

ANN RADCLIFFE

*A Sicilian
Romance*

A Gothic Novel

READER'S EDITION

Edited by Sandra K. Williams

IDLE SPIDER BOOKS
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A Sicilian Romance: A Gothic Novel (Reader's Edition)
by Ann Radcliffe

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition has been copyedited in accordance with current American practice in respect to punctuation. Spelling has been standardized throughout using the author's preferred spelling when it could be determined. In some places words and phrases have been reordered—and in a very few cases altered or removed—to improve ease of comprehension. Interspersed poems that don't directly relate to the plot have been eliminated. However, no scenes, no events, and no descriptions have been removed: the work stands as Ann Radcliffe wrote it, polished for today's readers.

If you need an exact reproduction of the original text or extensive footnotes, you may prefer one of the many other editions that are available. This is the *reader's* edition, intended for whiling away a solitary evening, when of course those hollow sighings and the shapes flitting past your curtains are merely the sounds and shadows of nearby branches twisting in the wind . . .

ON THE NORTHERN SHORE OF SICILY are still to be seen the magnificent remains of a castle which formerly belonged to the noble house of Mazzini. It stands in the centre of a small bay, and upon a gentle acclivity which on one side slopes toward the sea, and on the other rises into an eminence crowned by dark woods. The situation is admirably beautiful and picturesque, and the ruins have an air of ancient grandeur which, contrasted with the present solitude of the scene, impresses the traveller with awe and curiosity. During my travels abroad I visited this spot. As I walked over the loose fragments of stone which lay scattered through the immense area of the fabric¹ and surveyed the sublimity and grandeur of the ruins, I recurred,² by a natural association of ideas, to the times when these walls stood proudly in their original splendour, when the halls were the scenes of hospitality and festive magnificence, and when they resounded with the voices of those whom death has long since swept from the earth.

Thus, thought I, shall the present generation—he who

1. Structure; building.

2. Went back in thought.

*now sinks in misery, and he who now swims in pleasure
—alike pass away and be forgotten.*

My heart swelled with the reflection. As I turned from the scene with a sigh, I fixed my eyes upon a friar whose venerable figure, gently bending toward the earth, formed no uninteresting object in the picture.

He observed my emotion and, as my eye met his, shook his head and pointed to the ruin. "These walls," said he, "were once the seat of luxury and vice. They exhibited a singular instance of the retribution of Heaven, and were from that period forsaken, and abandoned to decay."

His words excited my curiosity, and I enquired further concerning their meaning.

"A solemn history belongs to this castle," said he, "which is too long and intricate for me to relate. It is, however, contained in a manuscript in our library, of which I could, perhaps, procure you a sight. A brother of our order, a descendant of the noble house of Mazzini, collected and recorded the most striking incidents relating to his family, and the history thus formed he left as a legacy to our convent. If you please, we will walk thither."

I accompanied him to the convent, and the friar introduced me to his superior, a man of an intelligent mind and benevolent heart, with whom I passed some hours in interesting conversation. I believe my sentiments pleased him for, by his indulgence, I was permitted to take abstracts of the history before me, which, with some further particulars obtained in conversation with the abbot, I have arranged in the following pages.

I

TOWARD THE CLOSE of the sixteenth century, this castle was in the possession of Ferdinand, fifth marquis of Mazzini, and it was for some years the principal residence of his family.

He was a man of a voluptuous and imperious character. For his first wife he married Louisa de Bernini, daughter of the Count de Bernini, a lady yet more distinguished for the sweetness of her manners and the gentleness of her disposition than for her beauty. She brought the marquis one son and two daughters, who lost their amiable mother in early childhood. The arrogant and impetuous character of the marquis operated powerfully upon the mild and susceptible nature of his lady, and it was by many persons believed that his unkindness and neglect put a period to her life.

However this might be, he soon afterwards married Maria de Vellorno, a young lady eminently beautiful but of a character very opposite to that of her predecessor. She was a woman of infinite art, devoted to pleasure, and of an unconquerable spirit. The marquis, whose heart was dead to paternal tenderness and whose present lady was too volatile to attend to domestic concerns, committed the education of his daughters to the care of a lady who was distantly

related to the late marchioness and completely qualified for the undertaking.

He quitted Mazzini soon after his second marriage for the gaieties and splendour of Naples, whither his son accompanied him. Though naturally of a haughty and overbearing disposition, he was governed by his wife. His passions were vehement, and she had the address to bend them to her own purpose and could so well conceal her influence that he thought himself most independent when he was most enslaved. He paid an annual visit to the castle of Mazzini, but the marchioness seldom attended him, and he stayed only to give such general directions concerning the education of his daughters as his pride, rather than his affection, seemed to dictate.

Emilia, the elder, inherited much of her mother's disposition. She had a mild and sweet temper united with a clear and comprehensive mind. Her younger sister, Julia, was of a more lively cast. An extreme sensibility subjected her to frequent uneasiness; her temper was warm, but generous; she was quickly irritated, and quickly appeased; and to a reproof however gentle she would often weep, but was never sullen. Her imagination was ardent, and her mind early exhibited symptoms of genius.

It was the particular care of Madame de Menon to counteract those traits in the disposition of her young pupils which appeared inimical to their future happiness, and for this task she had abilities which entitled her to hope for success. A series of early misfortunes had entended³ her heart without weaken-

3. Made tender; softened.

ing the powers of her understanding. In retirement she had acquired tranquillity, and had almost lost the consciousness of those sorrows which yet threw a soft and not displeasing shade over her character. She loved her young charges with maternal fondness, and their gradual improvement and respectful tenderness repaid all her anxiety. Madame excelled in music and drawing. She had often forgot her sorrows in these amusements when her mind was too much occupied to derive consolation from books, and she was assiduous to impart to Emilia and Julia a power so valuable as that of beguiling the sense of affliction. Emilia's taste led her to drawing, and she soon made rapid advances in that art. Julia was uncommonly susceptible of the charms of harmony. She had feelings which trembled in unison to all its various and enchanting powers.

Julia caught the instructions of Madame with astonishing quickness, and in a short time attained to a degree of excellence in her favourite study which few persons have ever exceeded. Her manner was entirely her own. It was not in the rapid intricacies of execution that she excelled so much in as in that delicacy of taste, and in those enchanting powers of expression which seem to breathe a soul through the sound, and which take captive the heart of the hearer. The lute was her favourite instrument, and its tender notes accorded well with the sweet and melting tones of her voice.

The castle of Mazzini was a large irregular fabric, and seemed suited to receive a numerous train of followers such as served the nobility in those days, either in the splendour of peace or the turbulence of

war. Its present family inhabited only a small part of it, and even this part appeared forlorn and almost desolate from the spaciousness of the apartments, and the length of the galleries which led to them. A melancholy stillness reigned through the halls, and the silence of the courts, which were shaded by high turrets, was for many hours together undisturbed by the sound of any footstep.

Julia, who discovered⁴ an early taste for books, loved to retire in an evening to a small closet⁵ in which she had collected her favourite authors. This room formed the western angle of the castle: one of its windows looked upon the sea, beyond which was faintly seen, skirting the horizon, the dark rocky coast of Calabria; the other opened toward a part of the castle and afforded a prospect of the neighbouring woods. Her musical instruments were here deposited, with whatever assisted her favourite amusements. This spot, which was at once elegant, pleasant, and retired, was embellished with many little ornaments of her own invention, and with some drawings executed by her sister. The closet was adjoining her chamber, and was separated from the apartments of Madame by a short gallery. This gallery opened into another, long and winding, which led to the grand staircase, terminating in the north hall, with which the chief apartments of the north side of the edifice communicated.

Madame de Menon's apartment opened into both galleries. It was in one of these rooms that she usually spent the mornings, occupied in the improvement of

4. Displayed; exposed.

5. Small room for privacy.

her young charges. The windows looked toward the sea, and the room was light and pleasant. It was their custom to dine in one of the lower apartments, and at table they were always joined by Vincent, a dependant of the marquis's who had resided many years in the castle, and who instructed the young ladies in the Latin tongue and in geography.

During the fine evenings of summer, this little party frequently supped in a pavilion which was built on an eminence in the woods belonging to the castle. From this spot the eye had an almost boundless range of sea and land. It commanded the Strait of Messina, the opposite shores of Calabria, and a great extent of the wild and picturesque scenery of Sicily. Mount Etna, crowned with eternal snows, and shooting from among the clouds, formed a grand and sublime picture in the background of the scene. The city of Palermo was also distinguishable, and Julia, as she gazed on its glittering spires, would endeavour in imagination to depicture⁶ its beauties, while she secretly sighed for a view of that world from which she had hitherto been secluded by the mean jealousy of the marchioness, upon whose mind the dread of rival beauty operated strongly to the prejudice of Emilia and Julia. The marchioness employed all her influence over the marquis to detain them in retirement; though Emilia was now twenty and her sister eighteen, they had never passed the boundaries of their father's domains.

Vanity often produces unreasonable alarm, but the marchioness had in this instance just grounds

6. Imagine.

for apprehension: the beauty of her lord's daughters has seldom been exceeded. The person of Emilia was finely proportioned. Her complexion was fair, her hair flaxen, and her dark blue eyes were full of sweet expression. Her manners were dignified and elegant, and in her air was a feminine softness, a tender timidity, which irresistibly attracted the heart of the beholder. The figure of Julia was light and graceful—her step was airy—her mien animated, and her smile enchanting. Her eyes were dark and full of fire, but tempered with modest sweetness. Her features were finely turned—every laughing grace played round her mouth, and her countenance quickly discovered all the various emotions of her soul. The dark auburn hair which curled in beautiful profusion on her neck gave a finishing charm to her appearance.

Thus lovely, and thus veiled in obscurity, were the daughters of the noble Mazzini. But they were happy, for they knew not enough of the world to seriously regret the want of its enjoyments, though Julia would sometimes sigh for the airy image which her fancies painted, and a painful curiosity would arise concerning the busy scenes from which she was excluded. A return to her customary amusements, however, would chase the ideal image from her mind, and restore her usual happy complacency. Books, music, and painting divided the hours of her leisure, and many beautiful summer evenings were spent in the pavilion, where the refined conversation of Madame, the poetry of Tasso,⁷ the lute of Julia, and the friendship of Emilia combined to form a species of happiness such as el-

7. Torquato Tasso, an Italian poet of the late 1500s.

evated and highly susceptible minds are alone capable of receiving or communicating. Madame understood and practised all the graces of conversation, and her young pupils perceived its value and caught the spirit of its character.

Conversation may be divided into two classes—the familiar and the sentimental. It is the province of the familiar to diffuse cheerfulness and ease—to open the heart of man to man, and to beam a temperate sunshine upon the mind. Nature and art must conspire to render us susceptible to the charms of, and to qualify us for the practice of, the second class of conversation, here termed sentimental, in which Madame de Menon particularly excelled. To good sense, lively feeling, and natural delicacy of taste must be united an expansion of mind and a refinement of thought which is the result of high cultivation.

To render this sort of conversation irresistibly attractive, a knowledge of the world is requisite, as well as that enchanting ease, that elegance of manner, which is to be acquired only by frequenting the higher circles of polished life. In sentimental conversation, subjects interesting to the heart and to the imagination are brought forward; they are discussed in a kind of sportive way, with animation and refinement, and are never continued longer than politeness allows. Here fancy flourishes, the sensibilities expand, and wit, guided by delicacy and embellished by taste, points to the heart.

Such was the conversation of Madame de Menon, and the pleasant gaiety of the pavilion seemed peculiarly to adapt it for the scene of social delights. On the evening of a very sultry day, after having supped

in their favourite spot, the coolness of the hour and the beauty of the night tempted this happy party to remain there later than usual. Returning home, they were surprised by the appearance of a light through the broken window shutters of an apartment belonging to a division of the castle which had for many years been shut up. They had stopped to observe it when it suddenly disappeared and was seen no more. Madame de Menon, disturbed at this phenomenon, hastened into the castle with a view of enquiring into the cause of it.

She was met in the north hall by Vincent. She related to him what she had seen, and ordered an immediate search to be made for the keys of those apartments. She apprehended that some person had penetrated that part of the edifice with an intention of plunder; disdaining a paltry fear where her duty was concerned, she summoned the servants of the castle, with an intention of accompanying them thither. Vincent smiled at her apprehensions, and imputed⁸ what she had seen to an illusion impressed upon her fancy by the solemnity of the hour.

Madame, however, persevered in her purpose, and after along and repeated search, a massy⁹ key covered with rust was produced. She then proceeded to the southern side of the edifice, accompanied by Vincent and followed by the servants, who were agitated with impatient wonder. The key was applied to an iron gate which opened into a court that separated this division from the other parts of the castle. They

8. Credited to a person or thing.

9. Massive.

entered this court, which was overgrown with grass and weeds, and ascended some steps that led to a large door, which they vainly endeavoured to open. All the different keys of the castle were applied to the lock, without effect, and they were at length compelled to quit the place without having either satisfied their curiosity or quieted their fears. Everything, however, was still, and the light did not reappear. Madame concealed her apprehensions, and the family retired to rest.

This circumstance dwelt on the mind of Madame de Menon, and it was some time before she ventured again to spend an evening in the pavilion. After several months passed without further disturbance or discovery, another occurrence renewed the alarm.

Julia had one night remained in her closet later than usual. A favourite book had engaged her attention beyond the hour of customary repose, and every inhabitant of the castle except herself had long been lost in sleep. She was roused from her forgetfulness by the sound of the castle clock, which struck one. Surprised at the lateness of the hour, she rose in haste and was moving to her chamber when the beauty of the night attracted her to the window. She opened it and, observing a fine effect of moonlight upon the dark woods, leaned forward.

In that situation she had not long remained when she perceived a light faintly flash through a casement in the uninhabited part of the castle. A sudden tremor seized her, and she with difficulty supported herself. In a few moments it disappeared, and soon after a figure bearing a lamp proceeded from an obscure

door belonging to the south tower. Stealing along the outside of the castle walls, it turned round the southern angle, by which it was afterwards hid from view.

Astonished and terrified at what she had seen, she hurried to the apartment of Madame de Menon and related the circumstance. The servants were immediately roused, and the alarm became general. Madame arose and descended into the north hall, where the domestics were already assembled. No one could be found of courage sufficient to enter into the courts, and the orders of Madame were disregarded when opposed to the effects of superstitious terror.

She perceived that Vincent was absent, but as she was ordering him to be called, he entered the hall. Surprised to find the family thus assembled, he was told the occasion. He immediately ordered a party of the servants to attend him round the castle walls, and with some reluctance, and more fear, they obeyed him.

They all returned to the hall without having witnessed any extraordinary appearance. Though their fears were not confirmed, they were by no means dissipated. The appearance of a light in a part of the castle which had for several years been shut up, and to which time and circumstance had given an air of singular desolation, might reasonably be supposed to excite a strong degree of surprise and terror. In the minds of the vulgar, any species of the wonderful is received with avidity; and the servants did not hesitate in believing the southern division of the castle to be inhabited by a supernatural power. Too much agitated to sleep, they agreed to watch for the remainder of the night.

For this purpose they arranged themselves in the

east gallery, where they had a view of the south tower from which the light had issued. The night, however, passed without any further disturbance, and the morning dawn, which they beheld with inexpressible pleasure, dissipated for a while the glooms of apprehension. But the return of evening renewed the general fear, and for several successive nights the domestics watched the southern tower. Although nothing remarkable was seen, a report was soon raised, and believed, that the southern side of the castle was haunted. Madame de Menon, whose mind was superior to the effects of superstition, was yet disturbed and perplexed, and she determined, if the light reappeared, to inform the marquis of the circumstance and request the keys of those apartments.

The marquis, immersed in the dissipations of Naples, seldom remembered the castle or its inhabitants. His son, who had been educated under his immediate care, was the sole object of his pride, as the marchioness was that of his affection. He loved her with romantic fondness, which she repaid with seeming tenderness and secret perfidy. She allowed herself a free indulgence in the most licentious pleasures, yet conducted herself with an art so exquisite as to elude discovery and even suspicion. In her amours she was equally inconstant as ardent, till the young Count Hippolitus de Vereza attracted her attention. The natural fickleness of her disposition seemed then to cease, and upon him she centered all her desires.

The Count Vereza had lost his father in early childhood. He was now of age, and had just entered upon the possession of his estates. His person was graceful yet manly, his mind accomplished, and his manners

elegant; his countenance expressed a happy union of spirit, dignity, and benevolence, which formed the principal traits of his character. He had a sublimity of thought which taught him to despise the voluptuous vices of the Neapolitans and led him to higher pursuits. He was the chosen and early friend of young Ferdinand, the son of the marquis, and was a frequent visitor in the family.

When the marchioness first saw him she treated him with great distinction, and at length made such advances as neither the honor nor the inclinations of the count permitted him to notice. He conducted himself toward her with frigid indifference, which served only to inflame the passion it was meant to chill. The favors of the marchioness had hitherto been sought with avidity and accepted with rapture; the repulsive insensibility which she now experienced roused all her pride, and called into action every refinement of coquetry.

It was about this period that Vincent was seized with a disorder which increased so rapidly as in a short time to assume the most alarming appearance. Despairing of life, he desired that a messenger might be dispatched to inform the marquis of his situation, and to signify his earnest wish to see him before he died. The progress of his disorder defied every art of medicine, and his visible distress of mind seemed to accelerate his fate. Perceiving his last hour approaching, he requested to have a confessor. The confessor was shut up with him a considerable time, and he had already received extreme unction when Madame de Menon was summoned to his bedside. The hand of

death was now upon him, cold damps¹⁰ hung upon his brows, and he with difficulty raised his heavy eyes to Madame as she entered the apartment. He beckoned her toward him and, after desiring that no person might be permitted to enter the room, was for a few moments silent. His mind appeared to labour under oppressive remembrances; he made several attempts to speak, but either resolution or strength failed him.

At length, giving Madame a look of unutterable anguish, he said, "Alas, madam, Heaven grants not the prayer of such a wretch as I am. I must expire long before the marquis can arrive. Since I shall see him no more, I would impart to you a secret which lies heavy at my heart, and which makes my last moments dreadful, as they are without hope."

"Be comforted," said Madame, who was affected by the energy of his manner, "we are taught to believe that forgiveness is never denied to sincere repentance."

"You, madam, are ignorant of the enormity of my crime, and of the secret—the horrid secret which labours at my breast. My guilt is beyond remedy in this world, and I fear will be without pardon in the next; I therefore hope little from confession even to a priest. Yet some good it is still in my power to do; let me disclose to you that secret which is so mysteriously connected with the southern apartments of this castle."

"What of them!" exclaimed Madame with impatience.

10. Moistness.

Vincent returned no answer; exhausted by the effort of speaking, he had fainted. Madame rang for assistance, and by proper applications, his senses were recalled. He was, however, entirely speechless, and in this state he remained till he expired, which was about an hour after he had conversed with Madame.

The perplexity and astonishment of Madame were by the late scene heightened to a very painful degree. She recollected the various particulars relative to the southern division of the castle, the many years it had stood uninhabited—the silence which had been observed concerning it—the appearance of the light and the figure—the fruitless search for the keys, and the reports so generally believed; and thus remembrance presented her with a combination of circumstances which served only to increase her wonder and heighten her curiosity. A veil of mystery enveloped that part of the castle, which now seemed impossible should ever be penetrated since the only person who could have removed it was no more.

The marquis arrived on the day after that on which Vincent had expired. He came attended by servants only, and alighted at the gates of the castle with an air of impatience and a countenance expressive of strong emotion. Madame, with the young ladies, received him in the hall. He hastily saluted his daughters and passed on to the oak parlour, desiring Madame to follow him.

She obeyed, and the marquis enquired with great agitation after Vincent. When told of his death, he paced the room with hurried steps, and was for some time silent. At length seating himself and surveying

Madame with a scrutinizing eye, he asked some questions concerning the particulars of Vincent's death.

She mentioned his earnest desire to see the marquis and repeated his last words. The marquis remained silent, and Madame proceeded to mention those circumstances relative to the southern division of the castle which she thought it of so much importance to discover. He treated the affair very lightly, laughed at her conjectures, represented the appearances she described as the illusions of a weak and timid mind, and broke up the conversation by going to visit the chamber of Vincent, in which he remained a considerable time.

On the following day Emilia and Julia dined with the marquis. He was gloomy and silent; their efforts to amuse him seemed to excite displeasure rather than kindness; and when the repast was concluded, he withdrew to his own apartment, leaving his daughters in a state of sorrow and surprise.

Vincent was to be interred, according to his own desire, in the church belonging to the convent of St. Nicholas. One of the servants, after receiving some necessary orders concerning the funeral, ventured to inform the marquis of the appearance of the lights in the south tower. He mentioned the superstitious reports that prevailed amongst the household, and complained that the servants would not cross the courts after it was dark.

“And who is he that has commissioned you with this story?” said the marquis in a tone of displeasure. “Are the weak and ridiculous fancies of women and servants to be obtruded upon my notice? Away—appear

no more before me till you have learned to speak what it is proper for me to hear.”

Robert withdrew abashed, and it was some time before any person ventured to renew the subject with the marquis.

The majority of young Ferdinand now drew near, and the marquis determined to celebrate the occasion with festive magnificence at the castle of Mazzini. He therefore summoned the marchioness and his son from Naples, and very splendid preparations were ordered to be made.

Emilia and Julia dreaded the arrival of the marchioness, whose influence they had long been sensible of, and from whose presence they anticipated a painful restraint. Beneath the gentle guidance of Madame de Menon, their hours had passed in happy tranquillity, for they were ignorant alike of the sorrows and the pleasures of the world. Those did not oppress, and these did not inflame. Engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and the attainment of elegant accomplishments, their moments flew lightly away, and the flight of time was marked only by improvement. In Madame was united the tenderness of the mother with the sympathy of a friend, and they loved her with a warm and inviolable affection.

The purposed visit of their brother, whom they had not seen for several years, gave them great pleasure. Although their minds retained no very distinct remembrance of him, they looked forward with eager and delightful expectation to his virtues and his talents, and hoped to find in his company a consolation for the uneasiness which the presence of the marchioness would excite.

Neither did Julia contemplate with indifference the approaching festival. A new scene was now opening to her, which her young imagination painted in the warm and glowing colours of delight. The near approach of pleasure frequently awakens the heart to emotions which a more remote and abstracted observance would fail to excite. Julia, who from a distance had considered with tranquillity the splendid gaieties of life, now lingered with impatient hope through the moments which withheld her from their enjoyments. Emilia, whose feelings were less lively and whose imagination was less powerful, beheld the approaching festival with calm consideration, and almost regretted the interruption of those tranquil pleasures which she knew to be more congenial with her powers and disposition.

In a few days the marchioness arrived at the castle. She was followed by a numerous retinue, and accompanied by Ferdinand and several of the Italian noblesse¹¹ whom pleasure attracted to her train. Her entrance was proclaimed by the sound of music, and those gates which had long rusted on their hinges were thrown open to receive her. The courts and halls, whose aspect so lately expressed only gloom and desolation, now shone with sudden splendour and echoed the sounds of gaiety and gladness. Julia surveyed the scene from an obscure window; as the triumphal strains filled the air, her breast throbbed; her heart beat quick with joy, and she lost her apprehensions about the marchioness in a sort of wild delight hitherto unknown to her. The arrival of the marchioness

11. Members of the nobility.

seemed indeed the signal of universal and unlimited pleasure. When the marquis went out to receive her, the gloom that lately clouded his countenance broke away in smiles of welcome, which the whole company appeared to consider as invitations to joy.

The tranquil heart of Emilia was not proof against a scene so alluring, and she sighed at the prospect yet scarcely knew why. Julia pointed out to her sister the graceful figure of a young man who followed the marchioness, and she expressed her wishes that he might be her brother. During their contemplation of the scene before them, they were summoned to meet the marchioness. Julia trembled with apprehension, and for a few moments wished the castle was in its former state. As they advanced through the saloon in which they were to be presented, Julia was covered with blushes, but Emilia, though equally timid, preserved her graceful dignity. The marchioness received them with a mingled smile of condescension and politeness, and immediately the whole attention of the company was attracted by their elegance and beauty.

The eager eyes of Julia sought in vain to discover her brother, of whose features she had no recollection, among the persons then present. At length her father presented him, and she perceived with a sigh of regret that he was not the youth she had observed from the window. He advanced with a very engaging air, and she met him with an unfeigned welcome. His figure was tall and majestic, he had a very noble and spirited carriage, and his countenance expressed at once sweetness and dignity.

Soon after, supper was served in the east hall, and the tables were spread with a profusion of delicacies. A band of musicians played during the repast, and the evening concluded with a concert in the saloon.

II

THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL, so long and so impatiently looked for by Julia, was now arrived. All the neighbouring nobility were invited, and the gates of the castle were thrown open for a general rejoicing. A magnificent entertainment¹² consisting of the most luxurious and expensive dishes was served in the halls. Soft music floated along the vaulted roofs, the walls were hung with decorations, and it seemed as if the hand of a magician had suddenly metamorphosed this once gloomy fabric into the palace of a fairy. The marquis, notwithstanding the gaiety of the scene, frequently appeared abstracted from its enjoyments, and in spite of all his efforts at cheerfulness, the melancholy of his heart was visible in his countenance.

In the evening there was a grand ball; the marchioness, who was still distinguished for her beauty and for the winning elegance of her manners, appeared in the most splendid attire. Her hair was ornamented with a profusion of jewels, but was so disposed as to give an air of voluptuousness rather than of grace to her figure. Although conscious of her charms, she

12. A formal meal; a banquet.

beheld the beauty of Emilia and Julia with a jealous eye, and was compelled secretly to acknowledge that the simple elegance with which they were adorned was more enchanting than all the studied artifice of splendid decoration. They were dressed alike in light Sicilian habits,¹³ and the beautiful luxuriance of their flowing hair was restrained only by bandelets¹⁴ of pearl.

The ball was opened by Ferdinand and the lady Matilda Constanza. Emilia danced with the young Marquis della Fazelli, and acquitted herself with the ease and dignity so natural to her. Julia experienced a various emotion of pleasure and fear when the Count de Vereza, the cavalier¹⁵ she had observed from the window, led her forth. The grace of her step and the elegant symmetry of her figure raised in the assembly a gentle murmur of applause, and the soft blush which now stole over her cheek gave an additional charm to her appearance. But when the music changed and she danced to the soft Sicilian measure, the airy grace of her movement and the unaffected tenderness of her air sank attention into silence, which continued for some time after the dance had ceased.

The marchioness observed the general admiration with seeming pleasure, and secret uneasiness. She had suffered a very painful solicitude when the Count de Vereza selected Julia for his partner in the dance, and she pursued him through the evening with an eye of jealous scrutiny. Her bosom, which before glowed only with love, was now torn by the agitation of other

13. Garments; gowns.

14. Small bands; ribbons.

15. A gentleman trained in arms and riding; a knight.

passions more violent and destructive. Her thoughts were restless, her mind wandered from the scene before her, and it required all her address to preserve an apparent ease. She saw, or fancied she saw, an impassioned air in the count when he addressed himself to Julia that corroded her heart with jealous fury.

At twelve the gates of the castle were thrown open, and the company quitted it for the woods, which were splendidly illuminated. Arcades of light lined the long vistas, which were terminated by pyramids of lamps that presented to the eye one bright column of flame. At irregular distances buildings had been erected, which were hung with variegated lamps disposed in the gayest and most fantastic forms, and collations were spread under the trees. Music, touched by unseen hands, breathed around; the musicians were placed in the most obscure and embowered spots so as to elude the eye and strike the imagination. Nothing met the eye but beauty and romantic splendour; the ear received no sounds but those of mirth and melody. The younger part of the company formed themselves into groups, which at intervals glanced through the woods, and were again unseen.

Julia seemed the magic queen of the place. Her heart dilated with pleasure, and diffused over her features an expression of pure and complacent delight. A generous, frank, and exalted sentiment sparkled in her eyes, and animated her manner. Her bosom glowed with benevolent affections, and she seemed anxious to impart to all around her a happiness as unmixed as that she experienced. Wherever she moved, admiration followed. Ferdinand was as gay as the scene around him. Emilia was pleased; and

the marquis seemed to have left his melancholy in the castle.

The marchioness alone was wretched. She supped with a select party in a pavilion on the seashore, which was fitted up with peculiar elegance. It was hung with white silk, drawn up in festoons, and richly fringed with gold. The sofas were of the same materials, and alternate wreaths of lamps and of roses entwined the columns. A row of small lamps placed about the cornice formed an edge of light round the roof which, with the other numerous lights, was reflected in a blaze of splendour from the large mirrors that adorned the room.

The Count Muriani was of the party. He complimented the marchioness on the beauty of her daughters. After lamenting with gaiety the captives which their charms would enthrall, he mentioned the Count de Vereza. "He is certainly of all others the man most deserving the lady Julia. As they danced, I thought they exhibited a perfect model of the beauty of either sex, and if I mistake not, they are inspired with a mutual admiration."

The marchioness, endeavouring to conceal her uneasiness, said, "Yes, my lord, I allow the count all the merit you adjudge him, but from the little I have seen of his disposition, he is too volatile for a serious attachment."

At that instant the count entered the pavilion.

"Ah," said Muriani, laughingly, "you are the subject of our conversation, and seem to be come in good time to receive the honors allotted you. I was interceding with the marchioness for her interest in your favor with the Lady Julia; but she absolutely refuses it.

Though she allows you merit, she alleges that you are by nature fickle and inconstant. What say you—would not the beauty of Lady Julia bind your unsteady heart?”

“I know not how I have deserved that character of the marchioness,” said the count with a smile, “but that heart must be either fickle or insensible in an uncommon degree which can boast of freedom in the presence of Lady Julia.”

The marchioness, mortified by the whole conversation, now felt the full force of Vereza’s reply, which she imagined he pointed with particular emphasis.

The entertainment concluded with a grand firework, which was exhibited on the margin of the sea, and the company did not part till the dawn of morning.

Julia retired from the scene with regret. She was enchanted with the new world that was now exhibited to her, and she was not cool enough to distinguish the vivid glow of imagination from the colours of real bliss. The pleasure she now felt she believed would always be renewed, and in an equal degree, by the objects which first excited it.

The weakness of humanity is never willingly perceived by young minds. It is painful to know that we are operated upon by objects whose impressions are as variable as they are indefinable—and that what yesterday affected us strongly is today but imperfectly felt, and tomorrow perhaps shall be disregarded. When at length this unwelcome truth is received into the mind, we at first reject with disgust every appearance of good, we disdain to partake of a happiness which we cannot always command, and we not infrequently sink into a temporary despair. Wisdom or accident, at length, recalls us from our error, and offers to us

some object capable of producing a pleasing yet lasting effect—which effect, therefore, we call happiness. Happiness has this essential difference from what is commonly called pleasure, that virtue forms its basis, and virtue, being the offspring of reason, may be expected to produce uniformity of effect.

The passions which had hitherto lain concealed in Julia's heart, touched by circumstance, dilated to their power, and afforded her a slight experience of the pain and delight which flow from their influence. The beauty and accomplishments of Vereza raised in her a new and various emotion, which reflection made her fear to encourage, but which was too pleasing to be wholly resisted. Tremblingly alive to a sense of delight and unchilled by disappointment, the young heart welcomes every feeling not simply painful with a romantic expectation that it will expand into bliss.

Julia sought with eager anxiety to discover the sentiments of Vereza toward her. She revolved each circumstance of the day, but they afforded her little satisfaction; they reflected only a glimmering and uncertain light which, instead of guiding, served only to perplex her. Now she remembered some instance of particular attention, and then some mark of apparent indifference. She compared his conduct with that of the other young noblesse, and thought each appeared equally desirous of the favor of every lady present. All the ladies, however, appeared to her to court the admiration of Vereza, and she trembled lest he should be too sensible of the distinction. She drew from these reflections no positive inference; and though distrust rendered pain the predominate sensation, it was so exquisitely interwoven with delight that she could not

wish it exchanged for her former ease. Thoughtful and restless, sleep fled from her eyes, and she longed with impatience for the morning, which should again present Vereza and enable her to pursue the enquiry.

She rose early and adorned herself with unusual care. In her favourite closet she awaited the hour of breakfast and endeavoured to read, but her thoughts wandered from the subject. Her lute and favourite airs lost half their power to please; the day seemed to stand still—she became melancholy, and thought the breakfast hour would never arrive. At length the clock struck the signal; the sound vibrated on every nerve. Trembling, she quitted the closet for her sister's apartment.

Love taught her disguise. Till then Emilia had shared all her thoughts; they now descended to the breakfast room in silence, and Julia almost feared to meet her eye. In the breakfast room they were alone. Julia found it impossible to support a conversation with Emilia, whose observations, interrupting the course of her thoughts, became uninteresting and tiresome.

She was therefore about to retire to her closet when the marquis entered. His air was haughty, and his look severe. He coldly saluted his daughters, and they had scarcely time to reply to his general enquiries when the marchioness entered and the company soon after assembled.

Julia, who had awaited with so painful an impatience the moment which should present Vereza to her sight, now sighed that it was arrived. She scarcely dared to lift her timid eyes from the ground, and when by accident they met his, a soft tremor seized

her; apprehension lest he should discover her sentiments served only to render her confusion conspicuous. At length, a glance from the marchioness recalled her bewildered thoughts. Other fears superseding those of love, her mind by degrees recovered its dignity. She could distinguish in the behaviour of Vereza no symptoms of particular admiration, and she resolved to conduct herself toward him with the most scrupulous care.

This day, like the preceding one, was devoted to joy. In the evening there was a concert, which was chiefly performed by the nobility. Ferdinand played the violoncello, Vereza the German flute, and Julia the pianoforte, which she touched with a delicacy and execution that engaged every auditor.¹⁶ The confusion of Julia may be easily imagined when Ferdinand, selecting a beautiful duet, desired Vereza would accompany his sister.

The pride of conscious excellence, however, quickly overcame her timidity and enabled her to exert all her powers. The air was simple and pathetic, and she gave it those charms of expression so peculiarly her own. She struck the chords of her pianoforte in beautiful accompaniment, and toward the close of the second stanza her voice, resting on one note, swelled into a tone so exquisite and from thence descended to a few simple notes which she touched with such impassioned tenderness that every eye wept to the sounds. The breath of the flute trembled, and Hippolitus, entranced, forgot to play. A pause of silence ensued at the conclusion of the piece, and continued

16. Listener or member of an audience.

till a general sigh seemed to awaken the audience from their enchantment.

Amid the general applause, Hippolitus was silent. Julia observed his behaviour and, gently raising her eyes to his, there read the sentiments which she had inspired. An exquisite emotion thrilled her heart, and she experienced one of those rare moments which illuminate life with a ray of bliss, by which the darkness of its general shade is contrasted. Care, doubt, every disagreeable sensation vanished, and for the remainder of the evening she was conscious only of delight. A timid respect marked the manner of Hippolitus, more flattering to Julia than the most ardent professions. The evening concluded with a ball, and Julia was again the partner of the count.

When the ball broke up, she retired to her apartment, but not to sleep. Joy is as restless as anxiety or sorrow. She seemed to have entered upon a new state of existence; those fine springs of affection which had hitherto lain concealed were now touched, and yielded to her a happiness more exalted than any her imagination had ever painted. She reflected on the tranquillity of her past life and, comparing it with the emotions of the present hour, exulted in the difference. All her former pleasures now appeared insipid; she wondered that they ever had power to affect her, and that she had endured with content the dull uniformity to which she had been condemned. It was now only that she appeared to live. Absorbed in the single idea of being beloved, her imagination soared into the regions of romantic bliss, and bore her high above the possibility of evil. Since she was beloved by Hippolitus, she could only be happy.

From this state of entranced delight she was awakened by the sound of music immediately under her window. It was a lute touched by a masterly hand. After a wild and melancholy symphony, a voice of more than magic expression swelled into an air so pathetic and tender that it seemed to breathe the very soul of love. The chords of the lute were struck in low and sweet accompaniment. Julia listened, and distinguished the following words:

Still is the night breeze!—not a lonely sound
Steals through the silence of this dreary hour;
O'er these high battlements Sleep reigns profound,
And sheds on all, his sweet oblivion power.
On all but me—I vainly ask his dews
To steep in short forgetfulness my cares.
Th' affrighted god still flies when Love pursues,
Still—still denies the wretched lover's prayers.

An interval of silence followed, and the air was repeated, after which the music was heard no more. If before Julia believed that she was loved by Hippolitus, she was now confirmed in the sweet reality. But sleep at length fell upon her senses, and the airy forms of ideal bliss no longer fled¹⁷ before her imagination.

Morning came, and she arose light and refreshed. How different were her present sensations from those of the preceding day. Her anxiety had now evaporated in joy, and she experienced that airy dance of spirits which accumulates delight from every object and, with a power like the touch of enchantment, can

17. Drifted; flowed.

transform a gloomy desert into a smiling Eden. She flew to the breakfast room, scarcely conscious of motion, but as she entered it, a soft confusion overcame her; she blushed, and almost feared to meet the eyes of Vereza. She was presently relieved, however, for the count was not there. As the company assembled, Julia watched the entrance of every person with painful anxiety, but he for whom she looked did not appear.

Surprised and uneasy, she fixed her eyes on the door, and whenever it opened, her heart beat with an expectation which was as often checked by disappointment. In spite of all her efforts, her vivacity sank into languor, and she then perceived that love may produce other sensations than those of delight. She found it possible to be unhappy, though loved by Hippolitus; and acknowledged with a sigh of regret, which was yet new to her, how tremblingly her peace depended upon him.

He neither appeared nor was mentioned at breakfast, but delicacy prevented her enquiring after him. Conversation soon became irksome to her, and she retired to the apartment of Madame de Menon. There she employed herself in painting and endeavoured to beguile the time till the hour of dinner, when she hoped to see Hippolitus. Madame was, as usual, friendly and cheerful, but she perceived a reserve in the conduct of Julia, and penetrated without difficulty into its cause. She was, however, ignorant of the object of her pupil's admiration.

The hour so eagerly desired by Julia at length arrived, and with a palpitating heart she entered the hall. The count was not there, and in the course of conversation, she learned that he had that morning

sailed for Naples. The scene which so lately appeared enchanting to her eyes now changed its hue: in the midst of society and surrounded by gaiety, she was solitary and dejected. She accused herself of having suffered her wishes to mislead her judgment, and the present conduct of Hippolitus convinced her that she had mistaken admiration for a sentiment more tender. She believed, too, that the musician who had addressed her in his sonnet was not the count, and thus at once was dissolved all the ideal fabric of her happiness. How short a period often reverses the character of our sentiments, rendering that which yesterday we despised, today desirable. The tranquil state which she had so lately delighted to quit, she now reflected upon with regret. She had, however, the consolation of believing that her sentiments toward the count were unknown, and the sweet consciousness that her conduct had been governed by a nice sense of propriety.

The public rejoicings at the castle closed with the week, but the gay spirit of the marchioness forbade a return to tranquillity. She substituted diversions more private but in splendour scarcely inferior to the preceding ones. She had observed the behaviour of Hippolitus on the night of the concert with chagrin, and his departure with sorrow; yet disdaining to perpetuate misfortune by reflection, she sought to lose the sense of disappointment in the hurry of dissipation. But her efforts to erase him from her remembrance were ineffectual. Unaccustomed to oppose the bent of her inclinations, they now maintained unbounded sway; and she found too late that, in order to have a due command of our passions, it is necessary to

subject them to early obedience. Passion, in its undue influence, produces weakness as well as injustice. The pain which now recoiled upon her heart from disappointment she had not strength of mind to endure, and she sought relief from its pressure in afflicting the innocent. Julia, whose beauty she imagined had captivated the count and confirmed him in indifference toward herself, she incessantly tormented by the exercise of those various and splotic¹⁸ little arts which elude the eye of the common observer, and are only to be known by those who have felt them; arts which individually are inconsiderable, but in the aggregate amount to a cruel and decisive effect.

From Julia's mind the idea of happiness was now faded. Pleasure had withdrawn its beam from the prospect, and the objects no longer illumined by its ray became dark and colourless. As often as Julia's situation would permit, she withdrew from society and sought the freedom of solitude, where she could indulge in melancholy thoughts and give loose to that despair which is so apt to follow the disappointment of our first hopes.

Week after week elapsed, yet the marquis made no mention of returning to Naples. He at length declared it his intention to spend the remainder of the summer in the castle. To this determination the marchioness submitted with decent resignation, for she was here surrounded by a crowd of flatterers, and her invention supplied her with continual diversions; that gaiety which rendered Naples so dear to her glittered in the woods of Mazzini and resounded through the castle.

18. Spiteful or malevolent.

The apartments of Madame de Menon were spacious and noble. The windows opened upon the sea, and commanded a view of the Strait of Messina, bounded on one side by the beautiful shores of the isle of Sicily, and on the other by the high mountains of Calabria. The strait, filled with vessels whose gay streamers glittered in the sunbeam, presented to the eye an ever-moving scene. The principal room opened upon a gallery that overhung the grand terrace of the castle, and it commanded a prospect which for beauty and extent has seldom been equalled. These were formerly considered the chief apartments of the castle and, when the marquis quitted them for Naples, were allotted for the residence of Madame de Menon and her young charges.

The marchioness, struck with the prospect which the windows afforded and with the pleasantness of the gallery, determined to restore the rooms to their former splendour. She signified this intention to Madame, for whom other apartments were provided. The chambers of Emilia and Julia forming part of the suite, they were also claimed by the marchioness, who left Julia only her favourite closet. The rooms to which they removed were spacious but gloomy; they had been for some years uninhabited and, though preparations had been made for the reception of their new inhabitants, an air of desolation reigned within them that inspired melancholy sensations.

Julia observed that her chamber, which opened beyond Madame's, formed a part of the southern building, with which, however, there appeared no means of communication. The late mysterious circumstances relating to this part of the fabric now arose to her

imagination, and conjured up a terror which reason could not subdue. She told her emotions to Madame, who, with more prudence than sincerity, laughed at her fears. The behaviour of the marquis, the dying words of Vincent, together with the preceding circumstances of alarm, had sunk deep in the mind of Madame, but she saw the necessity of confining to her own breast doubts which time only could resolve.

Julia endeavoured to reconcile herself to the change, and a circumstance soon occurred which obliterated her present sensations and excited others far more interesting. One day as she was arranging some papers in the small drawers of a cabinet that stood in her apartment, she found a picture which fixed all her attention. It was a miniature of a lady whose countenance was touched with sorrow and expressed an air of dignified resignation. The mournful sweetness of her eyes, raised toward Heaven with a look of supplication, and the melancholy languor that shaded her features so deeply affected Julia that her eyes filled with involuntary tears. She sighed and wept, still gazing on the picture, which seemed to engage her by a kind of fascination. She almost fancied that the portrait breathed, and that the eyes were fixed on hers with a look of penetrating softness.

Full of the emotions which the miniature had excited, she presented it to Madame, whose mingled sorrow and surprise increased her curiosity. But what were the various sensations which pressed upon her heart, on learning that she had wept over the resemblance of her mother! Deprived of a mother's tenderness before she was sensible of its value, it was now only that she mourned the event which lamentation

could not recall. Emilia, with an emotion as exquisite, mingled her tears with those of her sister. With eager impatience they pressed Madame to disclose the cause of that sorrow which so emphatically marked the features of their mother.

“Alas! my dear children,” said Madame, deeply sighing, “you engage me in a task too severe, not only for your peace, but for mine; since in giving you the information you require, I must retrace scenes of my own life which I wish forever obliterated. It would, however, be both cruel and unjust to withhold an explanation so nearly interesting to you, and I will sacrifice my own ease to your wishes.

“Louisa de Bernini, your mother, was, as you well know, the only daughter of the Count de Bernini. Of the misfortunes of your family, I believe you are yet ignorant. The chief estates of the count were situated in the Val di Demona, a valley deriving its name from its vicinity to Mount Etna, which vulgar tradition has peopled with devils. In one of those dreadful eruptions of Etna, which deluged this valley with a flood of fire, a great part of your grandfather’s domains in that quarter were laid waste. The count was at that time with a part of his family at Messina, but the countess and her son, who were in the country, were destroyed. The remaining property of the count was proportionably inconsiderable, and the loss of his wife and son deeply affected him. He retired with Louisa, his only surviving child, who was then near fifteen, to a small estate near Catania.

“There was some degree of relationship between your grandfather and myself; and your mother was attached to me by the ties of sentiment, which, as we

grew up, united us still more strongly than those of blood. Our pleasures and our tastes were the same; and a similarity of misfortunes might, perhaps, contribute to cement our early friendship. I, like herself, had lost a parent in the eruption of Etna. My mother had died before I understood her value; but my father, whom I revered and tenderly loved, was destroyed by one of those terrible events; his lands were buried beneath the lava, and he left an only son and myself to mourn his fate and encounter the evils of poverty.

“The count, who was our nearest surviving relation, generously took us home to his house, and declared that he considered us as his children. To amuse his leisure hours, he undertook to finish the education of my brother, who was then about seventeen, and whose rising genius promised to reward the labours of the count. Louisa and myself often shared the instruction of her father, and at those hours Orlando was generally of the party. The tranquil retirement of the count’s situation, the rational employment of his time between his own studies, the education of those whom he called his children, and the conversation of a few select friends anticipated the effect of time, and softened the asperities of his distress into a tender complacent melancholy.

“As for Louisa and myself, who were yet new in life, and whose spirits possessed the happy elasticity of youth, our minds gradually shifted from suffering to tranquillity, and from tranquillity to happiness. I sometimes thought that when my brother had been reading to her a delightful passage, the countenance of Louisa discovered a tender interest which seemed to be excited rather by the reader than by the author.

These days, which were surely the most enviable of our lives, now passed in serene enjoyments, and in continual gradations of improvement.

“The count designed my brother for the army, and the time now drew nigh when he was to join the Sicilian regiment, in which he had a commission. The absent thoughts and dejected spirits of my cousin now discovered to me the secret which had long been concealed even from herself; for it was not till Orlando was about to depart that she perceived how dear he was to her peace. On the eve of his departure, the count lamented, with fatherly yet manly tenderness, the distance which was soon to separate us. ‘But we shall meet again,’ said he, ‘when the honors of war have rewarded the bravery of my son.’ Louisa grew pale, a half-suppressed sigh escaped her, and to conceal her emotion she turned to her harpsichord.

“My brother had a favourite dog which, before he set off, he presented to Louisa. Committing it to her care, he begged she would be kind to it, and sometimes remember its master. He checked his rising emotion, but as he turned from her, I perceived the tear that wetted his cheek. He departed, and with him the spirit of our happiness seemed to evaporate. The scenes which his presence had formerly enlivened were now forlorn and melancholy, yet we loved to wander in what were once his favourite haunts. Louisa forbore to mention my brother even to me, but frequently, when she thought herself unobserved, she would steal to her harpsichord, and repeat the strain which she had played on the evening before his departure.

“We had the pleasure to hear from time to time that he was well. Though his own modesty threw a veil over his conduct, we could collect from other accounts that he had behaved with great bravery. At length the time of his return approached, and the enlivened spirits of Louisa declared the influence he retained in her heart. He returned, bearing public testimony of his valour in the honors which had been conferred upon him. He was received with universal joy; the count welcomed him with the pride and fondness of a father, and the villa became again the seat of happiness. His person and manners were much improved; the elegant beauty of the youth was now exchanged for the graceful dignity of manhood, and some knowledge of the world was added to that of the sciences. The joy which illumined his countenance when he met Louisa spoke at once his admiration and his love; and the blush which her observation of it brought upon her cheek would have discovered, even to an uninterested spectator, that this joy was mutual.

“Orlando brought with him a young Frenchman, a brother officer, who had rescued him from imminent danger in battle, and whom he introduced to the count as his preserver. The count received him with gratitude and distinction, and he was for a considerable time an inmate at the villa. His manners were singularly pleasing, and his understanding was cultivated and refined. He soon discovered a partiality for me, and he was indeed too pleasing to be seen with indifference. Gratitude for the valuable life he had preserved was perhaps the groundwork of an esteem which soon increased into the most affectionate love.

Our attachment grew stronger as our acquaintance increased; and at length the Chevalier¹⁹ de Menon asked me of the count, who consulted my heart, and finding it favorable to the connection, proceeded to make the necessary enquiries concerning the family of the stranger. He obtained a satisfactory and pleasing account of it. The chevalier was the second son of a French gentleman of large estates in France, who had been some years deceased. He had left several sons; the family estate, of course, devolved to the eldest, but to the two younger he had bequeathed considerable property. Our marriage was solemnized in a private manner at the villa, in the presence of the count, Louisa, and my brother. Soon after the nuptials, my husband and Orlando were remanded to their regiments.

“My brother’s affections were now unalterably fixed upon Louisa, but a sentiment of delicacy and generosity still kept him silent. He thought, poor as he was, to solicit the hand of Louisa would be to repay the kindness of the count with ingratitude. I have seen the inward struggles of his heart, and mine has bled for him. The count and Louisa so earnestly solicited me to remain at the villa during the campaign, that at length my husband consented. We parted—O! let me forget that period!—Had I accompanied him, all might have been well, and the long, long years of affliction which followed had been spared me.”

The horn now sounded the signal for dinner, and interrupted the narrative of Madame. Her beauteous auditors wiped the tears from their eyes, and with

19. Cavalier, or a gentleman trained in arms and horsemanship; a knight.

extreme reluctance descended to the hall. The day was occupied with company and diversions, and it was not till late in the evening that they were suffered to retire. They hastened to Madame immediately upon their being released and, too much interested for sleep and too importunate to be repulsed, solicited the sequel of her story. She objected to the lateness of the hour, but at length yielded to their entreaties. They drew their chairs close to hers and, every sense being absorbed in the single one of hearing, followed her through the course of her narrative.

“My brother again departed without disclosing his sentiments. The effort it cost him was evident, but his sense of honor surmounted every opposing consideration. Louisa again drooped, and pined in silent sorrow. I lamented equally for my friend and my brother; and have a thousand times accused that delicacy as false which withheld them from the happiness they might so easily and so innocently have obtained. The behaviour of the count, at least to my eye, seemed to indicate the satisfaction which this union would have given him. It was about this period that the Marquis Mazzini first saw and became enamoured of Louisa. His proposals were very flattering, but the count forbore to exert the undue authority of a father; and he ceased to press the connection when he perceived that Louisa was really averse to it. Louisa was sensible of the generosity of his conduct, and she could scarcely reject the alliance without a sigh, which her gratitude paid to the kindness of her father.

“But an event now happened which dissolved at once our happiness, and all our air-drawn schemes for futurity. A dispute arose between the Chevalier

de Menon and my brother, which it seems originated in a trifle but soon increased to a serious degree. It was decided by the sword, and my dear brother fell by the hand of my husband. I shall pass over this period of my life. It is too painful for recollection. The effect of this event upon Louisa was such as may be imagined. The world was now become indifferent to her, and as she had no prospect of happiness for herself, she was unwilling to withhold it from the father who had deserved so much of her. After some time, when the marquis renewed his addresses, she gave him her hand.

“The characters of the marquis and his lady were in their nature too opposite to form a happy union. Of this Louisa was very soon sensible; and though the mildness of her disposition made her tamely submit to the unfeeling authority of her husband, his behaviour sank deep in her heart, and she pined in secret. It was impossible for her to avoid opposing the character of the marquis to that of him upon whom her affections had been so fondly and so justly fixed. The comparison increased her sufferings, which soon preyed upon her constitution and very visibly affected her health. Her situation deeply afflicted the count, and united with the infirmities of age to shorten his life.

“Upon his death, I bade adieu to my cousin and quitted Sicily for Italy, where the Chevalier de Menon had for some time expected me. Our meeting was very affecting. My resentment toward him was done away when I observed his pale and altered countenance, and perceived the melancholy which preyed upon his heart. All the airy vivacity of his former manner was

fled, and he was devoured by unavailing grief and remorse. He deplored with unceasing sorrow the friend he had murdered, and my presence seemed to open afresh the wounds which time had begun to close. His affliction, united with my own, was almost more than I could support, but I was doomed to suffer and endure yet more.

“In a subsequent engagement my husband, weary of existence, rushed into the heat of battle, and there obtained an honorable death. In a paper which he left behind him, he said it was his intention to die in that battle; that he had long wished for death and waited for an opportunity of obtaining it without staining his own character by the cowardice of suicide or distressing me by an act of butchery. This event gave the finishing stroke to my afflictions. Yet let me retract—another misfortune awaited me when I least expected one. The Chevalier de Menon died without a will, and his brothers refused to give up his estate unless I could produce a witness of my marriage.

“I returned to Sicily and, to my inexpressible sorrow, found that your mother had died during my stay abroad, a prey, I fear, to grief. The priest who performed the ceremony of my marriage, having been threatened with punishment for some ecclesiastical offences, had secretly left the country; and thus was I deprived of those proofs which were necessary to authenticate my claims to the estates of my husband. His brothers, to whom I was an utter stranger, were either too prejudiced to believe or, believing, were too dishonorable to acknowledge the justice of my claims. I was therefore at once abandoned to sorrow and to

poverty, a small legacy from the Count de Bernini being all that now remained to me.

“When the marquis married Maria de Vellorno, which was about this period, he designed to quit Mazzini for Naples. His son was to accompany him, but it was his intention to leave you, who were both very young, to the care of some person qualified to superintend your education. My circumstances rendered the office acceptable, and my former friendship for your mother made the duty pleasing to me. The marquis was, I believe, glad to be spared the trouble of searching further for what he had hitherto found it difficult to obtain—a person whom inclination as well as duty would bind to his interest.”

Madame ceased to speak, and Emilia and Julia wept to the memory of the mother whose misfortunes this story recorded. The sufferings of Madame, together with her former friendship for the late marchioness, endeared her to her pupils, who from this period endeavoured by every kind and delicate attention to obliterate the traces of her sorrows. Madame was sensible of this tenderness, and it was productive in some degree of the effect desired. But a subject soon after occurred which drew off their minds from the consideration of their mother’s fate to a subject more wonderful and equally interesting.

One night that Emilia and Julia had been detained later than usual by company and the attendant ceremonial restraint, the easy conversation of Madame and the pleasure which a return to liberty naturally produces induced them to defer the hour of repose till the night was far advanced. They were engaged in interesting discourse when Madame, who was then

speaking, was interrupted by a low hollow sound which arose from beneath the apartment, and seemed like the closing of a door.

Chilled into a silence, they listened and distinctly heard it repeated. Deadly ideas crowded upon their imaginations, and inspired a terror which scarcely allowed them to breathe. The noise lasted only for a moment, and a profound silence soon ensued. Their feelings at length relaxed, and suffered them to move to Emilia's apartment, when again they heard the same sounds. Almost distracted with fear, they rushed into Madame's apartment, where Emilia sank upon the bed and fainted. It was a considerable time ere the efforts of Madame recalled her to sensation.

When they were again tranquil, she employed all her endeavours to compose the spirits of the young ladies, and dissuade them from alarming the castle. Involved in dark and fearful doubts, she yet commanded her feelings, and endeavoured to assume an appearance of composure. The late behaviour of the marquis had convinced her that he was nearly connected with the mystery which hung over this part of the edifice, and she dreaded to excite his resentment by a further mention of alarms, which were perhaps only ideal,²⁰ and whose reality she had certainly no means of proving.

Influenced by these considerations, she endeavoured to prevail on Emilia and Julia to await in silence some confirmation of their surmises; but their terror made this a very difficult task. They acquiesced, however, so far with her wishes as to agree to conceal

20. Existing in fancy only.

the preceding circumstances from every person but their brother, without whose protecting presence they declared it utterly impossible to pass another night in the apartments. For the remainder of this night they resolved to watch. To beguile the tediousness of the time they endeavoured to converse, but the minds of Emilia and Julia were too much affected by the late occurrence to wander from the subject. They compared this with the foregoing circumstance of the figure and the light which had appeared; their imaginations kindled wild conjectures, and they submitted their opinions to Madame, entreating her to inform them sincerely whether she believed that disembodied spirits were ever permitted to visit this earth.

“My children,” said she, “I will not attempt to persuade you that the existence of such spirits is impossible. Who shall say that anything is impossible to God? We know that he has made us, who are embodied spirits; he, therefore, can make unembodied spirits. If we cannot understand how such spirits exist, we should consider the limited powers of our minds, and that we cannot understand many things which are indisputably true. No one yet knows why the magnetic needle points to the north; yet you, who have never seen a magnet, do not hesitate to believe that it has this tendency, because you have been well assured of it, both from books and in conversation.

“Since, therefore, we are sure that nothing is impossible to God, and that such beings *may* exist—though we cannot tell how—we ought to consider by what evidence their existence is supported. I do not say that spirits *have* appeared; but if several discreet unprejudiced persons were to assure me that they had seen

one, I should not be proud or bold enough to reply, 'It is impossible.' Let not, however, such considerations disturb your minds. I have said thus much because I was unwilling to impose upon your understandings; it is now your part to exercise your reason and preserve the unmoved confidence of virtue. Such spirits, if indeed they have ever been seen, can have appeared only by the express permission of God, and for some very singular purposes; be assured that there are no beings who act unseen by him; and that, therefore, there are none from whom innocence can ever suffer harm."

No further sounds disturbed them from that time; and before the morning dawned, weariness insensibly overcame apprehension, and sank them in repose.

When Ferdinand learned the circumstances relative to the southern side of the castle, his imagination seized with avidity each appearance of mystery, and inspired him with an irresistible desire to penetrate the secrets of this desolate part of the fabric. He very readily consented to watch with his sisters in Julia's apartment; but as his chamber was in a remote part of the castle, there would be some difficulty in passing unobserved to hers. It was agreed, however, that when all was hushed, he should make the attempt. Having thus resolved, Emilia and Julia waited the return of night with restless and fearful impatience.

At length the family retired to rest. The castle clock struck one and Julia had begun to fear that Ferdinand had been discovered when a knocking was heard at the door of the outer chamber.

Her heart beat with apprehensions, which reason could not justify. Madame rose and, enquiring who

was there, was answered by the voice of Ferdinand. The door was cheerfully opened. They drew their chairs round him and endeavoured to pass the time in conversation; but fear and expectation attracted all their thoughts to one subject, and Madame alone preserved her composure. The hour was now come when the sounds had been heard the preceding night, and every ear was given to attention. All, however, remained quiet, and the night passed without any new alarm.

The greater part of several succeeding nights were spent in watching, but no sounds disturbed their silence. Ferdinand, in whose mind the late circumstances had excited a degree of astonishment and curiosity superior to common obstacles, determined, if possible, to gain admittance to those recesses of the castle which had for so many years been hid from human eye. This, however, was a design which he saw little probability of accomplishing, for the keys of that part of the edifice were in the possession of the marquis, of whose late conduct he judged too well to believe he would suffer the apartments to be explored. He racked his invention for the means of getting access to them, and at length recollected that Julia's chamber formed a part of these buildings; it occurred to him that, according to the mode of building in old times, there might formerly have been a communication between them. This consideration suggested to him the possibility of a concealed door in her apartment, and he determined to survey it on the following night with great care.

III

THE CASTLE WAS BURIED IN SLEEP when Ferdinand again joined his sisters in Madame's apartment. With anxious curiosity they followed him to Julia's chamber, which was hung throughout with tapestry. Ferdinand carefully sounded the wall which communicated with the southern buildings. From one part of it a hollow sound was returned, which convinced him the wall was something less solid than stone. He removed the tapestry, and behind it appeared, to his inexpressible satisfaction, a small door. With a hand trembling through eagerness he undrew the bolts, and was attempting to open the door when he perceived that a lock withheld his passage. The keys of Madame and his sisters were applied in vain, and he was compelled to submit to disappointment at the very moment when he congratulated himself on success, for he had with him no means of forcing the door.

He stood gazing on the door, inwardly lamenting, when a low hollow sound was heard from beneath. Emilia and Julia seized his arm; almost sinking with apprehension, they listened in profound silence. A footstep was distinctly heard, as if passing through the apartment below, after which all was still. Ferdinand,

fired by this confirmation of the late report, rushed on to the door and tried to burst his way through, but it resisted all the efforts of his strength. The ladies now rejoiced in that circumstance which they so lately lamented; for the sounds had renewed their terror, and though the night passed without further disturbance, their fears were very little abated.

The next day Ferdinand, whose mind was wholly occupied with wonder, could with difficulty await the return of night. Emilia and Julia were scarcely less impatient. They counted the minutes as they passed, and when the family retired to rest, hastened with palpitating hearts to the apartment of Madame. They were soon after joined by Ferdinand, who brought with him tools for cutting away the lock of the door. They paused a few moments in the chamber in fearful silence, but no sound disturbed the stillness of night. Ferdinand applied a knife to the door, and in a short time separated the lock. The door yielded, and disclosed a large and gloomy gallery. He took a light. Emilia and Julia, fearful of remaining in the chamber, resolved to accompany him, and each seizing an arm of Madame, they followed in silence. The gallery was in many parts falling to decay, the ceiling was broke, and the window shutters shattered, which, together with the dampness of the walls, gave the place an air of wild desolation.

They passed lightly on, for their steps ran in whispering echoes through the gallery, and often did Julia cast a fearful glance around.

The gallery terminated in a large old staircase which led to a hall below; on the left appeared several doors which seemed to lead to separate apartments.

While they hesitated which course to pursue, a light flashed faintly up the staircase, and a moment after passed away; at the same time was heard the sound of a distant footstep. Ferdinand drew his sword and sprang forward; his companions, screaming with terror, ran back to Madame's apartment.

Ferdinand descended to a large vaulted hall; he crossed it toward a low arched door which was left half open, and through which streamed a ray of light. The door opened upon a narrow winding passage; he entered and, the light retiring, was quickly lost in the windings of the place. Still he went on. The passage grew narrower, and the frequent fragments of loose stone made it now difficult to proceed. A low door, resembling that by which he had entered, closed the avenue. He opened it and discovered a square room, from whence rose a winding staircase, which led up the south tower of the castle. Ferdinand paused to listen; the sound of steps was ceased, and all was profoundly silent. A door on the right attracted his notice; he tried to open it, but it was fastened. He concluded, therefore, that the person—if indeed it was a human being that bore the light he had seen—had passed up the tower.

After a momentary hesitation, he determined to ascend the staircase, but its ruinous condition made this an adventure of some difficulty. The steps were decayed and broken, and the looseness of the stones rendered a footing very insecure. Impelled by an irresistible curiosity, he began the ascent undismayed. He had not proceeded very far when the stones of a step which his foot had just quitted gave way, loosened by his weight; the falling stones, dragging with

them those adjoining, formed a chasm in the staircase that terrified even Ferdinand, who was left tottering on the suspended half of the steps, in momentary expectation of falling to the bottom with the stone on which he rested. In the terror which this occasioned, he attempted to save himself by catching at a kind of beam which projected over the stairs. The lamp dropped from his hand, and he was left in total darkness. Terror now usurped the place of every other interest, and he was utterly perplexed how to proceed. He feared to go on, lest the steps above, as infirm as those below, should yield to his weight; to return was impracticable, for the darkness precluded the possibility of discovering a means. He determined, therefore, to remain in this situation till light should dawn through the narrow grates in the walls, and enable him to contrive some method of letting himself down to the ground.

He had remained here above an hour when he suddenly heard a voice from below. It seemed to come from the passage leading to the tower, and perceptibly drew nearer. His agitation was now extreme, for he had no power of defending himself, and while he remained in this state of torturing expectation, a blaze of light burst upon the staircase beneath him. In the succeeding moment he heard his own name sounded from below. His apprehensions instantly vanished, for he distinguished the voices of Madame and his sisters.

They had awaited his return in all the horrors of apprehension, till at length all fear for themselves was lost in their concern for him; and they, who so lately had not dared to enter this part of the edifice, now undauntedly searched it in quest of Ferdinand.

What were their emotions when they discovered his perilous situation!

The light now enabled him to take a more accurate survey of the place. He perceived that some few stones of the steps which had fallen still remained attached to the wall, but he feared to trust to their support only. He observed, however, that the wall itself was partly decayed, and consequently rugged with the corners of half-worn stones. On these small projections he contrived, with the assistance of the steps already mentioned, to suspend himself, and at length gained the unbroken part of the stairs in safety. It is difficult to determine which individual of the party rejoiced most at this escape. The morning now dawned, and Ferdinand desisted for the present from further enquiry.

The interest which these mysterious circumstances excited in the mind of Julia had withdrawn her attention from a subject more dangerous to its peace. The image of Vereza, notwithstanding, would frequently intrude upon her fancy and, awakening the recollection of happy emotions, would call forth a sigh which all her efforts could not suppress. That evening she took her lute to a favourite spot on the seashore and, resigning herself to a pleasing sadness, touched some sweet and plaintive airs. The purple flush of evening was diffused over the heavens. The sun, involved in clouds of splendid and innumerable hues, was setting over the distant waters, whose clear bosom glowed with rich reflection. The beauty of the scene, the soothing murmur of the high trees waved by the light air which overshadowed her, and the soft shelling of the waves that flowed gently in upon

the shores insensibly sank her mind into a state of repose. She touched the chords of her lute in sweet and wild melody, and sang an ode to the dewy shades of Evening.

Having ceased to sing, her fingers wandered over the lute in melancholy symphony, and for some moments she remained lost in the sweet sensations which the music and the scenery had inspired. She was awakened from her reverie by a sigh that stole from among the trees, and directing her eyes whence it came, beheld—Hippolitus! A thousand sweet and mingled emotions pressed upon her heart, yet she scarcely dared to trust the evidence of sight.

He advanced, and threw himself at her feet. “Suffer me,” said he, in a tremulous voice, “to disclose to you the sentiments which you have inspired, and to offer you the effusions of a heart filled only with love and admiration.”

“Rise, my lord,” said Julia, moving from her seat with an air of dignity, “that attitude is neither becoming you to use, or me to suffer. The evening is closing, and Ferdinand will be impatient to see you.”

“Never will I rise, madam,” replied the count with an impassioned air, “till—”

He was interrupted by the marchioness, who at this moment entered the grove. On observing the position of the count, she immediately began to retire.

“Stay, madam,” said Julia, almost sinking under her confusion.

“By no means,” replied the marchioness in a tone of irony, “my presence would only interrupt a very agreeable scene. The count, I see, is willing to pay you his earliest respects.”

Saying this she disappeared, leaving Julia distressed and offended, and the count provoked at the intrusion. He attempted to renew the subject, but Julia hastily followed the steps of the marchioness, and entered the castle.

The scene she had witnessed raised in the marchioness a tumult of dreadful emotions. Love, hatred, and jealousy raged by turns in her heart, and defied all power of control. Subjected to their alternate violence, she experienced a misery more acute than any she had yet known. Her imagination, invigorated by opposition, heightened to her the graces of Hippolitus; her bosom glowed with more intense passion, and her brain was at length exasperated almost to madness.

In Julia this sudden and unexpected interview excited a mingled emotion of love and vexation which did not soon subside. At length, however, the delightful consciousness of Vereza's love bore her high above every other sensation; again the scene more brightly glowed, and again her fancy overcame the possibility of evil.

During the evening a tender and timid respect distinguished the behaviour of the count toward Julia, who, contented with the certainty of being loved, resolved to conceal her sentiments till an explanation of his abrupt departure and subsequent absence from Mazzini should have dissipated the shadow of mystery which hung over this part of his conduct. She observed that the marchioness pursued her with steady and constant observation, and she carefully avoided affording the count an opportunity of renewing the subject of the preceding interview, which, whenever he approached her, seemed to tremble on his lips.

Night returned, and Ferdinand repaired to the chamber of Julia to pursue his enquiry. Here he had not long remained when the strange and alarming sounds which had been heard on the preceding night were repeated. The circumstance that now sank in terror the minds of Emilia and Julia fired with new wonder that of Ferdinand, who, seizing a light, darted through the discovered door and almost instantly disappeared.

He descended into the same wild hall he had passed on the preceding night. He had scarcely reached the bottom of the staircase when a feeble light gleamed across the hall, and his eye caught the glimpse of a figure retiring through the low arched door which led to the south tower. He drew his sword and rushed on. A faint sound died away along the passage, the windings of which prevented his seeing the figure he pursued. Of this, indeed, he had obtained so slight a view that he scarcely knew whether it bore the impression of a human form. The light quickly disappeared, and he heard the door that opened upon the tower suddenly close. He reached it and, forcing it open, sprang forward; but the place was dark and solitary, and there was no appearance of any person having passed along it. He looked up the tower, and the chasm which the staircase exhibited convinced him that no human being could have passed up.

He stood silent and amazed; examining the place with an eye of strict enquiry, he perceived a door which was partly concealed by hanging stairs, which till now had escaped his notice. Hope invigorated curiosity, but his expectation was quickly disappointed, for this door also was fastened. He tried in vain to

force it. He knocked, and a hollow sullen sound ran in echoes through the place, and died away at a distance. It was evident that beyond this door were chambers of considerable extent, but after long and various attempts to reach them, he was obliged to desist, and he quitted the tower as ignorant and more dissatisfied than he had entered it.

He returned to the hall, which he now for the first time deliberately surveyed. It was a spacious and desolate apartment, whose lofty roof rose into arches supported by pillars of black marble. The same substance inlaid the floor and formed the staircase. The windows were high and Gothic. An air of proud sublimity united with singular wildness characterized the place, at the extremity of which arose several Gothic arches, whose dark shade veiled in obscurity the extent beyond. On the left hand appeared two doors, each of which was fastened, and on the right the grand entrance from the courts. Ferdinand determined to explore the dark recess which terminated his view, and as he traversed the hall his imagination, affected by the surrounding scene, often multiplied the echoes of his footsteps into uncertain sounds of strange and fearful import.

He reached the arches and discovered beyond a kind of inner hall of considerable extent, which was closed at the farther end by a pair of massy folding doors heavily ornamented with carving. They were fastened by a lock, and defied his utmost strength.

As he surveyed the place in silent wonder, a sullen groan arose from beneath the spot where he stood. His blood ran cold at the sound, but silence returning and continuing unbroken, he attributed his alarm to

the illusion of a fancy which terror had impregnated. He made another effort to force the door, when a groan was repeated more hollow and more dreadful than the first. At this moment all his courage forsook him; he quitted the door and hastened to the staircase, which he ascended almost breathless with terror.

He found Madame de Menon and his sisters awaiting his return in the most painful anxiety; and thus disappointed in all his endeavours to penetrate the secret of these buildings and fatigued with fruitless search, he resolved to suspend further enquiry.

When he related the circumstances of his late adventure, the terror of Emilia and Julia was heightened to a degree that overcame every prudent consideration. Their apprehension of the marquis's displeasure was lost in a stronger feeling, and they resolved no longer to remain in apartments which offered only terrific images to their fancy. Madame de Menon, almost equally alarmed and more perplexed by this combination of strange and unaccountable circumstances, ceased to oppose their design. It was resolved, therefore, that on the following day Madame should acquaint the marchioness with such particulars of the late occurrence as their purpose made it necessary she should know, concealing their knowledge of the hidden door and the incidents immediately dependent on it; and that Madame should entreat a change of apartments.

Madame accordingly waited on the marchioness. The marchioness, having listened to the account at first with surprise and afterwards with indifference, condescended to reprove Madame for encouraging superstitious belief in the minds of her young charges.

She concluded with ridiculing as fanciful the circumstances related, and with refusing, on account of the numerous visitants at the castle, the request preferred to her.

It is true the castle was crowded with visitors; the former apartments of Madame de Menon were the only ones unoccupied, and these were in magnificent preparation for the pleasure of the marchioness, who was unaccustomed to sacrifice her own wishes to the comfort of those around her. She therefore treated lightly the subject which, seriously attended to, would have endangered her new plan of delight.

But Emilia and Julia were too seriously terrified to obey the scruples of delicacy or to be easily repulsed. They prevailed on Ferdinand to represent their situation to the marquis.

When Ferdinand entered upon the subject of the southern buildings to the marquis, he carefully avoided mentioning the hidden door. The marquis listened for some time to the relation in gloomy silence, but at length, assuming an air of displeasure, he reprehended Ferdinand for yielding his confidence to those idle alarms which, he said, were the suggestions of a timid imagination.

“Alarms,” continued the marquis, “which will readily find admittance to the weak mind of a woman, but which the firmer nature of man should disdain. Degenerate boy! Is it thus you reward my care? Do I live to see my son the sport of every idle tale a woman may repeat? Learn to trust reason and your senses, and you will then be worthy of my attention.”

The marquis began to retire, and Ferdinand now perceived it necessary to declare that he had himself

witnessed the sounds he mentioned. "Pardon me, my lord," said he, "in the late instance I have been just to your command—my senses have been the only evidences I have trusted. I have heard those sounds which I cannot doubt."

The marquis appeared shocked. Ferdinand perceived the change, and urged the subject so vigorously that the marquis, suddenly assuming a look of grave importance, commanded him to attend him in the evening in his closet.

After departing the marquis, Ferdinand met Hippolitus. His friend had passed the night in a state of sleepless anxiety and was with busy impatience watching for an opportunity of more fully disclosing to Julia the passion which glowed in his heart. The first moment in which he beheld her had awakened in him an admiration which had since ripened into a sentiment more tender. He had been prevented formally declaring his passion by the circumstance which so suddenly called him to Naples. This was the dangerous illness of the Marquis de Lomelli, his near and much-valued relation. But to depart in silence was a task too painful, and he contrived to inform Julia of his sentiments in the air which she heard so sweetly sung beneath her window.

When Hippolitus reached Naples, the marquis was yet living but expired a few days after his arrival, leaving the count heir to the small possessions which remained from the extravagance of their ancestors. The business of adjusting his rights had till now detained him from Sicily, whither he came for the sole purpose of declaring his love. Here unexpected obstacles

awaited him. The jealous vigilance of the marchioness conspired with the delicacy of Julia to withhold from him the opportunity he so anxiously sought.

Hippolitus was pacing the gallery in much seeming agitation until, observing Ferdinand, he advanced to him. "I am ill at heart," said he, in a melancholy tone, "assist me with your advice. We will step into this apartment, where we can converse without interruption." Throwing himself into a chair, he said, "You are not ignorant of the tender sentiments which your sister Julia has inspired. I entreat you by that sacred friendship which has so long united us to afford me an opportunity of pleading my passion. Her heart, which is so susceptible of other impressions, is, I fear, insensible to love. Procure me, however, the satisfaction of certainty upon a point where the tortures of suspense are surely the most intolerable."

"Your penetration," replied Ferdinand, "has for once forsaken you, else you would now be spared the tortures of which you complain, for you would have discovered what I have long observed: that Julia regards you with a partial eye."

"Do not," said Hippolitus, "make disappointment more terrible by flattery; neither suffer the partiality of friendship to mislead your judgment. Your perceptions are affected by the warmth of your feelings, and because you think I deserve her distinction, you believe I possess it. Alas! you deceive yourself, but not me!"

"The very reverse," replied Ferdinand; "'tis you who deceive yourself, or rather it is the delicacy of the passion which animates you, and which will ever operate

against your clear perception of a truth in which your happiness is so deeply involved. Believe me, I speak not without reason: she loves you.”

At these words Hippolitus started from his seat and clasped his hands in fervent joy. “Enchanting sounds!” cried he, in a voice tenderly impassioned; “*could* I but believe ye!—could I *but* believe ye—this world were paradise!”

During this exclamation the emotions of Julia, who sat in her closet adjoining, can with difficulty be imagined. A door which opened into it from the apartment where this conversation was held was only half closed. Agitated with the pleasure this declaration excited, she yet trembled with apprehension lest she should be discovered. She hardly dared to breathe, much less to move across the closet to the door, which opened upon the gallery, whence she might probably have escaped unnoticed, lest the sound of her step should betray her. Compelled, therefore, to remain where she was, she sat in a state of fearful distress which no colour of language can paint.

“Alas!” resumed Hippolitus, “I too eagerly admit the possibility of what I wish. If you mean that I should really believe you, confirm your assertion by some proof.”

“Readily,” rejoined Ferdinand.

The heart of Julia beat quick.

“When you were so suddenly called to Naples upon the illness of the Marquis de Lomelli,” said Ferdinand, “I marked her conduct well, and in that read the sentiments of her heart. On the following morning, I observed in her countenance a restless anxiety which I had never seen before. She watched the entrance of

every person with an eager expectation which was as often succeeded by evident disappointment. At dinner your departure was mentioned: she spilt the wine she was carrying to her lips, and for the remainder of the day was spiritless and melancholy. I saw her ineffectual struggles to conceal the oppression at her heart. Since that time she has seized every opportunity of withdrawing from company. The gaiety with which she was so lately charmed, charmed her no longer; she became pensive, retired, and I have often heard her singing in some lonely spot the most moving and tender airs. Your return produced a visible and instantaneous alteration; she has now resumed her gaiety; and the soft confusion of her countenance whenever you approach might alone suffice to convince you of the truth of my assertion.”

“O! talk forever thus!” sighed Hippolitus. “These words are so sweet, so soothing to my soul, that I could listen till I forgot I had a wish beyond them. Yes! Ferdinand, these circumstances are not to be doubted, and conviction opens upon my mind a flow of ecstasy I never knew till now. O! lead me to her, that I may speak the sentiments which swell my heart.”

They arose, and Julia, who with difficulty had supported herself, rose also, now impelled by an irresistible fear of instant discovery, and moved softly toward the gallery. The sound of her step alarmed the count, who, apprehensive lest his conversation had been overheard, was anxious to be satisfied whether any person was in the closet. He rushed in, and discovered Julia!

She caught at a chair to support her trembling frame and, overwhelmed with mortifying sensations, sank into it and hid her face in her robe. Hippolitus

threw himself at her feet. Seizing her hand, he pressed it to his lips in expressive silence. Some moments passed before the confusion of either would suffer them to speak.

At length Hippolitus recovered his voice. "Can you, madam," said he, "forgive this intrusion, so unintentional? or will it deprive me of that esteem which I have but lately ventured to believe I possessed, and which I value more than existence itself. O! speak my pardon! Let me not believe that a single accident has destroyed my peace forever."

"If your peace, sir, depends upon a knowledge of my esteem," said Julia, in a tremulous voice, "that peace is already secure. If I wished even to deny the partiality I feel, it would now be useless; and since I no longer wish this, it would also be painful." Hippolitus could only weep his thanks over the hand he still held. "Be sensible, however, of the delicacy of my situation," continued she, rising, "and suffer me to withdraw."

Saying this she quitted the closet, leaving Hippolitus overcome with this sweet confirmation of his wishes, and Ferdinand not yet recovered from the painful surprise which the discovery of Julia had excited. He was deeply sensible of the confusion he had occasioned her, and knew that apologies would not restore the composure he had so cruelly yet unwarily disturbed.

Ferdinand awaited the hour appointed by the marquis in impatient curiosity. The solemn air which the marquis assumed when he commanded him to attend had deeply impressed his mind. As the time drew nigh, expectation increased, and every moment seemed to linger into hours. At length he repaired to

the closet, where he did not remain long before the marquis entered.

The same chilling solemnity marked his manner. The marquis locked the door of the closet and, seating himself, addressed Ferdinand: "I am now going to repose in you a confidence which will severely prove the strength of your honour. But before I disclose a secret hitherto so carefully concealed and now reluctantly told, you must swear to preserve on this subject an eternal silence. If you doubt the steadiness of your discretion—now declare it, and save yourself from the infamy, and the fatal consequences, which may attend a breach of your oath; if, on the contrary, you believe yourself capable of a strict integrity—now accept the terms, and receive the secret I offer."

Ferdinand was awed by this exordium.²¹ The impatience of curiosity was for a while suspended, and he hesitated whether he should receive the secret upon such terms. At length he signified his consent.

The marquis, arising, drew his sword from the scabbard. "Here," said he, offering it to Ferdinand, "seal your vows—swear by this sacred pledge of honor never to repeat what I shall now reveal."

Ferdinand placed his hand upon the sword and, raising his eyes to Heaven, solemnly swore.

The marquis then resumed his seat, and proceeded. "You are now to learn that, about a century ago, this castle was in the possession of Vincent, third marquis of Mazzini, my grandfather. At that time there existed an inveterate hatred between our family and that of della Campo. I shall not now revert to the origin of

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the animosity, or relate the particulars of the consequent feuds—suffice it to observe that, by the power of our family, the della Campos were unable to preserve their former consequence in Sicily, and they have therefore quitted it to live in unmolested security in a foreign land.

“To return to my subject.—My grandfather, believing his life endangered by his enemy, planted spies upon him. He employed some of the numerous banditti who sought protection in his service, and after some weeks passed in waiting for an opportunity, they seized Henry della Campo and brought him secretly to this castle. He was for some time confined in a close chamber of the southern buildings, where he expired; by what means I shall forbear to mention. The plan had been so well conducted, and the secrecy so strictly preserved, that every endeavour of his family to trace the means of his disappearance proved ineffectual. Their conjectures, if they fell upon our family, were supported by no proof. The della Campos are to this day ignorant of the mode of his death.

“A rumour had prevailed long before the death of my father that the southern buildings of the castle were haunted. I disbelieved the fact, and treated it accordingly. One night, when every human being of the castle except myself was retired to rest, I had such strong and dreadful proofs of the general assertion that even at this moment I cannot recollect them without horror. Let me, if possible, forget them. From that moment I forsook those buildings; they have ever since been shut up, and the circumstance I have mentioned is the true reason why I have resided so little at the castle.”

Ferdinand listened to this narrative in silent horror. He remembered the temerity with which he had dared to penetrate those apartments—the light and figure he had seen—and above all, his situation in the staircase of the tower. Every nerve thrilled at the recollection; and the terrors of remembrance almost equalled those of reality.

The marquis permitted his daughters to change their apartments, but he commanded Ferdinand to tell them that, in granting their request, he consulted their ease only, and was himself by no means convinced of its propriety. They were accordingly reinstated in their former chambers, and the great room only of Madame's apartments was reserved for the marchioness, who expressed her discontent to the marquis in terms of mingled censure and lamentation. The marquis privately reproved his daughters for what he termed the idle fancies of a weak mind, and he desired them no more to disturb the peace of the castle with the subject of their late fears. They received this reproof with silent submission, too much pleased with the success of their suit to be susceptible of any emotion but joy.

Ferdinand, reflecting on the late discovery, was shocked to learn that he was the descendant of a murderer. He now knew that innocent blood had been shed in the castle, and that the walls were the haunt of an unquiet spirit, which seemed to call aloud for retribution on the posterity of him who had disturbed its eternal rest.

Hippolitus perceived his dejection, and entreated that he might participate in his friend's uneasiness.

Ferdinand, who had hitherto been frank and in-

genuous, was now inflexibly reserved. "Forbear," said he, "to urge a discovery of what I am not permitted to reveal; this is the only point upon which I conjure you to be silent, and this even to you I cannot explain."

Hippolitus was surprised, but he pressed the subject no further.

Julia, though she had been extremely mortified by the circumstances attendant on the discovery of her sentiments to Hippolitus, experienced an emotion more pleasing than painful after the first shock had subsided. The late conversation had painted in strong colours the attachment of her lover. His diffidence—his slowness to perceive the effect of his merit—his succeeding rapture when conviction was at length forced upon his mind, and his conduct upon discovering Julia proved to her at once the delicacy and the strength of his passion, and she yielded her heart to sensations of pure and unmixed delight.

She was roused from this state of visionary happiness by a summons from the marquis to attend him in the library. A circumstance so unusual surprised her, and she obeyed with trembling curiosity. She found him pacing the room in deep thought, and she had shut the door before he perceived her.

The authoritative severity in his countenance alarmed her, and prepared her for a subject of importance. He seated himself by her, and continued a moment silent. At length, steadily observing her, he said, "I sent for you, my child, to declare the honor which awaits you. The Duke de Luovo has solicited your hand. An alliance so splendid was beyond my expectation. You will receive the distinction with the

gratitude it claims, and prepare for the celebration of the nuptials.”

This speech fell like the dart of death upon the heart of Julia. She sat motionless—stupefied and deprived of the power of utterance.

The marquis observed her consternation. “I acknowledge,” said he, mistaking its cause, “that there is somewhat abrupt in this affair, but the joy occasioned by a distinction so unmerited on your part ought to overcome the little feminine weakness you might otherwise indulge. Retire and compose yourself; and observe,” continued he, in a stern voice, “this is no time for finesse.”²²

These words roused Julia from her state of horrid stupefaction. “O! sir,” said she, throwing herself at his feet, “forbear to enforce authority upon a point where to obey you would be worse than death; if, indeed, to obey you were possible.”

“Cease,” said the marquis, “this affectation, and practice what becomes you.”

“Pardon me, my lord,” she replied, “my distress is, alas! unfeigned. I cannot love the duke.”

“Away!” interrupted the marquis, “nor tempt my rage with objections thus childish and absurd.”

“Yet hear me, my lord,” said Julia, tears swelling in her eyes, “and pity the sufferings of a child who never till this moment has dared to dispute your commands.”

“Nor shall she now,” said the marquis. “What—when wealth, honor, and distinction are laid at my

22. Purity; delicacy.

feet, shall they be refused because a foolish girl—a very baby, who knows not good from evil, cries and says she cannot love! Let me not think of it—My just anger may, perhaps, outrun discretion, and tempt me to chastise your folly.—Attend to what I say: Accept the duke, or quit this castle forever, and wander where you will.” Saying this, he burst away.

Julia, who had hung weeping upon his knees, fell prostrate upon the floor. The violence of the fall completed the effect of her distress, and she fainted. In this state she remained a considerable time. When she recovered her senses, the recollection of her calamity burst upon her mind with a force that almost again overwhelmed her. She at length raised herself from the ground, and moved toward her own apartment, but had scarcely reached the great gallery when Hippolitus entered it.

Her trembling limbs would no longer support her; she caught at a banister to save herself. Hippolitus, with all his speed, was scarcely in time to prevent her falling. The pale distress exhibited in her countenance terrified him, and he anxiously enquired concerning it. She could answer him only with her tears, which she found it impossible to suppress, and gently disengaging herself, she tottered to her closet. Hippolitus followed her to the door but desisted from further importunity. He pressed her hand to his lips in tender silence and withdrew, surprised and alarmed.

Julia, resigning herself to despair, indulged in solitude the excess of her grief. A calamity so dreadful as the present had never before presented itself to her imagination. The union proposed would have been hateful to her even if she had no prior attachment;

what then must have been her distress when she had given her heart to him who deserved all her admiration and returned all her affection.

The Duke de Luovo was of a character very similar to that of the marquis. The love of power was his ruling passion; with him no gentle or generous sentiment meliorated²³ the harshness of authority or directed it to acts of beneficence. He delighted in simple undisguised tyranny. He had been twice married, and the unfortunate women subjected to his power had fallen victims to the slow but corroding hand of sorrow. He had one son, who some years before had escaped the tyranny of his father and had not been since heard of. At the late festival the duke had seen Julia, and her beauty made so strong an impression upon him that he had been induced now to solicit her hand. The marquis, delighted with the prospect of a connection so flattering to his favourite passion, readily granted his consent, and immediately sealed it with a promise.

Julia remained for the rest of the day shut up in her closet, where the tender efforts of Madame and Emilia were exerted to soften her distress. Toward the close of evening Ferdinand entered. Hippolitus, shocked at her absence, had requested him to visit her to alleviate her affliction and, if possible, to discover its cause. Ferdinand, who tenderly loved his sister, was alarmed by the words of Hippolitus and immediately sought her. Her eyes were swelled with weeping, and her countenance was but too expressive of the state of her mind. Ferdinand's distress when told of his father's conduct was scarcely less than her own. He

23. Made more tolerable.

had pleased himself with the hope of uniting the sister of his heart with the friend whom he loved. An act of cruel authority now dissolved the fairy dream of happiness which his fancy had formed, and destroyed the peace of those most dear to him. He sat for a long time silent and dejected; at length, starting from his melancholy reverie, he bade Julia good night and returned to Hippolitus, who was waiting for him with anxious impatience in the north hall.

Ferdinand dreaded the effect of that despair which the intelligence he had to communicate would produce in the mind of Hippolitus. He revolved²⁴ some means of softening the dreadful truth, but Hippolitus, quick to apprehend the evil which love taught him to fear, seized at once upon the reality.

“Tell me all,” said he, in a tone of assumed firmness. “I am prepared for the worst.”

Ferdinand related the decree of the marquis, and Hippolitus soon sank into an excess of grief which defied, as much as it required, the powers of alleviation.

Julia, at length, retired to her chamber, but the sorrow which occupied her mind withheld the blessings of sleep. Distracted and restless, she arose and gently opened the window of her apartment. The night was still, and not a breath disturbed the surface of the waters. The moon shed a mild radiance over the waves, which in gentle undulations flowed upon the sands. The scene insensibly tranquilized her spirits. A tender and pleasing melancholy diffused itself over her mind; and as she mused, she heard the dashing of distant oars. Presently she perceived upon the light

24. Pondered.

surface of the sea a small boat. The sound of the oars ceased, and a solemn strain of harmony, such as fancy wafts from the abodes of the blessed, stole upon the silence of night. A chorus of voices now swelled upon the air, and died away at a distance. In the strain Julia recollected the midnight hymn to the virgin, and holy enthusiasm filled her heart. The chorus was repeated, accompanied by a solemn striking of oars. A sigh of ecstasy stole from her bosom. Silence returned. The divine melody she had heard calmed the tumult of her mind, and she sank in sweet repose.

She arose in the morning refreshed by light slumbers; but the recollection of her sorrows soon returned with new force, and sickening faintness overcame her. In this situation she received a message from the marquis to attend him instantly. She obeyed, and he bade her prepare to receive the duke, who that morning purposed to visit the castle. He commanded her to attire herself richly, and to welcome him with smiles. Julia submitted in silence. She saw the marquis was inflexibly resolved, and she withdrew to indulge the anguish of her heart and prepare for this detested interview.

The clock had struck twelve when a flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the duke. The heart of Julia sank at the sound, and she threw herself on a sofa, overwhelmed with bitter sensations. Here she was soon disturbed by a message from the marquis. She arose and tenderly embraced Emilia; their tears for some moments flowed together. At length, summoning all her fortitude, she descended to the hall, where she was met by the marquis. He led her to the saloon in which the duke sat, with whom, having

conversed a short time, he withdrew. The emotion of Julia at this instant was beyond anything she had before suffered. By a sudden and strange exertion of fortitude, which the force of desperate calamity sometimes affords us but which inferior sorrow toils after in vain, she recovered her composure and resumed her natural dignity. For a moment she wondered at herself, and she formed the dangerous resolution of throwing herself upon the generosity of the duke by acknowledging her reluctance to the engagement and soliciting him to withdraw his suit.

The duke approached her with an air of proud condescension and, taking her hand, placed himself beside her. Having paid some formal and general compliments to her beauty, he proceeded to profess himself her admirer.

She listened for some time to his professions, and when he appeared willing to hear her, she addressed him. "I am justly sensible, my lord, of the distinction you offer me, and must lament that respectful gratitude is the only sentiment I can return. Nothing can more strongly prove my confidence in your generosity than when I confess to you that parental authority urges me to give my hand whither my heart cannot accompany it."

She paused; the duke continued silent. "'Tis you only, my lord, who can release me from a situation so distressing. To your goodness and justice I appeal, certain that necessity will excuse the singularity of my conduct, and that I shall not appeal in vain."

The duke was embarrassed; a flush of pride overspread his countenance, and he seemed endeavouring to stifle the feelings that swelled his heart. "I had

been prepared, madam,” said he, “to expect a very different reception, and had certainly no reason to believe that the Duke de Luovo was likely to sue in vain. Since, however, madam, you acknowledge that you have already disposed of your affections, I shall certainly be very willing, if the marquis will release me from our mutual engagements, to resign you to a more favored lover.”

“Pardon me, my lord,” said Julia, blushing, “suffer me to—”

“I am not easily deceived, madam,” interrupted the duke. “Your conduct can be attributed only to the influence of a prior attachment; and though for so young a lady such a circumstance is somewhat extraordinary, I have certainly no right to arraign²⁵ your choice. Permit me to wish you a good morning.” He bowed low, and quitted the room.

Julia now experienced a new distress; she dreaded the resentment of the marquis when he should be informed of her conversation with the duke, of whose character she now judged too justly not to repent the confidence she had reposed in him.

The duke, on quitting Julia, went to the marquis, with whom he remained in conversation some hours. When he had left the castle, the marquis sent for his daughter, and poured forth his resentment with all the violence of threats, and all the acrimony of contempt. So severely did he ridicule the idea of her disposing of her heart, and so dreadfully did he denounce vengeance on her disobedience, that she scarcely thought herself safe in his presence. She stood

25. Accuse of wrongness.

trembling and confused, and heard his reproaches without the power to reply. At length the marquis informed her that the nuptials would be solemnized on the third day from the present. As he quitted the room, a flood of tears came to her relief and saved her from fainting.

Julia passed the remainder of the day in her closet with Emilia. Night returned but brought her no peace. She sat long after the departure of Emilia; and to beguile recollection, she selected a favourite author, endeavouring to revive those sensations his page had once excited. She opened to a passage, the tender sorrow of which was applicable to her own situation, and her tears flowed anew.

Her grief was soon suspended by apprehension. Hitherto a deadly silence had reigned through the castle, interrupted only by the wind, whose low sound crept at intervals through the galleries. She now thought she heard a footstep near her door, but presently all was still, so she believed she had been deceived by the wind. The succeeding moment, however, convinced her of her error, for she distinguished the low whisperings of some persons in the gallery. Her spirits, already weakened by sorrow, deserted her: she was seized with an universal terror. Presently afterwards a low voice called her from without, and the door was opened by Ferdinand.

She shrieked, and fainted. On recovering, she found herself supported by Ferdinand and Hippolitus, who had stolen this moment of silence and security to gain admittance to her presence.

Hippolitus came to urge a proposal which despair only could have suggested. "Fly," said he, "from the

authority of a father who abuses his power, and assert the liberty of choice which nature assigned you. Let the desperate situation of my hopes plead excuse for the apparent boldness of this address, and let the man who exists but for you be the means of saving you from destruction. Alas! madam, you are silent, and perhaps by this proposal I have forfeited the confidence I so lately flattered myself I possessed. If so, I will submit to my fate in silence, and will tomorrow quit a scene which presents only images of distress to my mind.”

Julia could speak but with her tears. A variety of strong and contending emotions struggled at her breast, and suppressed the power of utterance.

Ferdinand seconded the proposal of the count. “It is unnecessary, my sister,” said he, “to point out the misery which awaits you here. I love you too well to tamely suffer you to be sacrificed to ambition, and to a passion still more hateful. I now glory in calling Hippolitus my friend—let me ere long receive him as a brother. I can give no stronger testimony of my esteem for his character than in the wish I now express. Believe me, he has a heart worthy of your acceptance—a heart noble and expansive as your own.”

“Ah, cease,” said Julia, “to dwell upon a character of whose worth I am fully sensible. Your kindness and his merit can never be forgotten by her whose misfortunes you have so generously suffered to interest you.”

She paused in silent hesitation. A sense of delicacy made her hesitate upon the decision which her heart so warmly prompted. If she fled with Hippolitus, she would avoid one evil, and encounter another. She would escape the dreadful destiny awaiting her,

but must, perhaps, sully the purity of that reputation which was dearer to her than existence. In a mind like hers, exquisitely susceptible of the pride of honor, this fear was able to counteract every other consideration, and to keep her intentions in a state of painful suspense. She sighed deeply, and continued silent.

Hippolitus was alarmed by the calm distress which her countenance exhibited. "O! Julia," said he, "relieve me from this dreadful suspense!—speak to me—explain this silence."

She looked mournfully upon him—her lips moved, but no sounds were uttered. As he repeated his question, she waved her hand, and sank back in her chair. She had not fainted, but continued some time in a state of stupor not less alarming. The importance of the present question operating upon her mind, already harassed by distress, had produced a temporary suspension of reason. Hippolitus hung over her in an agony not to be described, and Ferdinand vainly repeated her name. At length uttering a deep sigh, she raised herself and, like one awakened from a dream, gazed around her.

Hippolitus thanked God fervently in his heart. "Tell me but that you are well," said he, "and that I may dare to hope, and we will leave you to repose."

"My sister," said Ferdinand, "consult only your own wishes, and leave the rest to me. Suffer a confidence in me to dissipate the doubts with which you are agitated."

"Ferdinand," said Julia emphatically, "how shall I express the gratitude your kindness has excited?"

"Your gratitude," said he, "will be best shown in consulting your own wishes; for be assured that what

ever procures your happiness will most effectually establish mine. Do not suffer the prejudices of education to render you miserable. Believe me that a choice which involves the happiness or misery of your whole life ought to be decided only by yourself."

"Let us forbear for the present," said Hippolitus, "to urge the subject. Repose is necessary for you," said he, addressing Julia, "and I will not suffer a selfish consideration any longer to withhold you from it. Grant me but this request: that at this hour tomorrow night, I may return hither to receive my doom."

Julia having consented to receive Hippolitus and Ferdinand, they quitted the closet. In turning into the grand gallery, they were surprised by the appearance of a light, which gleamed upon the wall that terminated their view. It seemed to proceed from a door which opened upon a back staircase. They pushed on, but it almost instantly disappeared, and upon the staircase all was still. They then separated and retired to their apartments, somewhat alarmed by this circumstance, which induced them to suspect that their visit to Julia had been observed.

Julia passed the night in broken slumbers and anxious consideration. On her present decision hung the crisis of her fate. Her consciousness of the influence of Hippolitus over her heart made her fear to indulge its predilection by trusting to her own opinion of its fidelity. She shrank from the disgraceful idea of an elopement; yet she saw no means of avoiding this but by rushing upon the fate so dreadful to her imagination.

On the following night after the inhabitants of the castle were retired to rest, Ferdinand and Hippolitus, whose expectation had lengthened the hours into

ages, revisited the closet. Julia, who had known no interval of rest since they last left her, received them with much agitation. The vivid glow of health had fled her cheek and was succeeded by a languid delicacy less beautiful but more interesting. To the eager enquiries of Hippolitus she returned no answer but, faintly smiling through her tears, presented him her hand, and covered her face with her robe.

“I receive it,” cried he, “as the pledge of my happiness—yet—yet let your voice ratify the gift.”

“If the present concession does not sink me in your esteem,” said Julia in a low tone, “this hand is yours.”

“The concession, my love—for by that tender name I may now call you—would, if possible, raise you in my esteem; but since that has been long incapable of addition, it can only heighten my opinion of myself and increase my gratitude to you; gratitude which I will endeavour to show by an anxious care of your happiness, and by the tender attentions of a whole life. From this blessed moment,” continued he in a voice of rapture, “permit me in thought to hail you as my wife. From this moment let me banish every vestige of sorrow; let me dry those tears,” said he, gently pressing her cheek with his lips, “never to spring again.”

The gratitude and joy which Ferdinand expressed upon this occasion united with the tenderness of Hippolitus to soothe the agitated spirits of Julia, and she gradually recovered her complacency.

They now arranged their plan of escape, for which no time could be lost; the nuptials with the duke were to be solemnized on the day after the morrow. Their scheme, whatever it was that should be adopted, they

therefore resolved to execute on the following night. But when they descended from the first warmth of enterprise to minuter examination, they soon found the difficulties of the undertaking. The keys of the castle were kept by Robert, the confidential servant of the marquis, who every night deposited them in an iron chest in his chamber. To obtain them by stratagem seemed impossible, and Ferdinand feared to tamper with the honesty of this man, who had been many years in the service of the marquis. Dangerous as was the attempt, no other alternative appeared, and they were therefore compelled to rest all their hopes upon the experiment.

It was settled that if the keys could be procured, Ferdinand and Hippolitus should meet Julia in the closet; that they should convey her to the seashore, from whence a boat, which was to be kept in waiting, would carry them to the opposite coast of Calabria, where the marriage might be solemnized without danger of interruption. But as it was necessary that Ferdinand should not appear in the affair, it was agreed that he should return to the castle immediately upon the embarkation of his sister. Having thus arranged their plan of operation, they separated till the following night, which was to decide the fate of Hippolitus and Julia.

Julia, whose mind was soothed by the fraternal kindness of Ferdinand and the tender assurances of Hippolitus, now experienced an interval of repose. At the return of day she awoke refreshed and tolerably composed. She selected a few clothes which were necessary, and prepared them for her journey. A

sentiment of generosity justified her in the reserve she preserved to Emilia and Madame de Menon, whose faithfulness and attachment she could not doubt, but whom she disdained to involve in the disgrace that must fall upon them should their knowledge of her flight be discovered.

In the meantime the castle was a scene of confusion. The magnificent preparations which were making for the nuptials engaged all eyes and busied all hands. The marchioness had the direction of the whole, and the alacrity with which she acquitted herself testified how much she was pleased with the alliance, and created a suspicion that it had not been concerted²⁶ without some exertion of her influence. Thus was Julia designed the joint victim of ambition and illicit love.

The composure of Julia declined with the day, whose hours had crept heavily along. As the night drew on, her anxiety for the success of Ferdinand's negotiation with Robert increased to a painful degree. A variety of new emotions pressed at her heart and subdued her spirits. When she bade Emilia good night, she thought she beheld her for the last time. The ideas of the distance which would separate them, of the dangers she was going to encounter, with a train of wild and fearful anticipations crowded upon her mind; tears sprang into her eyes, and it was with difficulty she avoided betraying her emotions. Of Madame, too, her heart took a tender farewell. At length she heard the marquis retire to his apartment and the doors belonging to the several chambers of the

26. Made a plan for; settled.

guests successively close. She marked with trembling attention the gradual change from bustle to quiet, till all was still.

She now held herself in readiness to depart at the moment in which Ferdinand and Hippolitus, for whose steps in the gallery she eagerly listened, should appear. The castle clock struck twelve. The sound seemed to shake the pile.²⁷ Julia felt it thrill upon her heart. *I hear you*, sighed she, *for the last time*. The stillness of death succeeded. She continued to listen, but no sound met her ear. For a considerable time she sat in a state of anxious expectation not to be described. The clock chimed the successive quarters; her fear rose with each additional sound. At length she heard it strike one. Hollow was that sound, and dreadful to her hopes; for neither Hippolitus nor Ferdinand appeared.

She grew faint with fear and disappointment. Her mind, which for two hours had been kept upon the stretch of expectation, now resigned itself to despair. She gently opened the door of her closet and looked upon the gallery, but all was lonely and silent. It appeared that Robert had refused to be accessory to their scheme, and it was probable that he had betrayed it to the marquis. Overwhelmed with bitter reflections, she threw herself upon the sofa in the first distraction of despair. Suddenly she thought she heard a noise in the gallery. As she started from her posture to listen to the sound, the door of her closet was gently opened by Ferdinand.

“Come, my love,” said he, “the keys are ours, and

27. A small castle or tower.

we have not a moment to lose. Our delay has been unavoidable, but this is no time for explanation.”

Julia, almost fainting, gave her hand to Ferdinand, and Hippolitus, after some short expression of his thankfulness, followed. They passed the door of Madame’s chamber and, treading the gallery with slow and silent steps, descended to the hall. This they crossed toward a door. After opening it they found their way through various passages to a remote part of the castle, where a private door opened upon the walls. Ferdinand carried the several keys. They fastened the hall door after them, and proceeded through a narrow passage terminating in a staircase.

They descended, and had hardly reached the bottom when they heard a loud noise at the door above, and presently the voices of several people. Julia scarcely felt the ground she trod on, and Ferdinand flew to unlock a door that obstructed their way. He applied the different keys and at length found the proper one, but the lock was rusted and refused to yield. Their distress was not now to be conceived. The noise above increased, and it seemed as if the people were forcing the door. Hippolitus and Ferdinand vainly tried to turn the key. A sudden crash from above convinced them that the door had yielded when, making another desperate effort, the key broke in the lock. Trembling and exhausted, Julia gave herself up for lost. As she hung upon Ferdinand, Hippolitus vainly endeavoured to soothe her—the noise suddenly ceased.

They listened, dreading to hear the sounds renewed, but to their utter astonishment, the silence of the place remained undisturbed. They had now

time to breathe, and to consider the possibility of effecting their escape, for from the marquis they had no mercy to hope. Hippolitus, in order to ascertain whether the people had quitted the door above, began to ascend the passage. He had not gone many steps when the noise was renewed with increased violence. He instantly retreated.

They made a desperate push at the door below which obstructed their passage; it seemed to yield, and after another effort of Ferdinand burst open. They had not an instant to lose, for they now heard the steps of persons descending the stairs. The avenue they were in opened into a kind of chamber, whence three passages branched, of which they immediately chose the first. Another door now obstructed their passage; and they were compelled to wait while Ferdinand applied the keys.

“Be quick,” said Julia, “or we are lost. O! if this lock too is rusted!”

“Hark!” said Ferdinand.

They now discovered what apprehension had before prevented them from perceiving: that the sounds of pursuit were ceased, and all again was silent. As this could happen only by the mistake of their pursuers in taking the wrong route, they resolved to preserve their advantage by concealing the light, which Ferdinand now covered with his cloak. The door was opened, and they passed on; but they were perplexed by the intricacies of the place and wandered about in vain endeavour to find their way. Often did they pause to listen, and often did fancy give them sounds of fearful import. At length they entered on the passage which

Ferdinand knew led directly to a door that opened on the woods. Rejoiced at this certainty, they soon reached the spot which was to give them liberty.

Ferdinand turned the key; the door unclosed and, to their infinite joy, discovered to them the grey dawn.

“Now, my love,” said Hippolitus, “you are safe, and I am happy.”

Immediately a loud voice from without exclaimed, “Take, villain, the reward of your perfidy!”

At the same instant Hippolitus received a sword in his body and, uttering a deep sigh, fell to the ground. Julia shrieked and fainted; Ferdinand, drawing his sword, advanced toward the assassin, upon whose countenance the light of his lamp then shone, and discovered to him his father!

The sword fell from his grasp, and he started back in an agony of horror. He was instantly surrounded and seized by the servants of the marquis, while the marquis himself denounced²⁸ vengeance upon his head, and ordered him to be thrown into the dungeon of the castle.

The servants of the count, who were awaiting his arrival on the seashore, heard the tumult and hastened to the scene. There they beheld their beloved master lifeless and weltering²⁹ in his blood. With loud lamentations they conveyed the bleeding body on board the vessel which had been prepared for him, and immediately set sail for Italy.

Julia, on recovering her senses, found herself in a small room of which she had no remembrance, with her maid weeping over her. Recollection, when

28. Proclaimed.

29. Wallowing.

it returned, brought to her mind an energy of grief which exceeded even all former conceptions of sufferings. Yet her misery was heightened by the intelligence which she now received. She learned that Hippolitus had been borne away lifeless by his people, that Ferdinand was confined in a dungeon by order of the marquis, and that she herself was a prisoner in a remote room from which, on the day after the morrow, she was to be removed to the chapel of the castle, and there sacrificed to the ambition of her father and the absurd love of the Duke de Luovo.

This accumulation of evil subdued each power of resistance and reduced Julia to a state little short of distraction. No person was allowed to approach her but her maid and the servant who brought her food. Emilia, who though shocked by Julia's apparent want of confidence severely sympathized in her distress, solicited to see her; but the pain of denial was so sharply aggravated by rebuke that she dared not again to urge the request.

In the meantime Ferdinand, involved³⁰ in the gloom of a dungeon, was resigned to the painful recollection of the past, and a horrid anticipation of the future. From the resentment of the marquis, whose passions were wild and terrible, and whose rank gave him an unlimited power of life and death in his own territories, Ferdinand had much to fear. Yet selfish apprehension soon yielded to a more noble sorrow. He mourned the fate of Hippolitus and the sufferings of Julia. He could attribute the failure of their scheme only to the treachery of Robert, who had, however,

30. Enfolded; enveloped.

met the wishes of Ferdinand with strong apparent sincerity and generous interest in the cause of Julia. On the night of the intended elopement, he had consigned the keys to Ferdinand, who, immediately on receiving them, went to the apartment of Hippolitus. There they were detained till after the clock had struck one by a low noise which returned at intervals, and convinced them that some part of the family was not yet retired to rest. This noise was undoubtedly occasioned by the people whom the marquis had employed to watch, and whose vigilance was too faithful to suffer the fugitives to escape.

The very caution of Ferdinand defeated its purpose; for it is probable that, had he attempted to quit the castle by the common entrance, he might have escaped. The keys of the grand door and the courts remaining in the possession of Robert, the marquis was certain of the intended place of their departure; and was thus enabled to defeat their hopes at the very moment when they exulted in their success.

When the marchioness learned the fate of Hippolitus, the resentment of jealous passion yielded to emotions of pity. Revenge was satisfied, and she could now lament the sufferings of a youth whose personal charms had touched her heart as much as his virtues had disappointed her hopes. Still true to passion and inaccessible to reason, she poured upon the defenceless Julia her anger for that calamity of which she herself was the unwilling cause. By a dextrous adaptation of her powers, she had worked upon the passions of the marquis so as to render him relentless in the pursuit of ambitious purposes, and insatiable

in revenging his disappointment. But the effects of her artifices exceeded her intention in exerting them; when she meant only to sacrifice a rival to her love, she found she had given up its object to revenge.