

J U L I A,

OR

THE CONVENT OF ST. CLAIRE:

A TALE FOUNDED ON FACT.



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STRANGER, that massy, mouldering pile,  
Whose ivied ruins load the ground,  
Reechoed once to pious strains  
By holy sisters breathed around.

There many a noble virgin came  
To bid the world she loved....adieu ;  
There, victim of parental pride,  
To years of hopeless grief withdrew.



Yes, proud St. Claire ! thy costly walls  
Have witnessed oft the mourner's pain ;  
And hearts in joyless durance bound,  
Which sighed for kindred hearts in vain.

But never more within thy cells  
Shall beauty breathe the fruitless sigh,  
Nor hid beneath the envious veil  
Shall sorrow dim the sparkling eye.

For now, a sight by reason blest,  
Thy gloomy dome in ruins falls,  
While bats and screechowls harbour there,  
Sole tenants of thy crumbling walls.



And soon, blest change! as those dread plains,  
Where Etna's burning torrents poured,  
Become, when Time its power has shed,  
With softly-smiling verdure stored:

So, when thy darkly-frowning towers  
The verdant plain no longer load,  
These scenes, where sorrow reigned, may prove  
Fond, faithful lovers' blest abode.

And they shall pledge the nuptial vow,  
Where once far different vows were heard;  
And where thy pining virgins mourned,  
Shall babes, sweet smiling babes, be reared.



Hail, glorious change, to Nature dear !  
Methinks I see the bridal throng ;  
And hark, where lonely sisters prayed,  
How sweetly swells the social song !

But nought, O ! nought can her restore  
To social life, to happy love,  
Who once amidst thy cloistered train  
With passion's hopeless sorrow strove.

Lamented maid ! my faithful Muse  
To pity's ear shall tell thy tale ;  
Shall tell, at midnight's awful hour  
Why groaning ghosts affright the vale.



On Julia's softly dimpled cheek  
Just bloom'd to view youth's opening rose,  
When, proudly stern, her father bade  
St. Claire's dark walls her bloom enclose.

But no reluctance to obey  
With tears bedewed her beauteous cheek,  
Since love with soft persuasive power  
Not yet had taught her heart to speak.

“Yes,....be a nun's vocation mine,  
So I my brother's bliss improve ;  
His be their wealth,” sweet Julia cried,  
“So I may boast my parent's love !”



Proud Clermont blessed his generous child ;  
Her gentler mother dropped a tear,  
As if her boding heart foretold  
That love and Julia's woes were near.

For lo ! where glows the nuptial feast,  
And Clermont's heir leads in his bride,  
While Julia, called that feast to grace,  
Sits by a blooming baron's side.

Dear, fatal hour ! the feast is o'er,  
But still in faithful memory charms,  
And Julia's conscious heart has learnt  
To throb with passion's new alarms.



“ Now then I feel the power of love,”

She on her sleepless pillow cried,

“ Then must I still my sire obey,

And this warm heart in cloisters hide ?

“ But hold, fond girl ! thy throbbing breast

May be with hopeless fondness fraught ;

Yet sure Montrose’s speaking eyes

Declared he felt the love he taught.”

And well her hopes his glance had read,....

Montrose a mutual passion felt,

Nor long his tender pangs concealed,

But at her feet impassioned knelt.



Her downcast eye, her blush, her smile  
To crown her lover's suit conspired,  
Who, bold in hope, to Clermont told  
The artless wish by fondness fired.

But told in vain—"Away!" he cried;  
"O'er me your pleadings boast no power:  
Think not my son his rights shall yield,  
To swell my pining daughter's dower."

"No:—let his rights still sacred be,"  
Montrose with throbbing heart replied,  
"Give me but Julia's willing hand,  
I ask, I wish for nought beside."



“ And darest thou think that Clermont’s child  
Shall e’er pronounce the nuptial vow  
Unless,” he said, “ I could a dower  
Equal to Clermont’s rank bestow !

“ Away, young lord ! entreat no more !  
Nor thus with vain complainings mourn ;  
For, ere tomorrow’s sun has set,  
My child shall to her cell return.”

He spoke, and frown’d.—Alas, Montrose !  
In vain thy manly bosom mourned ;  
For, ere tomorrow’s sun had set,  
Thy Julia to her cell returned.



But changed indeed ! Youth's opening rose  
Now on her cheek no longer glowed ;  
And now, with earthly cares opprest,  
Before the holy shrine she bowed.

Now to religion's rites no more  
Her heart with ready zeal impelled ;  
No more with genuine fervour warm,  
Her voice the holy anthem swelled.

“ Whence thy pale cheek ? and whence, my child,  
Proceeds this change ? ” the abbess said,  
“ Why heaves thy breast with deep-drawn sighs,  
And wherefore droops thy youthful head ? ”



“ Yes,....you shall know,” the sufferer cried,

“ And let my fate your pity move !

See Passion’s victim ! Morn and eve

This struggling soul is lost in love.

“ And I yon sacred shrine profane ;

The cross with languid zeal I press ;

Montrose’s image claims the vows

Which my false lips to Heaven address.

“ Yes :—while I drop the sacred bead,

His form obtrudes upon my view,

And love’s warm tears my rosary wet,

Love claims the sigh devotion’s due.



“ Inhuman Father ! wilt thou risk  
My peace on earth, and hopes of heaven ?  
Tremble, tyrannic parent, think  
What love may do to madness driven ! ”

With pitying heart the abbess heard ;  
For she an answering pang had known,  
And well her gentle soul could mourn  
A fate, a grief, so like her own.

“ But why despair, my child ? ” she said,  
“ Before thy father lowly kneel,  
And teach that heart, though fenced by pride,  
Compassion’s generous throb to feel.”



Julia the kind advice obeyed ;  
And when the haughty Clermont came,  
Before his feet she lowly knelt,  
And hailed him by a parent's name.

“ Think'st thou to wrong thy brother's rights  
I e'er can be by thee beguiled ? ”

“ Father ! ” her trembling lips replied,

“ Say, is not Julia too your child ?

“ For him you bid the nuptial feast,  
And all life's dearest blessings glow,  
While I, alike your child, you doom  
To hopeless love, and lonely woe.”



But vain remonstrance, tears, and prayers ;  
The Count's proud heart could all deride,  
For Nature's voice can never melt  
The callous bosom fenced by pride.

“ Urge me no more,” he fiercely said,  
“ But know, not long these prayers can last ;  
Reflect, fond girl ! at morning's dawn:  
The year of thy probation 's past !”

Pale, pale grew then her youthful cheek,  
Heart-piercing seemed her mournful cry :  
“ Clermont ! relent,” her mother cried,  
“ Nor coldly doom thy child to die.”



But vain was Julia's piercing shriek ;

Nor justice he nor mercy knew :

“ Receive,” he said, “ my last embrace,”....

Then from the mournful scene withdrew.

Loud called the evening bell to prayers,

But still on Julia vainly called,

Who, leaning on her mother's breast,

With desperate words that breast appalled.

“ Suppress, suppress thy grief, my child,

Or fear to call dread vengeance down :

Wouldst thou not tremble, impious girl !

Before thy God's avenging frown ?”



“ Paint not that gracious God in frowns,  
Did not for us a Saviour bleed ?  
In mercy clothe his awful power,  
For I shall soon that mercy need.”

Dark, cheerless, awful is the night  
When tempests load the troubled air ;  
But darker, gloomier is the mind  
Where reigns the ghastly fiend Despair.

Fond mother ! in thy Julia's eyes  
Canst thou not see his reign is near ?  
Inhuman father ! hark ! loud groans  
Shall swell the blast ;....Beware ! beware !



“ Mother, the hour commands thee hence,”

Sad Julia cried, “ we now must part ;

And never may thy bosom know

A grief like that which rends my heart !

“ In all thy prayers tonight for me,

The awful throne of Heaven address,

While I with grateful bosom kneel,

And bid its power thy goodness bless.”

Speechless the mourning mother heard ;

Her tongue denied the word ‘ farewell !’

At length her quivering lips she pressed,

And Julia hurried to her cell.....



Now chill and loud the North wind blew,  
Through the long aisles hoarse murmurs ran ;  
The shuddering sisters' cheeks were pale,  
When they their midnight tasks began.

Mock'd by deep groans each anthem seemed,  
The vaulted roofs still gloomier grew :  
The blast of night was swelled by shrieks,  
The bird of night ill-omened flew.

The trembling tapers grew more pale,  
While, where their languid radiance fell,  
A phantom dimly seemed to glide,  
And loud was heard the passing bell.



“ Did you not see a phantom flit ?

Did you not hear the passing bell ?”

Each sister cried ; while, pale with dread,

With hurried steps she sought her cell.

At length arose the fatal morn

Decreed to seal sad Julia's doom,

And make the worm of hopeless love

Feed on her beauty's opening bloom.

“ Julia, thy bridal vest prepare ;

Thy heavenly spouse expects thee ; rise !”

The abbess cried.—“ Oh, stay awhile,”

Julia with broken tones replies.



“ The tapers burn, the altar glows,  
Robed are the priests in costly pride,  
The organ sounds ! Prepare !”—Again  
“ One moment stay !” the victim cried.

When through the long and echoing aisles  
An unknown voice the abbess hears—  
It seems with wild impatience fraught—  
And lo ! Montrose himself appears !

“ I come,” he cries, “ to claim my bride ;  
A father’s frown no more impedes :  
His son’s no more !—and Julia now  
To Clermont’s wealth and power succeeds.”



Distrest, yet pleased, the abbess heard,  
While on to Julia's cell she led,  
And, as she went, to pitying Heaven  
Her arms in pious homage spread.

“ Julia, come forth ! come forth, my child !  
Unlock thy cell, Montrose's bride !  
Now thou art his, a father's frown  
No longer will your fates divide.

“ Behold him here to snatch thee hence,  
And give thee to thy father's sight.”

“ How ! silent still ? ” Montrose exclaimed ;

“ Why thus thy lover's soul affright ? ”



The door with trembling speed he forced....

Ah me ! what object meets their eyes !

Stretcht on her bed in death's last pangs,

And bathed in blood, his Julia lies.

Presumptuous girl ! when Heaven afflicts

Should we its dread decrees arraign ?

Lo ! Heaven thy woe with mercy saw,

But thou hast made its mercy vain.

“ Behold the work of rash despair !”

In fluttering, feeble words she said :

“ Had I been patient still, Montrose,

This day had blessings on me shed.



“ Didst thou not say my father’s heart  
Had deigned at length thy vows to hear?  
Too late remorse ! but oh, to him  
My pardon, and my blessing bear.

“ But must I die ? and canst not thou  
Thy Julia from death’s terrors save ?  
We should have been so blest, Montrose !  
And must I leave thee for the grave ?

“ Help me ! they tear me from thy arms,  
Save me, O save thy destin’d bride !  
It will not be ;....forgive me, Heaven !”  
She feebly said, then groaned and died.



Oh! who can paint the lover's woe,  
 Or childless father's deep remorse,  
 While, bending o'er the blood-stained bed,  
 He clasped his daughter's pallid corse!

But from this scene of dreadful woe,  
 Learn why the village swain turns pale,  
 When he at midnight wanders near  
 The mouldering Convent in the vale.

There, faintly heard through whispering trees,  
 A mournful voice on Julia calls;  
 There, dimly seen, a blood-stained vest  
 Streams ghastly o'er the ivied walls.