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## THEOBALD;

### OR, THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY.

(Written by Madame la Comtesse de la Rochere, and published under the auspices of the Archbishop of Tours.)

(Continued.)

#### CHAPTER VI.—THE YOUNG HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

On his arrival at Bastia, Theobald found that Monsieur Casferelli had already taken all necessary steps to obtain the removal of his mother's remains; he had nothing left to do but to occupy himself with the means of accomplishing the melancholy duty imposed by his filial piety. The steam-vessel which coasts round the island regularly every fortnight being at the moment employed in the transport of laborers from Lucca, Theobald was obliged to hire one for the purpose. These workpeople pass over annually in great numbers, and for moderate wages, to spare the indolent Corsicans the trouble of tilling their fertile land. The mortal remains of Madame Loncini, removed from their temporary resting place and enclosed in a double oaken coffin, were placed with pious respect in the saloon of the vessel, transformed for the occasion into a *chappelle ardente*. A priest, a relation of the Casferelli's, who had offered his services to the young man, recited with him the service for the dead during the voyage. The vessel coasted along the shore to the roadstead "della Padulella" where the disembarkation took place: the coffin was then placed on a cart drawn by oxen, and conveyed, though not without much trouble, to Piovola, where Annuciata had arranged everything for receiving his sister-in-law's remains in a worthy and becoming manner. The clergy of the village went in procession to meet the corpse; and the numerous friends of the family accompanied it to the church, where the mass was celebrated with much solemnity. The funeral cortege then proceeded through the country to the family vault, situate at the foot of a green hill which overshadowed the little mortuary chapel. Theobald, the chief mourner, was to all appearance grave and composed; the feelings of his soul, as he passed before the house of the Fabianos, the cause of the heart-rending misfortunes that had befallen him, remained a secret between his God and himself.

Annuciata and Clarita also followed in the procession; they were both in deep mourning, their faces covered by veils. A most lively expression of hatred, pride, and regret, might have been seen in the countenance of the former; the latter had nothing but tears and prayers to offer, at the recollection of her much loved mother. Annuciata had herself taken a part in the preparation of the funeral repast, much against her nephew's wishes, who greatly disapproved the custom of feasting on such an occasion. It was in vain, his repugnance had to give way before the arbitrary will of his aunt. At length the guests retired, and the brother and sister were left alone to interchange their impressions and their hopes.

Some time afterwards, Theobald had the pleasure of presenting Francisco Peroncelli to his family; all were enchanted by his agreeable manners and good sense. Remaining three days at Piovola, he became a sincere admirer of the modest graces, and the many virtues of Clarita, and declaring in the warmest manner, the happiness he should experience in making her his wife, he pressed Theobald to solicit his sister's consent to an engagement.

The evening before young Peroncelli's departure, Theobald wished to have some private conversation with his sister. He found her seated by the side of her great-grandmother, spinning wool and singing at the same time to amuse the old lady.

'Leave your distaff, Clarita,' said he, 'and take a turn in the garden with me. My dear sister, taking her hand affectionately, as soon as they were alone, 'what I have to say is very serious, and I assure you I feel greatly embarrassed by the part of father, which I am called on to play.'

'What can it be?' inquired Clarita, almost frightened at this beginning; 'I hope you are not going to leave us again.'

'No, my dear sister, but I feel very young and inexperienced to act as mentor to a girl of your age. Listen to me. Annuciata is a being altogether unlike the rest of the world. She does not feel like you and I, consequently there can be no sympathy between you. She can clearly be no companion for you, and our good grandmother is so aged, we cannot hope to keep her long among us. You must then have some natural protector, whose duty it will be to conduct and shield you through all the dangers of the world—in one word, I am thinking of settling you in life. Francisco Peroncelli appears to me to be suitable in every way; he is a young man of much merit, of whom every one thinks and speaks highly; but I would decide on nothing without first asking your opinion and consulting your wishes on the subject.'

'I know,' said Clarita, with heightened color, 'that I must obey you in everything, for you replace my father, but as you are kind enough to consult my wishes, I will ask you to give me time for reflection, for my books have taught me never to undertake anything of importance, without first humbling myself before God, and seeking His aid in prayer.'

'You are right,' said her brother; 'but as Peroncelli leaves to-morrow, I should wish him to take back a decisive answer to his father.'—He then dwelt on all the good qualities of Francisco, and pointed out to Clarita all the advantages of the proposed union, and left her in an agitation of mind easily imagined. Clarita was a very young girl, without experience, knowing nothing of the things of the world; but affectionate and pious by nature, as well as education, she had the most entire confidence in prayer, and had recourse to it on all occasions of difficulty. She prayed long for assistance, and only appeared in the sitting room at the hour of the family meal.

Some hours previous to the departure of young Peroncelli, Theobald again sought his sister in his grandmother's room, and begged her to inform him of her decision.

'I have no will but yours,' said she to him; 'dispose of me as you think fit.'

'My dear Clarita,' replied her brother, 'I do entreat of you, forbear that set form of absolute submission, in use among the Corsican girls; and tell me candidly, as your best friend, if you consent willingly to marry Francisco?'

'Yes,' replied she, ingeniously, 'because I believe him to be good and virtuous, as you have assured me.'

'Well, then, my dear sister, consider him from this day as your affianced husband before God. I will hasten to give him our reply.'

At the news of Clarita's consent, Francisco was overjoyed, embraced his friend, and thanked him from the bottom of his heart for his good offices; he then took leave of all the family, promising to do all in his power to hasten the time of his return.

Theobald accompanied his future brother-in-law half-way to Vescovato, where the young man was only to pass a short time before he embarked for the continent. Clarita, silent and thoughtful, took her place as usual by the side of her great-grandmother.

'My child,' said the latter, appearing on this occasion to collect the full force of her intellectual faculties, which she possessed at rare intervals, 'the words you have just pronounced are a positive engagement; from this day your person and reputation are sacred, and as a trust confided to your care and good faith, and which you are bound to keep intact. Above all things, foster your affection for him whom your relations have selected, and who one day must occupy, after God, the first place in your heart. When you are his wife, employ all that Heaven has given you of wisdom and attractions to please him, console him in trouble and comfort him in fatigues; let order reign in every part of your house, govern his servants, and contribute by your work and economy to the prosperity of his home; be faithful to him, obedient to his wishes, and bring up his children in the respect that is due to the head of the family. It was thus that I endeavored to act with the husband that my parents had given me, and it is the conviction of having done my duty to the best of my power, that gives me the hope of soon rejoining him in heaven.' Clarita listened to this advice with pious respect, and promised to conform herself to it exactly.

The following day Theobald began seriously to occupy himself with his sister's instruction; she was a docile and most intelligent pupil, and made such rapid progress that he was both surprised and charmed. He regulated the hours of her lessons and duty, as he himself felt the necessity of working also on his own account.—Often in his leisure time he went into the woods, armed with the excellent gun presented to him by his aunt, and returned home laden with game of every description; the delight of Annuciata then manifested itself by loud exclamations, for she was proud of her nephew's address; on these occasions she relieved him herself of his gun and game-bag, and reserving what was necessary for the use of the house, she sent the rest as presents to her friends and neighbors.—Time passed quickly with Theobald in these peaceful occupations. He often took long walks in the field with Clarita, and this exercise strengthened her health. More frequently still, the brother and sister bent their steps to the resting place of their ancestors, where Theobald watered the flowers that grew around the solitary chapel, and Clarita wove garlands and crowns to place on her mother's tomb; then both knelt and prayed in silence for their parents, and returned home, their hearts full of salutary thoughts. Sometimes Annuciata accompanied them to the little chapel, resting awhile under the shade of the cypress and mastich trees, and then continuing her way to the *mucchio* of Pepe

Loncini, she deposited in the hiding-place of the red cross a small bag of powder and shot for Burcica, the outlaw; she then rejoined her companions in haste.

Meantime, this vehement young woman could not understand what she considered her nephew's supineness; for a long time she thought this apparent tranquillity of mind concealed some bold project or some happily-conceived plan, and she would not allow herself any imprudent question. But weeks and months passed away, and her young relative continued to enjoy his peaceful existence. The notary, who was to have sold his practice to Theobald, expressed a wish to continue business for some years to come, and the latter appeared very well pleased with the arrangement, for he enjoyed his happy quiet life, and the unbounded affection of his sister; his unerring rifle was formidable only to the game on the mountains, his mind was only occupied with his studies, and his imagination teemed with happy plans for the future.

Little by little the report spread in the village that the last of the Loncini's was not so terrible as Annuciata had described him, or as the muscular appearance of the young man might lead them to imagine.

Giuseppe Fabiano, who had at first shut himself up in his house, as in an impregnable fortress, took courage, and ventured to walk in the open square and shoot in the woods.

Annuciata was no longer congratulated on the presumed courage and physical strength of her nephew; indeed, a shade of irony was now and then perceptible in the conversation of many of the neighbors.

Theobald was perfectly indifferent to all this, but to his proud and vindictive aunt these observations were so many darts that pierced her heart. She longed to inoculate her nephew's soul with the burning thirst for vengeance that consumed her own. She would have sacrificed her whole existence, could she have his place for one day, to revenge herself and then die. Disgusted with seeing him lead a useful and innocent life, she tried at first with much reserve, afterwards more openly, to excite his naturally irritable disposition—in fact to shame him out of what she called his weakness.

The young man could not remain insensible to these indirect attacks, for the blood of a Corsican flowed in his veins. He often bounded with rage at the recollection of the outrages which, according to Annuciata's language, he had received in the person of his ancestors.—But religious principle very shortly took the upper hand in his generous mind, and each combat became another triumph of grace over natural propensities. The insinuations of his vindictive aunt soon changed to open reproaches, and each day they became more and more direct. From this time, a life of unspoken torment and bitterness commenced for Theobald. Sometimes, beside himself with the violence of this tury, whom he could not avoid, he was on the point of silencing her, by making her feel the absolute authority of the head of the family, whose privileges she was the first to proclaim; at other times he felt fascinated by a siren, who so well knew how, and on what occasion, to touch the weak points of his impetuous character, his self-love and honor, and then he shared all his aunt's fury and passion. Fearing at these times that he might not always have sufficient command over himself to resist the hateful feelings she succeeded in exciting, he resolved on leaving the paternal roof, and seeking under a less scorching sky the courage to remain innocent; but a glance towards Clarita would change his resolution. The angelic countenance of his sister, beaming with sweetness and charity, exercised over Theobald a power which he had no wish to avoid. One word from her brought back, as if by enchantment, some of the pure calm he had lost; for in her mind were stored great treasures of piety and love. Indulgence and pardon flowed from her as from an inexhaustible source. She detested crime, but was without hatred of the criminal.

This excellent girl understood instinctively what passed in her brother's mind, and her excessive timidity did not allow her to explain herself openly, she employed all her good sense and tenderness to console his troubles, and to divert him from dark thoughts. Walking with him, whenever she could, without neglecting Madame Loncini, she endeavored by conversations full of gaiety and charm to recall to his mind the instructions of the good baroness, and her excellent advice. Often directing their steps to the burial place of the family, she conversed with him of the mother they had lost, and whom they still so deeply regretted; of the grief which all these vindictive feelings had caused the poor woman during her life; and warmly extolling the gentleness and goodness of this fond mother, she would draw her brother into the chapel, saying—'Let us implore the Lord to grant us the same virtues; and when Theobald had conversed for some time with Clarita, he became gradually

calmer, feeling stronger and more master of himself. The prayers they offered up together were to him as heavenly dew, refreshing his soul, and allaying the devouring fire of his passions, and he arose calm and with a serene countenance, smiling at his sister, and admiring the beauties of nature with her, in truth, Annuciata, at times, appeared to Theobald as the evil genius personified, while Clarita really was to him a consoling angel.

#### CHAPTER VII.—THE ROOM IN THE TURRET.

One evening, after a violent storm between the aunt and nephew, Theobald had retired to his room in much excitement. Agitated and irresolute, he sat at his writing table, resting his head between his hands, his mind so disturbed that he scarcely knew whether Annuciata or himself best understood the laws of real honor.—At length, when he lifted up his head, his eyes were dry, his forehead burning, and he presented a melancholy example of the baneful effects of vindictive passions. Was not this young man in possession of numberless blessings showered upon him by the Almighty, and yet was it possible for him to be happy? Could he enjoy any of them under the influence of his aunt's evil suggestions? Do we not all know that without peace the best of earthly blessings lose their value? Poor Theobald, he felt this truth most bitterly, and sighing, "Alas!" said he, "how happy should I be but for my aunt's mistaken idea of honor.—O God! give me strength to resist—to remain pure of human blood."

His eyes at this moment fell on the New Testament which he had given his sister, and which was open at the following passage of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans:—

'Render to no man evil for evil. Take heed to do good, not only before God, but also before men. Live peaceably with all men. Avenge not yourselves, for vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.'

These words of the apostle, and the manner in which he had found them, produced a lively impression on his mind. What hand but Clarita's could have placed them on his table, and within his view?

'Then she must have read my heart—she understands all I suffer,' said Theobald, inwardly. 'This apparently simple child share all my feelings. Her thoughts and mine are the same.—And why should there not be other people here who feel as she does—men of sense and good principle, who have not adopted the terrible prejudices of Annuciata, who would believe in my courage without giving them proof of it by becoming a murderer? Oh, my gentle sister, how I love thee for thy modest virtues!—how I thank thee for thy kind sympathies!'

The thought that another heart shared his trouble—that another reasonable creature approved his resistance—comforted and soothed him. He made his nightly prayer with much fervor, and renewed his positive determination to remain innocent of human blood. The following morning, at sunrise, the young man was awake by the singing of the birds at his casement. He jumped up, and, opening the windows, he inhaled with delight the fresh morning air, still unimpregnated with the flagrant dew which imparts to the flowers all their freshness, and revivifies them after being withered by the heat of the preceding day. He looked vaguely over the now deserted square, and from thence to the thicket, which covered the hill and part of the plain.—The latter was already perfumed with the odor of myrtle-flowers, which were just beginning to open, and was diversified by small clusters of chestnut trees, covered with rich foliage which rose majestically here, and there. All this abundance of flowers and verdure resembled an immense English garden, or rather a park, that surrounded and encircled the village. While the young man was admiring this enchanting scene, he fancied he saw two human forms moving on the top of the hill which led to the Red Cross. Theobald seized his telescope, and, fixing his attention on this point of the horizon, he distinctly perceived a man and woman gesticulating violently, as if animated by a most violent discussion. They continued to converse for a quarter of an hour; then they separated, and each descended the hill in an opposite direction. The man plunged into the thicket. The female figure, on the contrary, continued her way to the village, and, light of foot as a fawn, she soon passed the narrow alley covered with briars that leads directly to it. The morning breeze played with her *mezzaro* of black lace, making it flutter around her neck and figure, while her small feet touched the tufts of heath so lightly that they scarcely seemed to bend under their weight.

'From whence can Annuciata come at this early hour?' said Theobald who recognized his aunt as she approached the house; and, whilst putting this question to himself, he shut the window and sat down at the table. But he was scarcely seated before some one knocked loudly at the door, and Annuciata, with her eyes fiercely

glaring, her bosom heaving, her forehead streaming with perspiration, presented herself to his view, mad with savage joy.

'Take your arms! take your arms, Theobald, the moment is now come in which you can prove you are a man. Seize your gun, and this pistol as well—that belonged to your father—and convince me that you can reach other game than defenceless hares.'

'Is the island suddenly attacked by the enemies of the state?' coldly demanded her nephew, crossing his arms over his chest. 'In that case I am ready; otherwise, I do not understand you.'

'Do not let us lose time in useless discourse,' cried Annuciata, with a tone and gesture of authority. 'I have just met Burcica, as I was taking powder and shot for him to the red cross. Signora,' said he, in a joyful tone; 'I was going to meet you at this very time, for I have just found a certain way of serving you. Send your nephew to me immediately, and take care no one sees him leave the village. I will wait for him at the waterfall, and he will then know what I am worth.'

'I will have nothing to do with your outlaws,' replied the young man, 'and do not seek his society, and am glad of this opportunity of telling you how I disapprove of your keeping up any acquaintance with him, especially on subjects that do not please me.'

'You do not know what you say,' said she shrugging her shoulders contemptuously. 'Listen to me, and learn that Fabiano hunted all day in the wood, and Burcica knows from good authority that he will shoot there again to-morrow.'

'Well, and what is that to me?' interrupted Theobald with impatience. 'I have neither the power nor the wish of preventing any one, whoever it may be, from shooting in the wood.'

'Listen to me,' pursued the fury, stamping on the ground; 'the moments are precious, more precious than you can suppose. In the mountain there exists a deep grotto, where Giuseppe Fabiano—your father's assassin, understand me well—where Giuseppe Fabiano is accustomed to take his *siesta*, when he passes the day shooting. He believes himself in perfect security, for the entrance to the grotto is concealed by the gnarled branches of an old oak, and is invisible to the eye; but Burcica, who explores the thicket in every direction, has just discovered this hiding-place, and what is more another outlet more secret still which leads to the same grotto, and by which you could easily surprise your enemy during his sleep. I undertake all the rest; but go, instantly, I entreat you. Burcica awaits you, and I answer for his fidelity as for myself. He is altogether devoted to us.'

'My aunt,' said Theobald, weighing his words and making the greatest effort to speak calmly; 'I would not willingly be wanting in the respect I owe you, my father's sister, but in his revered name, I now and forever declare to you that I only intend to revenge his memory by irreproachable conduct, open to all the world, and I implore of you to let me live quietly for the future.'

'And it is in the name of your father,' cried Annuciata, with fury; 'that I also declare in my turn that I would rather see you dead than dishonored, and I will not cease to pursue you with my indignation, until I find in you the courage of a Loncini.'

'In this case, either you or I must quit this house,' said the young man, exasperated.

'You are the master,' replied Annuciata, with apparent calm; 'but before you drive me from the home of my fathers, which I have preserved intact for you, grant me one request, and follow me to the turret, of which I alone possess the key.'

'Forgive the rudeness of which I have been guilty,' cried Theobald, already full of repentance for his rash words, on seeing a tear glisten on the eyelid of his aunt; 'you must know that the words did not proceed from my heart.'

'Come, Theobald,' said she in a grave and solemn voice.

They silently ascended the narrow and crooked staircase which led to the turret, and Annuciata turning the key in an old, worm-eaten door, introduced the young man into a dark, circular chamber, of which she hastened to open the window. Not a single piece of furniture decorated this room but round the walls painted in fresco, were placed at regular intervals, high stands of wood supporting dusty garments of every description.

'My nephew,' said Annuciata in a sepulchral tone; 'do you see this mantle of Corsican cloth, on which the dust and lapse of ages have been unable to efface the stain of blood? It belonged to your ancestor Pepe Loncini, whose burial-place is close to the red cross. He was the first of our family who fell under the blows of a Fabiano, and the cause of the murder has never been known. His blood was avenged by his nephew Paola Loncini, for Pepe had only