

GOTHIC BOURNES

**THERE IS A SKELETON IN EVERY
HOUSE
(1825)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY
Paula Fernández Canas

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(Pages 97-99)

THERE IS A SKELETON IN EVERY HOUSE.

THERE is no principle more destructive to human happiness than REVENGE; let it be taken in whatever light it may, it answers no purpose, but tends to aggravate [sic] men to scenes of bloodshed and crimes, various in themselves, but terrible in their consequences. When it is had, what better can man feel? It makes him none the richer; happiness it brings not, as the following dreadful tale can testify; peace comes not within the boundary of revenge, but it leaves him conscious of his guilt and a prey to his passions.

In the year 1676, there lived at Naples a lady of the name of Corsina, born at Capovana,¹ and wife of a noble cavalier named Ramondo de Balzo. It happened after some years that Heaven was pleased to deprive this lady of her husband, and she was left a widow with an only son. This youth possessed all the excellent qualities and endowments of his father, and became his mother's idol and only care. At length she considered that it would be greatly to his advantage to send him to Bologna, to pursue his studies; she consequently found him a tutor, provided him with books and every other necessary article, so that his studies might not be interrupted, and sent him away with a tender mother's blessing. He remained at Bologna for a considerable period of time, during which she furnished him with every comfort he could wish or require. The youth having every advantage, improved greatly, became an excellent scholar, and by his gentlemanly manners, correct conduct, and brilliant talents, gained the affection of all his fellow collegians. After a considerable time spent at college, he became a doctor of law, and was on the eve of his return to Naples, when he was taken seriously ill. The best physicians were summoned to his aid, but none of them gave any hopes of success. De Balzo perceiving he was a lost man, thought of nothing but his mother, and the distress of mind which his loss would occasion her. Contrary, however, to the expectations of every one that saw him, he recovered from his bodily indisposition—but it had left him so nerveless, low [98] and despondent, that nothing that was done for him could rouse him from the lethargic melancholy into which he had fallen. His physicians, as the only chance of removing his complaint, advised his marriage with some beautiful and accomplished young female, who was of a gay cheerful turn of mind, and who might, by her enlivening presence, eradicate the gloomy sensations which had crept over his mind. His mother was accordingly written to on the subject, who immediately set about making the necessary enquiries among every family with which she was acquainted in Naples. The task was a most arduous one—but the restoration of her son's health was the only feeling which her heart contained—that heart had no room for aught² else. At length her search appeared to have been crowned with success; she found a being who appeared so gay, so cheerful, so happy and unconcerned, that she seemed incapable of harbouring a single unpleasant thought. She was young and ravishingly beautiful. Madame Corsina, fancying she had found the very person she was in quest of, explained the nature of her mission. The young lady listened attentively to Madame Corsina's story, then replied, "Alas! Madame, instead of being the gayest of

¹ Of Capua, a town in Italy.

² Anything.

the gay, in me behold the veriest³ wretch that ever crawled the earth; the most miserable being at heart that ever had existence; there never was born, perhaps, a more devoted unfortunate woman than myself, or one who has been more tried by deep sorrows and heavy afflictions: and that you may be convinced of this," said she, "follow me." Taking the hand of Madame Corsina, she led her through a secret passage into an inner chamber or recess, where, drawing aside a sable curtain, she pointed with one hand to a nauseous skeleton which hung dangling to a beam, and with the other to the livid corpse of a man, covered and encrusted with blood, that lay beneath! Madame Corsina started back with horror, consternation, and affright, exclaiming, "Oh God! what means this dreadful sight?" The young lady mournfully sighed; then with eyes bursting with tears, answered—"In me behold the Marchioness de Sartine; that skeleton of bones was once the beloved of my heart; poverty stood in the way of our union; my parents united me to the Marquis de Sartine. My lover came to bid me an eternal farewell ere his departure to foreign climes. The Marquis found us weeping together. Infuriate with rage and jealousy, he drew his dagger and stabbed him in the side, then dragged him (while the life-blood flowed) to this room, and caused him to be hung up as you perceive: then with an unequalled barbarity, confined me with the body, and after my release compelled me to see the unfortunate victim of his rage night and morning of every day. Think of my dreadful anguish! think of the horrid torture of my soul!—I lived but for revenge!—that revenge was sure and terrible!—behold its effects! With the selfsame weapon that struck my beloved the fatal blow, I stabbed the titled villain to the heart, and dragged him to this spot, where I daily glut my eyes with the food my just vengeance has provided. Now begone, and think for the future that those who appear the most happy are often the most wretched. Begone!—but dare not breathe a word, a whisper of what thou hast seen and heard this day; my power and vengeance are yet terrible!" Madame Corsina quickly departed from the house more dead than alive, and on her return home was still more dreadfully afflicted by the melancholy account of the death of her son, who had suffered a relapse. Bowed down by sorrow, she soon followed him to the grave. The Marchioness de Sartine, continually tortured by remorse, that "worm that never dies," at last made a public avowal of the crime she had been guilty of, and was adjudged to die, but [99] from the particular circumstances of the case, and in consideration of her rank, she was permitted to enter a convent, the rules of which were enforced with unceasing severity, where, by acts of devotion and penance, she endeavoured to conciliate an offended God, and at last died, a true penitent, but with a heart broken with care, remorse, anguish, and sorrow.

³ Old or literary use of the superlative of *very*.