

1812

The Affecting History of the Duchess of C****
Who Was Confined Nine Years in a Horrid
Dungeon, Under Ground, Where Light Never
Entered, a Straw Bed Being Her Only Resting Place,
and Bread and Water Her Only Support, Conveyed
by Means of a Turning-Box, by Her Inhuman
Husband; Whom She Saw but Once During Her
Long Imprisonment, Though Suffering by Hunger,
Thirst, and Cold, the Most Severe Hardships, But
Fortunately She Was at Last Discovered, and
Released from the Dungeon, By Her Parents.
[Transcript]

Stéphanie Félicité Genlis

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The Literary Visitor Or ENTERTAINING MISCELLANY COMPRISING Meritorious Selections and Original Productions IN PROSE AND VERSE.

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From the Friends of MADAME DE GENLIS.

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HISTORY OF THE
DUCHESS OF C****

I was born at Rome, and am descended from one of the most illustrious houses in Italy. Being the sole heiress of an immense fortune, no pains were spared to give me a suitable education. Brought up by the best of mothers, beloved by a tender father, and esteemed by a family of whom I was the only hope, fortune and nature seemed to favor me with their choicest gifts. I attained my fifteenth year, without having once experienced a single sorrow, without having known the slightest indisposition or shed any other tears than those of tenderness and joy. I was (...) of recollecting the past. I enjoyed the present with transport; nor did I behold aught in the future but a situation equally prosperous and happy.

A young lady, the daughter of an intimate friend of my mother, was the companion of my infancy. Her character was irreproachable, and her heart not devoid of sensibility; but she wanted experience, and consequently could neither counsel nor direct me. Nevertheless, I contracted a violent friendship for this young creature, and my confidence in her was unbounded. I loved and respected my mother; but I did not regard her as my friend, because she had permitted me to confer that endearing title on another; she had even a satisfaction in seeing me form such a dangerous connection. This indiscretion cost me dear; it was the chief source of all my misfortunes. My friend married to the marquis of Venuzi, of whom she had been enamoured above a year. She had communicated her secret to me; and this confidence had but too much raised my imagination, and misled my heart. My friend, two days after the wedding, accompanied the marquis to his delightful villa, thirty miles from Rome. My mother was of the party, and took me with her. The marchioness of Venuzi was three years older than me. Her conduct seemed to be governed by a great share of prudence and good sense; and therefore, although she was only her nineteenth year, my mother left us at full liberty to enjoy each other's company alone, whenever we pleased. One evening, after supper, the marchioness proposed to

me a walk in the park. At some distance from the house, we entered a little wilderness; when, turning down one of the walks, we saw, very distinctly, a young gentleman on a garden seat. On perceiving us, he arose, and the great surprise he expressed, excited the same sensation in us. The moon shone on his face; we were near him, and were equally struck by his graceful figure and noble air. After a moment's silence, as he did not retire, the marchioness asked him who he was. He answered her with equal respect and politeness, but refused to mention his name, and immediately went away.

We returned directly to the house, much surprised at this adventure, which we did not fail to communicate to the marquis. He smiled, and suffered us to perceive that this young man was not unknown to him; and, as I expressed a great desire for some farther information concerning him, "all that I can tell you," says he, "is, that this young man is independent, and of an illustrious family. He has for a long time ardently desired to see you; and, if you consent to it, I will tomorrow acquaint you with his name." The next day I renewed my enquiries, but without receiving any satisfactory answer. At night, when my mother had retired to her chamber, I repaired to my friend. We shut ourselves up in her closet, and talked over the adventure of the preceding evening; when, on a sudden, the door was opened, and I saw the marquis of Venuzi enter, holding in one hand a dark lantern, and with the other introducing the same young man whom I had such an inclination to know. I was quite motionless with surprise. "I present to you," said the marquis, approaching me, "my prisoner, whose liberty, I believe," continued he, laughing, "It is no longer in my power to restore, since he has been so imprudent as to wish to see you a second time." At these words I blushed, and felt inexpressible embarrassment. Notwithstanding I was so young, I had some confused idea of the consequences of such an adventure. I was that moment resolved to leave the room, to hasten to my mother, and to confess all to her; but curiosity contained me, and I forgot my duty. The marquis, assuming a more serious air, informed us, that he was going to entrust us with an important secret. "I know your discretion," said he; "and I am persuaded you will both justify the confidence you have inspired."

After the preamble, the marquis made me promise inviolable secrecy; and the young man informed us, that he was called the count of Belmire; that his father, the marquis of Belmire, was brother to the duke of C****, one of the richest nobleman in Naples; that the duke, who was the head of the family, having quarreled with the marquis, had contrived to ruin him at court, and had persecuted him with such rancor, and that he was obliged to leave his country, and settle in France, where he had an affair of honor four years afterward, that obliged him to seek another retreat; that the marquis of Venuzi, his intimate friend, being then in France, and about to return to Italy, had prevailed upon him to accept of an asylum in this very house, where he had been concealed three months; that he himself (the young count,) having heard me frequently mentioned, could not resist the curiosity he had to see me, and after the transient glimpse of me by moonlight, he had been more urgent with the marquis to procure him an interview, on which he set so high a value; and, finally, that he was the next day to accompany his father to Venice." After having heard this information, I rose; and, notwithstanding all the entreaties of the marquis to the contrary, immediately retired to my chamber, overwhelmed with sorrow. I durst not reflect on what had just passed. I was afraid to interrogate my heart, or to examine my conduct. I could not conceive how I had been capable of attending, unknown to my mother, and at midnight, to a young man, a stranger, who had presumed to talk to me of love. I perceived, clearly, that I ought

to distrust the advice of the marquis of Venuzi, and that even his wife was not in a situation to direct me. I shuddered at the danger before me. A prophetic horror whispered, that I was going irrecoverably to lose my reputation, my tranquility, and all the happiness I had hitherto enjoyed. But the marchioness of Venuzi soon resumed her wonted influence over me. She incessantly talked to me of the count of Belmire. These dangerous conversations contributed to pervert my understanding, but could not dissipate my melancholy thoughts.

At the expiration of three months we returned to Rome. Towards the end of the winter, there was a variety of entertainments.

The marquis of Venuzi, in particular, gave a masked ball, at which I was present, with my mother. About two in the morning, the marchioness proposed to me, that I should go into her room to change my dress. We left the ball-room, and on crossing a small gallery, but indifferently lighted, I observed a mask following us. What was my surprise, when the mask, approaching me, and throwing himself at my feet, was discovered to be the count of Belmire! Notwithstanding my emotion, and the secret joy I felt in seeing him again, my first idea was, to endeavor to escape. But he detained me by my robe, entreating me to grant him a moment's conversation; he conjured the marchioness to prevail on me to hear him. She united her entreaties to his, and at that I had the weakness to consent. The count told me, that his father's affair was very happily accommodated; that he had been for six weeks past at Naples, having had the satisfaction of terminating his difference with the duke his brother, by a very cordial reconciliation. "My father," continued he, "sets out in a month for France in order to arrange his private affairs in that kingdom, before he finally settles in his native country; and I, before I accompany him in this journey, am solicitous to know my fate. I am come privately from Naples, solely to know whether the tender homage which I have presumed to offer, be absolutely rejected. Speak madam.—If you hate me, I shall bid you an everlasting adieu. Despised by you, I am undone. I renounce Italy forever. Speak.—Your answer will recall me to my country, or sentence me to irrecoverable exile."

As the count pronounced these last words, I could not refrain from tears. This answer he too well understood; he required no other. A thousand times he assured me of his unceasing love. Certain of my affection, and of his returning to Rome in six months; entitled, by his rank and expectations, to demand my hand, although his fortune was not so considerable as mine; every thing seemed to justify his hopes; in which, nevertheless, in spite of myself, my heart could not participate.

Two months after this interview, which forever destroyed all the tranquility of my life, the duke of C**** came to Rome, and I saw, him at a *conversazione* (so the assemblies in Italy are called) at the French ambassador's. When he was introduced to me, I felt a kind of shock, an unaccountable sensation. The duke of C****, who was then about thirty-six, was perfectly handsome; but one could not help remarking, in his eyes and eye-brows something gloomy and inauspicious, which struck more forcibly at first sight than the nobleness and regularity of his figure. His look was piercing and austere; and when he endeavored to soften it, it rendered it ambiguous and deceitful. His deportment was in general contemptuous and haughty; and although, in some respects, he was not deficient in politeness, his manner was equally peremptory and imperious. Elated by his birth, his employments, his riches, his interest at court,

and his success with the fair, nothing, he thought, was ever to resist his inclinations, or oppose his pleasure. Impetuous, violent, and corrupted by prosperity and pride, he could neither subdue his passions, nor rise superior to resentment. Implacable, through weakness and vanity, he gloried in never forgiving. His enmity was heightened by rancor, and he would sacrifice every thing to the horrid pleasure he experienced in the gratification of revenge. Such was the duke of C****. I felt an invincible antipathy to him, the first moment I beheld him. Unfortunately for me, I inspired him with very different sentiments. He procured an introduction to my mother; and a fort-night after, my father declared to me, that the duke had demanded me in marriage, and that I must prepare for the ceremony in a month. My father added, "I have given my word without asking your consent; for I took it for granted, that you would accept with pleasure the greatest match in Italy, a man who adores you, and whose person is so agreeable." I received this declaration (which appeared to me like a sentence of death), without being able to utter a single word. My father loved me, but he was absolute. Besides, what could I say? Had I even the consolation of applying to my mother, with what face could I avow my error, and confess that I had disposed of my heart with her approbation? It was then I perceived, the full extent, the fatal imprudence of my conduct; and that the greatest misfortune which can befall a young woman, is the not having regarded her mother as her true friend and confidant.

Deprived thus of the sweet resource of uttering my complaints to some soothing friend, I concealed my sufferings and grief within my own breast, and carefully avoided the marchioness of Venuzi, whose dangerous advice I dreaded. Obedience alone, I thought, could expiate my error. I submitted to my fate, and sacrificed my happiness to the deference which I paid to the command of my parents. I married the duke of C****, and set out almost immediately with him for Naples. When we arrived in that city, and entered the palace where I was to spend my life, I experienced sensations of grief too poignant to be expressed. The duke, who attributed my melancholy to my affection for my parents, endeavored to divert y attention, by the protestation of a passion which it was not in my power to return. I appeared at court, and soon perceived that the duke was extremely jealous. This circumstance, however, gave me little concern. I would gladly have retired from every scene of fashionable dissipation; but the vanity of the duke, notwithstanding my apparent aversion to gaiety, and his own disposition to jealousy, was too predominant to permit it.

When I had been married about seven months, I learned that the marquis of Belmire had died in France; that, by his will, he had appointed the duke guardian of his son; and that the latter, on his return to Italy, had been taken ill at Turin. A fort-night after, the duke entered my apartment, and informed me, that he had just received a letter from his nephew, whose health was happily re-established. "He will not come to Naples," added the duke, "but he has written to you, to entreat you to prevail upon me, to grant him permission to make a tour for two years. Here is the letter." He then gave it to me with the seal broken. I took (...) and, in a faltering voice, read aloud what follows:

"MADAM, "Although I have not the happiness of being known by you, I persuade myself that I am too unfortunate not to inspire you with some companion. I have lost the best and tenderest of fathers. Grief and despair had brought me almost to the grave; the cruel tenderness of my friends has recalled me to life. But to what an existence I am restored! I have lost all that could endear it to me. Forgive me, madam, for troubling you with sorrows in which you are not interested, but

with which my heart is overwhelmed. Oh! Condescend, at least, to pity and excuse me. My father, by his last will, has placed me under an entire subjection to my uncle; but I cannot obey the order to return to Naples. That place is now become hateful to me. It was there he lived so many years. Every thing in that city will recall the most distracting ideas. No. I can never go thither. I am sure, madam, that you can imagine how very strong, how natural this resistance must be; and that you will have the goodness to engage my uncle to revoke an order which is not in my power to obey. Obtain for me, madam, the permission to travel—to fly—to banish myself from Naples—in a word, to carry far from Italy, that anguish and those sorrows which I shall retain to the latest moment of my life. I am, with respect, &c. “The Count de BELMIRE.”

I can give no idea of the grief and terror which I experienced on reading this letter. I was apprehensive that it was impossible for the duke not to understand the double meaning it conveyed. Of all men, he was the most mistrustful and suspicious. Nevertheless, as he did not know that his nephew had been at Rome, and was persuaded that I never could have seen him, he had not the most distant idea of the truth. For my part, being unable to keep within my bosom the distracting sentiments by which I was agitated, I was so imprudent as to write a letter the next day to the marchioness of Venuzi, explaining of my cruel fate, and deploring the fatal passion which I could not conquer.—The marchioness, in her answer, questioned me concerning the duke’s behavior. I was explicit in my reply. I did not scruple to declare, that every day I discovered such faults and vices of the duke, together with such a ferocity of character, as but too well justified the antipathy I had conceived for him. Thus, by the reiterated imprudence of my conduct, I actually completed, as it were, the digging of that abyss which was already half open under my feet.

About this time I again enjoyed the happiness of seeing my father and mother. I was near my time. They came from Naples to be with me. I was delivered of a daughter. I asked, and obtained permission to suckle her. This delightful employment, while it lasted, suspended all my sorrows, and made me insensible to the ill treatment of the duke, who, for a long time, had ceased to put any restraint upon his conduct, and had permitted me to behold all the violence and impetuosity of his character. The day after I had weaned my child he came to me, and said, that we must immediately set out for a seat he had, thirty-six miles from Naples. My daughter was with me. I took her in my arms, and followed the duke without uttering a word. We got into the carriage. I held my daughter on my lap; I caressed her. The duke was silent, and seemed, during the whole journey, to be quite absorbed in thought.

When we arrived at the castle, we passed over a drawbridge. I shuddered at the rattling of the chains; and at that instant, by a kind of involuntary impulse, I looked at the duke. “What ails you?” said he; “the antique appearance of this castle seems to surprise you. What then, do you think you are entering a prison?” He uttered these words with a forced and malicious smile; and I could perceive in his eyes such a cruel pleasure, as made me ready to sink with horror. Wishing, however, to conceal it, I reclined my head on my daughter’s. I could not refrain from tears. Feeling them trickle on her face, she began to cry! Her cries pierced my very soul. I pressed her to my heart with sensations of indescribable tenderness. I wept and sobbed. In this situation I alighted from the carriage. The duke, tearing, as it were, my child from my arms, gave her to one of the servants; and seizing one of my hands, led, or rather dragged me toward the castle.—He then made me ascend a staircase which terminated in a long gallery. The evening came on; the

gallery which we were crossing, was very spacious and gloomy. The duke at first walked extremely fast; then stopping suddenly, “you tremble,” said he; “whence can proceed this terror? Are you not with a husband whom you love, and whose duty it is to protect you.” “Oh! heavens!” I exclaimed, “what means that gloomy and distracted look, that terrible tone of voice?”—“Come, come,” he answered, “we are going to finish the explanation.” At these words, almost carrying me in his arms (for I could neither follow him nor walk) he dragged me out of the gallery into a large bed-chamber. I flung myself into a chair, and gave a free passage to my tears. He left the room, but soon returned with a candle, which he placed on a table opposite to me, seating himself by me. I durst not look at him.—At last he spoke: “You have sufficiently enjoyed the secret reproaches of your conscience; it is now time to overwhelm you with confusion; read these letters. I have copied them myself.” He then gave me a packet of papers; and seeing that I hesitated to receive them, he took a sheet, and read it aloud. From the first words, I well knew it was one of the letters which I had written to the marchioness of Venuzi, in which I had mentioned, without reserve, not only the fatal sentiments of my heart, but my unconquerable aversion to the duke. “Ah!” I exclaimed, “I am undone.” “Perfidious woman!” cried the duke, “I have not then had the happiness to please you. I selected you—I preferred you to all other women. I adored you and you hated me. You fancied yourself unhappy—I inspired you with an *unconquerable aversion!*—Well, then, I will justify your hatred. I will give you sufficient reason to detest me. Betrayed, dishonored by you, do you think I can suffer such outrages with impunity?”—“Hold!” interrupted I, “you may accuse and punish, with aspersing me. I am guilty, indeed, in some degree; but, if I have not been able to subdue an unhappy passion, at least, your honor and mine are yet unsullied; and I have only to reproach myself for the imprudent confession which friendship extorted from me.”—“Perfidious woman,” returned the duke, in a rage, “hear your condemnation.” Then taking up another of the letters he read the following passage:—‘that object, alas! which nothing can eradicate from my heart, is as much to be pitied as myself. Does he not know to what excess he is beloved? Does he not know how severely I reproach myself for a confession which now renders me so guilty and so wretched?’—I recollected but too well this passage in one of my letters. I also perfectly remembered that I had not only forborne to name the count of Belmire in any of them, but that I had even spoken of him in such an indirect manner, that it was impossible to know, from these letters, at what period the attachment I confessed, first took its rise; and the duke, who had been violently jealous, at the time of our marriage, of two persons at the court of Naples, who had given proofs of particular attention to me, had not the least doubt that one of these was the object of my passion.

This supposition left him no room to hesitate about me; for, after the passage he had just read, it appeared beyond a doubt that I had avowed my sentiments since my marriage. The only method, therefore, which I could take to justify myself, was to declare, that when I gave him my hand, I had no longer a heart to dispose of. But I well knew what a despicable opinion he had conceived of the sex, and how very much he was disposed to entertain the most odious suspicions. Sensible of this, the welfare of my daughter would not permit me to be more explicit. I did not leave Rome till six weeks after my marriage; and had the duke understood that I had conceived an affection for another before I became acquainted with him, it was very probable that he would harbor the most injurious doubts respecting the birth of my daughter. Besides, this confession might have led to a discovery of the whole truth. He might have soon recollected a thousand circumstances to ascertain it; the letter which I had received from his nephew—my emotions on reading it, my blushes every time he mentioned his name to me—he might, at last, have

discovered the connexion between the marquis of Venuzi and the count of Belmire's father. In a word, if I had destroyed that prepossession which centered all his suspicions at Naples, I should then have risked a secret which it would be impossible to betray without exposing the object of my affection to all the fury of his resentment. And this was the more to be dreaded, as the count of Belmire, who was only nineteen, was absolutely dependant on the duke, who was his uncle and guardian. All these reflections rose at once to my imagination, and involved me in unspeakable embarrassment. Thus, not daring to justify myself, what answer could I give? The duke interpreted my silence as a confession, which demonstrated his own dishonor and my disgrace.

His passion then knew no bounds—he rose; and with his face inflamed, and eyes sparkling with fury, “you have nothing, then,” said he, “to alledge in your defence?”

“Alas!” answered I, “are you in a situation to hear me? I am innocent—I invoke heaven to witness it.”

“You innocent!” interrupted he, “dare you persist in it? Have you not written yourself, that your lover knows *to what excess he is beloved?*”

“And yet,” replied I, bursting into tears, “I am innocent. Heaven knows that I am.”

“Oh! thou monster of deceit!” exclaimed the duke, “tremble at the vengeance that is ready to overwhelm thee.”

At these words, uttered in a menacing and dreadful tone, I thought I heard the inevitable sentence of destruction. I threw myself upon my knees; and lifting up my hands to heaven, “Oh God!” I cried, “God, my only refuge, protect me.”

“Rise,” said the duke, in a milder voice, “sit down, and attend to me.”

I obeyed, looking at him with a timid and suppliant air.—He was for some moments silent; then fetching a deep sigh, “you ought to be sensible,” said he, “to what a degree I am offended; you, who accuse me of being passionate and vindictive; you, ungrateful woman, to whom I have hitherto, given only proofs of love; you, who have such just reason now to dread the effects of my vengeance. Nevertheless, it is yet possible for me to forgive you. But your sincerity only, can disarm my anger. Remember, that henceforth, the slightest concealment will irrecoverably ruin you. I can be content with one victim; but one I am determined to have. Name instantly the vile seducer, who has thus made you violate the solemn vows, the most sacred duties.”

“No,” interrupted I, “no; I have broken no vows. I have violated no duties.”

“I will know,” replied the duke, raising his voice, “I will know the name of your lover. I command you to tell me.”

At this moment I anticipated all the horror of my fate; but, with the sense of danger, I received an accession of courage; and preferring death itself, to the base action he proposed, I

replied, “if you must have a victim, sacrifice her whom you have in your power. Let the whole weight of your vengeance, fall on me; for the name you demand, you shall *never* know.”

Astonished and confounded at this unexpected intrepidity, the duke sat for some time motionless. He could find no words expressive of his rage. At last, it burst out. “Wretch!” said he, “I shall never know it! Ah! I perceive you have no idea to what excesses I can proceed; you do not yet know me.”

“I expect every thing, and, miserable as I am, can bid defiance to death.”

“Death! Cease, thus to flatter thyself. No; I have not destined such consolation for thee. For a year past I have been nourishing hatred and revenge in the bosom of my soul. I have been meditating a punishment for thy infidelity; and dost thou think that the vengeance of a moment can satisfy me? No; thou shalt not die.—Thy tomb, indeed, is prepared, but thou must descend into it alive; nor shalt thou find there that death which thou desirest.”

These dreadful words chilled my blood; my eyes closed, and I sunk senseless on the floor. When I recovered, I found myself in the arms of my women. I inquired eagerly for one of them who had ever evinced the tenderest affection for me, and who was the only one who had accompanied me from Rome. They informed me that she was left behind at Naples. It was then evident, that the duke had expressly ordered her not to attend me. This circumstance heightened my terror beyond conception. I passed the night, encircled by my women; under a sensible constraint in their presence, yet dreading to be alone: neither daring to complain before them, nor to send them away. About six in the morning, I desired them to lead me to my daughter’s chamber. She was still asleep.—I dismissed my women and sat down by her cradle. The sight of her, far from mitigating, did but augment my sorrows. “Alas! dear child” said I, “thou sleepest in peace. I see thee, perhaps, for the last time. Receive! O receive my tenderest blessings! Gracious God!” continued I, falling on my knees, “I submit to my dreadful fate; but let my daughter, my dear daughter, be happy. If they have the inhumanity to tear her from me, be thou, O God! her father and protector.” My sobbings now increased and deprived me of utterance.

At this instant the door flew open, and the duke appeared. I shuddered at his aspect; my tears ceased to flow. I rose; but, being unable to support myself, I sunk upon a sofa. “Well,” said he, “has reflection taught you to be more reasonable? Are you sensible of all the consequences you hazard by resistance to my wishes?” A deep sigh was my only answer. “That name which I have demanded,” continued the duke, “are you still determined that I shall never know?” I lifted up my eyes to heaven.—I persisted in my silence. “I must have a positive answer,” said he, “will you name him; or not?”

“I cannot,” answered I.

“Ah!” cried the duke, “thou hast pronounce thy own sentence.— Look at that child, and take leave of her forever.”

“No,” interrupted I, “you cannot be so barbarous as to tear her from me. Oh! leave me my child. Let me see her at sometimes, and I will endure, without murmuring, whatever your hatred can inflict.”

That moment my daughter awaked; she opened her eyes, and smiling upon her father, lifted up her little hands, almost clasped, towards him. “Alas!” said I, “she seems to plead for me. Oh! my child, my dear child, why canst thou not speak? Thou wouldst soften thy father.”

I was then going to take her in my arms, but the duke seized her.—“Leave her,” said he, “she is no longer yours.”

“Oh!” cried I, “take my life, or restore me my child.” I threw myself at his feet. I bathed them with my tears. I embraced his knees. He contemplated me for a moment in this situation; then, spurring me from him in a rage, he went some steps toward the door. I followed him, still on my knees, crying out, “my daughter, my daughter!” The child, terrified, uttered a plaintive cry, stretching her little arms toward me. At that instant I lost sight of her. The duke rushed furiously out of the room; but returned in a moment after, and made me go into my own apartment.

Then, composing his countenance, “you think,” said he, “that I have an obdurate heart; and yet— He stopped, his eyes bent upon the ground—those eyes, whose wild and ill-boding looks might have discovered his vile deceit. I was in his power. I had no idea of his dreadful views. I could perceive no advantage that he could derive from dissimulation. I was only eighteen. I thought then, at last, he had begun to reproach himself with this excess of cruelty, and that, at least, he would mitigate the punishment on which he had meditated before. A ray of hope somewhat revived my heart. I again talked to him of my daughter.

He heard me with a gloomy air, but not expressive of displeasure. He gave me to understand, that his affection for me had alone impelled him to such violent measures; and that if I would take care of my health, I might see my daughter again. So dear a hope, made me forget all my sufferings. Seeing the duke less cruel, I began to conceive myself more guilty. After the letters which he had read, I thought it natural that he should suspect me of absolute infidelity; and that his hatred was an obvious consequence. I excused the violence of his conduct, and was deeply impressed by that compassion which he had affected for my sufferings.

A fever, occasioned by the violent agitations I had undergone, obliged me to go to bed. The duke then appeared to feel the utmost anxiety. He dispatched an express to Naples for two physicians; he never quitted my bed-side; affected the greatest tenderness for me, before my women; and, when we were alone, said every thing to persuade me that his affection was much stronger than his resentment; and he positively assured me, that as soon as my fever had left me, I should see my child again. At this promise I forgot all the sufferings he had made me endure. I snatched one of his hands, and pressed it between mine; and O bedewed with tears of gratitude that barbarous hand which was in a few hours to drag me from my chamber and to plunge in a dreadful dungeon. The physicians assured him that my illness was not very dangerous; and their practice at Naples being urgent, they set out in two days. The very morning of their departure, the anxiety the duke expressed for me, seemed greater than ever; and although I had no longer any fever, he obliged me to keep my bed. As he had made all my women sit up with me the three preceding

nights, they were overcome by fatigue, and he now dismissed them to take repose for the whole day; declaring that he would nurse me himself, with one of his valets, and an old woman, the keeper of the castle. He selected them in preference to any of his other servants, because he knew them each to be equally credulous and ignorant. The curtains of my bed were drawn, and I thought that my women were still attending, when at noon I perceived that no one was in my chamber, except the two persons I have just mentioned. I expressed my surprise at this. The duke came to my bed-side, assuring me that I should not be worse attended on that account, and that he would not leave me.—“Oh! why then?” exclaimed I, with great emotion, “I am not ill.” To this question he gave me no other answer, than begging me not to talk, and endeavor to compose myself. He sat down by my bed-side.—My eyes were suffused with tears.—He now appeared very much disturbed and agitated, and I observed a very extraordinary alteration in his countenance. About three in the afternoon he desired to see my arm.—I presented it trembling.—He felt my pulse: on a sudden he started up; he ran to my two new attendants; he told the valet, aloud, to go that instant to the stables, and send an express to Naples for a physician; and the old woman he despatched in all haste for a chaplain. When he had given these orders, he exclaimed, in a voice of grief and consternation, “she is dying, she is dying.” Imagine, if possible, the excess of my astonishment and terror. My first idea was to get up, and endeavor to escape; but I sunk down upon my bed again, without strength, with a palpitation of heart which deprived me of respiration, and a terror which chilled and left me quite motionless. My two attendants, after having each received orders that must take them at least three quarters of an hour to execute, instantly left me and the duke together. He then came to me, and presenting me a cup, “here,” said he, “take this draught.” At these words, my hair stood erect, a cold sweat ran down my face; it was the last moment, I thought, of my life, for I had not a doubt that he was giving me poison. “Drink it,” returned he.

“Alas!” answered I, “what is it you are giving me?”

“What you must drink.”

“Leave me, then, to implore infinite mercy.”

“Dare you then suspect me? do you accuse me of a crime?”

“Alas! I accuse my own imprudence, and my hard fate. Oh, my God!” I continued, clasping my hands, “forgive me, forgive my persecutor; comfort my parents; protect my child.”

After this short prayer, I felt all my courage revive.—I looked at the duke with a steady eye.—He was pale, trembling and disconcerted.—He spoke some words scarcely articulate: and then raising my head with one hand, with the other he applied the cup to my lips.—I no longer hesitated.—Without the least resistance I drank all the liquor he gave; and, believing that I had now received my death, I sunk down upon my pillow. Some moments after, my eyes grew heavy, and closed; a total stupefaction seized me, and I fell into a deep lethargy.

In about a half hour, the valet and old woman returned. The duke, with his hair in disorder, and his face bathed in tears, ran to meet them, and told them I had just expired. He brought them into my chamber, in order, he added, to have a confirmation of his misfortune, or to assist me, if

I had yet any remains of life. He approached my bed, and having had the precaution to draw my curtains close, and make the room very dark, he pretended to give me all imaginable assistance. At last, he appeared to abandon himself to the most violent grief. The chaplain arrived; he ordered him to read the prayers for the dead. In the mean time my women, who just awaked, and all the servants, came crowding into my room.—The duke was upon his knees by my bedside; my two attendants told their fellow servants all the endeavors that had been used to recover me. After this, the duke half-opened my curtains for a moment. They saw me pale and lifeless, and no one had any doubt of my death. The duke made every body retire into the next room, except the chaplain, a venerable man of eighty, who remained with him, and continued the prayers for the dead till midnight. He then ordered all his servants to retire to rest, —He declared that I should not be interred till the next evening; and that, not being able to tear himself from me, he should stay there the remainder of the night. He shut all the doors of my apartment.—He ordered the chaplain and my two attendants, to wait his orders in an anti-chamber that was separated from my apartment by three large rooms. He told them that he should not leave me till seven in the morning, and that he chose to remain alone with me, that he might not be disturbed in his grief and in his prayers. The whole family, exhausted by fatigue, eagerly accepted the permission to retire, and by four o'clock in the morning, every one was asleep. Then, by degrees, recovering from my lethargy, I awoke.

On opening my eyes, and looking around me, I perceived the duke standing by my bedside. I started at the sight of him, although I had not any remembrance of what had passed. But afterward, looking steadfastly at him, I had a confused recollection that he was exasperated against me. I felt an emotion of terror.—I turned my head away; and being desirous of composing myself, that I might recollect some ideas of what had happened, a thousand vague and fantastic forms rose in my imagination, and I sunk into a stupid reverie, which was followed by a kind of drowsiness. The duke then gave me a smelling bottle, and made me take some drops of a liquor, which quickly revived me. I rose up—I looked round me with astonishment. My ideas growing clearer by degrees, I recollected that I had thought I was taking poison, and I almost questioned my existence. “Oh!” I exclaimed, at last, “by what miracle am I restored to life?”

“You have experienced only an imaginary terror,” said the duke; “compose yourself and banish these injurious apprehensions.” I durst not answer. I half drew my curtains.

I looked round the room; and, seeing that I was alone with the duke, my terrors the more sensibly increased, as I had now entirely recovered my senses. “Why then,” said I, “do you watch me alone?”

“You shall know it presently,” said he; “now get up.”

At these words he brought me a gown; he assisted me to put it on; and supporting me in his arms, he led, or rather carried me to a great chair. As he saw me still weak and trembling, he made me take some more of the drops which he had just given me; and, after a moment's silence, “now,” said he, “I will conceal nothing from you. The draught you took yesterday was a sleeping potion.”

“For what?”—“Hear me without interruption.—You have betrayed and dishonored me. I have offered you pardon, and you have refused it. Convicted of infidelity, you still cherish in your heart a guilty passion. Neither my anger nor my threats have been able to persuade you to declare to me the name of your lover. You thought, perhaps, that my regard for your family would prevent me from taking your child from you and depriving you of liberty. You thought, no doubt (for there is not a crime of which your hatred will not think me capable) that the only method I could adopt to avenge myself, was, secretly to attempt your life; and your *unconquerable aversion* for me could easily determine you to die. But know, at last, that you shall live, and that you shall be torn forever from your parents, your friends, your servants, and the whole world.”

“O heaven!” I exclaimed; “and do you think, barbarous man, that an affectionate father, and the best of mothers; will not demand me at your hands?”

“They will receive tomorrow,” replied the duke, “the false intelligence of your death.”

“Great God! and how will you be able?”

“I have already announced your death in the castle. During your profound sleep, all my people, beheld you, as they imagined, dead.”

“Alas!” interrupted I, “I exist no longer then, but for you. I see all the horrors of my fate.”

“You do not yet know all,” said the duke; “learn that I have under this castle some vast caverns, unknown to all the world, and to which the light never comes.”

“O God! I am undone then, I am lost forever.”

“No,” resumed the duke; “your fate is still in your own power. I can instantly go and awake your people, and declare that you were only in a lethargy. I have not yet sent my letter to your father.—I can yet restore you to the world, and forgive you. I only exact a word, a single word from you.—I must have a victim.—I have already declared it.—Name your lover, and you shall resume your rights. I will restore you to the world, to life.”—

“What is it you propose to me—to deliver up to your resentment an object, who, I repeat it, has never injured you!—Oh! I should be unworthy to live, of I could have the baseness to consent to it.”

“Think well of it,” said the duke, darting at me a furious look; “yet another refusal, and I will drag you to that dark abode, from which nothing can release you. To-morrow your father and mother will be either deploring your death, or rejoicing in your recovery. To-morrow you will once more behold your daughter and the day, or you will be forever deprived of light, and groaning at the bottom of a dungeon. In a word, to-morrow we shall see you in this castle, enjoying perfect health, or we shall be attending the solemnities of your funeral. Reflect seriously upon it. This moment past, not a hope of pardon is left. In vain would you implore it by repentance. I shall no longer have it in my power to grant it.”

At this urgent and dreadful speech I rose in the utmost consternation. I turned with terror toward the door; and giving a lamentable shriek, “ah, me!” said I, “am I, then, abandoned by all the world! Oh, my daughter, I am to live, and never see thee more. My father! my mother! to-morrow you will deplore my death. My child!—Oh, let me once more see my child.”

“Speak but one word,” answered the duke, “and in a quarter of an hour your child shall be in your arms.” At these words I felt my heart rending. I remained silent for a moment. The count of Belmire, it occurred to me, was absent; he was not to return for a year. In that time it might be easy for me to inform him of his danger; and, besides, an ingenuous confession would demonstrate my innocence. But on a sudden, recollecting the cruelty of my persecutor, I as hastily rejected this groundless temptation. “Who will assure me,” thought I, “that this confession will restore my child’s and my liberty? Ought I not rather to fear that the duke, certain of my aversion, will never abandon the vengeance he has meditated; or, at least, that he will be content only to mitigate its inhuman rigor? And, in this doubt, can I be tempted to abandon his rage, the object I have loved?”

All these reflections occurred to me with extreme rapidity. The duke imagined I was hesitating. He repeated his urgency. “The day,” he added, “will soon appear. It is time to determine. I am now going to wake the family, and inform them that you are living, or to take you instantly to your tomb. Speak—will you name the author of your misfortunes, and of mine?”

At this question, I lifted up my eyes to heaven; and, summoning to my aid all my resolution, I answered, “I CANNOT.”—

“Wretch!” said the duke, “what is it you say?”—

“No,” I resumed, “abandon that hope: I will NEVER name him.”—Perfidious woman!” exclaimed he, “thou preferest then thy lover to thy child, to liberty, to life, to the whole world. Tremble, tremble at thy fate. The moment of vengeance is at last arrived.” As he finished these words, he was going to seize my arm. Penetrated with fear, I escaped from him. I ran to the other end of the chamber, and throwing my arms round one of the bed-posts, I kept fast hold of it. In making this effort my night-cap came off, and my hair fell down to my shoulders. The duke, who was coming to me, stopped; he appeared surprised, and evidently struck; he gazed on me silently, a moment; then, forcing me from the bed-post, he brought me opposite a looking-glass. “Unhappy woman!” said he, contemplate, for the last time, that beauty, which the most horrid darkness will soon conceal forever. Lift up thy eyes; look at thyself. Be not more inhuman than I am.—Think of thy youthful charm. Think, with pity, on the fate that awaits you. It is yet in thy power to change it.” I could not then refrain from casting an apprehensive and languid look at the glass.—I presently closed my eyes, and felt some tears trickle down my cheeks.—“Well,” resumed the duke, “is your resolution yet unshaken?”

“Oh!” answered I, “have you indeed, sincerely offered me a sight of my child?”

Scarce had I uttered these words, when the duke, in a transport of rage, caught me in his arms, and carried me out of the room. I made but little resistance; in the excess of terror, I was nearly motionless. After having crossed two or three rooms, he made me descend by a private stair-

case, and I found myself in a spacious court, at the end of which was a door, which the duke opened. We went out, and I observed that we were in a garden. At this instant, the duke perceiving day appear, “this morning,” said he, “is the last thy eyes will ever behold.”

I threw myself upon my knees; and, raising my head to heaven, “Oh God!” I cried, “Oh God! thou, who knowest my innocence, wilt thou suffer me to be interred alive and deprived forever of the light of heaven?”

At these words the duke dragged me about twenty paces, to a rock; and putting a key behind a large stone, a trap-door sprang open. I trembled, the duke stopped. “This moment,” said he, “is still left. This is your tomb; it is yet but half open. Repent at last; convince me of your remorse by an ingenuous confession, and I am ready to pardon you. You may imagine, perhaps, that in the moment of completely gratifying my just resentment, I may dread the consequences to myself. But I have long meditated my plan. I have been attentive to every circumstance; and nothing can deter me.”

He then gave me an account of all the dreadful precautions he took during the time I was in a lethargy. He also told me that he had caused a pale and livid figure of wax to be made, which he should place in my bed; and that, under the pretence of discharging (...) of piety, he would bury it himself with the assistance of the old woman, who would be a witness of the internment, without being obliged to place any confidence in her. “Once more,” added he, “will you accept the pardon, which I still deign to offer to you for the last time? Speak—sacrifice your lover to my resentment. Tell me his name, or forever renounce your liberty, and the light of day.”

At these words I extended my arms toward the rising sun, as if to bid an everlasting adieu. The sight of the heavens exalted my soul, and endued me with unexpected courage.—I looked with contempt upon the earth; and turning towards the duke, “take,” cried I, with an undaunted voice, “take your victim.” At this instant he dragged me.—My heart panted with violence; I turned my head to behold yet once more the day I was going to abandon forever.

We descended into a gloomy cavern; my trembling legs unable to support me. I was now dreadfully convulsed; I struggled in the arms of my cruel protector, and fell at his feet without sense or motion. I know not how long I remained in this condition. I know not how long I remained in this condition. I was to revive, alas! only to abhor a most shocking existence. How shall I describe the extreme horror of my soul, when, on opening my eyes, I found myself alone in those vast dungeons, encircled by impenetrable darkness, and lying on some straw mats. I screamed out; and the echo repeating the dreadful sound from the inmost recesses of the cavern, it made me startle, and redoubled the terror that oppressed me. “Oh God!” I cried, “is this the only voice that will answer me, the only sound I am henceforth to hear?” At this idea I wept profusely. While I was thus indulging the violence of my grief, I heard the door of my dungeon open, and the duke soon appeared with a lantern. He placed by my side a pitcher of water and some bread.—“Here,” said he, “is your food for the future—you will find it every day in the *turning-box* (a box so called from turning on a pivot. Being fixed in the wall, the people within receive and return their various necessaries, without being seen. It is much used in nunneries) opposite you. I shall bring and put it there myself; and shall never more enter this frightful dungeon.”

At these words I looked around me. I saw a spacious cavern, the extent of which my eye could not reach. The part I occupied, was hung with coarse straw mats, to keep it from the cold and damp; for the barbarian who had plunged me into this horrid abode, had taken all the precautions in his power to prolong my life in it. After having observed, trembling, the dismal scene around me, I turned again to my inhuman gaoler; and at last a hatred so merited, and which could no longer be concealed, burst forth at once. I reproached him with the excess of his barbarity, and expressed without reserve, all the detestation with which he had inspired me. He heard me some time with concentrated rage; then, no longer able to contain himself, he flew into a most violent passion, and precipitately left me. From that day, whenever he came to bring me food, he constantly knocked at the turning-box, till I answered him, and then went away without uttering a word. I soon repented of having thus by my reproaches, increased still more, if possible, his hatred for me. I recollected that he was the father of my child, and that, that dear child was in his power. Besides, notwithstanding the horror of my situation, hope was not yet entirely extinguished in my bosom. The more I revolved it in my mind, the less probable it appeared that he really intended to detain me forever in that dreadful captivity. I even flattered myself that he had not announced my pretended death wither in the castle or to my family; and that he had found out some other method of eluding their enquiries. How could I imagine that he had imposed upon himself the painful necessity of bringing me every other day the necessaries of life, and by that means of confining himself so closely to the castle, since he dared not trust the secret to any one?

These reflections persuaded me that he would one day put a period to his vengeance. Full of this idea, every time he knocked at the turning-box, I spoke to him; and, altho' he did not answer me, I implored his compassion and assured him of my innocence. As I was absolutely deprived of light, I cannot tell how many months I preserved this hope; but at last I entirely lost it. My reason then forsook me, I accused Providence; I murmured at its decrees. I had the presumption to imagine that the excess of my misfortune gave me a right to dispose of my life. Determined to die, I was two days without taking any nourishment, or fetching it from the turning-box. In vain the duke knocked and called me, I obstinately forbore to answer him. At last he entered my prison.—When he appeared with the lantern in his hand, notwithstanding all the horror which his presence excited, I felt a secret joy in again beholding the light, but I did not speak to him. He offered to soften the rigor of my captivity, and to give me a light, some books and better food, if I would at last tell him the name he had so often demanded. At this proposal I looked disdainfully upon him. “Now,” said I, “that you have broken all the ties which united us, my heart is free. It now indulges, without remorse, the sentiments which once it vainly endeavored to subdue. That object, whose name you demand with no other view than to sacrifice him to your vengeance, is now dearer to me than ever.—My last sigh shall be for him. And do you think that I will declare him?”

“Then,” resumed the duke, “every sentiment of religion is extinguished in your soul. You cherish in your heart an adulterous passion, and you would be guilty of suicide.”

“Barbarian!” interrupted I, “am I still your wife? Dare you assert it; you, who have plunged me into this abyss; you, who are still in mourning for me? It is true, I have no longer the fortitude to endure existence; but that God, who hears and observes us both, will punish you alone for the despair to which you have reduced me. In such a situation as this, if I commit a crime, you alone

will be responsible for it. No living creature can hear my tears and lamentation. But do you think that the deepest caverns, the thickest walls, can keep from the omniscient being the cries of helpless and persecuted innocence? Tremble —That dread being observes us both. He compassionates, he will pardon me; but his avenging arm is lifted over you.”

The duke shuddered as I spoke. He gazed at me with an air of wildness.—Pale, thunderstruck, and agitated, with down-cast eyes, for some time he stood in malignant musing and sullen silence.—At last, he spoke. “Impute not to me, but to yourself alone the calamity you lament. You were guilty; I have unquestionable proofs of it; you have not been able to contradict them; and yet I did not punish you, till after I had repeatedly offered you pardon. I again propose to mitigate your punishment, and you refuse it.— Yes, were it your pleasure, notwithstanding your infidelity, notwithstanding your aversion for me, you might still be in my palace, you might be there see your child.”—“Oh! my child!” interrupted I,—“Alas! is she still alive? What, what has become of her?” “She is with your mother.”—“She is then no longer in your hands.—Is it really true?—The duke, then, perceiving that this idea revived me, took a letter from my mother out of his pocket, and permitted me to read it. This letter, which I bedewed with my tears, was as follows:

“My grand daughter arrived here yesterday evening. Oh! how shall I describe all the emotions which I felt while I folded her to my heart!—You give her to me; —she is mine. I feel that I already love her in excess.—She may be able to attach (...) to life;—but Oh! I must still be inconsolable. — Alas! how can I now enjoy the happiness as of being yet a mother, without feeling the most disquieting uneasiness! — After the loss I have sustained, is there a felicity on earth which I can depend! I will come and see you next summer, and bring your daughter with me.—We will spend two months with you.—(...) you cannot tear yourself from the melancholy spot which your grief so much endears to you, I will find resolution enough to come to you.—I will see the magnificent monument, which your love has erected in the memory of an object so worthy of our tears. Perhaps, I shall there find the period of all my sufferings! —Alas! it is impossible that a mother, without dying, can embrace the tomb of her daughter. And yet, I will live. Religion commands it, and nature herself enjoins the sacred law. I will live for the dear child you have the goodness to confide to me. Oh! how shall I ever acknowledge such an obligation, such a sacrifice!— —How tenderly should you love this child! She has all her mother’s features; she has all her charms. My own daughter is thus restored to me in her infancy. Oh! (word illegible) flattering an illusion!—Unhappy mother!—Thou hast no longer a daughter.—The violence of thy grief cannot deliver them from life.”

I had scarce finished this letter, when, falling on my knees, “Oh God!” I cried, “my child is in the arms of my mother; that mother consents to live for my child. Oh God! I praise thee; thou hast wounded only me. I now bow submissive to thy will. Pardon my distracted murmurs; pour down thy blessings on all I love, and prolong my painful existence at thy pleasure.” I now sunk again upon my straw, for I was so weak I could not support myself. The duke seized that instant to offer me some refreshment, which I very readily took. He then left me, and from that moment I never saw him more. Yet, faithful to the vow which I had made, I now took care of my life. Religion taught me to know and to relish all the inexhaustible consolations which she is able to bestow. She insensibly banished from my soul, that unhappy passion, which had been the greatest misfortune of my life. In a word she inspired what human wisdom and mere

philosophy could never give—the fortitude to endure, without despairing and without murmuring, nine years of long captivity, in a dungeon wherein light could never enter.

I will acknowledge, however, that for the first two or three years my sufferings were so extreme, that even the recollection of them makes me now shudder. That time in which I supposed (from the best calculation it was in my power to make) that my mother and daughter must be arrived in the same castle under which I was a prisoner—that time passed away in the most agonizing manner and formed the most cruel part of my captivity. But, By the help of prayer I was enabled to rise superior to my fate, and to acquiesce in it with the most entire resignation. Restored to the influence of reason and to myself, I not only experienced a considerable alleviation of my sufferings, but I even became accustomed to darkness and captivity. I even contrived some amusements to employ and pass the time away. My prison was spacious. I walked about great part of the day, or rather night. I made verses, which I repeated aloud. I had a fine voice; I was a perfect mistress of music.—I composed some hymns, and one of my greatest pleasures was to sing them, and to listen to the responsive echo. My sleep became peaceful. Agreeable dreams represented to me my father, my mother, and my daughter. Those dear objects seemed ever satisfied and happy. Sometimes I found myself transported into the delightful palaces or beautiful gardens. I again beheld the skies, the trees, the flowers. In fine, these sweet illusions restored to me all the blessings I had lost. I awoke, it is true, with a sigh; but I slept with pleasure. Even when awake joy was no longer a stranger to my bosom: my imagination was raised into a kind of sweet enthusiasm. In the presence of the supreme being, I flattered myself with humble assurance that my patience and resignation would render me not an unworthy object in his sight. Witness of all my actions, he deigned to hear me, to whisper to my heart, to revive it, to elevate it to himself; and I now scarcely felt a solitude on my cavern. After the privation of all the objects of my love, the only things I regretted, in spite of myself, were the light and sky. I could not conceive how any one could give way to despair in the most dismal captivity, if he enjoyed a window that had a prospect to the country. At last, I was so habituated to my situation, that so far from desiring death, I even more than once found that I was apprehensive of it. I often wanted food. The duke sometimes brought me sufficient for three or four days. I imagined that he was then compelled to go a short journey; and when my provision was nearly exhausted I felt some anxiety. The death of the tyrant would be mine; and that cruel idea made me utter prayers for his safety.—It is true, I no longer felt an aversion for him. Religion had easily led me to renounce every sentiment of hatred. And what could this weak effort cost me? Had I not already triumphed over my passion? I pitied my persecutor. I pictured to myself the dreadful situation of his soul; his distraction, his terrors, his remorse; and I found I was severely avenged.

In the beginning of my captivity, I had never heard him approach, without being ready, at the same time, to faint with terror. By degrees, these violent emotions grew weaker. Some sensation indeed, he always excited, that were not unmingled with horror. Nevertheless, I was desirous that he would come, not only for the preservation of my life, but that he thus broke the deep and frightful silence of my situation. He made me sensible of motion and sound; he occasioned a kind of agitation, which, though it was never agreeable, was yet become necessary to me. I cannot express how very ardent and singular was my desire to hear some sound. When it thundered very much, I heard it. I cannot describe what were my sensations then. I imagined that I was less alone. I listened to the awful sound with eagerness and extacy; and when it

ceased, I sunk into the deepest melancholy and dejection. Such was nearly my situation for six or seven years. During that period, nothing ever really affected me much, but the chagrin I felt in being totally ignorant of whatever concerned my mother and daughter. In vain I questioned the duke through the turning-box, whenever he approached it. I could not obtain one word in answer; for since his last appearance in the dungeon, he had never spoken more.—All my fortitude was necessary to support this cruel uncertainty, on a subject so interesting to my heart. Often when I invoked heaven for my mother and daughter, my heart felt a sudden impression, and my tears flowed apace. “Alas!” cried I, “do they still exist? I pray for their happiness, and perhaps I have the dreadful misfortune to survive them.” At other times I felt so forcibly the animating consolations of hope, that I did not feel the slightest anxiety on their account. In those happy moments I would flatter myself that some unexpected event might yet extricate me from my prison.

This idea made such an impression upon my mind, particularly during the last year of my captivity, that I made a vow to God, that if ever I recovered my liberty, I would consecrate my life to him, in a solitude remote from Rome, and would there spend the remainder of my days, as soon as ever my daughter should no longer have occasion for my care. In the mean time I was approaching the most interesting period of my life.—I was approaching the happy moment of deliverance; and the divine goodness was about to recompense me amply for nine years of suffering and grief.

For some time I imagined that the duke constantly resided in the castle, because he regularly brought me my food. But one day he failed to come at the appointed time. I grew impatient at the delay. I had entirely finished my allowance. I slept, however, with tolerable tranquility. The next day I expected in vain the succor which became every instant more necessary. There was no remedy but patience. Anxiety, as much as hunger and thirst, deprived me of sleep, and I remained in this situation near another day. Then, absolutely exhausted, I had no other prospect than a speedy dissolution. I contemplated death with tranquility; yet the remembrance of all that was dear to me would intrude, to embitter my dying thoughts. “Unhappy daughter! unhappy mother!” I cried; “In what a forlorn condition am I doomed to expire! My dear parents! must I thus die without receiving your last blessing? Oh my child! I cannot give the (...). Thou canst not even regret me. In the dying moments of thy wretched mother, thou art enjoying, no doubt, the amusements and pleasures suitable to thy age. Dreadful idea! I am dying; and all that are dear to me have been reconciled to their loss. But what am I saying, inconsiderate that I am? I complain, I murmur, when all my miseries are just going to terminate. Great God! forgive me this guilty weakness. My heart rejects it. Oh! my judge, my father, deign to call me to thyself. Full of hope and confidence, certain of immortal bliss, I expect death with security, I would even invoke it, did not resignation teach me to wait thy pleasure.”

I concluded these words, I sunk down almost lifeless on the straw that served me for a bed.—I felt a serenity of soul, the sweets of which, till that moment, I had never tasted. Like a salutary balm, it seemed suddenly to heal every wound of my heart. Excessive weakness soon disordered my ideas. I imperceptibly fell into a delicious kind of sleep, during which the most delightful scenes successively appeared to my imagination. Around my bed, I thought, were encircling angels, and bright celestial forms. I heard, afar, harmonious voices, and more than mortal sounds. I saw heaven half-opened; and God, on a resplendant throne, extend his arms, and graciously bid

me approach. In reality, he was then watching over me; and his paternal hand was going to break my chains. On a sudden I awake—quite startled. I fancy I hear a knocking at the turning-box. I listen: I hear it again. My panting heart! but what a surprise! what unutterable extacy! I hear a voice and that voice is no longer my tyrants. It is new to me. It appears to me like the voice of an angel descended from heaven to deliver me. Astonished, distracted, I clasp my hands with an emotion of gratitude inexpressibly fervent. “Oh God!” I cried, “is it a deliverer whom thou sendest? Ah! I accepted death with joy, and thou restorest me to life.” With these words I endeavor to rise, and hasten to the turning-box. I cannot; my strength forsakes me. I again sink upon my bed. At this moment the door is opened, and I perceive some light. Somebody enters. I rise. I would fain look. I can distinguish nothing. My eyes, so long deprived of light, cannot bear the glimmer of a lamp, and close in spite of me. “Who, who are you?” I exclaim, with a faltering voice. At these words I again open my eyes, still dazzled by the light. I perceive a person on his knees, before me, who, putting his arm under my head, tenderly supports it, and presents me with some food. Then, almost famished with hunger, I have no longer any idea, but that of satisfying this imperious appetite; every other thought appears suspended, and I seize with eagerness the proffered sustenance. At last, finding my strength revive I turn all at once to my deliverer. His face was in the shade; I could not distinguish his features. “Oh! speak,” said I, “are you the accomplice of my persecutor, or are you come to deliver?”—“Oh heavens!” interrupted the stranger, “what voice is this? where am I?” Then, hastily rising, he fetches the lamp nearer, and looks at me with an earnestness mingled with compassion and horror. I fix my eyes for a moment on his face, now enlightened by the lamp. He seemed pale and trembling, but it was impossible to mistake him. I wish to speak; my tears almost deprive me of utterance. I can only speak the name of the count of Belmire. It is he indeed. He falls at my feet; he bedews them with tears; he looks at me again; he reproaches, and he praises heaven. The excess of his compassion gives an air of wildness and grief to what was extacy and joy. We each speak at once, without hearing, without answering each other. At length the count, rising impetuously, “Oh! most inhuman of men!” cried he; “most execrable monster! is there a punishment at all adequate to thy crime? And you,” continued he, assisting me to rise, “the unfortunate victim of a tyrants relentless rage; come, you are free.”

At these words, my first impulse was, to spring toward the door; but instantly checking myself, “ah!” said I to the count, “you are my deliverer; to you I owe my life, my liberty; but the blessings you restore, can I still regard them as such? Alas! I dare not ask. My father, my mother?”

“They are alive.”

“Oh heavens!—and my daughter?”

“She is at Rome; she will be soon in your arms.”—“Oh God!” I cried, prostrating myself “what gratitude can ever acquit the debt I owe thee? This moment, alone, rewards me for all my sufferings. Oh! my generous benefactor, I continued, addressing myself to the count, “now, for your recompence, know that I am innocent. But, before I relate the particulars of my melancholy history, allow me to ask you one question. Certainly the duke is ill?”

“He is attacked by a mortal distemper; he cannot survive three days.—Come, leave this horrible

dungeon; let the barbarian, before he expires, know that you are at liberty.”— “No,” interrupted I, my parents only must deliver me from this prison.” I then entreated the count to send an express that instant to my father. He promised me he would; and giving me a piece of paper and pencil, I immediately wrote the following note

“Oh my father! my mother! I am still alive. I am innocent. Come, and by your presence restore me really to life. Deliver me from a dreadful dungeon, and make me forget all the (...) I have endured.”

This note was scarcely legible.—I was nearly a quarter of an hour in writing it; for I no longer knew how to form a letter, and spelling I had entirely forgotten.—The count, perceiving that I was resolutely determined to remain in the dungeon till the arrival of my mother, gave to me the keys of all the doors and left me with inexpressible regret, after having promised to dissemble with the duke, if he were yet living, and to see me again the next evening. When I found myself once more alone, I felt a terror almost as strong as that which I had formerly experienced at the beginning of my captivity. And yet I was no longer in the dark; for the count had left me a lamp and a dark lantern. I also asked him for a watch, that I might count the hours; for I did not imagine it would be possible to sleep one moment. Immoveable on the spot where the count had left me, I could scarcely draw my breath. I durst not lift my eyes, and yet I could not forbear, by stealth, to cast a look around me. The light so far from cheering me, added to my terror, by giving me a full view of my gloomy and mournful habitation. At last, unable any longer to support that situation, I arose. I (...) the light. I opened my first door, and entered a kind of long gallery, where the turning-box was placed. I already felt that relief, on finding myself in a new place, and which brought me to the last door of my prison. I hurried on to the end of the gallery, and opened the door by which it was terminated. I then found myself at the foot of the stair-case of my dungeon; and being no closer confined than by the double door that opened into the garden, I shut that of the gallery, as if to separate myself from my frightful cavern. Then ascending the staircase precipitately, I sat down on the last step, and, at length, began to breathe. One would imagine, that after an event so happy, so unexpected, I should have felt a joy most exquisitely pure. But I had suffered so long, I had been so wretched, that my heart could not at once be susceptible of those fascinating pleasures, which the sweetest hopes would naturally afford. I thought, indeed, with transport, that the dear objects of my affection were still in being. But when I reflected on the inexpressible happiness I should enjoy in finding myself once more in the arms of my mother, and embracing my father and my child, I could not flatter myself that such felicity was ever to be my lot.

A thousand dismal apprehensions sprung up to distress and darken my imagination; and in this state of melancholy and dejection, the chimerical fears appeared to me so many real presages of my woe. This interesting period of my life, the day when the count of Belmire entered my prison, was the third of June, 17—. He left me at midnight; and till six in the morning I remained in the situation I have just described, when at once I thought I heard some gentle sounds. I listened with the greatest attention at the door of my prison; and notwithstanding its thickness, and that of the rock which covered it, I could very distinctly hear the warbling of the birds, that were waked by the appearance of day. The emotions of joy which I experienced at that instant, are not to be described nor conceived. All my melancholy vanished, and my heart was again open to hope and felicity. The sweetest tears flowed from my eyes, although my ideas were extremely confused,

and I was incapable of reflecting on the unexpected change in my situation; for my attention was engrossed by the desire of hearing what was passing in the garden. With my ear close to the door, and holding my breath, I listened with an attention from which no other thought could divert me. I heard dogs barking, men walking about, and even talking indistinctly; and all these different sounds were productive of inexpressible pleasure. However, toward the close of the day, I earnestly longed for night, that I might again see the count of Belmire, and that I might question him on a thousand circumstances of which I was impatient to be informed, and which successively occurred to my imagination, in proportion as my ideas assumed a more regular form. For instance, I wished to know how long I had been confined in my prison. Before the count appeared there, I imagined that I was near fifty years old. His youthful aspect convinced me that grief and wearisome days are calculators of time; but I still I could not (...) my age within four or five years. The count returned exactly at midnight. I could easily perceive, by his pale countenance, how deeply he was affected by sorrow and compassion for the event which had produced such a happy change for me. Regarding my situation which obliged me to receive him alone at such an hour; honoring the fatal tie more ready to be broken, but which still connected me; he neither mentioned the sentiments which in happier times I had not hesitated to avow, nor those which he still retained for me. After having informed me that he had enclosed my note in a letter to my father, and that the duke was in the last extremity, I begged him to acquaint me with the motives which induced the latter to entrust him with so important a secret. He accordingly proceeded to gratify my curiosity in the following words:

“I had been a year on my travels when I received the news of your death. I learned at the same time, that the duke was inconsolable for his loss. This circumstance greatly diminished my natural antipathy to him. I travelled two years more; and, being then recalled by some affairs, I returned to Italy. Obligated to see the duke, it was necessary to repair to this castle; for he very seldom absented himself from it, and then only to spend two or three days at Naples. Here I saw the monument erected to your memory; I beheld your picture placed in almost every apartment— I attached myself to this mansion, and even to the inhuman monster who had thus made you the victim of his fury. He discovered such violence of grief, such a deep melancholy, that, soon preferring his society to every other, I came every year to spend five or six months in this castle. About a year ago he was seized with an incurable distemper; but yet not in the least apprehending it to be so, he still continued to make excursions to Naples. Last winter he entirely left off going to court, and wrote to me at Rome, to desire that I would come and see him. I arrived here about the end of January, and found him rapidly declining, although not confined to his bed, and still continuing to walk about. I even thought I could perceive, at times, that he was not entirely in his senses. A prey to remorse, life for nine years past has been an insupportable burden to him, and yet he could not perceive the end of it approach with horror. At length, declining every day, he was seized at once with convulsions that obliged him to keep his bed.— He remained in this situation three days; at the end of which one of his valets came to acquaint me, at nine o’clock in the evening that he wanted to speak with me. The man added that the duke, that night and the preceding one, had sent his servants out of the way, in order to endeavor to rise without assistance; but that being too weak to stand, he had rung for them, and they had found him out of his bed, half-dressed. I went that instant into his chamber. He dismissed his physician and attendants; and informing me he was going to entrust me with an important secret, made me swear to keep it inviolably. Then, looking at me with an air of wildness, ‘family reasons,’ said he, ‘oblige me to confine in this castle a woman whose crimes have merited death.

She must want sustenance; go, and carry her some. Knock at the turning-box, which serves for that purpose. If she do not answer you, enter her prison and give her what is necessary. But I must previously inform you that this woman is not in her senses. Pay no regard to what she says; but when you have given her some sustenance, return immediately.—I promise to acquaint you one day with her name and history.’ The duke then disclosed to me the secrets of his caverns; and taking from under the pillow a parcel of keys, he put them into my hands, desiring me to execute this commission without delay. The barbarian, supposing that I had never seen you, thought that he could not confide in a more proper person, and thus committed into my hands both your destiny and mine.”

When the count had finished this recital, he entreated me to make him acquainted with my history. But as I could not relate it without speaking of the sentiments which I had once entertained for him, I declared that I could not comply with his request but in the presence of my father and mother.—From the calculation of the count, I expected my father to arrive within two days at farthest. Less agitated now, and more capable of reflection, I enjoyed, for twenty-four hours, all the happiness which so dear an expectation could inspire. My impatience then increasing, as the hour of my deliverance approached; it presently knew no bounds and became an insupportable torment. I never felt any thing which I can compare to the violent emotions which I experienced on the night preceding the happiest day of my life. My eyes intensely fixed on the watch, I mournfully considered, at my leisure, the slow progress of its index. Every moment I thought I heard a noise; I started; I felt my blood boil in my veins, and my heart palpitated with violence. These agitations grew stronger, when the singing of birds announced the dawn of day, that happy day in which I was going to be born again, and resume the name, with all the dear and sacred claims, of daughter and of mother. That moment formed to compensate for an age of sufferings; that moment so impatiently longed for—it approaches—it comes at last.

Reiterated cries and tumultuous voices are heard. I soon distinguish a confused noise of carriages and armed men. The clamor increases, it approaches. I tremble. O heavens! what voice strikes my ears, and penetrates my very soul? Oh! my mother!—She calls her daughter. My heart springs toward her. “Oh! God! who gavest me fortitude to support my misfortunes, let me not sink under this excess of joy. I faint; I am dying.—Must I expire at the feet of my mother?”

At these words my door is opened. I rush out of my cavern.—Notwithstanding the bright glare of day, that strikes and hurts my dazzled eyes: I see, I recollected my mother—my father. I give a violent scream; I fling myself into their arms; I faint away. Oh! who can describe the extacy of my soul, when I recovered my senses? I found myself on the bosom of the dearest of mothers, my face bedewed with tears; my father on his knees before me, pressing both my hands in his. I beheld again the day, the sun. I was soon again to behold my daughter. —That instant realized my dearest hopes, and satisfied the utmost wishes of my heart.—I can give no account of my ideas in the first moments of this affecting scene. I felt too much to be able to think, or to express, the violence of my joy, otherways than by sobs and tears. At last my father, raising me up in his arms, “come, my dear child,” said he, “quit this dreadful abode, where guilt has long been the oppressor of innocence; come.” At these words I rise up; I looked around me and saw, with surprise, that we were surrounded by a troop of armed men, among whom I recollected many relations, and some old friends of my father, who informed me, that after having

assembled them before he left Rome, he had conducted them to Naples; and having thrown himself at the king's feet, and shown him my note, he not only obtained leave to go and take me away by force, if force were necessary, but some troops to assist him. "When I arrived here," continued my father, "I was informed that your vile persecutor had just expired. This happy day then restores you to all you love, delivers you from an execrable tyrant, and secures you perfect liberty."

All the answer I could give my father was by embracing him with tears. At the summit of felicity, and having nothing now to dread, I could not forbear pitying from my very soul the wretched duke of C****. "Alas!" thought I, "if I had loved him, he might not have polluted his life by such guilty excesses; he might have lived, and been happy." The reflection, while it excited my compassion, made it painful and melancholy, and for some moments embittered all my joy. At last, we set out; and the next day, the delight of the daughter was increased by that of the mother. I found again that child so passionately beloved. I folded her in my arms. I saw her shed tears, and I heard her call me mother. I was in a kind of intoxication the first two days of my arrival at Rome, stunned with noise, astonished at everything, and enjoying nothing truly but the happiness of seeing my daughter again, and of finding myself between my father and mother. Then my heart being completely satisfied, I began to feel the value of all the blessings that were restored to me. I found enjoyments equally agreeable and new, in the most common things of life; in every object I beheld a spectacle of wonder. The first time I walked out by moonlight, I experienced an ineffable sensation of admiration and extacy, in beholding again that serene and beautiful splendor, with the skies all bespangled with innumerable orbs. I could not walk in the country or in a garden, without stopping at every step, attentively to examine the minutest object. I was never tired with contemplating the flowers, the fruits, the trees, the verdure of the fields, the closing evening, and that sublime spectacle—the rising sun.

In such meditations did my heart enjoy, with transport, all that felicity of which it had been so long deprived. I also felt inexpressible pleasure in finding myself again in the palace in which I was born, and in which I had spent the happy years of infancy and youth. But I confess that I could not again behold, without pain, the marchioness of Venuzi, that early friend, who was the first cause of all my misfortunes. The count of Belmire soon followed me to Rome; and in the presence of my father and mother, the marchioness of Venuzi, and some of my relations, I gave him my history. I had scarcely finished, when, throwing himself at my feet, he expressed, in the most passionate terms the excess of his sensibility and gratitude. "What!" cried he, "you might, by naming me, have extricated yourself from that horrid destiny! It was I, who plunged you in that abyss; and while you were weeping there, I beheld the day of which you were deprived for me. May I be permitted to flatter myself, that love may still recompense you for all the miseries it has caused you to endure? Could that heart, so noble and susceptible, be otherwise than faithful? Have your misfortunes led you to discard those sentiments, without which it is impossible for me to live?" At these words, my father affectionately embraced the count, and gave me to understand, by his action, how much he approved his sentiment. But for my part, having lost even the idea of a passion which had once such an ascendancy over my heart, I could not conceive how any one could be devoted to it, and still less how it were possible I could be the object of it. After some pause I addressed the count, and described to him so naturally the situation of my heart that he instantly gave up every hope. He retired from Rome for some time; but the sentiment which made him fly soon recalled him; and consoled by the sincere friendship

which I so warmly expressed for him, he fixed his residence there entirely.

In the mean time, far from losing any relish for the happiness I enjoyed, every day seemed to make me still more sensible of its inestimable worth. How delightful were my thoughts every time I awoke! I felt the most exquisite delight in looking round, in beholding my daughter's bed by the side of mine, and in finding myself again in my paternal dwelling. I could no longer comprehend how I had been able to support the privation of that felicity which I now enjoyed, or even of the pleasures and convenience which habit began to make me think absolutely necessary to life. These ideas inspired me with the most tender compassion for all the unfortunate. I had lain for nine years upon a bed of straw. I had endured hunger, thirst and cold.—I could never hear with inattention the complaints of those poor objects who were imploring my compassion. In their fate I recollected mine; and I enjoyed the most heartfelt satisfaction in soothing and relieving them. To receive, to welcome them was not sufficient; I thought it my duty to go in search of them. The desire of finding out the unfortunate, in order to convert their tears into rejoicing, was not a virtue in me; it was the most urgent appetite of my soul, and the sweetest of all of my pleasures. But the more I became accustomed to the ease which was restored to me, the stronger was the impression which the remembrance of my captivity excited; and it soon became impossible for me either to mention my misfortunes or to listen with tranquility to such histories or conversations as had any tendency to recall them to my recollection. I could not bear darkness, nor absolute solitude, were it only for a moment. One night, I remember my lamp went out. I awoke; and, finding myself in utter darkness, I felt a terror so great that I screamed out; my servants hastened to me, and found me pale, terrified and almost senseless. This involuntary weakness was not my greatest distress. In a very short time I perceived myself absolutely incapable of superintending the education of my daughter. I was obliged to learn again to read, write and cast accounts. But, by a singularity, remarkable enough, I had hardly forgotten the least thing of what I had read in my youth: for not having had, for nine years, any sort of occupation, I had sought for one in the past, by often recalling, circumstantially, whatever I had learnt from books and conversation.

I was twenty seven years of age when I left my prison, and my daughter was then ten.—Solely engaged with her, living quite in retirement, constantly shut up in my apartment, and seeing no one but my father, my mother, and sometimes the count of Belmire, I thus passed five years of my life.—My daughter then attained her fifteenth year; and, being the greatest fortune in Italy, all the families of distinction made proposals to me. For a long time I had secretly made my choice. I consulted my daughter, and she confessed that her sentiments coincided with mine. My father and mother entered into my views, and I no longer delayed their accomplishment.—The count of Belmire, still young, of a captivating figure, equally virtuous and amiable, and master of a noble fortune, had constantly refused the most advantageous and splendid alliances. It was to that dear friend that I offered my daughter.—“I give her to you,” said I, “she is yours; she is fifteen, which was my age when I first beheld you. As I was never born for your felicity, I can derive no other consolation on that account, than in seeing you happy with my daughter.” At these words he seized one of my hands; bedewed it with his tears; and, as I urged him to answer me, “ah!” said he, at last, “have you not a right to dispose of my destiny?”

That very evening the marriage articles were signed, and eight days after the count was married to my daughter. I remained at Rome another year; and then, seeing my daughter settled and

perfectly happy, I turned all my thoughts to that retirement and solitude to which, when I was in prison, I had vowed to consign myself. The air of Rome was not agreeing with me, the physicians had ordered me to repair to Nice for some time.—I undertook this journey by La Corniche; and was so delighted with the situation of Alberga, that I determined to fix my residence in this place. I built here a neat and convenient house, in which I took up my abode on my return from Nice. Here, for four years past, I have perfectly recovered my health, and my life glides away in sweet repose——Here I have written this history, which I intend for my grand daughters, when they shall be of proper age to derive benefit from it. In quitting the world I have not renounced the objects that are dear to me.—Since my residence here, I have made two journeys to Rome, to see my father and mother; and every year my daughter and son-inlaw come to spend three months in my retreat. In a word, it is impossible to be more completely happy than I am.

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