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## Source for "The Unfortunate Victim"

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THE TRAGICAL STORY OF  
LUDOVISIO CARANTANI,  
A MILANESE AND HIS TWO  
DAUGHTERS.

THERE is no species of domestic tyranny so iniquitous and oppressive as that which unreasonable parents frequently exercise over their children, in popish countries, by forcing them into a state of life to which they have no call. If children ought never to be left to their own free choice, it is certainly when the shutting them up for life in a convent or monastery is under consideration; for God requires the consecration of the heart; and to him that oblation alone which is pure and voluntary, is an acceptable sacrifice.

The following story affords a striking example of the fatal consequences of such compulsion, and is too well attested to admit any doubt of its being true.

Ludovisio Carantani, a native of Varese, a city in the Milanese, had only two daughters by a wife who had brought him a considerable fortune: but that parental affection which ought to have been divided between them, was confined to the eldest, whose name was Victoria, though she was not near so amiable as Olympia, her youngest sister.—This capricious preference was evident even in their infancy. Victoria enjoyed all the caresses of her father, nor could her sister obtain the least token of his tenderness or affection. Her mother's love indeed made her some amends for this indifference; but death having deprived her of this consolation, she was exposed to numberless contradictions, and suffered continual ill treatment. Victoria's beauty, and the fortune which she might expect from the wealth and partiality of her father, soon drew about her a great number of suitors; and Carantani, that he might marry his favourite with the greater advantages, was determined to sacrifice to her interest the happiness of Olympia, whom he accordingly put into a convent, and caused a report to be spread that she had resolved upon a religious life. This report gained credit; the number of Victoria's lovers increased, among whom were gentlemen of the best families in the country.

The father already congratulated himself upon the success of his scheme. As he had always treated the amiable Olympia with severity, he was persuaded that she would be soothed by the tranquillity of a convent, and think herself happy to have escaped the rudeness and neglect she had suffered at home. Nor was he altogether mistaken; for, at the solicitation of several of her relations who were devotees, and had been gained over by her father, she consented

to take the habit of a novice or probationer in the monastery of San Martino. But there is a time of life when nature speaks a language very different from that of monastic devotion. Olympia, although young, lively, and of a complexion naturally amorous, was on the point of becoming the victim of her father's ambition, and her own inexperience; but, on the very day of the ceremony, she saw, amongst the company assembled as usual on these occasions, an amiable cavalier, who made a deep impression on her heart. Immediately the thoughts of a convent became intolerable: and she reflected with horror upon the sacrifice which she was just about to make, of all the advantages which she might promise herself in the world.

The nuns and her devout relations, who soon perceived the alteration, endeavoured in vain to bring her back to her first resolution. All the answer that they received from her was, that her circumstances being equal to those of her sister, she had no inclination to sacrifice herself to her ambition, or to the partiality of her father that her design was to marry, and that she entreated them to prevail upon her father to give her to a young cavalier of a very good family, by whom she knew she was beloved.

It is easy to imagine the astonishment of Carantani, when he was acquainted with a resolution which quite frustrated the scheme he had formed for raising the fortune of his dear Victoria. He earnestly entreated the nuns and his kinswomen to redouble their endeavours to make Olympia alter her resolution. But these endeavours only inflamed her passion, and increased her disgust for a monastic life; nor did she conceal her sentiments even from her father, who came frequently to see her, in order to discover the effect of the remonstrances of his friends; to these he added his own; but perceiving that this expedient did not succeed, he had recourse to menaces, and assured her, that if she did not resolve upon a religious life, he would take her home again, where she might expect to be the most wretched of women.

Olympia, who knew her father's unkindness by a long and cruel experience, did not doubt but he would keep his word. Yet she endeavoured to mollify him by the most tender and pathetic expostulations; but neither arguments; entreaty, nor tears made the least impression upon his heart.

As by this change in Olympia's resolution, the match of his Victoria was in danger of being broken off, her lover growing cold and indifferent, in proportion as her fortune became precarious, Carantani, was so much enraged, that the next time he visited Olympia he told her, in a transport of fury, that if she did not take the veil as soon as her novice's term expired, he would put her to death, with his own hand.

"If I die, it shall not be by your hand (replied his amiable daughter calmly). I have often represented to you my aversion to a monastic life, yet you command me to sacrifice myself to the fortune of my sister, and to that excessive fondness which you have always shown for her; and if it be impossible for me to prevail upon you to retract this command, you shall be obeyed, since my obedience will spare you the crime which you threaten to commit against me; but you and my sister will have perpetual cause to regret the cruel sacrifice which you oblige me to make you."

She added, that he might whenever he thought proper order the necessary preparations for the ceremony: after which she withdrew.

Carantani, who probably did not know to what lengths despair might carry a young maid, when love has once seized on her heart, pleased himself with the thoughts of having made her change her resolution. He went with an air of triumph to carry the news to his dear Victoria and her lover, who were then together. They exulted greatly upon it, and now thought themselves happy.

As the time appointed for Olympia to take the veil was now near, signior Carantani made all the usual preparations, and, as if he thought the unhappy victim knew not to whom she was to be sacrificed, he took measures for solemnizing the marriage of his eldest daughter at the same time.

On the day preceeding that which was fixed for this double ceremony, Olympia thought it her duty to make a last effort to soften her father,—and, if possible, divert him from so barbarous a sacrifice. For this purpose she again reasoned, she expostulated, she entreated, but Carantani was equally deaf to the voice of reason, nature, and religion; he continued inflexible to his purpose, and confirmed his threatenings by the most horrible oaths.

"Ah! my dear father (said the amiable Olympia, with a look of unutterable tenderness and grief,) consider well what you about; consider that to me your answer is either life or death, and be assured if you sacrifice me to my sister's fortune, you will repent when it is too late; the phantoms that now mislead you will vanish at once; you will perceive with horror the effects of your delusion, and feel the pangs of remorse when they are aggravated by despair; but further conversation will only ratify my destruction, by increasing your resentment: permit me, therefore, to withdraw, and do not give your final answer till to-morrow. But remember, that if I perish, you will be wretched; and that, in refusing mercy to your daughter, you give sentence against yourself."—With these words she left the parlour.

Carantani, whose eyes the last sentence might have opened, disregarded it as one of those wild menaces which are usually the last resource of a

passion increased by opposition, and exasperated by despair. The preparations for Victoria's marriage engrossed his attention, and he thought of nothing but how to render it splendid and magnificent. The relations who were invited to this double ceremony, were already assembled in the church of the convent, and Olympia was dressed in her richest apparel and most splendid ornaments, which at these times are put on only to be renounced for ever with the greatest solemnity. The dreadful moment arrived in which this blooming victim was to be conducted to the altar: then knowing that she had nothing further to hope, yet concealing her despair, she asked leave of the nuns who were about her to go up into her cell under pretence of recollecting herself for a few minutes, and meditating in private upon the important affair which she was about to transact. This was readily granted, and Olympia went up, not into her cell, but into a garret which was over it, and after having deplored her misfortunes, and prayed to God for pardon, she fastened to one of the beams a cord, which she had taken from one of the nuns who used it for a girdle, put it about her neck, threw herself from a little bench on which she stood, and in a few minutes expired.

In the mean time the company, who had been almost an hour assembled in the church, waited with impatience for the beginning of the ceremony. The abbess was acquainted with it, who was equally surpris'd at the delay, and asking the nuns the reason of it, was informed of Olympia's request: they waited almost an hour longer, but still Olympia did not appear. They then went to seek her in her cell, but there she was not to be found; other parts of the convent were searched, but without success. At length, after much time spent in fruitless enquiry, one of the nuns thought of going up into the garret. What a mournful! what a horrid spectacle was there!—The unfortunate Olympia hanging in the fatal cord with which she had put an end to her life.

Seized with horror at the ghastly sight, she ran precipitately down stairs—and, rushing into the choir where the nuns were assembled, she filled them with terror and astonishment by her outcries and lamentations. The alarm soon spread itself from the choir to the church, where all the relations, with the utmost consternation, received the news of the sudden death of the unhappy Olympia, the most shocking circumstances of which the abbess prudently concealed. At first they would not believe it; they demanded a sight of her—and, going out of the church in a body, the ladies and Carantani himself (this privilege being granted to fathers) entered the convent, notwithstanding the resistance of the abbess and nuns. What a spectacle was this for a father—for a sister—for a whole family!—One of the most amiable young women, the victim of a violent despair, all the horror of which was yet visible in her countenance!

Great as Carantani's obduracy had hitherto been, he now burst into tears and became frantic with despair. He accused himself, too late, as the murderer of his daughter; and, stung with this tormenting thought, which was but too much the suggestion of truth, he fled from the convent, and even from the city, with the greatest precipitation. He mounted his horse with a design to conceal his shame, his grief,

and his remorse, in the obscurity of a country seat. But heaven designed him for a public example. He had scarce rode six miles, when his horse, taking fright, threw him; and, his foot hanging in the stirrup, he suffered a death yet more dreadful than that of his unhappy daughter. Dragged by his horse, which ran full speed, every limb was broken, and his body covered with wounds and bruises. But divine justice seemed to extend itself even to his carcase after he was dead, the head and arms of which were at length entirely torn off; nor did the horse stop till he got home. Who can conceive the horror and consternation of his family, when they saw the horse furiously galloping, and dragging after him the torn and bloody trunk! Victoria, who was an eye witness of this dreadful event, could not sustain the complicated calamity, which was thus heaped upon her, on the very day on which she expected to have been completely happy. The death of her sister, and of her father, attended with uncommon circumstances of horror, and the loss of her lover, who refused to enter into an alliance with a family which suicide had dishonoured, made so deep an impression upon her mind, that she died two days after, and closed that series of disastrous events, which afford an ever memorable instruction to parents with respect to their conduct towards their children.