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# The Monk



Par Matthew Lewis  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAmbrosio, the worthy superior of the Capuchins of Madrid, falls to the temptations of Matilda, a fiend-inspired wanton who, disguised as a boy, has entered his monastery as a novice. Ambrosio then falls in love with one of his penitents and finally kills her in order to escape detection. However, he is discovered, tortured by the Inquisition and sentenced to death. Although extravagant in its mixture of the supernatural, the terrible, and the indecent, the book contains scenes of great effect. The novel is a prime example of 18th century Gothic, written partly in response to Walpole and Radcliffe and enjoyed a considerable contemporary vogue.ExtraitChapter IILord Angelo is precise;Stands at a guard with envy;

scarce confesses That his blood flows, or that his appetite Is more to bread than stone. Measure for Measure. Scarcely had the abbey-bell tolled for five minutes, and already was the church of the Capuchins thronged with auditors. Do not encourage the idea, that the crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst of information. But very few were influenced by those reasons; and in a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless attempt. The audience now assembled in the Capuchin church was collected by various causes, but all of them were foreign to the ostensible motive. The women came to show themselves, the men to see the women: some were attracted by curiosity to hear an orator so celebrated; some came, because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; some, from being assured that it would be impossible to find places in the church; and one half of Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other half. The only persons truly anxious to hear the preacher, were a few antiquated devotees, and half a dozen rival orators, determined to find fault with and ridicule the discourse. As to the remainder of the audience, the sermon might have been omitted altogether, certainly without their being disappointed, and very probably without their perceiving the omission. Whatever was the occasion, it is at least certain, that the Capuchin church had never witnessed a more numerous assembly. Every corner was filled, every seat was occupied. The very statues which ornamented the long aisles were pressed into the service. Boys suspended themselves upon the wings of cherubims; St. Francis and St. Mark bore each a spectator on his shoulders; and St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double. The consequence was, that, in spite of all their hurry and expedition, our two newcomers, on entering the church, looked round in vain for places. However, the old woman continued to move forwards. In vain were exclamations of displeasure vented against her from all sides: in vain was she addressed with I assure you, Segnora, there are no places here. I beg, Segnora, that you will not crowd me so intolerably! Segnora, you cannot pass this way. Bless me! How can people be so troublesome! The old woman was obstinate, and on she went. By dint of perseverance and two brawny arms she made a passage through the crowd, and managed to bustle herself into the very body of the church, at no great distance from the pulpit. Her companion had followed her with timidity and in silence, profiting by the exertions of her conductress. Holy Virgin! exclaimed the old woman in a tone of disappointment, while she threw a glance of enquiry round her; Holy Virgin! what heat! what a crowd! I wonder what can be the meaning of all this. I believe we must return: there is no such thing as a seat to be had, and nobody seems kind enough to accommodate us with theirs. This broad hint attracted the notice of two cavaliers, who occupied stools on the right hand, and were leaning their backs against the seventh column from the pulpit. Both were young, and richly habited. Hearing this appeal to their politeness pronounced in a female voice, they interrupted their conversation to look at the speaker. She had thrown up her veil in order to take a clearer look round the cathedral. Her hair was red, and she squinted. The cavaliers turned round, and renewed their conversation. By all means, replied the old womans companion; by all means, Leonella, let us return home immediately; the heat is excessive, and I am terrified at such a crowd. These words were pronounced in a tone of unexampled sweetness. The cavaliers again broke off their discourse, but for this time they were not contented with looking up: both started involuntarily from their seats, and turned themselves towards the speaker. The voice came from a female, the delicacy and elegance of whose figure inspired the youths with the most lively curiosity to view the face to which it belonged. This satisfaction was denied them. Her features were hidden by a thick veil; but struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist. Her figure was rather below than above the middle size: it was light and airy as that of an Hamadryad. Her bosom was carefully veiled. Her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot of the most delicate proportions. A chaplet of large grains hung upon her arm, and her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze. Such was the female, to whom the youngest of the cavaliers now offered his seat, while the other thought it necessary to pay the same attention to her companion. The old lady with many expressions of gratitude, but without much difficulty, accepted the offer, and seated herself: the young one followed her example, but made no other compliment than a simple and graceful reverence. Don Lorenzo (such was the cavaliers name, whose seat she had accepted) placed himself near her; but first he whispered a few words in his friends ear, who immediately took the hint, and endeavoured to draw off the old womans attention from her lovely charge. You are doubtless lately arrived at Madrid, said Lorenzo to his fair neighbour; it is impossible that such charms should have long remained unobserved; and had not this been

your first public appearance, the envy of the women and adoration of the men would have rendered you already sufficiently remarkable. He paused, in expectation of an answer. As his speech did not absolutely require one, the lady did not open her lips: After a few moments he resumed his discourse: Am I wrong in supposing you to be a stranger to Madrid? The lady hesitated; and at last, in so low a voice as to be scarcely intelligible, she made shift to answer, No, Segnor. Do you intend making a stay of any length? Yes, Segnor. I should esteem myself fortunate, were it in my power to contribute to making your abode agreeable. I am well known at Madrid, and my family has some interest at court. If I can be of any service, you cannot honour or oblige me more than by permitting me to be of use to you. Surely, said he to himself, she cannot answer that by a monosyllable; now she must say something to me. Lorenzo was deceived, for the lady answered only by a bow. By this time he had discovered, that his neighbour was not very conversible; but whether her silence proceeded from pride, discretion, timidity, or idiotism, he was still unable to decide. After a pause of some minutes It is certainly from your being a stranger, said he, and as yet unacquainted with our customs, that you continue to wear your veil. Permit me to remove it. At the same time he advanced his hand towards the gauze: the lady raised hers to prevent him. I never unveil in public, Segnor. And where is the harm, I pray you? interrupted her companion somewhat sharply. Do not you see, that the other ladies have all laid their veils aside, to do honour no doubt to the holy place in which we are? I have taken off mine already; and surely, if I expose my features to general observation, you have no cause to put yourself in such a wonderful alarm! Blessed Maria! Here is a fuss and a bustle about a chits face! Come, come, child! Uncover it! I warrant you that nobody will run away with it from you. Dear aunt, it is not the custom in Murcia Murcia, indeed! Holy St. Barbara, what does that signify? You are always putting me in mind of that villanous province. If it is the custom in Madrid, that is all that we ought to mind; and therefore I desire you to take off your veil immediately. Obey me this moment, Antonia, for you know that I cannot bear contradiction. Her niece was silent, but made no further opposition to Don Lorenzos efforts, who, armed with the aunts sanction, hastened to remove the gauze. What a seraphs head presented itself to his admiration! Yet it was rather bewitching than beautiful; it was not so lovely from regularity of features, as from sweetness and sensibility of countenance. The several parts of her face considered separately, many of them were far from handsome; but, when examined together, the whole was adorable. Her skin, though fair, was not entirely without freckles; her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long. But then her lips were of the most rosy freshness; her fair and undulating hair, confined by a simple ribband, poured itself below her waist in a profusion of ringlets; her neck was full and beautiful in the extreme; her hand and arm were formed with the most perfect symmetry; her mild blue eyes seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of diamonds. She appeared to be scarcely fifteen; an arch smile, playing round her mouth, declared her to be possessed of liveliness, which excess of timidity at present repressed. She looked round her with a bashful glance; and whenever her eyes accidentally met Lorenzos, she dropped them hastily upon her rosary; her cheek was immediately suffused with blushes, and she began to tell her beads; though her manner evidently showed that she knew not what she was about. Lorenzo gazed upon her with mingled surprise and admiration; but the aunt thought it necessary to apologize for Antonias mauvaise honte. Tis a young creature, said she, who is totally ignorant of the world. She has been brought up in an old castle in Murcia, with no other society than her mothers, who, God help her! has no more sense, good soul, than is necessary to carry her soup to her mouth. Yet she is my own sister, both by father and mother. And has so little sense? said Don Christoval with feigned astonishment. How very extraordinary! Very true, Segnor. Is it not strange? However, such is the fact; and yet only to see the luck of some people! A young nobleman, of the very first quality, took it into his head that Elvira had some pretensions to beauty. As to pretensions, in truth she had always enough of them; but as to beauty! If I had only taken half the pains to set myself off which she did! But this is neither here nor there. As I was saying, Segnor, a young nobleman fell in love with her, and married her unknown to his father. Their union remained a secret near three years; but at last it came to the ears of the old marquis, who, as you may well suppose, was not much pleased with the intelligence. Away he posted in all haste to Cordova, determined to seize Elvira, and send her away to some place or other, where she would never be heard of more. Holy St. Paul! How he stormed on finding that she had escaped him, had joined her husband, and that they had embarked together for the Indies! He swore at us all, as if the evil spirit had possessed him; he threw my father into prison as honest a pains-taking shoe-maker as any in Cordova; and when he went away, he had the cruelty to take from us my sisters little boy, then scarcely two years old, and whom in the abruptness of her flight she had been obliged to leave behind her. I suppose that the poor little wretch met

with bitter bad treatment from him, for in a few months after we received intelligence of his death. Why, this was a most terrible old fellow, Segnora! Oh! shocking! and a man so totally devoid of taste! Why, would you believe it, Segnor? when I attempted to pacify him, he cursed me for a witch, and wished that, to punish the count, my sister might become as ugly as myself! Ugly indeed! I like him for that. Ridiculous! cried Don Christoval. Doubtless the count would have thought himself fortunate, had he been permitted to exchange the one sister for the other. Oh! Christ! Segnor, you are really too polite. However, I am heartily glad that the cond was of a different way of thinking. A mighty pretty piece of business, to be sure, Elvira has made of it! After broiling and stewing in the Indies for thirteen long years, her husband dies, and she returns to Spain, without an house to hide her head, or money to procure her one! This Antonia was then but an infant, and her only remaining child. She found that her father-in-law had married again, that he was irreconcilable to the cond, and that his second wife had produced him a son, who is reported to be a very fine young man. The old marquis refused to see my sister or her child; but sent her word that, on condition of never hearing any more of her, he would assign her a small pension, and she might live in an old castle which he possessed in Murcia. This had been the favourite habitation of his eldest son; but, since his flight from Spain, the old marquis could not bear the place, but let it fall to ruin and confusion. My sister accepted the proposal; she retired to Murcia, and has remained there till within the last month. And what brings her now to Madrid? enquired Don Lorenzo, whom admiration of the young Antonia compelled to take a lively interest in the talkative old womans narration. Alas! Segnor, her father-in-law being lately dead, the steward of his Murcian estates has refused to pay her pension any longer. With the design of supplicating his son to renew it, she is now come to Madrid; but I doubt that she might have saved herself the trouble. You young noblemen have always enough to do with your money, and are not very often disposed to throw it away upon old women. I advised my sister to send Antonia with her petition; but she would not hear of such a thing. She is so obstinate! Well! she will find herself the worse for not following my counsels: the girl has a good pretty face, and possibly might have done much. Ah, Segnora! interrupted Don Christoval, counterfeiting a passionate air; if a pretty face will do the business, why has not your sister recourse to you? Oh! Jesus! my lord, I swear you quite overpower me with your gallantry! But I promise you that I am too well aware of the danger of such expeditions to trust myself in a young nobleman's power! No, no; I have as yet preserved my reputation without blemish or reproach, and I always knew how to keep the men at a proper distance. Of that, Segnora, I have not the least doubt. But permit me to ask you, Have you then any aversion to matrimony? That is an home question. I cannot but confess, that if an amiable cavalier was to present himself Here she intended to throw a tender and significant look upon Don Christoval; but, as she unluckily happened to squint most abominably, the glance fell directly upon his companion. Lorenzo took the compliment to himself, and answered it by a profound bow. May I enquire, said he, the name of the marquis? The marquis de las Cisternas. I know him intimately well. He is not at present in Madrid, but is expected here daily. He is one of the best of men; and if the lovely Antonia will permit me to be her advocate with him, I doubt not my being able to make a favourable report of her cause. Antonia raised her blue eyes, and silently thanked him for the offer by a smile of inexpressible sweetness. Leonellas satisfaction was much more loud and audible. Indeed, as her niece was generally silent in her company, she thought it incumbent upon her to talk enough for both: this she managed without difficulty, for she very seldom found herself deficient in words. Oh, Segnor! she cried; you will lay our whole family under the most signal obligations! I accept your offer with all possible gratitude, and return you a thousand thanks for the generosity of your proposal. Antonia, why do not you speak, child? While the cavalier says all sorts of civil things to you, you sit like a statue, and never utter a syllable of thanks, either bad, good, or indifferent! My dear aunt, I am very sensible that Fye, niece! How often have I told you, that you never should interrupt a person who is speaking! When did you ever know me do such a thing? Are these your Murcian manners? Mercy on me! I shall never be able to make this girl any thing like a person of good breeding. But pray, Segnor, she continued, addressing herself to Don Christoval, inform me, why such a crowd is assembled to-day in this cathedral. Can you possibly be ignorant, that Ambrosio, abbot of this monastery, pronounces a sermon in this church every Thursday? All Madrid rings with his praises. As yet he has preached but thrice; but all who have heard him are so delighted with his eloquence, that it is as difficult to obtain a place at church, as at the first representation of a new comedy. His fame certainly must have reached your ears? Alas! Segnor, till yesterday I never had the good fortune to see Madrid; and at Cordova we are so little informed of what is passing in the rest of the world, that the name of Ambrosio has never been mentioned in its precincts. You will find it in every ones mouth at Madrid. He seems to have fascinated the inhabitants; and,

not having attended his sermons myself, I am astonished at the enthusiasm which he has excited. The adoration paid him both by young and old, by man and woman, is unexampled. The grandees load him with presents; their wives refuse to have any other confessor; and he is known through all the city by the name of

The Man of Holiness. Undoubtedly, Segnor, he is of noble origin? That point still remains undecided. The late superior of the Capuchins found him while yet an infant at the abbey-door. All attempts to discover who had left him there were vain, and the child himself could give no account of his parents. He was educated in

the monastery, where he has remained ever since. He early showed a strong inclination for study and retirement; and as soon as he was of a proper age, he pronounced his vows. No one has ever appeared to claim him, or clear up the mystery which conceals his birth; and the monks, who find their account in the favour which is shewn to their establishment from respect to him, have not hesitated to publish, that he is a

present to them from the Virgin. In truth, the singular austerity of his life gives some countenance to the report. He is now thirty years old, every hour of which period has been passed in study, total seclusion from the world, and mortification of the flesh. Till these last three weeks, when he was chosen superior of the society to which he belongs, he had never been on the outside of the abbey-walls. Even now he never quits them except on Thursdays, when he delivers a discourse in this cathedral, which all Madrid assembles to

hear. His knowledge is said to be the most profound, his eloquence the most persuasive. In the whole course of his life he has never been known to transgress a single rule of his order; the smallest stain is not to be discovered upon his character; and he is reported to be so strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in

what consists the difference of man and woman. The common people therefore esteem him to be a saint. Does that make a saint? enquired Antonia. Bless me! then am I one. Holy St. Barbara! exclaimed Leonella, what a question! Fye, child, fye! these are not fit subjects for young women to handle. You should not seem to remember that there is such a thing as a man in the world, and you ought to imagine every body to be of the same sex with yourself. I should like to see you give people to understand, that you know that a

man has no breasts, and no hips, and no. . . . . Luckily for Antonias ignorance, which her aunts lecture would soon have dispelled, an universal murmur through the church announced the preachers arrival. Donna Leonella rose from her seat to take a better view of him, and Antonia followed her example. He was a man of noble port and commanding presence. His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. His

nose was aquiline, his eyes large, black and sparkling, and his dark brows almost joined together. His complexion was of a deep but clear brown; study and watching had entirely deprived his cheek of colour. Tranquillity reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead; and content, expressed upon every feature, seemed to announce the man equally unacquainted with cares and crimes. He bowed himself with humility to the audience. Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few

could sustain the glance of his eye, at once fiery and penetrating. Such was Ambrosio, abbot of the Capuchins, and surnamed The Man of Holiness. Antonia, while she gazed upon him eagerly, felt a pleasure fluttering in her bosom which till then had been unknown to her, and for which she in vain endeavoured to account. She waited with impatience till the sermon should begin; and when at length the friar spoke, the sound of his voice seemed to penetrate into her very soul. Though no other of the spectators felt such violent

sensations as did the young Antonia, yet every one listened with interest and emotion. They who were insensible to religions merits, were still enchanted with Ambrosios oratory. All found their attention irresistibly attracted while he spoke, and the most profound silence reigned through the crowded aisles. Even Lorenzo could not resist the charm: he forgot that Antonia was seated near him, and listened to the preacher with undivided attention.

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