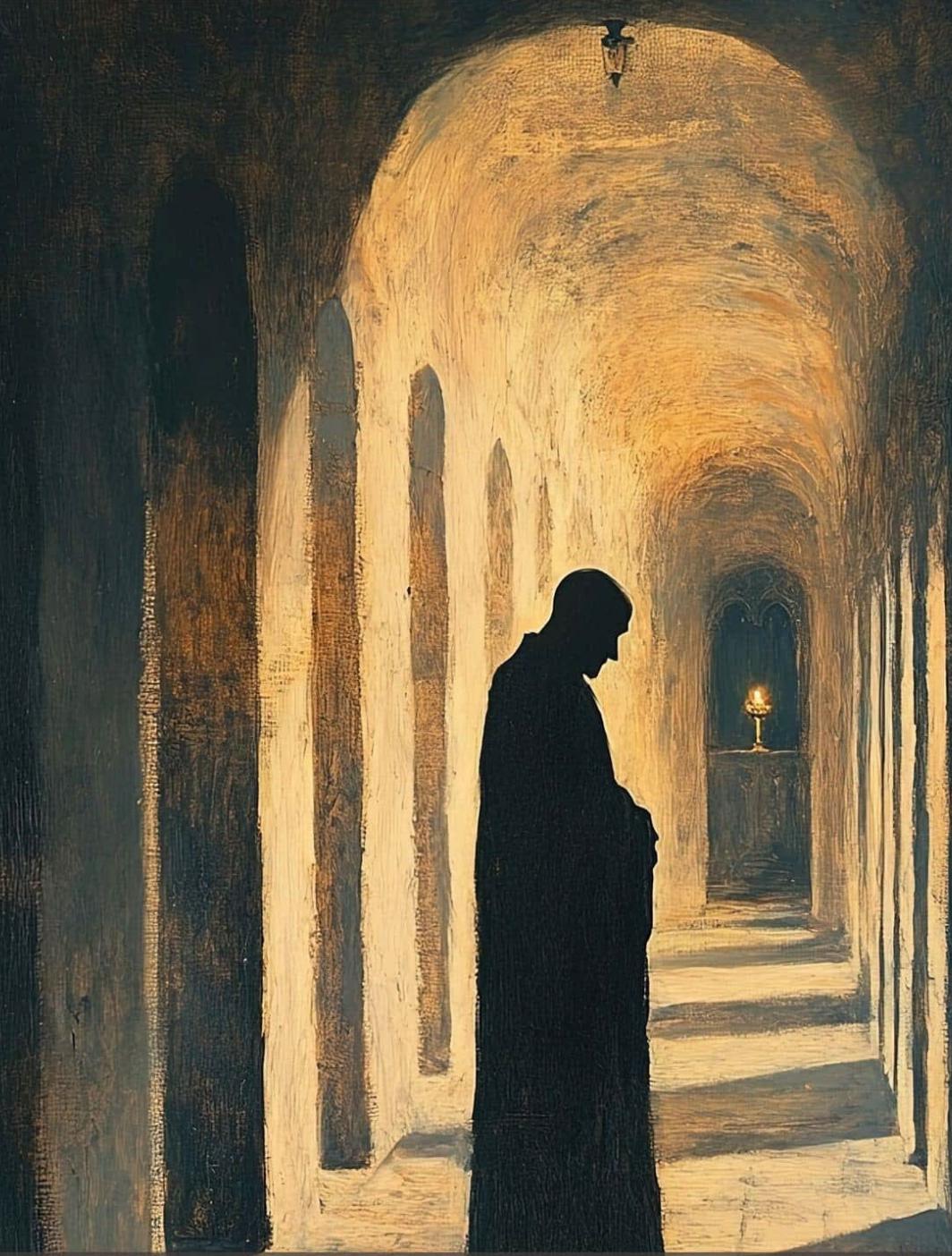


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THE MONK: A ROMANCE

Matthew Lewis



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MATTHEW LEWIS





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Preface

IMITATION OF HORACE Ep. 20. — B. 1.

Methinks, Oh! vain ill-judging Book,
 I see thee cast a wishful look,
 Where reputations won and lost are
 In famous row called Paternoster.
 Incensed to find your precious olio
 Buried in unexplored port-folio,
 You scorn the prudent lock and key,
 And pant well bound and gilt to see
 Your Volume in the window set
 Of Stockdale, Hookham, or Debrett.
 Go then, and pass that dangerous bourn
 Whence never Book can back return:
 And when you find, condemned, despised,
 Neglected, blamed, and criticised,
 Abuse from All who read you fall,
 (If haply you be read at all
 Sorely will you your folly sigh at,
 And wish for me, and home, and quiet.
 Assuming now a conjuror's office, I
 Thus on your future Fortune prophesy:—
 Soon as your novelty is o'er,
 And you are young and new no more,
 In some dark dirty corner thrown,
 Mouldy with damps, with cobwebs strown,
 Your leaves shall be the Book-worm's prey;
 Or sent to Chandler-Shop away,
 And doomed to suffer public scandal,
 Shall line the trunk, or wrap the candle!
 But should you meet with approbation,
 And some one find an inclination
 To ask, by natural transition
 Respecting me and my condition;
 That I am one, the enquirer teach,
 Nor very poor, nor very rich;
 Of passions strong, of hasty nature,
 Of graceless form and dwarfish stature;
 By few approved, and few approving;
 Extreme in hating and in loving;
 Abhorring all whom I dislike,
 Adoring who my fancy strike;
 In forming judgements never long,
 And for the most part judging wrong;
 In friendship firm, but still believing
 Others are treacherous and deceiving,

Chapter 1

— *Lord 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