendant.

Dreadful was the conclusion of this affair; enraged at her firm resistance to all his proposals, and her continual demands to be sent to an Italian convent, rage fired his brain; he was not used to this obduracy, where he sued for love; jealousy inflamed his passions, and he resolved to make her honor a sacrifice to his revenge. As a wife he no longer thought of her; he saw no prospect of happiness with her in that state; but he trusted her spirit subdued by her loss of virtue, she would consent to retire to some close but elegant seclusion, and become his mistress, till at a more mature age, her person being altered, she might mix in a larger circle, under an assumed name, or quit the country.

In pursuance of thus cruel plan, Julietta soon found that the Count was an unprincipled libertine, and her ruin completed. Still she rejected every offer, and disdain was now added to her refusals; and if ever she deigned to make the least supplication to her undoer, it was on the old plea of a religious retirement; but this was positively denied, and De Valvé informed her she must either consent to what he proposed, or linger out the remainder of her days in the gloomy apartment that now formed her abode. Julietta renewed her intreaties, with a vow of silence as to the past, though she had suffered the severest injury that could be offered to a defenceless female, provided he granted her request, but he was inflexible.

“Then I am lost,” exclaimed the fair nun, “lost for ever!” and sinking on her knees, she raised her snowy hands towards heaven, and called on it to witness, that she would never pardon De Valvé, but would hate him while life remained, and, if possible, haunt him after death; concluding by saying, she would leave no means untried to gain her liberty, and expose the guilty Count to the vengeance of those laws, both moral and ecclesiastic, that he had dared to violate.

Yet the hardened Lewis felt no remorse, and frequently this wretched much to be pitied victim of lust and cruelty, was compelled to suffer a repetition of his detested embrace.

More than once her piercing shrieks had faintly reached the inhabited part of the castle, but it procured her no redress, for that circumstance, joined to gleams of light having been partially seen through the gothic casements of the north wing, only served to increase their superstitious terrors, and make them more than ever eager to avoid that part of the edifice, and their vile master often diverted himself with the exaggerated accounts of what they had seen or heard, for many of their horrific descriptions had no foundation but what arose from the effect of fright on their weak brains.

In his visits to the unfortunate nun, he was supposed to be engaged with his usual parties, for he left the mansion by the grand entrance, and returned the same way, and entered the north wing by a small door that was partially obscured by one of the buttresses.

Julietta had endured her painful and degrading confinement above three months. Grief wasted her form, and faded the lustre of her eye; and the repeated disappointments she met within her attempts to escape, overwhelmed her countenance with the deepest gloom. No longer an object of love to the Count, she became that of hatred and disgust, and he sincerely wished her death; for his alliance was sought by the Marquis de Loire, for his daughter, one of the wealthiest heiresses Normandy could boast. Her person was attractive, and her manners were mild and interesting. Her complexion, which was a brunette, was not exactly suited to the fancy of the Count, yet on the whole, she pleased him, and he sighed for the advantages offered in the proposed union.

He returned home one night, from an entertainment at the Count de Loire's, in very low spirits, regretting his past actions, and debating how he should act with regard to Julietta.

He went to bed, but sleep, though strongly courted, would not shed her benign influence over him. He left his couch; an uneasy presentiment hung over him respecting Julietta, and he determined to visit that hapless fair one, to propose a new plan that had just entered his brain, for her removal from the castle, that he flattered himself would neither endanger his, nor her safety, from its happy contrivance.

As all the servants were enjoying their slumbers, or at least retired hours since to their beds, he crossed through the apartments to the principal gallery of the western wing, and to reach the northern one, it was necessary to cross the gothic chapel. He opened the door with an awe unusual to him, and started back with sensations of exquisite alarm and surprise, on beholding a female figure approaching towards him through the middle isle. Some moments elapsed before he had courage to raise his eyes once more to the object of his terror, who had not yet beheld him, though now only at a few paces distant. It was Julietta, who had re-assumed her nun's dress, now in the act of making her escape, which she would without doubt have effected, had she not unfortunately been intercepted by the enraged Count. He pronounced her name in an angry accent; she beheld him and shrieked for aid, imploring heaven and earth to save her. The Count entreated silence, but she heeded him not, her exclamations alarmed him beyond expression; so near to the apartments she must soon be heard. His character, his life was at stake, every moment he expected some intruder. He endeavoured to force Julietta back to her apartment, but she burst from him, and flying to the altar, clung to the host, and daring him to touch her, renewed her screaming supplications for rescue.

Alas! lovely injured hapless girl; surely the heavens frowned at thy birth, and some malign planet had charge of thy destiny; thy ravisher was too profane to be awed by the refuge on which thou relied, and which would have subdued a less impious character. He drew a short poniard from his bosom, which he always wore concealed there; and aimed it at the heart of his victim; but it was not till he had given her repeated wounds, that the poor nun drew her last sigh, which she did in the very act of uttering a dreadful but deserved malediction on the head of her brutal murderer.

No sooner was the horrid deed accomplished, than the Count would have given all his possessions to have it recalled, but it was too late, and his conscience awoke to all the enormities of his crime; but he soon stifled this inward monitor, by representing what he had done as a compelled act of self preservation, and he turned his thoughts to disposing the corpse out of the way. But all his efforts could not remove it, the weight, now life had fled, was too much for him, and the sanguinary stream flowed in torrents from the wounds on the marble pavement. He retreated from the chapel, and locked the doors.

He hastened to his apartment, and taking a soporific draught, once more returned to bed, and slept very sound till a late hour of the day.

During breakfast, he was mortified by the entrance of his house steward, accompanied by Madame de Amand, an aged respectable woman, who had the superintendance of the female domestics; they both assured him, that neither themselves, or the servants under them, (and in whose names they had been requested to make the declaration) could stay at the castle, which was certainly visited by supernatural spirits, as they could all testify, for every individual of the family had heard.

The Count mustered resolution to reply with asperity, "Not every individual, for I at least am exempted, for I heard it not. But why this sudden resolve to leave my service? Long since I have heard idle tales of the shut-up apartments being haunted."

"While they confined their visits," said the steward, "to the deserted parts of the fabric, it was little heeded, and it was seldom any thing was seen or heard; but of late it has increased there, and on this last night noises were heard in the chapel of a dreadful and most uncommon nature." "And now they approach so near us," rejoined Madame St. Amand, "we are in momentary fear of some horrid spectre crossing our sight."

"Pshaw," said the Count, rising from his seat, "no more of this tedious stuff; I could have borne such ideas from two of my lowest domestics with some patience, but from you, whose education and natural sense out to make you soar above such vulgar prejudices, and set a proper example to the rest, is insufferable. This night I will watch in the chapel alone, and if I do not effectually lay the ghost, I give you all leave to quit the castle on the third day from this. Go and impart my resolve to the household, and with it my strict commands, that every one of you retire to your respective chambers at eleven this night, nor presume to leave them till eight the next morning. I will have no interference, the merit or demerit shall be all my own."

They were going respectfully to endeavour to persuade him from what they termed a rash, if not a presumptuous attempt, but he waved his hand in token for them to retire, and they reluctantly obeyed.

It was now the hour in which he was to meet Alexis; he took from him the parcel he had brought, and giving him some gold, ordered him to return at midnight, as he wanted him to assist in a particular affair, which he could not commit to another person.

Alexis was shocked when he came to the knowledge of Julietta's death, and the manner of it; but he had gone too far to recede, and a thirst for money chased remorse. He descended to the vaults under the chapel with the Count, where they had formerly concealed the shell in which they stole the then living Julietta from the priory. In this the remains of the murdered nun was placed, and deposited in a remote part of the furthest division of the vaults, behind an enormously large stone coffin, which contained the dust of Reginald, first Count de Valvé, so created by the grandfather of William, Duke of Normandy, afterwards the conqueror of England, a touch more honourable man than the present possessor of his title and estates. After depositing the corpse of Julietta, so as to secure their own safety, their next care was to cleanse the blood from the pavement, a task they accomplished with much difficulty; still some spots remained on the steps of the altar, which no labour or skill could erase, and as they were so small as to escape the observation of any but a very nice inspector, they flattered themselves they had cleared away every vestige of their guilt; for were these traces of blood perceived, who could tell how they came there; and the Count having rewarded his assistant with the enormous price he demanded, they left the chapel in more composure of mind than could be expected after such horrid transactions.

The next morning the Count had his servants assembled in the great hall, and he reported that he had indeed beheld an appalling vision—the spectre of his own father, who bitterly reproached him for not having had a proper number of masses performed for his soul's repose, dying as he did in full health, cut off suddenly without a minute allowed for preparation, to encounter the awful presence of his Maker. “I have promised,” continued the Count, “to strictly observe what he enjoins, and shall this morning consult a reverend prelate on the occasion, and have the required number of masses performed within this month, and till that period is elapsed, I will have the chapel close shut, and I trust peace is once more restored to the man.” The domestics bowed and retired; some were satisfied with what their Lord had said, and troubled themselves no further about the matter; but there were others, who thought the whole affair very mysterious, and though they could not tell what was wrong, remained convinced that all was not right; the noises that had recently alarmed them certainly ceased. Some praised the Count's valour, and the others silently blamed him, on the supposition that there was more past in the chapel than he chose to meet the eyes or ears of his domestics. This, however, proved but a short lived wonder, other passing events engaged their attention, and the circumstance was not, till called forth by a disclosure of the Count's crimes, but faintly remembered.

Six months after the murder of Julietta, a venerable priest attended in the chapel belonging to the Count de Valvé, to join the hands of that nobleman to those of Isabel, daughter of the Marquis de Loire, an amiable young lady, who sincerely loved her intended bridegroom, and knew not his vices.

She was attended to the altar by her parents, and six young ladies of the first quality, drest in white and silver, as her bridesmaids. The Count de Valvé was sumptuously habited, and looked a very Adonis. He was attended by the same number of gentlemen; and the chief servants of both families, ornamented with bridal favours, were allowed to be spectators of the ceremony; and a number of singing boys were allowed to come from the cathedral, to perform a nuptial anthem. But the expected felicity of the day was much damped by the following circumstances. As de Valvé was placing the ring on his bride's finger, three large distinct drops of blood fell from his nostrils on the white dress of the bride; she gave a deep sigh at this ill omen, and trembled violently during the remainder of the ceremony.

No sooner was it concluded, than the Count was observed to fix a steady gaze towards the altar; his colour fled, a cold perspiration bedewed his forehead, and with a heavy groan dropped senseless on the steps, and was conveyed to one of the nearest chambers.

Isabel, now Countess de Valvé, her mother, and the rest of the ladies, was conducted to a saloon, where every elegance was displayed; but the joys of the fair bride was blighted, and she reclined on a sofa, weeping in the arms of the afflicted Marchioness.

In the mean time the Count had recovered, and assured the anxious Marquis, that what he had witnessed was entirely owing to the overflowings of his joy at the honour done him by the fair Isabel, and they returned with the gentlemen into the saloon; to the great relief of the bride, who feared that some fatal indisposition was going to snatch De Valvé from her. A sumptuous repast was served up, the wine circulated briskly, and the guests enlivened the circle with refined wit, songs and elegant conversation. But the Count was frequently abstracted, and his conduct gave rise to many painful conjectures in the breasts of Isabel's parents, who were now apprehensive that he would not prove a kind husband.

A twelvemonth elapsed without any complaint on the part of the Countess, yet she was not happy. De Valve seemed to love her to distraction, yet at times he would start with horror from her, rush from the room, and she would not see him for hours; when he would return quite composed, but refuse to give any explanation to her tender intreaties to know the cause of his anxiety, and she was certain he had some mighty secret labouring in his breast.

The Countess at this period was laying in with beauteous boy; but De Valvé, as soon as his first emotions of joy had subsided at this event, became more than ever gloomy. He was convulsed in his slumbers, and his health rapidly declined. The real cause was, his being haunted every midnight by the spectre of the murdered nun; though unseen by every other human eye. In vain he resorted at that hour to public places, she still was there, he could not escape her, and with her gestures she threatened dread vengeance. The first time of her awful appearance was at this altar, where she met her doom exactly at the moment

that Isabel was pronounced his bride. Yet this was not the only ill he had to struggle with; Alexis was become quite burthensome and impertinent; his request for money was insupportable. He had quitted his station of gardener, and reporting that he had a fortune left him by a relation, lived in riotous profusion, and the base enjoyment of low pleasures, suited to his vulgar mind; and such was the state of his conscience, that he was never easy but when inebriated. The Count detested the sight of him, as being the only individual who knew his guilt, and who injured his fortune by unbounded rapacity, and he determined to remove him from the earth, but not to trust any other hand with the commission of this dreadful crime, as that would only be to get rid of one tormentor to create another. With his person completely disguised, he sallied forth on this horrid enterprize with a trusty dagger. He knew where Alexis was to spend his evening, and he concealed himself in an angle of one of the surrounding towers of the cathedral, called Tour de Beauvre, or Butter Tower, (Pope Innocent the 8th having granted the indulgence of using butter in Lent to those Normans who contributed to its erection) and rushing on him, aimed a blow at his breast, but it pierced his arm, and a struggle ensued, in which Alexis proved the conqueror, and discovered the Count to be the assailant; mutual revilings past, and in the heat of passion they forgot their own safety; their conversation was heard. They were both arrested and conveyed to separate dungeons. Alexis was first brought before the judges; he refused to confess what horrid act had passed between him and the Count, and was condemned to the rack; on the very first tortures of which he disclosed every particular, and directed them to the chapel of De Valvé for the blood stained altar, and described where the nun had been confined, and the spot where her remains were laid:—all was found as he said. The servants of the Count was examined, and related what had passed between them and his Lordship, respecting the noises and lights, particularly the shrieks in the chapel and the Count's tarrying there on the subsequent night, being the 28th and 29th of August. This proving Alexis's confession true, as to the time of the nun's murder and burial, the judges would hear no more on the subject, and the Count de Valvé, and his infamous confederate Alexis, were condemned to be burnt at the stake, in the open space of ground opposite to the Priory of St. Clair's, to the great satisfaction of its superior, and the family of Le Roche.

The Countess de Valvé was inconsolable; she could not bear that the father of her child (for as a husband she no longer esteemed him) should suffer such a death, and her relations joined with her in dreading the ignominy it would cast on their names. Innocent's day drew near: they were allied to the Archbishop of Rouen, and they flattered themselves they had interest enough with the primate, to get him to select the depraved Count for the individual who was to have the benefit of his privilege. Isabel feared that the high spirit of the Count would lead him to prefer death, to the humiliations attending the pardon; but in this she was mistaken; he dreaded to die; his crimes made him shrink from entering eternity, and he eagerly grasped at a prolongation of his wretched existence.

The petition was granted on condition that De Valvé quitted Normandy within thirty-six hours after his liberation; and that the fair Countess was at the charge of conveying, in a manner suitable to her birth, the remains of the murdered nun to the vaults of St. Clair, that she might be interred (...) funeral rights among the departed of the same sisterhood, and have proper masses for her soul's repose. As there was no monument allowed within

the walls of the priory, Isabel was to erect one to the memory of Julietta, and applicable to the tragic tale, in the cathedral of Notre Dame (where its remains are yet to be seen.) This was agreed to, and Alexis suffered alone, amidst the curses and revilings of thousands of spectators.

The parting between the Count and his lady, (for the tender-hearted Isabel yielded to his request of granting him an interview with herself and his infant son, previous to his embarking from Dieppe to England, where he intended entering into a monastery of Black Cannons on the Suffolk coast) was such as no pen can describe; and many months elapsed ere she perfectly recovered from the shock her feelings received.

The Countess faithfully performed her part of the contract with liberal munificence, The corpse, of Julietta was honoured by the attendance of the prioress and her nuns, (strewing violets as they passed along) for on this singular occasion, they had leave from the archbishop to quit the holy walls, and join the funeral train.

The Countess had the castle taken down completely to its foundation, and an elegant mansion erected on its scite, for her son and his descendants, residing in the mean time with her parents.

De Valvé did not survive but three years, and expired penitent, but tormented with a dreadful gloom, declaring that Julietta stood at his couch, rejoicing in his agonies.

The Countess lived two years in widowhood, and then gave her hand to the Chevalier de St. Forlaix, an amiable, accomplished and wealthy French gentleman, who assisted her in the superintendance of her youthful son, teaching him in early life to subdue his passions, and keep them within the bounds due to decorum and society. This exemplary lady had the happiness to see him at a proper age take possession of his father's title and possessions, and retain them in a manner that was an honour to his family, and a blessing to his vassals and dependants.

It is remarkable that the young Count de Valvé became enamoured of the Lady Ambrosia, niece of the murdered nun; at first he despaired of success, but the aged Marquis Le Roche, with great liberality of sentiment, joined the hands of the lovers, saying, "that he abhorred the vices of the late Count, and was in the person of his daughter a great sufferer by him, but that did not prevent him doing justice to the virtues of the son, and respecting the excellent wife and mother."

FINIS.

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