

*M. Thompson*

Z O F L O Y A;

OR,

*THE MOOR:*

A ROMANCE

OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

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BETTER KNOWN AS

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AUTHOR OF THE NUN OF ST. OMERS, HOURS OF SOLITUDE, &c.

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VOL. I.

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These shall the fury passions tear ———

COLLINS.

———Let me not let pass

Occasion which now smiles, beho'd alone

The woman, opportune to all attempts———

MILTON.

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# Z O F L O Y A;

OR,

## THE MOOR.



### CHAP. I.

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**T**HE historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events—he must ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects; he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle.

VOL. I.

B

About

About the latter end of the fifteenth century, on the birth-night of the young Victoria de Loredani, most of the youthful nobility of any rank in Venice were assembled at the pallazzo of her parents to do honour to the festival — the hearts of all appeared in unison with the hilarity of the scene; even the lovely and haughty Victoria smiled with an unchecked vivacity; for no fair Venetian had presumed to vie with her, either in beauty of person, or splendour of decoration. Another circumstance contributed to elevate her spirits, and render her triumph complete. Leonardo, her brother, ever haughty and turbulent in his manners, had acknowledged that she outshone every female present.

At this time the Marchese di Loredani had been married seventeen years to Laurina di Cornari, a female of unexampled

amplified beauty, and of rare and singular endowments. If she possessed a foible, it arose from vanity, from too great a thirst of admiration, and confidence in herself. At the period of her marriage with the Marchese she was scarcely fifteen, and he himself not more than twenty—it was a marriage contracted without the concurrence, without even the knowledge of respective friends, resolved on in the delirium of passion, concluded in the madness of youth! Yet, unlike the too frequent result, disgust and repentance did not follow this impetuous union; for chance and circumstances happily combined to render it propitious. Time had not yet perfected the character of Laurina: she saw beside her an husband whose ardent love appeared to suffer no diminution; no temptations crossed her path—it required, then, no effort to be virtuous; and as, in revolving years,

reason approved the choice of a passion at the time indiscriminating, she gradually adored as an husband him she had thoughtlessly selected as a lover.

Two children, within two years after their marriage, had been its only fruits: from this circumstance, lavish and imprudent was the fondness bestowed by the parents upon their idolized offspring — boundless and weak was the indulgence for ever shewn to them. The youthful parents little comprehended the extent of the mischief they were doing: to see their wayward children happy, their infantine and lovely faces undisfigured by tears or vexation, was a pleasure too great to be resigned, from the distant reflection of future evil possible to accrue from the indulgence. The consequence was, that Victoria, though at the age of fifteen, beautiful and accomplished as an angel,  
was

was proud, haughty, and self-sufficient—of a wild, ardent, and irrepressible spirit, indifferent to reproof, careless of censure—of an implacable, revengeful, and cruel nature, and bent upon gaining the ascendancy in whatever she engaged.

The young Leonardo, who was a year older than his sister, having been as much the victim of an injurious fondness as herself, possessed, with all the bolder shades of her character, a warm impassioned soul, yielding easily to the seductions of the wild and beautiful, accessible of temptation, and unable to resist, in any shape, the first impulses of his heart. This disposition, though it perhaps might never lead him into vice, would prevent him from repelling its inroads with the iron shield of energy: he was violent and revengeful, yet capable of sacrificing himself to a sentiment of gratitude; he had a

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quick

quick impatient sense of honour — feelings noble, though impetuous, and a pride (encouraged infinitely by the Marchese) of birth and family dignity, which, sooner than by an act of meanness have disgraced, he would have perished. Thus it could not be denied, that in his ill-regulated character were some bright tints.

Such were the children whom early education had tended equally to corrupt; and such were the children, whom to preserve from future depravity, required the most vigilant care, aided by such brilliant examples of virtue and decorum as should induce the desire of emulation. Thus would have been counteracted the evils engendered by the want of steady attention to the propensities of childhood.

Yet,

Yet, with all these causes for reflection and deep regret—causes which did not strike the broad beam of conviction upon the eyes of the infatuated parents; yet were they happy; the whole city of Venice contained no pair so happy. Laurina di Loredani, still in the meridian of beauty, and still adored by an husband, though not with the fantastic delirium of a boy, yet with an enthusiastic and approved affection; the most beneficent, the noblest, and the best of human beings, was the Marchese, admired by all, yet living alone for her whom his boyish heart had worshipped: his unsuspecting and generous nature gloried in the attractions of his wife—to see her followed and admired yielded to *his* heart a pleasure exquisite and refined—to *hers* a sentiment less noble, because it centered in self-gratification, and considerations of self ever debase the heart.

At this juncture it may not be amiss for a few moments to digress, in stating, that at the period which commences this history, the Venetians were a proud, strict, and fastidious people—in no country was the pride of nobility carried to a greater extent; their manners, also, received a deep and gloomy tincture from the nature of their government, which in its character was jealous and suspicious, dooming sometimes to a public, sometimes to a private death, on mere surmise or apprehension of design against the state, and always by secret trial, its most distinguished members. This power was exercised by Il Consiglio di Dieci, or council of ten, by ordering nobles to be hung by the feet between the pillars of St. Marc, or else dispatching them more privately, that the order might not suffer in the opinion of the people, by plunging their bodies in the

Orfano,

Orfano, or otherwise. The Venetians were fond of their mistresses, and jealous of their wives to a degree, uniting the Spanish and Italian character in its most sublimated state of passion. To avenge an injury sustained, or supposed to be so, to achieve a favourite point, or gratify a desire otherwise unobtainable, poison or the dagger were constantly resorted to. Sanguinary and violent by nature, climate, habit, and education, the hatred of the Venetians once excited became implacable, and endured through life.

Having thus briefly reverted to the character of a nation where the principal scenes of the following history are laid, we proceed with matter more immediately connected with it.

It was in the midst of the gay revel-  
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ing in the Pallazzo di Loredani that a stranger arriving at the gates, requested admittance to the Marchese. On being told that one acquainted with his name desired to see him, the Marchese ordered immediately that the person should be admitted; when, the doors of the saloon being thrown open, a graceful figure entered, respectfully bowing, and presented to Loredani a letter from the Baron Wurmsburg, a German nobleman, and most intimate friend of his; wherein he requested of the Marchese, that he would exercise his hospitality in favour of Count Ardolph, the bearer, a German likewise, of high rank, fortune, and unblemished character. No sooner had the Marchese di Loredani perused the letter, than, with conciliating politeness, he extended his hand to the count, and led him immediately to the upper end of the saloon, where Laurina, her daughter,

daughter, and the rest of the company, had assembled, that the stranger, on his entrance, might not be disconcerted or pained by fancied observation. He introduced him first to the Marchesa, and then to the company in general. There was that in the air and striking appearance of the count, which created at once a sensation of awe and admiration; his figure was noble and commanding, and in his features shone a dignity and fascination, which, while it irresistibly attracted the regards of all, flattered and delighted, if his could be attracted in return; yet, once attracted, those powerful regards overpowered by their beauty and their brilliancy those on whom they turned. Such in his personal semblance was Count Ardolph; and, as such, drew speedily around him a bright circle, of which he became the focus: every one forgetting, in the ease and gracefulness

of his manners, the recentness of his introduction, while his presence diffused around a spirit, a vivacity, and an interest, of which before the assembly had seemed unconscious.

Victoria, as the young divinity of the festival, was presented to him by her beautiful and scarce less blooming mother: the eyes of the count dwelt momentarily upon her charms; he complimented her with politeness, but not with warmth, and turned immediately to the Marchesa with an air so expressive of admiration, that an insignificant observer might have remarked the difference of his regards.

At a late hour the company separated, and Count Ardolph was conducted to a splendid apartment in the Pallazzo of the Marchese.

CHAP.

## CHAP. II.

**B**EFORE we proceed, some account must be given of Count Ardolph, as to the bent of his principles and character; as to his introduction amid the ill-fated family of Loredani, may be ascribed the origin of those misfortunes which subsequently overwhelmed them.

By birth he was German: being left early in life, from the death of an only surviving parent, to his own disposal, he quitted his native country, and visited France and England; in both places, instigated at once by inclinations naturally vicious, and the contamination of bad example, he plunged into such a stream

stream of depravity as rendered him in a few years callous to every sentiment of honour and delicacy; but the species of crime, the dreadful and diabolical triumph which gratified his worthless heart the most, was to destroy, not the fair fame of an innocent, unsullied female—not to deceive and abandon a trusting, yielding maid,—no, he loved to take higher and more destructive aim—*his* was the savage delight to intercept the happiness of wedded love—to wean from an adoring husband the regards of a pure and faithful wife—to blast with his baleful breath the happiness of a young and rising family—to seduce the best, the noblest affections of the heart, and to glory and to exult in the wide-spreading havoc he had caused. Endowed with a form cast in nature's finest mould, blest, or rather cursed, with abilities to astonish and enslave, possessed of every grace and every charm

charm that could render a man the most dangerous, or the most perfect of his sex, he employed these rare and fascinating qualities, as a demon would put on the semblance of an angel, to mislead and to betray. Yet, even of perpetual conquest the heart of man will grow weary. Ardolph, as the fury of passion or excitement of vanity became gratified and assuaged, sunk into inanity; and, despising all he had acquired, disdaining those females whose blandishments, while they had momentarily enchanted his senses, had been incapable of touching his heart, he quitted Paris, the hot-bed of his vices and profligacy, in disgust, and hoped by change of scene to give a zest to those feelings which excessive and unlimited gratification had blunted and almost destroyed. Yet, in change of scene, he had as yet failed of finding what he sought with an anxious and impatient curiosity—

a woman who should be capable of inspiring his *heart* with continued sensation; for the proud Ardolph denied, in his mind, the possibility of the existence of such a woman. He analysed and investigated, with too contemptuous and prejudiced an eye, not to find in the sex an infinity of folly, weakness, and inconsistency. Thus it was, that having triumphed over them, he disdained his conquest, and disdained himself to have been attracted by them.

Such was the sceptical, the cruel, the dangerous Ardolph, at the period of his arrival in Venice; for which place the Baron Wurmsburg, a friend and distant relative of his family, seeing him only such as he appeared to be (for Ardolph had deigned to revisit for a short period his native land), gave him to the Marchese di Loredani an introductory letter:  
little

little suspecting the depravity of his heart, he recommended him in strong terms to the kindness and hospitality of that nobleman, building that recommendation upon the strength of an honourable friendship formerly subsisting between them.

To Venice, Ardolph had only come in search of novelty and amusement, to find, if possible, fresh scope for the gratification of his seductive and destroying talents; little expecting, however, that he should meet with aught to attract or to retain him there.—We now hasten to the more circumstantial part of our history.

He had not been long an envious and ungrateful guest in the house of Lore-dani, ere he beheld with evil eye the happiness which reigned among them; his soul burned to disfigure the beautiful fabric of a family's happiness, and to  
scatter

scatter around him misery and devastation. But, to atchieve this, on whom did the malignant fiend fix his regards? Not on the young, the ardent, and self-confident Victoria, but on her lovely and attractive mother!—on the wife of his hospitable unsuspecting host!—of the man who daily and hourly showered down civilities and attentions on him. It was *his* honour and *his* happiness that he sought to blight—it was *his* offspring whom he sought to destroy and to disgrace—it was *his Wife* whom he sought to seduce! Such was the gratitude of man to man! and such still it continues to be!

But it so happened, that, susceptible as was Laurina to admiration, and more particularly so from a man of the high accomplishments and endowments of Count Ardolph, she still loved her husband with  
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an undiminished love, and considered him as the god of his sex. The attention and the admiration she excited, were certainly a source of gratification to her; but then she excused herself with the belief, that it was as much on his account as on her own, and hence was a most powerful barrier opposed to the machinations of the wily Ardolph. But, unfortunately, opposition and difficulty were what he had long and ardently sought; it strung his dangerous energies anew; and while he gazed on the glowing charms of the devoted wife, and beheld with darkened eye their faithful vassalage to her husband, he vowed, even in the centre of his guilty heart, that he would conquer, or perish in the attempt.

He had now been nearly three months under the roof the Marchese, when a profound melancholy (partly occasioned by  
a view

a view of happiness he had not yet destroyed, and partly by the gradual increase of sensations to which he had till now been a stranger) appeared to take entire possession of him. Whether it was the beautiful and unobtrusive virtues of Laurina, or whether it was that her high and protected situation, by enhancing the danger and boldness of his attempt, added fuel to his passion, cannot be ascertained: certain it was, women, more *beautiful* than the Marchesa, had been tempted, obtained, and forsaken by him; it could not, therefore, all-seducing as she was, be her person only that enslaved him; and for the beauties of *mind*, further than they added glory to the destruction he caused he had little devotion. How then happened it, that on frequent occasions rushing from her presence, in a delirium of rage and passion, he discovered, and avowed to his proud heart, the ascendancy she

she had gained over its hitherto frigid insensibility. Sometimes, in imagination, he would reduce her in an instant to the level of those unfortunates he had betrayed and abandoned: but even so, she was *still* Laurina, and he felt that over *her* he could gain no triumph. Thus, in the maddening passion which hourly consumed him, did he experience some slight retribution for the misery he had so often caused to others.

Mean time Laurina, on remarking his increasing melancholy, had experienced sensations in her bosom which she wished not to investigate: she could not help perceiving (for so the insidious Ardolph had desired) that it was a melancholy not independent of herself. His stolen, yet purposely betrayed, ardent glances, directed towards her — his deep sighs, the tumultuousness of his frame, if by accident

dent he touched her hand; or even any part of her dress—all, all failed not to be observed by the Marchesa, and to make its unfortunate impression; yet, had she never, even in thought, strayed from her husband—for so gradual, so unsuspected, are the first approaches of a guilty passion to the heart, that she would have started on being told she felt more for Ardolph than the interest of friendship.

It was one evening, that, straying pensively down an avenue in the garden, she suddenly encountered him; not, however, accidentally on his side, who was forming, unconsciously to herself, a portion of her thoughts: he appeared before her, pale, haggard, and with an expression of wretchedness on his countenance deeper than any he had yet worn. Involuntarily she stopped; and, looking with

with kindness in his face, asked, in a soothing voice, if he were ill. An enquiry into the cause of his complaint was all he had anxiously desired, but had not yet ventured to expect: thrown for once, however, off his guard, no longer master of his violent emotions, he threw himself at her feet, and acknowledged, in hurried accents, the passion with which she had filled up his heart. Confounded, bewildered, and overcome, the trembling Laurina knew not how to fly; yet to remain an instant after an avowal so base, would, she felt, be infamous, and participating in its guilt. She made an agitated attempt to disengage herself from the Count, who on his knees grasped wildly between his hands one of her's. But in admitting to her *thoughts, even for an instant, any other man than her husband*—in listening for an instant to an acknowledgment of the passion with which she had inspired

spired him, the unhappy Laurina had advanced *one step* in the path of vice, and to recede required an energy and resolution almost incompatible with the weakness of which she had been already guilty! — At length, inspired with sudden resolution, touched, as it were, by a keen sense of the impropriety of her situation, she snatched her hand from the deluding Ardolph, and, flying from his presence, sought, in the solitude of her chamber, vent to her emotions.

There, sunk in shame, and absorbed in retrospection, she dared not analyse the feelings excited in her bosom: a thousand times did she wish that Count Ardolph had never entered the Pallazzo Loredani; but the reigning, the only foible of her nature, whispered to her the brilliant triumph of captivating such an heart as his, whose every smile, whose every look, seemed

seemed a condescension from the superiority of his nature.

Oh! self-love!—dangerous and resistless flatterer!—thou immolatest at thy shrine more victims than all the artifices of man!

Earnestly did Laurina desire to be virtuous, earnestly did she pray for fortitude to preserve her from the power of temptation; but she had not strength to fly from it, and in that alone her safety would have consisted. Her mind became torn with conflicting sentiments; her reason, her gratitude, the secret and powerful ties of early habit, taught her to adore her husband; but the insidious Ardolph daily led her senses wandering, and corrupted the purity of her heart. In his company she became thoughtful and embarrassed; in his absence, restless and

unhappy. The cruel Ardolph perceived his advantage, and pursued it: like a keen blood-hound he hunted the wretched victim of his pursuit, even to the brink of destruction — no friendly hand extended to save her, no guardian angel hovered nigh; and, ere she knew the extent of her danger, she was far beyond the reach of preservation.

CHAP.

## CHAP. III.

THAT it is but too often an ungenerous principle in human nature, first most ardently to desire the possession of a certain object, and despise it when obtained, cannot be disowned. In the present instance, however, there was an exception to this principle. A real passion had absorbed, for the first time, the heart of the seducer Ardolph. To have estranged from an husband the honour of his wife, to have gained over her sacred virtue a dreadful ascendancy, did not satisfy him; he resolved to possess her wholly—to blast the doting husband with conviction of his dis-

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honour

honour—to plunge his offspring in eternal ruin and disgrace, and to despoil them of the protection and tender services of a mother.

For the achievement of this purpose, he found it necessary to degrade completely in her own eyes the miserable and deluded Laurina; then, profiting by her agony and despair, he represented to her, that it was in fact adding to her guilt, in a most flagrant and abominable degree, to remain under the roof of him she conceived herself to have so deeply injured—was it not adding treachery to dishonour? and was it not, in reality, the crime of deceiving, under such circumstances, far beyond that of acknowledging her guilt by an immediate and honourable flight:—“If the treasure is gone,” pursued the sophisticating Ardolph, “the casket can but little avail; and could you then, Laurina,

rina, live a life of deception, deluding your husband in the idea of fondly possessing a treasure that is no longer his?"

"Oh!—no, no!" cried the wretched wife; "leave me, oh, cruel Ardolph!—fly for ever from me!—Here will I remain, and die; and may the tortures I now endure expiate, in the sight of a merciful God, the most infamous of crimes!"

But Ardolph, the eloquent *friend*, whose seductive blandishments had so *far* destroyed the delicate fabric of connubial happiness, was not to be diverted from the most material part of his task; for slight is the perseverance required to atchieve that which is already more than half accomplished. He vowed, and he even believed at the moment that his vow was sincere, that, while life endured, he

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would

would adore her who, for his sake, had forfeited so much.

“ My children !— oh, my children !” deeply sighed the frantic Laurina.

“ May those children,” exclaimed Ardolph, calling upon outraged Heaven to attest the prayer, “ may those children witness—nay, *perpetrate* my destruction, should ever my heart become cold towards thee !”

Let us forbear to dwell on this scene of weakness on the one hand, and depravity on the other. Complete as he could wish was the triumph of the seducer; he bore his victim from the scenes of her past honour and her happiness !—he bore her from her home !—from the arms of her husband !—from the embraces of her children !—and  
far

far from Venice, the place of her nativity!

To paint the horror of Loredani when he discovered the perfidy of those whom his noble heart had cherished and relied on—the wife he had fondly adored, the guest he had received and trusted—would, if expression could do justice to it, be superfluous: he beheld himself, at once, the wretched, the desolate, and the *only* guardian of his forsaken children, forsaken by *her* who had given them birth!—From the wildness of despair he emerged and strung himself to virtuous resolution, determined, while his heart would hold from breaking, to live for his children, and to supply to them, as far as the love and protection of a father could, the fallen but once virtuous mother they had lost. Thus did the Marchese court to his aid those divine energies of which

good minds are ever susceptible. But another trial awaited him still: scarcely had he acquired fortitude to leave the gloomy solitude of his chamber, ere fresh wounds were inflicted upon his lacerated heart, by the horrid tidings that Leonardo his son, the pride and heir of his house, had, soon as the flight of his mother became known, rushed from his home, and never since returned! — Well did the proud, though agonised father, trace in this action of his boy, his noble, tenacious, and impetuous spirit — well did he trace, exult, and participate in the glorious feelings, whose ebullition could not be restrained; and while he deplored the rashness of such conduct, he adored the sentiment that had impelled it. Yet fondly he hoped, that the young enthusiast, when the indignant fervor of the moment should have subsided, would return to be pressed in the  
arms

arms of his widowed parent, and to mingle his tears with his. He entertained the idea, that, under the first painful impression of shame and grief, he had perhaps secreted himself at the house of a friend; but when every friend had been questioned, and day after day had elapsed, and still he came not, the expectant, heart-sick, and disappointed father, with bitter reluctance, resigned all hope; and, pressing his solitary daughter in his arms, saw concentered in her all that must attach him to existence, and preserve him from despair.

Victoria, thus the idol, the hope, and only solace of the heart-broken Marchese, was become the deity to which the house looked up: her word was law throughout; and to dispute the smallest of her wishes, would have been deemed amounting to sacrilege. Ever of a bold

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and towering spirit, haughty, fond of sway, it was with difficulty that her partial mother could occasionally administer a slight reproof; but now, with an unlimited scope for the growth of these dangerous propensities, they bade fair soon to overtop the power of restriction. Vainly did the Marchese hope that time, by maturing her reason, and improving her ideas, would correct the wrong bias of her character; for strict education alone can correct the faults in our nature; they will not correct themselves. If improper tendencies are engendered by early neglect, education may still work a reform; for we are in a great measure the creatures of education, rather than of organisation: the former can almost always surmount the defects of the latter. Thus, though Victoria in childhood gave proofs of what is termed, somewhat injudiciously, a corrupt nature, yet a firm  
and

and decided course of education would so far have changed her bent, that those propensities, which by neglect became vices, might have been ameliorated into virtues. For example, haughtiness might have been softened into noble pride, cruelty into courage, implacability into firmness; but by being suffered to grow entirely wild, they overrun the fair garden of the mind, and prevented proper principles from taking root. What then must be thought of the unfortunate and guilty mother, who, making light of the sacred charge devolving on her, the welfare of her children, as depending on the just formation of their minds, not only neglects that sacred charge, but seals the fiat of their future destruction, by setting them in her own conduct an example of moral depravity — depriving them of the world's respect, and rendering them thereby indifferent to their own?

With saddened eye the Marchese traced occasionally the progress of his daughter's character; but he endeavoured to disguise from himself the suspicion that her heart was evil. To add to his unhappiness, the society of Victoria was generally shunned, not in reality on account of the disgrace brought upon her by her mother's conduct, but on account of her own violent and overbearing disposition, which rendered her obnoxious to the young nobility of Venice. The haughty girl, however, attributed the neglect she experienced to the former cause; and as such, conceiving herself deprived of the world's consideration, became daily more indifferent regarding it. Thus do vicious minds lay hold of every excuse for the pursuance of evil.

One evening, about a year having elapsed since the departure of Laurina,  
as

as she sat in sullen silence by her sorrowing parent, he turned affectionately towards her, and said—

“ Wherefore, Victoria, dost thou debar thyself of the amusements befitting thine age and situation, to sit in cheerless solitude with me? Why dost thou not invite to thee thy friends and acquaintances, and visit them in return?”

Victoria haughtily returned — “ Because they would neither come to me, nor suffer me to go to them.”

“ And why so?” eagerly enquired the Marchese.

“ Because my *mother* has disgraced us,” gloomily replied the unfeeling Victoria.

Never had the name of his unfortunate wife been uttered by the Marchese since her ignominious flight—never had he reverted to, or even breathed a reproach upon the baseness of her conduct. The cruel Victoria had roughly touched a string that reverberated to agony!—the wretched father struck his forehead; and, springing from his seat, cast a look of anguish on his daughter, and rushed from the apartment.

But the recollections she had awakened, the feelings of bitterness she had renewed, rent his bosom with renovated torture. Never, never had the memory of the misguided Laurina's ingratitude left his torn mind: in secret he had brooded over his misery; in secret, where no eye could reproach him for his weakness, he had deplored and fondly loved; but never, in the presence of a human being, had he  
appeared.

appeared to remember that he had once possessed a wife. Pride preserved him from public regret; but his lacerated heart paid for it when alone.

Unable to bear longer in solitude the keenness of those sensations excited by his daughter, he left, as the cool breezes of night came on, his secluded chamber; he sought by motion to disturb the chain of thought that formed heavy in his mind, and to fly, if possible, from himself. He had wandered about some time, when, in an unfrequented part of the city, he beheld a man walking swiftly before him: he was enveloped in a cloak; but the outlines of his figure were such as to send through the frame of the Marchese sensations of tingling horror, followed by a rage so frantic as almost to deprive him of sense. He thought that in the stranger he beheld Ardolph, the machinating villain

lain who had blasted his every hope and happiness.

Unknowing what he did, unaware of the violence and rapidity of his own emotions, he darted after the person, and tearing aside his cloak, discovered indeed the wretch he had imagined!

“Draw, monster, devil, and incendiary!” exclaimed the frantic husband, at the same time snatching his stiletto from his bosom.

“I have no sword,” coolly returned the count; “but I have, like yourself, a stiletto, that shall be at your service.”

The Marchese heard no more: he struck and struck again with desperate fury at the body of his antagonist; but his aim was rendered unsure by his thirst  
for

for vengeance, by the raging and uncontrolled passions of his soul. The count, calm, and self-collected, parried with hellish dexterity his indiscriminate attempts; but receiving, at length, the point of his adversary's stiletto in his shoulder, he suffered an impulse of rage to nerve his hand; and, retreating for an instant, then furiously advanced, and plunged his dagger to the hilt in the breast of the unfortunate Loredani.

Thus did he become the *murderer* of the *husband*, as he had been already the *seducer* of his *wife*; and his guilt, at the bar of Heaven, assumed a dye seven times deeper than before.

The instant that the Marchese fell, Ardolph hurried from the spot, first taking care to conceal his stiletto, and to wrap his cloak closely around him. To  
seek

seek assistance for the being he had inhumanly sacrificed, entered not his ignoble mind. There, then, weltering in his blood, might the Marchese have remained, but for the arrival of some passengers, who, soon ascertaining his rank and residence, conveyed him to the Pallazzo Lore-dani. Thither a surgeon being immediately summoned, dressed his wound; and to the feeble yet earnest enquiries of the Marchese, felt compelled to pronounce it mortal.

“ Tell me the utmost,” in a firm though low voice, said he, “ that it is possible for me to exist ?”

“ Not longer than to morrow, I fear,” the surgeon slowly replied.

“ 'Tis enough,” said the Marchese ; “ let my daughter be sent to me.”

“ My

“ My lord, you must not talk,” observed the professional attendant.

Loredani looked upon him with an anguished smile. “ If I have so few hours to *live*,” he said, “ what have I to guard against?—Let me see my daughter.”

“ My lord, your death will be hastened.”

The Marchese feebly waved his hand—Victoria was called: she entered the room with slow and trembling steps—she gazed upon the death-marked features of her father with horror and regret—horror at the situation in which she saw him, and regret at the thought of having given him, a few hours before, a pang so deep. Of this emotion was Victoria susceptible; therefore,

therefore, at this moment, her heart was not *utterly* depraved.

She approached the bed-side of her father—her naturally stubborn heart now deeply and profoundly affected. The dying Marchese stretched forth his parched and trembling hand: she took it; and, pressing it to her bosom, sunk upon her knees beside him.

“ Oh, my child!—my Victoria!” he faintly began — “ I am snatched from thee at a time and season when least thou canst afford to lose me;—yet, ere I die, let me—oh, my love!—perform my duty to Heaven and to thee. Let me implore thee to suffer my dying counsels to sink deep into thy heart.—My Victoria, correct, if thou canst, the errors of thy disposition—think upon what we are—think on life, how unsure, how unstable is its  
pos-

possession!—think that, in the midst of buoyant health, elate in youthful pride, surrounded by riches, and every gratification they can procure, that still, even for a moment, we cannot ensure it; some dreadful unforeseen event, some accident arises, and cuts us off; let not, therefore, the riches thou wilt in all probability be mistress of, render thee proud or self-confident; let them not cause thee to forget we are but the creatures of a day, existing we know not how, and reserved for—we know not what!—let not the independence of thy fortune render thee unfeeling or inaccessible; nor think that the accidental circumstances of birth and riches render it unnecessary for thee to abide by the strictest rules of virtue. Remember, that in proportion to the elevation of thy rank, thy inferiors will look up to *thee*; and, therefore, it becomes a moral obligation on thee, to keep a guard  
over

over thy conduct, so that no possible evil may be derived from thy example; for thou wilt be hereafter responsible for whatever vices are imitated from thee, and for whatever contamination thou mayest cause in the society of which thou art a member. Be not deluded with the ignoble idea, that it is less incumbent on *thee* to be virtuous than those below thee; for, in proportion as thou hast power and scope for the commission of evil, and the gratification of self, so in proportion is thy merit in forbearance, and a steady rectitude of conduct. ‘How glorious is it to live with dignity and decorum!\*

to reign in the fiery wildness of the passions, to place happiness in the highest perfection of which our nature is capable, and to remember that we live to become wor-

\* Cicero.

thy

thy of a higher state than that which we at present move in !”

Overcome with pain and weakness, the Marchese suddenly ceased; nor had his counsel been delivered but in a faltering voice, broken every now and then from excess of anguish. The exertion which, from a principle of duty, he forced himself to make, struck forcibly to the heart of Victoria. The time was past midnight—a pale lamp emitted its faint rays over the spacious chamber, and shewed the pallid features of her father—of that father whose love for her, even in death, taught him to despise his own agony. The pause he had made was solemn and affecting. The scene impressed her imagination, and his words her mind; while the silence, the gloomy silence, that reigned around, was only interrupted by her sobs.

The

The wan hand of the Marchese hung over the bed—Victoria held it to her heart: his dim eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of love and bitter regret—“ Oh my Victoria! thou wilt be unprotected,” he faintly said, and a deep sigh rose from his heavy heart, as dreadful recollections passed through his brain. Suddenly a noise was heard, the door of the apartment flew open, and in-rushed—no, it was no delusion—the figure of Laurina!

“ Heaven! do I behold aright!” feebly cried Loredani, endeavouring to raise himself in his bed—“ or is death so near, that already dim shadows, the semblance of former friends, hover before my eyes?”

“ Oh, my God!—oh, Loredani, my injured husband!—bless me, I implore—  
oh,

oh, you cannot!—yet forgive—oh, forgive me, ere you die!—Curse me not with your last breath!”

So saying, the frantic Laurina threw herself prostrate on the ground by the side of the bed where lay her dying husband, cut off, by her guilt and misconduct, in the flower of his life.

Loredani succeeded for an instant in raising his head upon his hand: a heavenly and celestial expression irradiated his features; he gazed upon the prostrate wretch beside him with the look of a pitying angel; then, motioning to Victoria, he said—“Retire, my child, for a moment.” When she was withdrawn—

“Laurina!” said he, in a low solemn voice, “arise.”

She raised herself upon her knees, but covered her face with her hands.

“Laurina!” said he again, in the voice of a man who, conscious he has not long to live, desires to say nothing idly—“Laurina, look upon me.”

There was that in his manner which impelled obedience, and the eyes of his guilty wife met his.

“Laurina!—it is yet in thy power to repair, in some measure, the evil thou hast done.—When I am laid in the grave, seek out, if possible, thy son—that son who fled his home, on discovery of thy perfidy—seek him; and, if it should please Heaven that thou shouldst prove successful, retire with him, and thy daughter Victoria, far from Venice; for Venice, methinks, is no longer a place for thee.

Endea-

Endeavour to expiate, by a life of penitence, the great crimes thou hast been guilty of; for, dreadfully as thou hast marred the happiness and the honour of thy children, perhaps it is not destroyed. Retire, then, to where thou art unknown; and hereafter in the world they may claim consideration and respect — But, oh, Laurina! tremble, if thou returnest to guilt and infamy! — eternal destruction *then* betides both thee and them! — There is no redemption! — Never will the impression of this night fade from the mind of Victoria, if thou wilt *yet* have courage and resolution to abandon thy guilty career, and to instil into her mind, by thy *future example*, principles of virtue and honour. — Laurina, unfortunate and once-loved wife! thou wilt make thyself answerable, by thy conduct, not only for the life and future actions of thy daughter, but for the *fiat* which will go forth respecting

specting her, when she renders up her great account!—Ponder, then, well upon the mighty charge, that, by appearing before me at this awful moment, thou bringest upon thyself—yes, on *thy example*——Oh! thou who couldest desert thine innocent and lovely offspring—on *thy example* will the life and conduct of thy daughter *now* be formed!”

“Oh, spare me!—spare me!” cried the wretched Laurina, in accents of despair. “I swear——”

“Let my Victoria enter,” said the Marchese, gasping for breath: “I have—I have not a moment to live!”

Laurina rose, and bade Victoria enter. As she approached—“Quick, my child!” cried Loredani, “and embrace thy mother.——Laurina!—*now* swear to protect  
 tect

tect and cherish thy daughter, to preserve her from evil, and from the *contamination of bad example!*"

" I swear, I swear!" articulated Laurina, in a voice drowned by sobs, and pressed convulsively her daughter to her bosom.

" Victoria — *swear!*" murmured the Marchese, " that thou wilt forget the errors, and imitate the *future virtues and example* of thy mother!"

" *I swear, father!*" in a solemn voice, answered Victoria.

" Oh, God! — I thank — thee — thank thee!" gasped the dying Loredani. —  
 " Kiss me, my — Victo — ria — my — Thy hand, Laurina — I *forgive — thee —*  
 Oh, God! — my God! — I die *content!*"

Thus perished, in the flower of his days, the noble Loredani, the victim of a FRIEND'S ingratitude, and of a WIFE'S depravity!

CHAP.

## CHAP. IV.

AFTER the fatal rencontre of the ill-starred Marchese with Ardolph, the latter hurried, as has been already observed, from the spot. Having had sufficient time to escape from the scene of action, and being of course completely unsuspected, he reached, by bye and circuitous ways, his own house, which, having had occasion to return to Venice, he had hired for a short time only, at some distance from the populous city, under a feigned name; hoping, for the little while he had to remain, completely to elude discovery from the injured Loredani.—To return, however. When he entered the room

D 4

where

where the apostate wife Laurina was sitting, she was struck with an appearance of sternness in his countenance, and an unusual seriousness of manner.

Approaching him, and tenderly taking his hand—for deep was the sway the traitor had acquired over her he had betrayed—she asked if aught had occurred to which she might attribute his altered looks.

Pressing the hand which held his, and looking steadily in her face, he said—  
“Laurina, I have this night committed that which my heart condemns, but which the necessity of the case enforced. Say only, before I tell thee all, that thou wilt not hate me for what involuntarily I have done.”

“Hate thee!” passionately exclaimed the  
the

the deluded wife — “ I could not hate thee, Ardolph, if thou hadst committed murder !”

“ Murder !” gloomily returned Ardolph — “ I hope not, Laurina ; but I have wounded, I fear mortally, thy — husband !”

A piercing shriek was the only answer of the horror-struck Laurina : her avenging crimes flew in her face — they flashed like lightning through her brain. She rushed from the presence of Ardolph, and flew, as the resistless impulse of her frantic remorse dictated, to the well-known mansion of her martyred husband. Ardolph, who merely imagined that she had flown from him, impelled by the overflowing anguish of the moment, suspected not, till some hours had elapsed, ~~whither~~ she had gone. When at length, ~~however,~~

he surmised and ascertained the truth, his rage and apprehensions knew no bounds; for the passion with which the wretched Laurina had first inspired him, that fatal passion, which in its *consequences* and progress was the cause of such immediate and such wide-spreading evils, had not as yet subsided: opposition, too, or difficulty, could only tend, in the breast of such a character as Ardolph, to give it strength and violence. Sooner, at this period, would he have endured death than her loss; and he determined, therefore, whatever the chance of being suspected, whatever the risk of being discovered, to respect no sanctuary which could detain her from him, nor permit her even to exist independently of himself.

For this purpose he completely disguised his person; and wandering near the Pallazzo Loredani, now the mausoleum

leum only of its once happy master, resolved that from that spot he would never depart, but with her whom he knew to be enclosed within its walls.

It was on the eve of the second day after the death of Loredani—and Laurina, in the bitterness of remorseful anguish, was weeping the consequences of her unhappy conduct—that a letter was put into her hands. Upon opening it, she found it to run as follows—

“ Your present residence is no place for you, having forfeited, by a preference most gratefully recognised, all title to act as the wife of the deceased Loredani. I would recommend it to you, to depart from the place where you now are, with all possible expedition. The haughty relatives of the Marchese will soon fill the house: you will be considered as the  
D 6
boldest

boldest and most infamous of women, and treated with all the ignominy that revenge and illiberality can dictate.

“ARDOLPH.”

Laurina, whose mind was still acutely smarting under the wounds inflicted by the last words of her husband, and whose heart was deeply and sensibly impressed with a conviction of her unworthiness, wrote, without hesitation, the following answer—

“Ardolph, dare my guilty heart admit the horrible acknowledgment that I love you still?—you whom my bewildered reason shews me at once a *seducer* and a *murderer*!—Oh, wretch! that can cherish such sentiments!—for what am I reserved?—But mark my determination— it is to see you *no more*!—With Victoria, the innocent sufferer for her mother's crimes,

crimes, it is my intention to quit immediately the roof under which I am: I shall retire for a time into a remote province—then, when the remembrance of my infamy has ceased, I shall again endeavour to mix with society—not for my own sake, but for the sake of that daughter I have so cruelly wronged; ask not, therefore, to see me, for the request will be vain.—I dare not load with such a weight of guilt my blackened soul!

“ For ever farewell.”

Having dispatched these few lines by the messenger, who still waited, the wretched, half-repentant Laurina expected, with an agitation and horror of mind she vainly attempted to quell, some further notice from the unworthy Ardolph. Scarcely dared she acknowledge to herself the base, the lurking hope, that he would not so easily resign her. With  
trembling

trembling frame, then, and mind of anarchy, did she compel herself to prepare for speedy necessary departure from the roof of her husband, where she felt, with impunity she must not long remain.

An hour, however, had not elapsed since the departure of her letter, before the same messenger returned with an answer — an answer which, to the eternal shame of Laurina be it said, conveyed to her breast a sensation of smothered unacknowledged delight, equal, at least, to the irrepressible feelings of shame with which it was accompanied. It ran thus—

“ You would retire from Venice with your daughter—— Mark me, Laurina— with me there is no trifling— leave at midnight your present abode, and bring with you Victoria. On the canal, opposite your window, I shall await you.—

You

You must go with me to Monte Bello, the villa which I hired on my arrival here, as a retreat during my necessary stay: the situation is retired and distant from the city: there we may remain free from suspicion; for it is the opinion of every one that the Marchese met his death by the hands of bravoës. I have only this to add—When there, if you *still continue to desire it*, I will myself accompany you to any seclusion you may point out, and leave you there for ever unmolested.—Let this however be fully understood between us—I swear, by every thing that is sacred and holy, whether you accede or not to my present proposition, you depart not unaccompanied by me from the city of Venice—through the world will I pursue you, Laurina, for ever cross your path, haunt you eternally, if for a moment you dare hesitate or think to escape,

“ARDOLPH.”

From

From her variously agitated heart Laurina heaved a deep and tremulous sigh. Essaying to believe herself irrecoverably fixed in the resoluteness of virtue, and without daring farther to investigate the real workings of her mind, she wrote as follows—

“ Confident, most cruel and invincible of mankind!—confident, that I shall live and die in the performance of my promise to —— I dare not write the name, for my conscious beating heart unnerves my fingers. I accede to your proposition; and trust—since I must—to your *honour* for the performance of your promise.”

Thus far being arranged, the weak and misguided Laurina again commenced her preparations—but, ah! with renewed alacrity; for, though undefined perhaps by herself,

herself, her sensations were those produced by a conviction of still being loved, and still being seen once more by him, whom, of all men, she should have shunned and abhorred: Such, such is the picture, too often, of a guilty human heart.

At midnight, Laurina, accompanied by Victoria, left the Palazzo Loredani. The determined Ardolph was punctual to his appointment: he received them with a proud seriousness; and, conducting them to a gondola which he had in waiting, they speedily arrived at Monte Bello.

It is not necessary to enlarge upon this incidental part of our history: suffice it, that arrived at his villa, the seductive Ardolph called to his aid all those dangerous and seductive blandishments which already had been the cause of so much  
guilt

guilt and mischief; and successfully, too successfully he called them. The wretched Laurina yielded at first to the delay of a few hours under the roof of the unprincipled betrayer, and well he knew how to improve this short delay; for what man, having once corrupted the *heart* and *principles* of the woman he deludes, has ever found it difficult to maintain his victory, if he thought it worth his while? Most literally, indeed, did Ardolph keep his conditional promise, that Laurina should have free liberty to depart if still she continued to *wish* it. Unhappy wretch! she wished it *not*; for, blinded by the fascinations of her lover, she found it impossible to live but in his presence.

Gradually and imperceptibly their intercourse, now doubly criminal, became dearer and more strongly cemented than ever: yet was the wretched farce of journeying

neying in various directions, and even to considerable distances, (under the pretext of discovering some suitable situation for the young Victoria and her deluded mother) steadily persevered in; for, did not Ardolph know, that change of scene was conducive to the plans he had in view, of restraining from compunctious reflection the mind of Laurina? and by so ordering, that in his society she should experience no moment of melancholy, make her view with horror the idea of abandoning him, and secure her entirely to himself.

The plans of Ardolph, ever well arranged, rarely failed of success. Infatuated by his seductions, Laurina sought, eagerly sought, to evade reflection; and as a wretch writhing with pain flies to the relief of opium, so did Laurina, from the pangs of conscience, to the soothing and

in-

intoxicating presence of him who destroyed her; for could she ever endure the *secret* horrible conviction of her guilt—that she had rushed from the *death-bed* of her husband—from where his sainted spirit still lingered, to the very arms of his *murderer*!—that she had forfeited her *solemn vow*, which his soul had tarried to hear sworn?—Could she, even with all the aid of sophistry, attempt to seek in her own mind a palliation of this?—She had no resource, then, but in Ardolph; in his eyes she idolatrously beheld an excuse for her crimes, and in his fascinating voice was recorded a temptation she imagined no heart could have resisted.

Gradual and terrible are the approaches of vice! The only absolute original imperfection of Laurina was vanity and love of admiration. This error, trifling

fling when in a dormant state, but dangerous when improperly called forth, of what a catalogue of dreadful evils did it not become the cause! — what awful mischiefs had not already ensued! Should not this lesson, then, be conveyed to the mind—that the propensity of our natures to evil should be vigilantly checked, and that the guard which should be constantly kept over the wanderings of the heart, should never be suffered to slumber on its post?

**CHAP.**

## CHAP. V.

A YEAR had now elapsed since the death of Loredani. The melancholy events which had characterised that period, had become fainter and fainter in the mind of Laurina: the journies of enquiry had long since ceased; and on the subject of her departure from the society of Ardolph the perjured wife no more expatiated.

They did not reside in the city of Venice, but still at Monte Bello, some few miles distant; for the circumstances, still unforgotten, with which their names were connected, would have caused them to be viewed with disdain and indignation  
by

by the higher classes of society : they remained, therefore, at their villa, and thither contrived to attract most of the dissolute and many of the thoughtless inhabitants of Venice ; for the aggregate of the world will run even into the very dens of profligacy for amusement, as in a few individuals alone is it vested to be the censors of vice. Monte Bello resounded to the voice of mirth and folly ; reflection appeared to be banished ; and those events which should have been engraved in characters of blood upon the hearts of its inmates, appeared rapidly sinking into oblivion, or to be remembered only with indifference.

It happened, that among the gay Venetians who frequented their society, was one called Il Conte Berenza : he was a man of peculiar sentiments, and extraordinary character ; he came not to Monte Bello  
in

in search of amusement, nor merely from indolence: he came from an investigating spirit, to analyse its inhabitants, and to discover, if possible, from the result of his own observation, whether the mischief they had caused, and the conduct they pursued, arose from a selfish depravity of heart, or was induced by the force of inevitable circumstances: he came to investigate character, and to increase his knowledge of the human heart.

He found, however, or fancied that he found, but little to interest the consideration of the liberal philosopher in the relative situations of Ardolph and Laurina: he concluded in his mind that they had voluntarily rushed into evil, and had possessed the power to have withdrawn themselves in time from the dangerous vortex — he therefore viewed them with contempt and dislike, unmixed with the slightest

slightest portion of pity—he beheld wretches who had studied alone their own gratification, wholly unmindful of the mischiefs they might cause in its atchievement. Under this impression, he regarded, with eyes of no common interest, the young Victoria: pride alone forbade his soliciting her hand; for never yet had Berenza beheld a female whose character he had imagined so formed to constitute his happiness: nay, so ardent in his admiration was the misguided philosopher—misguided in this instance—that, had no dishonour in his idea been attached to the unfortunate girl, he would have made her his wife upon speculation, and relied upon the power he believed himself to possess over the human mind for modelling her afterwards, so as perfectly to assimilate to his wishes. Her wild and imperious character he would have essayed to render noble, firm, and dignified;

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her

her *fierté* he would have softened, and her boldness checked. Berenza knew not, so unconscious is the heart of man of the springs of its own movements, that it was the graceful elegant form, and animated countenance of Victoria, that led him to form of her strongly-marked character the best and most flattering estimate. She was at this period about seventeen: the age of Berenza was five and thirty; his person was majestic, and his countenance, though serious, possessed a sweetness of expression, that riveted and delighted the eye: but it was not this so much that engaged the attentions and allured the fancy of the young Victoria—no, it was the flattering remark that herself exclusively attracted his regards—regards, which the natural haughtiness, and apparent coldness of his character, rendered peculiarly gratifying to her vain mind. It was for this she sought

sought his society, and courted his notice, till Berenza, wound almost to a pitch of enthusiasm, scarcely lived but in the hope of calling her his. Attachments his philosophic mind had none, excepting to a brother some years younger than himself, who was at this time absent from Italy, to divert the melancholy of an almost hopeless passion: his thoughts and wishes, therefore, centered in Victoria with undivided ardour.

It may naturally be supposed that the character of Victoria, by nature more prone to evil than to good, and requiring at once the strong curb of wisdom and example to regulate it, had not, since the death of her father, obtained much opportunity of improvement. She saw exemplified, in the conduct of her mother, the flagrant violation of a most sacred oath—she saw every principle of  
E 2
delicacy

delicacy and of virtue apparently contemned—and, although the improper bias of her mind led her infinitely to prefer the gay though horrible state of degradation in which she lived, to the retirement and seclusion so strongly insisted on by the dying Marchese, yet had she reflection and discrimination enough, fully to perceive and condemn the flagitious disregard those dying commands had received. But Victoria was a girl of no common feelings—her ideas wildly wandered, and to every circumstance and situation she gave rather the vivid colouring of her own heated imagination, than that of truth.

Berenza had awakened in her breast feelings and passions which had till now remained dormant, mighty and strong, like the slumbering lion, even in their inactivity. Slight, indeed, was the spur which  
which



happy as my mother, at least, if Berenza should love *me* as Count Ardolph loves *her*."

But it happened that the heart of Berenza had acquired a *real* passion, while that of Victoria was susceptible only of novel and seducing sensations—of anticipations of future pleasure. Berenza *loved*—Victoria was only roused and *flattered*. Upon consideration, but not certainly impartial consideration, the enamoured philosopher concluded that it would not be an act of baseness or guilt to withdraw Victoria from her present dangerous and ineligible situation—to acknowledge his passion to her, and induce her, if possible, to abandon the contaminated roof under which she resided. The pride of the Venetian, however, must have been stronger than his love, for it rejected the idea of making her his wife; while  
he

he determined to leave no means untried to cause her to become his mistress.

Pursuant to this idea he sought the earliest opportunity of obtaining a private interview with Victoria. An opportunity early presented itself; and having declared to his delighted auditors the ardent love with which she had inspired him, he delicately but frankly proposed to her the plan upon which he had for some time past suffered himself to dwell enraptured.

The boldly organised mind, the wild and unrestrained sentiments of Victoria, prevented her from being offended at the proposition of Berenza: had she for an instant conceived, that his strict ideas deemed her incapable of being legally his, she must, with all her desire for a lover,

have spurned him indignantly from her; but pride here acted as the preservative of pride, and her vanity easily led her to believe that Berenza thought marriage a degrading and unnecessary tie to love like his.

Under this impression she gave him her hand: Berenza seized it with ardour, as the earnest of consent; and, seating himself at the feet of his mistress, who smiled with high and unusual joy, he entered more fully into his arrangements, and the means by which he proposed she should quit Monte Bello unsuspected. Victoria listened with lively emotions; pleasure flushed triumphant her animated cheek, and shone in her wild eyes with an almost painful brilliancy: her heart glowed with the love of enterprize; she felt capable of deeds which, though in their *conception* they dilated and seduced her soul, she could neither *comprehend*  
nor

nor *identify*; but she felt inspired for action, and the enthusiasm which burnt in her bosom, lighted up every feature with lambent and ethereal fire. Suddenly, in the very midst of her felicitations, while Berenza, still at her feet, was pouring in her intoxicated ears his various plans for their future happiness, in rushed, rage and horror depicted in her countenance, the half frantic Laurina!

“Wretch!” she exclaimed, seizing violently the arm of Victoria—“wretch! is it thus you recompence my indulgence towards you—the fond, the foolish confidence, which your mother has ever placed in you?—And *you*, Signor Berenza, monster of depravity! is it thus *you* recompence the hospitality of Count Ardolph, in seeking to seduce our only happiness, the innocent Victoria?”

F. 5

“Signora,

“ Signora,” replied Berenza, with a disdainful smile, “ you are indeed well qualified to arraign those who *trample on the rights of hospitality!*”

The eyes of the conscience-struck Laurina sought for an instant the ground—her countenance became suffused with a guilty blush—her heart beat with violence, and scarcely could she support her trembling frame! Berenza, with dignified calmness, took the hand of Victoria—“ I do not,” he continued, in a firm deliberate voice, “ I do not plead guilty to the charge of attempting to *seduce* your daughter. — I wish,” he added, in a severe accent, “ to *save* her from seduction. Pardon me, if I say, that under *this* roof, I conceive it inevitably awaits her.”

“ Victoria,” cried Laurina, recovering from her agitation, but awed by the manner

ner of Berenza from replying to *him*—  
 “Victoria, I command you to leave the  
 room—yes, for the first time in my life, I  
*command* you never more to hold con-  
 verse with Il Conte Berenza!”

Berenza fixed his proud and enquiring eyes upon the countenance of Victoria. Whether she caught a spark of the fire which emanated from them, or thus for the first time asserted the bold and independent sentiments of her bosom, is immaterial; but, withdrawing proudly her hand from Berenza, as though she needed not his aid, and advancing a few steps towards her mother, she thus replied—

“That you never, Signora, *commanded* me till now, is true; that you command me now, when it is too late, is equally so. I *determine* to quit this roof, which is no

protection to me, for that of Il Coute Berenza, which I trust will be."

"Oh, Victoria!—Victoria!—art thou *mad!*" exclaimed Laurina, clasping her hands, and now beginning to feel the terrible commencement of those retributive pangs so justly ordained as the punishment of those parents who corrupt their children—"Art thou mad, my child? or wouldst thou voluntarily plunge me in eternal disgrace?"

"Plunge *you* in disgrace!" contemptuously returned Victoria.

"Oh, my child! my child!" cried the distracted mother, sinking under the overpowering excess of remorseful anguish, "wouldst thou indeed *abandon* me?"

"You

“ *You abandoned me—my brother—and my father!*” sternly replied the torturing Victoria.

“ Oh, daughter! — oh, Victoria!” — groaned Laurina — “ this from thee!”

“ Mother — *eternally* hast thou disgraced us!” she replied. “ For me, no one has ever thought me worthy of love but Il Conte Berenza. Let me, then, *accept* his love, and be happy. Why, I ask you, should considerations of *your* happiness sway me in opposition to my *own*? When *you* loved Count Ardolph, you know, mother, that you fled with him, regardless of the misery you gave my father. Do you not remember too——”

“ Cease, scorpion! — cease, for *God’s* sake!” shrieked Laurina, in agony.

“ Let

“ Let me, then, depart with Il Conte Berenza. Remember, it is your fault,” pursued the pitiless girl, “ that ever I saw him. Had *you* but kept the oath — the *oath*, mother, that—that you swore at the death-bed of my father——”

The images conjured up by the forked tongue of a reproaching child, were too much even for the guilty Laurina to endure; and, in a convulsion of irrepressible anguish, she sunk upon the floor.

Berenza, who had at first listened with delight and surprize to the independence of spirit, as he considered it, evinced by the undaunted Victoria, now became visibly shocked at her persevering and remorseless cruelty to a mother, whose personal tenderness for her had at least merited some little gratitude. Scarcely willing to analyse if his love for her had  
not

not already somewhat diminished by the display of a trait so offensive to a delicate and feeling mind as filial ingratitude and unkindness, he approached, and raised Laurina from the floor. When she became in a degree recovered, he assisted her, with respectful forbearance, to her chamber; and whispering to Victoria, in rather a serious voice, to be tender towards her mother, retired, and left them together.

But the slight shade of reserve which marked the countenance of Berenza, as he waved his hand to Victoria in parting, had not failed to make even more than its due impression on her: her vivid imagination easily led her to trace the occasion of his altered air. She saw that her cruel recriminations on her mother had excited his disgust: alarmed at the remotest idea of becoming indifferent to him, she instantly

stantly determined on regaining his esteem. Approaching her weeping mother, therefore, with a conciliating air, she endeavoured to soothe her into composure; but having awakened the remorse of the conscious Laurina, she no sooner beheld in the artful Victoria a disposition to softness, than she resolved to take immediate advantage of it to withdraw her, if possible, from the vortex of guilt and libertinism into which she saw her plunging. A keener pang assailed the heart of the mother, as she acknowledged, in dreadful conviction, the fatal effects of her own example: to alleviate, therefore, the tortures of her mind, to save her loaded conscience from such an addition of guilt, she sought with energy to preserve her daughter. To every persuasion, however, even to every supplication to give up her distracting resolution without reserve, the wild impassioned Victoria was wholly deaf.

deaf. The utmost that Laurina could obtain, was a reluctant promise to see Il Conte Berenza no more for that day. Even this would not have been granted, had not the deeply-meaning Victoria imagined, that, by debarring her lover from seeing her for a few hours, he would begin so far to feel the loss of her society, as wholly to forget, in his uneasiness, the cause he had had for displeasure against her.

Laurina, after some hours of more poignant wretchedness than she had almost ever experienced, separated at length, for the night, from her daughter. She flew instantly to Ardolph, and imparted to him this new and unexpected cause, to her, of unhappiness. So keen, indeed, were her compunctious feelings, that, with bitter tears, she vowed she would quit him on the morrow, and retire at  
once,

once, with Victoria, to some seclusion, where, experience now convinced her, she ought long since to have been.

Ardolph listened without interruption. When Laurina paused, he looked at her with tender seriousness, and said—

“ That a union like ours, Laurina, cemented by ties and by circumstances, which, however they may be considered by the prejudiced and misjudging, nothing should have the power of annulling; that such an union should either be innovated or destroyed by the impudent caprice of a forward girl, admits not of a thought. Listen to what I have to propose, and let Victoria, as she ought, reap the fruits of her audacity. It would be easy for me to forbid Il Conte Berenza to remain here another hour—it would be easy to imprison Victoria in her chamber, and prevent them

them seeing each other; but we shall have recourse to no compulsory measures; on the contrary, to such only as shall be at once simple, cool, and effective. It is most probable that Il Conte Berenza has never had occasion to correspond with your daughter; he is, therefore, ignorant of her hand-writing. Do you then draw up a few lines, suppose to the following effect—

‘ Dear Berenza, owing to the unhappiness manifested by my mother, I have agreed to deny myself, for a little time, the pleasure of seeing you. I therefore entreat of you to return to Venice; and when the effect produced by present circumstances shall in some degree have worn off, I will gladly write to you to return.’

“ Let these, or a few similar lines, be  
con-

conveyed at once to Berenza, and you will find the effect produced will be an immediate and voluntary absence from hence. The instant he departs for Venice, Victoria shall quit this abode."

"Without me, do you mean, Ardolph?"

"We will both escort her *hence*, Laurina, and she shall be too securely lodged, ever more to interrupt our happiness;—and, now that an idea strikes me," he hastily added, perceiving that Laurina was on the point of speaking, and determined to drown her objections, "I have an admirable seclusion for her. In our excursions last year, Laurina, we made at one time a short stay, as you doubtless call to mind, with your cousin the Signora di Modena: she resides, I think, near Treviso. Nothing can be more retired, more fitted for Victoria, than her abode.

abode. The Signora di Modena was singularly polite and courteous towards *me*," smiling as he spoke. "Come, come, my Laurina, no objections: but on this matter we will talk further—mean time, should even Berenza, finding that he is not recalled by his mistress, venture hither we can receive him with marked coolness. When he no longer perceives the load-star of his attraction, he will naturally conceive that we have purposely withdrawn her; and having certainly no *claim* to an explanation, he will speedily and in chagrin desert us."

"Thus," he added, in a gayer tone, "shall we be rid of every source of trouble and uneasiness; and thus, my beloved, you perceive, there is no immediate necessity for separating the soul from the body. To tear yourself from me, to whom you are more even than  
soul—

soul—no, we must not bend to circumstances, we must make them subservient to us. No human being, nor any consideration on earth,” he added, in an emphatic voice, “must now, Laurina, separate thee and me. But, come,” resuming the gaiety of his manner, “to business.”

Laurina mechanically took up a pen, and, as Ardolph dictated, traced something similar to what has been already given. The letter finished, it was conveyed to Berenza by a female servant of Laurina's, who was ordered not to wait for any answer.

The feelings of Berenza, as he read characters, which he never for a moment doubted had been traced by the hand of Victoria, were such, as to the line of conduct they instigated him to adopt, highly  
favour-

favourable to the views of Count Ardolph. But Berenza was not displeased by the perusal; nay, it is uncertain, if he had not even a contrary sentiment; for he believed that Victoria's declining to see him for a short time, was merely an atonement offered by her for her recent misconduct to an insulted and wounded mother. As such, therefore, he felt, with genuine goodness, disposed to concede to her idea; and, believing that his departure might assist to establish that harmony which his presence had interrupted, and which it was absolutely requisite to the ultimate atchievement of his own wishes should be restored, he determined to lose no time, but to quit Monte Bello at once, for the purpose of being enabled to return to it hereafter with better prospects of success. He experienced, too, something like a sensation of pleasure, that Victoria should evince  
remorse

remorse for the pain she had inflicted upon a doting parent: and perceiving, in addition, that a prompt departure would avoid some unpleasant, and perhaps very serious explanation with Count Ardolph, he called instantly, under the impression of these ideas, for his servant, and ordered him to get ready for returning to Venice. He had indeed a slight inclination to leave a line for Victoria; but, upon reflection, thinking it might only tend to irritate Laurina against him, he determined to dispense even with this; and all being very soon prepared for his short journey, with a bright Italian sky sparkling over his head, and the moon to light him on his way, Il Conte Berenza bade adieu to Monte Bello.

## CHAP. VI.

ON the following morning, Laurina entered the bedchamber of her daughter, and after some slight conversation, informed her, in a tone of affected surprize, of the departure of Berenza.

The intelligence, for an instant, gave to the haughty bosom of Victoria a pang of acute mortification, but this emotion was speedily succeeded by one of violent and uncontrouled rage. Looking fiercely at her mother, she said—

“ Il Conte Berenza went not willingly  
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from hence. At whose instigation was he driven to depart?"

"Not at the instigation of any one, Victoria," mildly but falteringly replied Laurina.

Victoria withdrew her keen eyes from the countenance of her mother, and in a musing but stern voice said—

"If Il Conte Berenza departed voluntarily, he will rest passive, and take no measures to see me; but if he was impelled hence, then will he write to me, and inform me of the truth. Thus, even at all events, will the mystery be cleared up."

"And in the mean time, cruel girl," said Laurina, who had been accurately tutored by Ardolph, "and in the mean  
time,

time, we, to amuse ourselves, will plan an excursion somewhere."

From the air of innocence so well assumed by Laurina, the unbending Victoria almost believed it real: she relaxed into a smile, and half soothed, half angry, she suffered her mother to take her hand.

"When are we to depart, and whither are we to go?" she haughtily enquired.

"We shall depart, if you do not object, my love, almost immediately," mildly returned Laurina, "and it is the wish of Count Ardolph, that we should pay first a visit to the Signora di Modena, at her delightful retreat, Il Bosco, near Treviso."

"What! to that forbidding, formal old creature?" sullenly muttered Victoria.

“Come, my love, she is a relation, you know. There, however, we need only remain a few days, and afterwards our little tour shall be prescribed by Victoria.”

Victoria deigned a haughty smile. Her mother tenderly pressed the hand she still held, and rising, said—

“Adieu for the present, my love; prepare, as I am going to do, for our departure.”

Not unpleasing was this request to Victoria, for her wounded pride now again usurping the place of regret and love, “Surely,” thought she, “had Berenza really loved me, he would not so coolly, so suddenly have departed, without leaving even a line. No, perhaps, he began to imagine, that by persevering in the plan

he had intended, he might become involved in some embarrassment or inconvenience; therefore, if even his departure was not voluntary, no doubt he readily embraced the slightest hint to disentangle himself from his engagement with me; can he then be worthy of regret? And yet I may wrong him, perhaps—Some combined artifice, some circumstances, of which I am not aware! But I will not reflect; let time, for time only can convince me.”

With an unsettled mind, and an heart ill at ease, Victoria began to arrange a few things for her departure. She was not suffered by the Count or Laurina to remain long in solitude, the nurse, too often, of dangerous reflection. They entered her chamber together, and in a gay, unembarrassed tone, Ardolph enquired if she was ready. “I am,” was the laconic answer of Victoria.

F 3

“Then

“ Then so are we,” said he, and took her hand to lead her from the room.

With coolness, but without anger, the proud girl withdrew her hand, and followed them in silence from the apartment.

Ardolph, who resolved that no danger should arise from delay, had caused every thing to be prepared: they embarked, therefore, immediately for Treviso, on the Terra Firma, and Victoria, though she little dreamt it at the time, bade a long adieu to Venice.

Every attempt at conversation was for some time baffled by the sullen taciturnity of Victoria; but by degrees (perhaps from a feeling of shame at the idea of being thought to regret a man, who, after all, might have voluntarily abandoned her) her sullenness relaxed, and she determined to  
assume

assume a cheerfulness that she was far from feeling. This change delighted Laurina; so powerfully indeed did it affect her misguided heart, that she even began to repent the precipitancy of her conduct, and to feel some pangs at the-idea of immuring in a disgusting solitude a young creature, who, but for the mischievous tendency of her own example, might have been rendered to society a value and an ornament.

Ardolph read in her eyes the increasing softness of her heart, and that her purpose wavered. She even ventured to cast towards him a look expressive of her feelings; but he, whose aim it was to remove every barrier to his continued possession of Laurina, instantly by a stern look of the most unshaken resolution, convinced her every attempt would be vain to alter his purpose. Laurina sighed; for the eyes of

F 4

Ardolph

Ardolph had told her there was nothing to hope; she sunk into painful thought, and it now became the task of Victoria to rally her mother, and to shew, vain girl, how far she could conquer her feelings, and become mistress of herself; her every endeavour, however, but added to the compunction of mind experienced by the unhappy Laurina.

As they had departed from Venice at a late hour, it was dusk when they reached Treviso, and arrived at Il Bosco, which was so named from its situation in the midst of a wood: its gloomy appearance, however, did not depress Victoria, who was by this time absolutely in spirits. The mother's heart was rived: she knew it was the intention of Ardolph, after her relation should be instructed as to the conduct it was his wish she should pursue towards Victoria, laying infinite stress upon

upon the levity and freedom of her principles, to abandon her solely to the guardianship of this person, with whom even Laurina herself had never been much in the habit of associating; she therefore ardently longed to alter the severe resolution of the unyielding Ardolph; but the effort she knew would be vain. With him she could achieve nothing, when not under the immediate apprehension of losing her. Divested of that, he became stern, unrelenting, and inaccessible, which was indeed his natural character. To have obtained from him a remission of the sentence, she should have begun earlier, before even her departure from Monte Bello. Now, having gone so far, to suppose he would retract, was supposing impossibilities. In vain she anxiously examined his countenance; she saw there nothing but a complacent, cool expression, the result of a settled purpose in the mind,

The Signora di Modena welcomed Count Ardolph with all the warmth she could command. Laurina anxiously examined her countenance, to see if she could augur aught of kindness or gentleness to reconcile her to her guardianship of her daughter; but in the frigid features of this forbidding female nothing was discernible but the austere pride of ungracious virtue, with an aukward attempt at condescending kindness, which shewed how much it cost her to assume.

Acquainted with the unhappy misconduct of Laurina, and likewise that it had lost her her place in society, she, with the arrogated superiority of little minds, ever triumphing in the fall of others, contented herself with a solemn curtsey towards her, while on Victoria she scarcely deigned to glance.

The

The Signora di Modena, as has been already observed, was distantly related to Laurina. She was not more repulsive in person than in character; a long yellow visage, small grey eyes, and a stiff unbending meagre figure, constituted the former. She was proud, fastidious, and possessed of a mercenary soul. From her youth, alarmed at the idea of conventual seclusion, yet being portionless, as the daughters of the Italian nobility frequently are, she preferred residing an occasional dependant in such noble families as would permit her lengthened visits, where she would act alternately the overseer, the companion, the governess, or the servant. By these, and other winding paths, by flattery, peculation, and hypocrisy, she had actually amassed, as the friendless period of age approached, sufficient to make it pass with comfort, though not with affluence; and, to recompense herself

for the contempt she had in her early life experienced, becoming, as far as she could, the torment and scourge of all who were miserable enough to be subject to her controul. No man, even in the best of her days, had ever glanced toward her with the eye of admiration, much less attempted to solicit her in marriage; and for this reason, her bitterness against all females who could attract, or dare to yield to the regards of the other sex, knew no bounds, and they could hope from her no mercy. Such was the Signora di Modena, whose self interest would not permit her to quarrel with Laurina, because, though she had never much associated with her, she had often proved herself a generous friend towards her. Still her wretched affectation and rancorous envy would not suffer her to display much warmth. No such reason, however, operated in her conduct to Ardolph; of him she was desirous

sirous to *make* a friend; and hence her mercenary homage was directed towards him, and she paid him chiefest court. He had not therefore entirely jested when he had remarked to Laurina the courtesy of the Signora toward him on a former visit. Nothing, however, could excite in him a desire to prolong his stay beyond what was necessary under her roof; he, therefore, presuming upon her uncommon deference towards him, requested an early supper, that Victoria might then retire, and he might be enabled to enter at once upon the grand object of their visit.

Supper was at length announced, and the unsuspecting Victoria detesting the the very looks of the old Signora, which had already succeeded in damping her spirits, requested to be shewn to her chamber, as soon as it was concluded. Beneath her stern and scrutinizing regard,  
her

her haughty mind felt a sentiment of impatient disgust, and an oppression never known before to the buoyant carelessness of her disposition. On bidding her mother good night, she felt impelled, from the very uneasiness she experienced, to throw her arms round her neck, with unusual affection, and whispered to her, that she hoped they should not long remain under so gloomy and ungenial a roof. Scarcely could the anguished mother reply; her heart smote her, for her deception and conscience whispered to her truths that brought the blood into her cheeks. She however pressed the hand of Victoria, and faltered out 'good night;' while the reflection that it might be perhaps be for the *last time*, filled her bosom with acute pain, and her eyes with tears.

Victoria left the room almost reproaching herself for having ever pained a heart  
of

of such fond sensibility as her mother's. She was scarcely gone, ere the impatient Ardolph, turning towards the Signora di Modena, entered abruptly upon the business he was most desirous of accomplishing.

“Will you, Signora,” he began, “allow me to say a few words to you?”

The Signora stiffly bowed, endeavouring to smile graciously, but succeeding only in a ghastly distortion of feature.

The well bred Ardolph, however, took it for a smile of acquiescence, and thus proceeded:—

“Your courtesy and politeness to me, Signora, and, above all, the high opinion I entertain of your character, induce me to place in you a confidence I could not  
5. certainly

certainly repose in any other female.—I am to inform you, then, that the young girl, who has just left the apartment, I am desirous to commit for a certain period to your care. Naturally evil disposed, of a haughty and audacious temper, she has been nearly by flattery and indulgence destroyed. Her ideas are entirely corrupted, and, child as you may think her, for she is scarcely eighteen, there have not been wanting those of the other sex who have sought to undermine her principles.”—Here the Signora heaved a loud tremulous sigh, and, turning up her eyes to heaven, made the holy sign of the cross. The Count with external gravity and secret contempt proceeded:—“What I would therefore presume to request of you is, that you will condescend to keep over this proud and forward girl so strict a watch, as scarcely to suffer her ever from your sight.”

“ But

“ But do not, do not treat her severely, dear cousin,” interrupted Laurina with a faltering voice.

The immaculate Signora replied only by a cool half-scornful look, and scarcely seemed proud of the appellation which Laurina had given her, though once it was the chief boast of her little mind. She now thought *herself* superior to the fallen wife of Loredani.

“ I would have you, Signora,” continued Ardolph, endeavouring to call back her attention to himself, “ I would have you confine her, if it be necessary, to the solitude of her chamber, for a short time.”

“ Oh, Ardolph,” cried Laurina, unable to command her feelings, “ you are too  
too

too cruel, there can be no occasion for such harshness."

Another look from the unbending Signora chilled her into silence, who then turned again with the utmost deference towards the Count.

"Laurina, you are no judge," coldly observed Ardolph, "the Signora will only act as circumstances may require; to her conduct and discretion you may safely commit your daughter, when by a due course," he pursued, looking towards the Signora, "of restraint, and privation of every incitement to evil, a change for the better shall be perceptible in her disposition, we will withdraw her hence, and you, Laurina, may again receive her. Mean time, Signora di Modena, it is my intention to depart early to-morrow morning

ing from this place, leaving Victoria still asleep. When she arises, astonished at not seeing us, she will enquire of you respecting us. You will then gently disclose to her the truth, and her own destination for the present. By degrees you will, I doubt not, reconcile her to what she will perceive to be inevitable. Deign to act in this affair, Signora, with that zeal and punctuality, which your piety will teach you to exert for the salvation of a soul, and with that prudence, which has hitherto appeared so eminently to distinguish your own conduct in life : in which case, allow me to add, you shall not find me ungrateful." Again a smile, which appeared hideous, because it seemed unnatural to the hard features it dilated, was the return for this last significant remark of the Count's. He had skilfully touched the spring, the only spring upon which any feeling, or any principle of the Signora, hung—

hung—Interest. She found, as she had all along imagined, that it was her *interest* to court and to oblige the Count; she therefore determined to yield to whatever he should require, fondly promising herself in return, some splendid remuneration.

“ Be assured, my Lord Count,” she said, in a grating, discordant voice, intended to be gentle and conciliating, “ I will observe your wishes to the uttermost; and as for you, Signora Laurina,” looking towards her with a pitying air, “ for all I intend to observe my Lord Count’s wishes, you shall not have any reason to complain of the treatment your daughter will receive.”

At these words, the grateful Laurina flew towards her, and, seizing her hand, which she fervently pressed, she said,  
“ Oh,

“ Oh, you have no child, my dear Signora, yet pity the feelings of a mother, and be kind to mine. She has never, no never been opposed, nor treated with harshness.” Hastily, and with a look almost amounting to horror, the pure and dignified Signora withdrew her hand, as from the touch of pollution; then rising, and retreating three steps, stretching out her arm at full length, to prevent the nearer approach of so sinful and impure a being, she said—

“ I will do the duty of a good catholic towards your child. I shall study the preservation of her soul, and more her spiritual interest than her temporal vanities.”

The conscious and abashed Laurina turned aside, with shame, even from the *show* of virtue in its most ungraceful form, pride, and affectation.

“ There

“There appears no occasion for further discourse,” observed Ardolph coldly, “we shall rely upon the proper tenor of your conduct towards Victoria. When we think that time and reflection shall have shewn her her faults, and taught her to amend them, we will visit you again; if we find her sufficiently improved in her character, we shall receive her once more. Mean time, cousin di Modena, good night, have the goodness to direct that we may be awakened early for the purpose of commencing our journey homewards, before sun-rise. And that you may bear us in mind till our return, deign to accept this ring, as a small token of the respect we cherish towards you.” So saying, Ardolph took from his finger a magnificent ring, which he placed on one of the Signora’s, whose half-closed eyes had more than once been rivetted upon it. Then gallantly bowing on her withered hand, he  
withdrew

withdrew, leaving her in admiration at his singular politeness, and her own dexterity, as she thought, in having turned him already to such good account.

Pursuant to his determination, long ere the sun had risen, Ardolph, with his weeping and remorseful companion, were far from the villa Il Bosco. Perceiving, however, that Laurina was not yet reconciled to the prompt and severe measures he had so obstinately pursued, he forbore for the present to touch upon the subject, though his heart exulted to think, that what he willed he executed, and that nothing now could intervene to deprive him of a woman, whom his pride, equally at least with his love, made him so desirous of retaining. Had no obstacles ever existed to his possession of her, and even to his retaining her afterwards, the depraved and cruel Ardolph had either never sought,  
or

or long since have disdained her. But his passion and his pride, kept in continual alarms, gave a renewed vividness to feelings, which, but for such excitements, would have sunk into apathy or disgust. Such was the vitiated mind of Ardolph, that he could taste no delight that possessed not the poignant zest of having caused misery or destruction to others. Innocent and easily acquired pleasures suited not his profligate soul. Beauty to him was but a slight attraction, if not surrounded with difficulty, and shielded either by the dotting fondness of a husband, or cherished as the glory of an admiring family. Such had been the situation, when he first beheld her, of the unfortunate and now degraded Laurina; of her, whom he beheld himself, as he proudly thought, in the future undisturbed possession of, even till she should outlive, if such could be, his present love and admiration of her—if such could

could be, oh, then Laurina, in bitterness of heart, mightest thou curse the hours when first thou wert seen by the cruel and insensible Ardolph.

Those feelings so base, yet not unparalleled in the nature of man, which actuated the mind of Ardolph, gave an elation to his spirits, which dispensed itself in a brilliant animation over his fine features and ever fascinating manners. Without alluding to the cause of Laurina's grief, he contrived, by the most gentle and tender blandishments, gradually to dispel it. Such a seducing influence did he still possess over her ruined mind, that there were moments when she literally forgot there was a being in the world but himself. When she listened to his attractive converse, and gazed on the dignified beauty of his form, she felt rising in her breast a sentiment of

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that vanity, which had already proved her destruction. She even conceived towards him (such was her infatuation) an increase of love and gratitude, when she reflected that it was the unbounded ardour of his attachment to her which had induced him to act with severity towards any one who had sought to embitter it. Thus, even the sacrifice of her child, sacrificed at the shrine of *her* errors and her crimes, by him who had been the cause of all, she began to contemplate with emotions of less poignant regret. Scarcely could she grieve in earnest at any thing which bound closer to her the object of her idolatrous love. It seemed as if every occurrence which should have made her view him with sentiments of horror, but increased the delusion of her soul; each moment that carried her further from the child she had abandoned, effaced more and more her image from  
her

her mind : her ideas became more strongly rivetted upon him, whose artifices had rendered her an infamous wife and a cruel mother ; while himself was the exclusive charm of her unhappy existence. Let us leave then for a time this guilty pair to enjoy the society of each other, and return to the deserted Victoria.

When she awakened, and looked round the large and desolate chamber, which the ill light afforded by a lamp on the preceding night had prevented her from viewing, the first feeling of her mind was renewed disgust against the owner of the mansion, and an impatient hope that the Count and her mother would not prolong their stay under a roof so hateful. Finding, however, that no one attended to call her, and imagining she must have slept many hours, the morning appeared to be far advanced ; she arose, and, dressing herself

G 2

self

self hastily, descended from her chamber, and entered the garden. Here she had not been long, before she beheld advancing towards her a short muscular looking girl, habited in the costume of a peasant. She approached Victoria, and informed her, that the Signora di Modena desired her company at breakfast. With a haughty supercilious air, and a smile of derision on her features, Victoria glanced over the figure of the humble girl, and, without deigning a reply, preceded her into the house.

Entering the apartment where breakfast was laid, she saw there seated alone, at the table, the old Signora, in unbending state. Without even offering to her the customary salutations of the morning, the haughty Victoria enquired impatiently if Count Ardolph and her mother still slept.

“ I think

“ I think it improbable,” coolly returned the Signora.

“ Why are they not here, then ?” pursued the offended girl in a quick tone.

“ Because,” answered the Signora, with malicious and ill-disguised exultation, “ they must by this time, I imagine, be some way on their journey from hence.”

“ Gone !” almost shrieked Victoria ; “ did you say gone ?”

“ I said so,” with unaltered countenance carelessly returned the Signora— “ Is there any thing so dreadful, young lady, in being compelled to remain with me for a while ? Come, be charitable,” she tauntingly proceeded—“ I have been long very solitary, and you will be noble company for me, I think.”

The rage of Victoria knew no bounds; she gazed wildly round the apartment; the whole truth rushed through her mind at once—the base, the unpardonable artifice that had been used—she struck her head violently with her clenched hand, and passionately exclaiming—“ I am deceived and entrapped !” rushed from the room before the Signora was aware of her intention; and, reaching the apartment where she had slept, she secured the door.

There, casting herself upon the floor, her passion vented itself in a violent paroxysm of tears; but becoming suddenly ashamed of yielding, as she thought it, to a weakness so ignoble, and angry with herself that the ill treatment of any one should have power to excite in her either grief or lamentation, she checked a rising gush, while rage and the most deadly hatred  
against

against those who had thus dared to dupe and to betray her, took possession of her swelling heart. An ardent desire of revenge followed; and thus from the conduct, misjudging and inexcusable, that had been pursued towards her, did every violent and evil propensity of her nature become increased and aggravated.

No sooner had Victoria called to her aid the loftier and more dangerous passions, than she became to appearance calm; and though now and then, when reflecting upon the deception of her mother, and cold deliberate artifice of Ardolph, her eyes shot fire, and the pulsation of her heart increased; yet, in her general aspect, there were no longer traces of grief, but, on the contrary, a superior and dignified expression, which would have done honour to a nobler motive: her head no longer drooped; and rising  
 o 4 hastily

hastily from the floor, on which, after her first paroxysm, she had remained sitting, with firm and measured step she traversed the apartment to and fro. In the course of her cooler reflection, it occurred to her that Il Conte Berenza must have been impelled by artifice, and not his own desire, to quit Monte Bello. This idea soothed the sovereign pride of her bosom: she felt that her charms had not been slighted; and, at some future period, she did not yet despair of convincing him that the separation was neither on her side voluntary. But then she recurred to her present situation—was it intended she should remain for ever a prisoner in this gloomy abode? Again she yielded for a moment to the influence of circumstance, and her heart became chilled at the idea. Yet she determined to observe minutely—to make no enquiries—to betray no vexation,

ation, but to act precisely as events might shew necessary.

Soothed and calmed by these mental arrangements, and by the victory which reason, as she conceived, had obtained over her weaker feelings, she resolved, as evening drew on, to quit the solitude of her chamber, and breathe for a short space the air of the garden. For the whole of the day she had not tasted food; and though she heeded not the calls of hunger, she became sensible of the privation. The cold and unfeeling Signora, happy to have a human being, and, above all, an ardent and high-spirited creature, to tyrannise over, resolved that no refreshment should be offered her till she herself came, and, with proper apologies for her conduct, requested it: but of this Victoria formed not the remotest intention; and it is probable that, rather than have done so, she

G 5

would

would have fallen a victim to the pangs of hunger. Fortunately for her, however, though infinitely to the regret of the tantalising Signora, she was not put to this trial. Having walked for a while in the garden, and refreshed her wearied faculties with the dewy fragrance of the atmosphere, she entered the house, and proceeded, though unintentionally, to the very apartment where supper was prepared; there quietly seating herself opposite to the old Signora, she partook, without ceremony, of what was before her: she even made some attempt at conversation; but, foiled in her proposed plan of ungenerous mortification, the Signora di Modena was too vexed to make any reply. She had hoped to have found her inmate stubborn, refractory, and violent, giving fine scope thereby to her favourite art of tormenting. How grieved and disappointed then was she to find the  
fury

fury of the morning sunk into calm, and, as it appeared, patient submission.

Victoria, perceiving the Signora determined upon sullen silence, requested permission to withdraw for the night, in a tone of the utmost politeness. The only answer she obtained was a stiff inclination of the head. More determined than ever at this, that she should not have the gratification of provoking her, she coolly rose, and wishing her, with a profound curtsy, good night, left the room.

When she was gone, this worthy and pious catholic began to reflect, that, by means like these, Victoria would escape from all the arrangements she had been making to punish and mortify her. "This will never do," she cried, while ruminating how best she might vex and harass the mind of her unfortunate guest: "she

has become *reconciled* to her situation without any attempt on my side to render her so; but she shall not escape thus—I will break that proud spirit, and make her submit afterwards.”

Such were the reflections of the charitable devotee; and, with these thoughts at work in her brain for the comfort and happiness of others, she said a long prayer, during which she frequently struck her breast, and retired to repose.

Victoria, after sitting for an hour at the window, with a mind still persevering in the resolution to be firm, sought likewise her bed, and soon forgot the vexations of the day in slumber.

On the following morning, she awakened at an early hour; and, after having  
drest

dress herself, she prepared to pass from her chamber into the garden. Trying her door, she found it was fastened on the outside; and discovering soon that every attempt on her part to shake it must be ineffectual, she opened the window, and stationed herself beside it.

In about half an hour the door was unlocked, and the young muscular girl already mentioned entered the room, with a bowl of milk and a slice of coarse bread. These she laid upon the table, and was retiring—

“Come back!” imperiously cried Victoria. The girl sullenly turned half round.

“I chuse to walk in the garden,” she pursued.

“The

“ The Signora will not permit,” gruffly returned the girl.

“ Will not permit !” repeated Victoria.

“ No,” laconically answered the girl, again laying her hand upon the lock of the door.

“ Why do you leave these things behind you ?” cried Victoria, smothering the rage she felt rising in her breast.

“ It is your breakfast,” replied the girl, quitting the room, and locking the door after her.

“ So, then, I am made a prisoner !” muttered Victoria, and her cheeks assumed a crimson dye, as she endeavoured faintly to smile at the impotent malice of the Signora. “ How have I incurred  
this ?

this? Not, surely, by my conduct of yesterday!" But the malevolent disposition of the tyrant devotee became evident to the haughty girl, and she deemed her a being too insignificant to excite a moment's pain. "This cannot last for ever," thought she; "and when the wretch is weary of confining me, she will, for variety, set me at liberty: mean time, I must amuse myself the best I can."

She then searched her trunk, which, on the night of her arrival, had been brought into this chamber. Here she found some drawing materials. The surrounding scenery, beautifully romantic, furnished ample employment for her pencil; and, with mixed sensations contending in her bosom, she seated herself by an open window, and endeavoured by occupation to banish reflection.

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This unworthy procedure and system of torment, on the part of the Signora, continued in full force for some days, till want of exercise, and inferior food, began, though the proud Victoria disdained complaint, to have a visible effect upon her health. At this the Signora, who was informed of the circumstance by the young girl who attended her, began to be slightly alarmed, and to apprehend likewise that she might overstep, by such measures, the limits that had been prescribed her, and render herself amenable for any ill consequences that might arise; such, for example, as the sickness of Victoria, which, by distressing and aggrieving Laurina, might bring her into disfavour with the Count; perhaps, as he appeared so tenderly to love Laurina, even excite his anger against her, for such unauthorised severity. For though Ardolph had said, she might, if *necessary*, confine Victoria

to

to her chamber, he had not bid her do so without cause, much less deprive her of her accustomed food, and give her only a scanty portion even of the worst. Under these considerations, therefore, she determined to relax a little; and Victoria, from being confined the whole of the day, and visited only twice in the course of it by Catau, her attendant, with a small quantity of bad bread and milk, was suffered, accompanied, however, by Catau, to walk an hour in the garden, morning and evening. To attempt to describe the indignant feelings of Victoria at this treatment, or the struggle it cost her, amounting almost to phrensy, to subdue the expression of the violent rage that fermented in her bosom, would be indeed vain; yet she bore all, and was determined sooner to die than betray the smallest symptom of vexation or impatience.

But

But desire of revenge, deep and implacable, was nurtured in her heart's core, and gave to her character an additional shade of harshness and ferocity: thus she became like the untameable hyæna, that confinement renders only more fierce.

A few days after this comparative liberty had been allowed her, the Signora, by Catau, requested her presence in the drawing-room. In strict pursuance of the conduct she had prescribed herself, she instantly obeyed, and regretted only that her pallid cheek and sunken eyes were evidences of suffering beyond her power to conceal, and would gratify, as she feared, the malignity of her tyrant. She entered the apartment, however, with an air neither of sullen reserve nor acknowledged resentment, but placid, cool, and unembarrassed. Thus, too, did she learn the most refined  
artifice,

artifice, which, by practice, became imbued into the mass of her other evil qualities.

The Signora, somewhat discomfited by the unexpected demeanor of Victoria, having previously arranged her hard features for the intended expression of severe reprimand, knew not for the moment how to receive her: at length, she said—"Be seated, child."

With secret scorn and hate, Victoria obeyed.

"It is not my intention," solemnly, and in a laboured accent, began the Signora, "to revert, at present, to your violent and improper conduct, when first you became an inmate under this roof; nor, upon account of what is past, to punish you further. I merely wished to evince to  
you

you that softness, humility, and obedience, are indispensable requisites here, and that nothing can be tolerated that shews an overbearing, haughty, or ferocious spirit. You are by this time, I trust, properly convinced of your error."

The heart of Victoria rose in her bosom—it swelled with indignation to reply—but again she conquered her emotions, and the only evidence of them was a momentary rush of the blood into her cheeks. The Signora proceeded—

"Under this impression, I deem it no longer necessary to confine you. You will not, however, be suffered to go beyond the walls of this mansion; the garden, at all events, must be the extent of your wanderings, and your only society Catau, and, at meal-times, myself."

How

How the pride of Victoria battled for vent!—"Society for Catau!"—but still she spoke not.

"I shall likewise expect that you peruse such religious book as I shall put into your hands, and which, I humbly hope, will tend to amend the stubbornness of your proud heart. Moreover, that you abjure the vanities of dress, and meekly comply with every requisition, that, as a good and pious catholic, anxious for the salvation of your soul, I shall think it my duty to make of you."

The Signora now paused for breath—Victoria still remained silent, as not seeming to suppose an answer was required.

The Signora then resumed—"How much ought you to thank Heaven, proud child, that has caused you to be placed  
under

under my care—that has rescued you from the abode of vice and abomination, and placed you beneath the roof of purity and virtue. Count Ardolph even tells me, unhappy girl! that young as you are, you have already suffered your corrupt imagination to wander after man!—Oh! Santa Maria! that ever I should live to speak the word,” continued the devotee, turning up her eyes, and making the sign of the cross—“teach me to bear with patience, admitting to my presence one of passions and propensities so vile, and whose mother has already trespassed before her, beyond redemption, in the paths of sin!—You may retire, child,” she said, changing her tone of rhapsody into one of haughty severity; “retire, and seek Catau: she is a meet companion for the contaminated offspring of one who is immersed many fathoms deep in guilt and shame.”

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This last bitter, illiberal, and uncalled for reproach, tingled with burning heat through every vein of the insulted Victoria. "Oh, mother! — cruel mother!" she faintly murmured, and hastened from the room.

**CHAP.**

## CHAP. VII.

IT would be endless to dwell on the varied and unworthy artifices which the pious Signora di Modena had recourse to, for the torment and annoyance of her unhappy charge. Suffice it to say, that in time their effect became blunted and despised, and the whole thoughts of Victoria turned to the possibility of escaping from such vulgar tyranny: for long she revolved in her mind even the remotest probability, but in vain; she could never penetrate farther than the allotted garden, and knew not even the precise path or door that might lead beyond it—even were that difficulty obviated, she was ignorant

rant of the means of getting to Venice, whither, could she but once escape; she was determined to hasten.

Under these circumstances, the image of Catau presented itself to her mind. Confined as she was almost wholly to the society of this untaught girl, she had leisure to remark in her, certain traits of docility and goodnature, ill concealed beneath the sullen sternness she had evidently been commanded to assume.

Catau was a peasant of Switzerland, short and thick in her person, hard favoured, of rude and vacant features, ignorant and inured to labour: she had been selected by the Signora to attend and watch Victoria, first to mortify her by the careless clumsiness of her manner, and the inferiority of her station; and, secondly, from an idea that Victoria would

despise her too much to endeavour to corrupt or make a friend of her. Should she even make the attempt, the Signora presumed the extreme stupidity of Catau would render it abortive. But here, for once, the infallible Signora, as she believed herself, was mistaken in her fancied penetration. Catau was not only not so stupid as she was supposed, but was possessed of a certain shrewdness, and power of combining ideas, which, hid beneath an habitual silence and placidity of disposition, had drawn upon her the mistaken imputation of heaviness and insensibility. Catau could think; and, what was more, she could *feel* — yes, infinitely beyond those who so proudly sat in judgment upon her character.

To return, however, to Victoria. No sooner had the remotest glimmerings of a possible attempt beamed upon her mind, than

than instantly she determined, by every means in her power, to attach Catau to her interests. Time and experience had already made her so far acquainted with the malevolent and tormenting spirit of the Signora di Modena, that she well knew one great step towards the scheme in embryo, was not, by any means, to appear reconciled to the society of Catau, but, on the contrary, to seem to shun and despise her; for it was sufficient for this worthy catholic to be aware of the particular circumstance, that could yield a moment's satisfaction to any one, instantly to reverse it, and continue with unwearied perseverance in that line of conduct which appeared to give most pain and uneasiness: therefore, when she seemed to dislike being accompanied by Catau in the garden, which she often did purposely, the Signora, with a distorted smile of

fancied triumph, would tell Catau to take her arm, and lead her thither, thinking by that to inflict on the proud heart of her charge the deepest mortification. But here again the Signora was fallible; for no sooner was Victoria out of her sight, than she smiled on Catau with an air that said—"There is no other way of preserving your attendance." This smile would penetrate the heart of her humble companion; and she would feel so gratified and affected, that, perhaps, at those moments, Victoria might have made an attempt not destitute of success. Such, however, was not her plan; she had not yet sufficiently arranged it, and she resolved to do nothing from crude undigested ideas. She was but now in the infancy of her attempt, sounding the disposition of Catau; and her mailed heart was not to be thrown off its guard by

by any effusions of softness or feeling, attributable to the effect of the moment alone.

It so happened, that one evening they perambulated to a part of the garden which was yet unknown to Victoria : it was a beautiful close avenue, the sides and roof of which were interwoven branches of vine and honeysuckle ; the entrance was almost concealed by a thick shrubbery, which it required no slight ingenuity to penetrate ; and, from the serpentine direction of the path, it appeared wholly impossible to ascertain its extent. Still having made their way through, they proceeded, Victoria with a vague and indefinable feeling of hope and fear, and Catau merely with that vacant curiosity incident to vulgar minds.

At length, after walking for near half

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an hour, they only reached the extent of the garden, bounded by the high circular wall, which had so often, since the comparative liberty she had enjoyed, filled the mind of Victoria, in contemplating it, with a despondency almost hopeless. The winding path they had traversed, had alone deceived her as to the imagined distance; and, as she gloomily surveyed the strong and lofty enclosure, she almost doubted if any outlet whatever existed. "Surely," thought she, "there is only an entrance to this garden from the house, and no outlet from the garden itself." While thus she ruminated, walking slowly along by the side of the wall, she became convinced, as she proceeded, that the precise part of the garden in which she now found herself, she had never seen before. At length, a small wooden door, formed in the wall, and secured by two rusty bolts, and a heavy iron lock, presented itself

itself to her eager view. She instantly called to Catau to approach: and, pointing to the door, enquired of her if she knew whither it led. Catau readily applied an eye to the key-hole—

“ It leads into the wood, Signora, which surrounds this house; but, unless we were outside, I cannot tell the exact spot.”

The first part of her reply fixed the breathless attention of Victoria. “ Into the wood!” repeated she mentally, and applied her eye likewise to the key-hole. “ And is there no way, Catau,” said she, “ of opening this door?”

“ None, that I know of, Signora,” replied Catau; “ and even if there was, you know, Signora,” she added, in a hesitating voice, “ you know that——”

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“ I understand you, Catau,” answered Victoria; “ but you know there could be nothing wrong in rambling now and then about the wood; and, supposing the Signora has forbid it, how could it ever become known?”

“ Why, that is true,” replied Catau, thoughtfully. “ I must own, it is a hard thing to be so confined; but, holy Jesu, Signora, we could never open this door!”

“ Oh, Catau!” said Victoria, in a gentle voice, “ nothing is impossible to those who are willing. You could easily procure the key, under some pretence or another; and think, then, how delightful it would be for us to be quite out of the reach of the horrible Signora!”

“ Ho, ho,” cried Catau, with quickness, as if suddenly awaking from a reverie



already began to miss us—by this hour Ambrosio, too, has most likely returned home, and may be in the very place I speak of. To-morrow, when he shall be in a distant part of the garden, I will watch the moment when no one is near, and slip through his little cottage to the spot; for I must pass through Ambrosio's residence, Signora, to get at it—I shall then whip down the keys as quick as lightning; and if you will *promise*, Signora—if you will promise not to betray me, nor to stay out too long, I will do all I can to oblige you.—I do not think," she continued, "this door has been opened for a long time—perhaps the very key that belongs to it may be in this bunch."

Victoria was fearful to appear too eager; and, ardently as she longed to penetrate beyond the unvaried precincts  
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prescribed by the Signora, she acquiesced with apparent readiness to the arrangements of Catau, and reluctantly agreed to bend her steps homeward.

The whole of the night was past in giving way alternately to trembling hope and the deepest despair. The perpetual ferment of her brain, and, above all, the violent restraint she imposed upon her feelings and natural disposition, scarcely ever suffering herself to be provoked, for an instant, from the cool and systematic conduct she prescribed herself, had begun long since to have a visible effect upon her personal appearance: she had become thin and pallid; but still her eyes burnt with an ardent though melancholy lustre, that bespoke the *trammelled unsubdued* ferocity of her soul.

About noon the following day, Catau,

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who

who had been absent since she had risen, (for she occupied the same apartment as Victoria) rushed suddenly into the room, and, first carefully securing the door, drew from her pocket a huge bunch of rusty keys. At this sight Victoria's eyes sparkled, and the orient tint revisited momentarily her pallid cheek: she devoured them with eager look, and in fancy applied them in turn to the lock of the door. It was, however, as yet, too early to venture forth; for they might be tempted to remain longer absent than would be prudent, and suspicion might be excited; they therefore agreed to defer till evening their destined trial.

Now, in all this active conduct of the simple Catau, there was absolutely not the smallest intention of aiding or abetting Victoria to escape; she would, on the contrary, have shuddered at the idea: but

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though, in obedience to the orders of the Signora, she had, in the commencement, treated her with sullen coldness, yet in a little time, as is natural for a young uncorrupted mind, she had become weary of this assumed character, and returned to the kind, gentle, and respectful conduct, more consonant to her feelings. Besides which, the involuntary awe with which superior rank inspired her, was not to be done away; for superior rank, if accompanied with any dignity, makes resistless impression on the vulgar mind.

Victoria, who beheld with pleasure this gradual change of conduct, divested herself as much as possible of her natural *hauteur*; and, having a point to carry, she behaved towards Catau with the utmost condescension, now and then bestowing on her such trifles as were still within her power (for of the greatest part  
of

of her little possessions, clothes, &c. the Signora had deprived her, under the pretence of curing her of a sinful vanity detrimental to the good of her soul). But what Victoria could, she did; and the trifles which, with grace, she pressed upon Catau, were acceptable, and had their desired effect; for vulgar minds are *almost always* mercenary: therefore, as far as *she* could, in return, she enlarged the slender sphere of Victoria's comforts, and her solitary unvaried amusements. Thus, in procuring for her the keys, she had it merely in contemplation to obtain for her, if possible, a few moments of satisfaction.

Early in the evening they descended to the garden, and hastened to the avenue already described. Strong anxiety winged the feet of Victoria, and soon she reached the door which had already excited in her  
mind

mind ideas so various and confused. Snatching the keys from Catau, who had toiled after her, she applied them in turn, with trembling impatience, to the lock: one at length appeared to suit the best; she essayed to turn it, but in vain—it was reserved for the sinewy hand of Catau to triumph over the united strength of rust and iron. She wrenched the key with violence; it turned in the lock: she applied her force to the bolts alternately with her hand and a stone, which she had picked up: the door at length yielded to her perseverance, and flew open.

Happy and joyous sight for the imprisoned Victoria!—she darted, like a wild bird newly escaped from its wiry tenement, into the beautiful and romantic wood that presented itself to her ravished view. The cautious and less ardent Catau closed the door after them, and

followed. Victoria looked wistfully around: she beheld no boundaries, nothing to retard her, should she effect her escape. For a moment she ruminated; then calling Catau towards her, she said, in a careless tone — “Catau, canst thou tell now in which direction lies the city of Venice?”

“Venice, Signora!” answered Catau, pausing and gazing around, “Venice lies there,” pointing with her finger.

“Then,” said Victoria, clapping her hands, while her cheeks crimsoned with rage, “Monte Bello,” pointing contemptuously towards the left, “must be on that side.” Reflections, too bitter and too strong to be endured, rushed through her mind: she turned abruptly away, and with a look that seemed to say—“Accursed be the quarter where I was deceived.”

ceived and duped, and accursed every breeze that is wafted thence !”

But far, far different sensations actuated her, when she cast her eyes forwards. “ There,” thought she, “ is Venice itself, and there dwells *Berenza!*” Distance, which, like death, always magnifies to the imagination the charms of those who were beloved, together with the deception that had been used to separate her from him, induced her to think of him with a tenderness, that, but for those circumstances, perhaps, she had never felt in so powerful a degree.—“ Ah, dear *Berenza!*” she mentally continued, “ might I but hope to see *thee* once more——”

She turned towards Catau, anxious to rally her thoughts; and, taking her arm, she walked on with her in silence. A thousand unconnected ideas still floated  
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in her mind: time passed unheeded, till Catau, respectfully reminding her that it would be expedient to return, roused her from her visions of the future, and she readily acquiesced in the propriety of the movement.

CHAP.

## CHAP. VIII.

It may be naturally presumed, that the mind of Victoria remained bent upon escape; not a day past, that she did not induce Catau to extend their walks farther and farther from the outlet, an outlet the Signora little thought they would ever discover, much less dream of attempting. Every day, too, did she contrive to make silent, though accurate observations, as to the direct course it would be most proper for her to pursue.

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At length, unable to bear continued procrastination, she determined to put in execution the plan that had been so long arranging in her brain. Accordingly, on the following evening, when the unsuspecting Catau had been lured, by her kind and condescending manner, to accompany her far, infinitely farther than they had ever yet ventured, she suddenly stopt short, and thus addressed the astonished girl—

“ Catau, I will never more return to Il Bosco—my term of slavery is now over—I shall bend my course whither I please—to the East, the West, the North, or the South. Listen, therefore, to what I have to propose: exchange instantly your apparel for mine, and by your prompt acquiescence merit this diamond ring, which has been concealed from the old Signora, and which I will  
in

in that case immediately bestow upon you. You can easily, as we have hitherto done, return into the house unperceived, and array yourself in some of your usual attire. Should you be questioned as to my escape, swear, what will be true, that you was not privy to it. Should you be questioned as to whither I am gone, swear, what is true, that you cannot tell. If, even after all this, the Signora should think fit to discharge you, I do not see that you will have any thing to regret; and with regard to any advantage you might think you lost, this ring, which is extremely valuable, will more than indemnify you. Now these are the *pacific* terms which I propose to you; if you refuse them, I am equally determined to fly; and, if nothing but violence will avail to oppose *my* strength to yours, my strength, it is true, may not *equal* yours; but you may find, to your cost, Catau," she added, with  
meaning

meaning in her eyes, "that victory may not always depend upon that alone."

Catau trembled like a leaf in the gale: the firmness and decision with which she had been addressed, left her not the power of reply. Victoria, marking her consternation, began calmly to take off her robe; and, in that gentle tone she knew so well how to assume, thus went on—"I see, Catau, that you have the good sense to feel the propriety of my resolution, and the kindness to wish to assist me in it.—Come, my good girl, prepare to undress."

"Oh, Signora!" faltered out Catau. At length, involuntarily taking at the same time the first step to divest herself of her attire—"oh, Signora, what are you about to do?"

"To

“ To leave a tyrant ! ” answered Victoria, with quickness, her eyes darting fire ; “ and I wish you, Catau, speedily the same good fortune.—Come, hasten your movements,” she proceeded, handing her the robe she had now taken off.

Poor Catau mechanically proceeded to do as she was ordered. Hurried in her naturally slow conceptions, yet in the native goodness and simplicity of her heart, seeing something in the conduct of Victoria which she could not blame, (for who, more than the poor drudge Catau, had reason to hate the tyrannical and never-satisfied Signora ?) she went on, but not so quickly as Victoria desired, to exchange with her gradually every necessary external part of her dress, to render the disguise complete.

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Though the imperious, unaltered Victoria had acquired, by assumed gentleness, the love of the humble Catau, yet had she still the power of inspiring her with awe. Conscious of that, and knowing that her weak mind must, in the present case, be taken by surprise, and subdued by the force of language, she had preferred this mode to that of attempting sudden flight. Such an act would have roused her drowsy faculties; and, once impelled, it was possible she might have excelled her in swiftness of foot, which would have delayed, perhaps destroyed, her entire project. Besides, it was infinitely more politic to make Catau a friend, than, by apparent ingratitude and want of confidence, render her perhaps an enemy.

The transformation was at length completed; when Victoria, presenting Catau with

with the promised ring, slightly pressed her hand, and said—"My good, my honest Catau, if you possibly can, return to the house unseen, and enter the chamber we have usually occupied—secure the door. Should the Signora see nothing of us for the night, she will conclude, that, supperless, we have retired to bed, and will not have the foolish goodnature to disturb us, perfectly satisfied to have saved a meal. We are never in the habits of seeing her till late in the day. I shall then be safe from the reach of tyranny, at least, I hope so; and, should we ever meet again, you will have no cause to repent the part you have acted.—Adieu, my kind girl, for time flies—adieu; return homewards, and do not attempt to follow me."

"Oh, Signora! Signora!" sobbed Catau, while the tears streamed copiously

over cheeks resembling the full-blown damask rose.

“ If you *really* love me, Catau,” said the calm Victoria, who felt not a shadow of regret at leaving her faithful companion, “ if you really love me, detain me no longer, but turn at once, and let me behold you on your return.”

Catau, with a violent burst of tears and sobs, seized the hand of Victoria, and impressed on it a kiss forcible in proportion to the affection it was meant to convey. She then turned hastily away; and, without power to speak a word, proceeded towards the house with a speed almost sufficient to satisfy the impatience of Victoria.

She remained, however, upon the spot, thinking every moment an age till the poor

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girl

girl was out of sight, who, unconsciously however, turned frequently round to obtain a last look of her she so much regretted to leave. At these periods, Victoria, though with a feeling of vexation and anger, would hastily wave her hand, as if to say—"I see thee, but pr'ythee go on." At length, some trees intervening, excluded entirely from her view the object she desired to lose sight of; then, hastily turning from the spot, she bent her steps forward, fondly congratulating herself, that every step she took brought her nearer and nearer to Venice.

The sun had set about an hour. Victoria, who had walked, or rather ran, with the utmost celerity, from the moment that she beheld Catau no longer, had hoped in a short time to have penetrated the wood; she, however, found herself mistaken, for the wood was of extensive di-

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mensions;

mensions; and, ignorant of its windings, she had not taken the shortest way to emerge from it. Though she continued her speed with unabated eagerness, night, to her confusion, began to draw in, and still she was wandering in its mazes. As it grew darker, the necessity of abstaining from her journey became evident. "And whither can I seek for shelter to night?" she mentally ejaculated, casting her eyes around. A small white shed, embosomed at a distance among some trees, caught her view: she felt an emotion of gladness, and was hastening towards it; but, suddenly recollecting, that when her flight should be discovered, it was not improbable but the very road she had taken might be searched, and that, in such case, this shed being liable to the observations of others as well as herself, might undergo some scrutiny, she determined instantly to avoid, as much as possible, the  
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the habitations of man, and to pursue the path that appeared the most unfrequented. Sooner than incur the smallest risk of being traced, the firm-minded Victoria decided on passing the night in common with the race of animal nature, beneath no other canopy than the star-sprinkled heavens.

In pursuance of this resolve, she turned from the path that led, as she now perceived, to various scattered seclusions of humble life; and, beneath the umbrageous shade of a self-formed bower, composed of jessamine and the luxurious vine, o'erhanging and intertwining from a wild hedge on one side of the forest, she cast herself for repose.

“ Here,” thought she, “ why may I not enjoy a few hours of more refreshing rest than hitherto I have obtained on

more luxuriant beds? I am safe too in doing so; for the Signora will not even hear of my escape till noon to-morrow."

Thus reflecting, sleep stole gradually over her senses. Fatigued by the unusual exertions of the day, for some hours she enjoyed undisturbed repose; nor, till the sun-beams playing through the tender branches upon her closed eyelids, and the carol of the birds, exhilarated by the divine rays of the morning, burst melodiously forth, did she awaken.

She no sooner opened her eyes, than, starting upon her feet, she again commenced her journey with the utmost speed. A few Naples biscuits, which she had the day before thought of securing, served her for breakfast, and she ate them as she proceeded. Her chief desire was now to leave behind her the wood; for this she increased

increased her speed, and, after two hours walking, found herself in a kind of path that she hoped would give her some unerring clue to proceed by. Eager with this idea, she swiftly measured its winding way: it terminated, at length, in a lonely canal, bordered on each side by poplars and acacias; and Victoria beholding this, cast herself almost hopeless close to its edge.

“ Oh !” she cried, “ how deeply must I have wandered !—on this melancholy canal no gondola, most likely, ever passes ! To retrace my steps would be certain destruction to my hopes—here, then, may I as well remain, and die !”

She had thrown herself upon her face, and despondently leaned her forehead upon her clasped hands. The soft gale sighed among the trees—no human being

seemed nigh to interrupt the solitude. The melody of the birds among the lofty poplars and the spreading acacias, alone broke the heavenly silence of the scene; and Victoria, indifferent to these wild beauties, so hostile to her wishes, remained prostrate and in despair.

At length, a low distant sound struck upon her ear: she started — “Did it not resemble the remote noise of oars, dipping, at measured intervals, in the canal?—No, no! it was but the breeze agitating the leaves of the trees.” And again she reclined her head.

Presently the sound returned, but with increased effect: it was accompanied—most joyous conviction!—by a rough voice, singing a song common among the gondolieri. In an instant, Victoria was upon her feet: she bent eagerly over  
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the canal, and descried a gondola most leisurely approaching, and containing only a single rower, who was coasting coolly along the edge of the lake.

“ Oh !” thought Victoria, “ on that careless being depends *my* fate ! — How slowly he approaches, while I burn with impatience !”

Without increasing an *iota* in speed, by degrees the gondola came near. Victoria eagerly hailed it—

“ Whither go you, friend ?” she asked.

“ To Venice.”

Victoria’s heart leaped—

“ Wilt thou permit me,” she asked, “ to enter thy gondola ?”

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“Canst thou pay, my pretty one?” asked the gondolier in turn.

Victoria was silent: all she had possessed, her ring, she had given to Catau. The gondolier was silent likewise, and her hopes began again to fade.

At length, she cast her eyes upon the countenance of the gondolier: though coarse and brawny, she perceived that he was a young man. “Alas!” she said, “I *have* no money, friend; but I have a lover in Venice, and if thou wilt convey me thither, the blessed Virgin will ever send thee luck.”

The gondolier, in turn, cast his eyes upon Victoria: he beheld, beneath her peasant's hat, that she was beautiful. He conceived her, from her garb, to be a peasant in reality, and readily believed that  
that



could ever you think of meeting a gondola where I found you perched? It is not once in a century that any of us pass thereabouts, except indeed at an odd time or so. Why, if it had not been a cavalier that I took up this blessed morning, before the heats began, to carry him to a pretty villa that he has close almost to the borders of the canal—and, between you and I, I carried a pretty Signora along with him—his reason, no doubt, for setting off at such an hour, so private, you know—Well, if it had not been for that, I say, which is no business either of mine or yours, (I was well enough paid)—the devil a gondola you might have caught that way these six days. So you see, my pretty rogue, how lucky you are—and to get such luck for nothing too!”

Victoria, who had long ceased to attend to the long-winded dissertation of the  
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gondolier, catching only his last words, most cordially assented to them, at the same time expressing her gratitude for his goodnature.

To this the gondolier made no other reply than a broad significant grin, winking at the same time one eye, alluding, as Victoria supposed, to the lover she had told him of; and then began again with the song he had been singing before she hailed him.

Soon, to her infinite joy, Victoria beheld the towers and domes of stately Venice rising proudly from the Adriatic, encircled round by its green arms. It was the time of the Carnival: multitudes of gay and splendid gondolas appeared upon the lake, as they drew near; they were now upon the point of landing at St. Mark's. Victoria turned to thank the  
gondolier

gondolier for his kindness—he nodded and smiled, and helped her out of the gondola, whispering in her ear, that he should never at any time object to do so pretty a girl a service.

Once more at liberty, and at her own disposal, secure too in her disguise, Victoria, without trepidation, mixed with the gay crowd of St. Mark's Place, in the faint hope, perhaps, of discovering among them one to whom her heart involuntarily pointed. Fatigued, at length, by exertion and want of food, for she had tasted nothing but a few biscuits since the preceding evening, and evening again was now far advanced, she quitted St. Mark's Place, to seek a spot less thronged and confused. As she proceeded, a sudden faintness, the consequence of exhaustion, overcame her so far, that, to prevent falling in the street, she hastened beneath a lofty portico,

portico, and seated herself upon one of its steps. Leaning her swimming head upon her hand, she remained for some moments unable to move; her heart palpitated, and she began to fear that mind might not *always* prove omnipotent over matter. By degrees, however, the faintness went off: she raised her head. The gay appearance of the streets and the canals, every window illuminated, and the splendid apparel of the masks, ill and overpowered as she felt, yielded her a sensation of the highest delight: she could remember only that she had escaped from a dreary solitude and the most abominable tyranny, and every feeling of sickness vanished at the idea.

As still she continued sitting, (her symmetrical figure habited in her homely garb, and those strong-marked features shaded by a large and simple hat) amid  
the

the gay and hurrying crowd, that still continued to pass, a group of masqueraders caught her attention. Among them was one of a tall and noble figure, far surmounting the rest: he wore a domino of blue silk wrapped carelessly round him, so that his left shoulder with part of his vest was displayed, which sparkled with jewels; on his head he wore a Spanish hat of black velvet, surmounted by a lofty plume of snow-white feathers, confined in it by a diamond loop.

Upon this attractive figure her eyes fixed as he past with a sort of confused recollection of having before seen it. The hasty glympse she had caught, however, was insufficient to ascertain where, and involuntarily she started up to have a better view of his person: as she did so, he turned round. True, he was masked; but conviction flashed upon her senses; —sudden.

—sudden and irresistible was the impulse—she flew towards him, and laying her hand upon his arm, exclaimed—  
“ Berenza !”

“ Yes!—oh, yes!” in a low but eager voice answered the mask, pressing her hand upon his arm; “ mark me, but retire.”

Victoria drew back—the mask rejoined the group he had a moment separated from, and was soon lost in the crowd.

Bitter was the vexation and disappointment of Victoria; — by happy accident was thus discovered, and in the same moment lost, him on whom her chief hopes depended! But still the splendid illusion of the scene remained—the mind of Victoria was supremely elastic, and she consoled herself with the reflection that  
she

she was still in Venice, and at liberty. She continued mechanically moving along, till at length she found herself in a more retired part of the city, where resided some of the inferior inhabitants. From this place she hastened; but every where the brilliancy of the scene began now to fade; the night was considerably advanced; the gay crowd, visibly diminishing, had entered their houses to carouse; and the splendid light decreasing, assumed the appearance of a twilight gilded by the last rays of the setting sun.

The adventurous Victoria now began to perceive the possibility there existed of passing another night without shelter: the reflection was unwelcome to her feelings; but she preferred it to the remotest risk of discovery, by seeking out any of her former acquaintances, or dependants. Again, therefore, seating herself beneath  
a por-

a portico, she leaned her head upon her hand, and gave way to reflections of a gloomy tendency. She was hungry and fatigued; and these circumstances added to the depression of her spirits. Suddenly a voice sounded in her ear—"Follow me." She raised her head, but perceived no one; again therefore she covered her eyes with her hand, and endeavoured to resume her train of thought.

"Rise," said the same voice again. She started, and instinctively arose. The portico at which she had seated herself was the first in the street. A tall figure darted as it were from behind her: it appeared enveloped in a dark cloak; and retreating swiftly to such a distance as to render its actual presence dubious, beckoned in an inclining attitude to Victoria. Glad even of so mysterious, perhaps dangerous, a mandate, she hastened to

to obey, as fast as her enfeebled limbs would allow. The stranger perceiving that she did so, again retreated; but still continuing to invite, Victoria still pursued: at length, in a deserted part, he stopped. Victoria approached: he encircled her waist; and, drawing aside his cloak, she discovered the spangled habit, and the figure of Berenza!

“Hush!” he hastily exclaimed, perceiving she was about to express her joy; then again withdrawing himself, he proceeded towards a small door in the street, at which he gave three distinct knocks. It opened cautiously: he put forth his hand, and beckoned Victoria; she drew near; he seized her arm, and conducting her into the house, the door closed. They had not walked many paces through a dark narrow entry, before Berenza stopped; and, taking a handkerchief from his pocket,

pocket, bound it lightly over the eyes of Victoria, saying to her, in a low voice—  
“ Fear not; this shall not be for long.”  
Victoria only smiled, and did not answer.

At length they ascended some stairs, and appeared to enter an apartment. The Conte pressed the hand of Victoria, and bade her take the bandage from her eyes : she did so, and instantly uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise; for a sumptuous and brilliantly illuminated chamber struck upon her dazzled sight: the walls were covered with large resplendant mirrors, that variously reflected her simply attired but graceful figure:

Berenza appeared for a moment to enjoy her surprise; then, fervently pressing her in his arms, he said—

“ Here

“ Here my lovely and beloved Victoria will be sole mistress; she will no more fly from the man who more than life adores her.”

“ Fly!” repeated Victoria—“ I never fled from thee, Berenza!”

“ Didst thou not, my love? Much then requires explanation, but not at this juncture. You look pallid and fatigued; rest here awhile, till some slight refreshment is procured.”

So saying, he gently seated Victoria upon a superb sofa, and for a few moments left her to herself.

The most pleasing ideas now took possession of her mind, as in a recumbent posture she awaited the return of Berenza. Her fatigues, her difficulties, even her

her imprisonment, all was forgotten in her present prospect of long desired happiness.

“ Now, then, cruel and ungenerous mother,” she exclaimed, “ thou canst no longer deprive me of a happiness similar to that which thou so selfishly enjoyest !— a happiness which, but for *thee*, my awakened fancy had never conceived, nor my soul coveted. Ah ! mother, mother ! thou didst deceive and betray me ; but I shall still live to thank thee for teaching me the path to love and joy.”

As she concluded this wild expression of her misguided sentiments, Berenza entered ; he had heard what she had uttered ; and, pleased as he undoubtedly was that chance had thrown in his way the girl he had admired and loved, yet his delicate and refined mind experienced a  
sensation

sensation of regret at the avowed freedom of her principles. Yet still more severe were his reflections against the *authors* of this mischief, the *parent*, whose example and conduct had corrupted the sentiments of her *daughter*, and the *wretch*, whose seductions had corrupted the *parent*. But mentally he promised himself to restrain and correct the improper bias of Victoria's character; for Berenza, though a refined voluptuary, possessed a noble, virtuous, and philosophic soul.

He seated himself by the side of Victoria, and gently took her hand. It was dry and feverish. "You have undergone considerable exertion this day," he said, gazing on her countenance, "have you not, my sweet Victoria?"

Victoria smiled, and great was the dismay of Berenza, when he learned that  
for

for upwards of twenty-four hours she had not tasted food. He instantly forbade her to utter another word till nature was recruited, and the moment a collation he had ordered made its appearance, he tenderly pressed her to eat; nor till he thought her sufficiently refreshed, would he reply to the most pressing of her eager interrogatories respecting the real cause of his precipitate departure from Monte Bello.

At length, when he explained to her this circumstance, and his conviction at the time of having acted expressly consonant to her own wishes, nothing could exceed the rage she evinced at the deception which had been practiced; and unwilling as was Berenza to countenance or encourage the undue violence of her disposition, he could scarcely avoid participating in the expression of her sentiments. "The gross unworthiness of the parental duplicity

city had surprised and disgusted him ; and if for a moment before he had been disposed to lament the effect of her daughter's flight upon the mind of Laurina, he *now* felt that compassionating sentiment give way to one of pleasure that Victoria had escaped, and escaped to him. It appeared too, in the course of his explanation to Victoria, that surprised at not receiving from her the smallest intelligence for a length of time, though according to the intimation in the note, he was taught to expect he might shortly hear from her, he had, impatient at the delay, presented himself uncalled at Monte Bello ; there had he learned, that by her own desire his fair mistress had taken her departure from thence, and had expressly required that he should be kept in ignorance of her retreat ; for that reflection having convinced her of the impropriety of encouraging his attentions, she had determined  
to

to endeavour at least to overcome it, and therefore conceived that absence was the most likely, nay the only mode of forwarding so desirable a point. "I confess," pursued Conte Berenza, "from the knowledge I possessed of your character, I thought such sudden variation of sentiment almost incompatible with it; but having no alternative, for I felt I had no right to request an explanation from your mother or the Count, (you, according to the law of things appertaining rather to them than me,) and urged by the cool looks I received, I took my departure, secretly hoping that time would bring me some satisfactory elucidation of a circumstance that I could not help considering as somewhat mysterious."

Ere their mutual explanations had ceased, the night was far advanced, The history of Victoria's sufferings at the Signora

nora de Modena's; the mode of her escape; her difficulties, her precautions to avoid being traced—all, all must be detailed and expatiated on ere she would think of retiring. Berenza at length ventured to recur to the necessity there was for her taking some rest. Unwillingly, at his delicate sollicitation, she agreed to do so, when summoning some female attendants, he ordered them to shew her to the chamber which had been hastily prepared for her.

No sooner had Victoria reached her apartment, than she requested her attendants to withdraw, for she was desirous of indulging alone the influx of her ideas; delight and pleasure had such complete possession of her, that scarce could her trembling hands perform the office of disrobing herself. Long too after she had entered her elegant bed (which rose in  
the

the form of a dome, bordered with deep gold fringe) did her buoyant spirits drive sleep from her pillow. At length, however, her ardent imagination became overpowered; she fell asleep, and brilliant fantasies gamboled before her in the dreams of the night.

Berenza too retired to repose, but his reasoning mind, though in such recent attainment of a desired good, was placid and unruffled; the images which occupied it were devoid of the romantic trappings of fancy; he beheld Victoria such as she really was, unembellished, unornamented; his keen eye that perceived her beauties, discerned likewise her defects. He appreciated her character; he beheld at once her pride, her stubbornness, her violence, her *fierté*. "Can I," asked himself, "be *rationaly* happy, with a being imperfect as she now is? No; un-

less I can modify the strong features of her character into the *nobler* virtues, I feel that all her other attractions will be insufficient to fill up my craving heart."— Pursuing these reflections, Berenza fell asleep. Victoria beneath his roof, *voluntarily* in his power, he had leisure to *re-  
vise* and *amplify* on those errors, which, while she seemed *unattainable*, struck him in a point of view infinitely less momentous. *Such* is the nature of man!

CHAP.

## CHAP. IX.

THE sun had risen far above the horizon when Victoria awakened: she hastily arose, and perceived that the peasant's garb had been exchanged for habiliments more resembling those she had till now been accustomed to wear. This she with justice attributed to the delicate attention of Berenza. Dressing herself, she summoned attendance, and was informed, that Il Conte Berenza had been long waiting breakfast for her, and desired them to conduct her to the apartment where he was. She found him sitting upon a sofa, with breakfast things before him. On her entrance he rose, and

K 4

conducted

conducted her to sit beside him. His demeanor towards her was rather that of a sincere and a tender friend, than of an ardent lover; for the mind of Berenza, ever aiming at perfection, felt, that ere he could avow himself the latter, he must himself new model the object.

During breakfast he conversed upon indifferent subjects; but more sedulously and more anxious than ever did he scrutinise her, as, though in her air and in her eyes he would read every movement of her soul. Yet true it was that Berenza was a voluptuary, but a philosophical, delicate, and refined voluptuary;—it was not the perfection of *body* only that he required, but the perfection also of *mind*.

Victoria perceived that embarrassment clouded the manners of the Conte. She  
sought

sought by every means to draw him from his apparent abstraction, and gaily taking his hand, she said—

“ Berenza, why are you not chearful ? You were wont to tell me, that I should constitute your happiness, if once I became yours—now then, that fortune has united us, you appear *less* happy than when you despaired of gaining me ; nay, indeed, dear Berenza, almost indifferent to her you so professed to love.”

Berenza rose during the speech of Victoria. A new idea had taken possession of his mind—it was the tormenting, the useless reflection, that perhaps he was not particularly distinguished by the confidence of Victoria ; that perhaps she had flown to him merely as a refuge from discomfort and oppression, and that had *another* addressed her, she would equally

K 5

have

have flown to him. This suggestion struck a pang to the heart of the refining philosopher; suppressing his emotion, however, and taking the hand of Victoria, he only said—

“ You have often, my love, known me abstracted and thoughtful, without any particular reason occurring at the moment—heed me not, and I shall speedily be myself again.”

“ Then I will withdraw to my chamber, my Lord,” said Victoria, secretly piqued and disgusted that her presence should not be a talisman against *every* species of uneasiness.

“ Do so, my love. Consider yourself here as mistress, and all I have at your disposal. Make such arrangements as you may think fit, without hesitation. Employ yourself a few hours apart from  
me—

me—we will meet at dinner, and in the evening repair to the Laguna, where my Victoria will be the fairest.

Victoria withdrew, but her air was indignant; and Berenza observing it, sighed as he gazed after her, mentally exclaiming, “Victoria, how imperfect thou art—fool that I was,” he continued, I never possessed either the heart or the mind of this girl—*circumstances* only have impelled her towards me—Oh! could I but penetrate her thoughts; could I but discover her actual *feelings*, my mind would be at rest; were I only convinced of her love, I could easily new model her character, because the precepts and the wishes of those we love sink deep into the heart. But no matter; I will be the friend, the brother, the protector of the girl who has thrown herself into my arms. I will love her too, but never, no never will I meanly

K 6

take

take advantage of a fortuitous circumstance. I will be *convinced* of her affection,—her absolute, her exclusive affection; and till I am thoroughly convinced, I will be her *friend*, and not her lover.”

Such was the determination of the reasoning philosopher, whose delicate and fastidious mind made its own food, and took for ever a pleasure in repining upon itself.

At dinner they again met, and when the heat of the day was succeeded by the cooling breezes of evening, Berenza led his fair charge to St. Mark's Place, along which multitudes of gay Venetians were flocking to get into their gondolas. The Conte assisted Victoria into his, which was splendid and gaily accoutred. Happy was the vain Victoria to find herself thus in the midst of the gay world. The La-  
guna

guna was covered with an innumerable quantity of gondolas, soft music sounded from every side, and sweet female voices sometimes accompanied the strains. The scene elevated her spirits: she blest the moment when she had escaped from the tyranny of a discontented bigot. She cast her eyes around, and she perceived that she had excited that attention and admiration she so much loved to obtain. She even fancied that the Venetian belles viewed her with an air of envy—the idea was doubly pleasing, and her animation increased. But she did not for a moment suppose that this envy was excited on account of the companion who sat beside her. Berenza was indeed accounted the most accomplished cavalier in Venice—the very phœnix of grace and elegance. His opinions, his taste, his approbation formed the standard of fashion;—for, though

though no one knew or appreciated the dignity and delicacy of his mind, yet was he considered the most graceful and fascinating of men. His society was universally courted, even by the women, though they well knew his refined and superior judgment. His was not the heart of a sensualist, if indeed a sensualist hath a heart; he could not gaze enraptured on the accurate formation of a limb; waste his hours in contemplating incessantly a beautiful form, or resign his independence, while admiring some harmonious combination of feature or complexion. Even his most irrational hours were never spent at the feet of a simpering coquet. No, it was necessary that Berenza's beauties should be polished, that they should possess the talisman of mind. Well was this general trait in his character understood; yet his society and his notice were ea-  
courted

courted by females;—since to attach him would indeed have been triumph, who then could forbear the attempt?

Victoria excited therefore universal envy in one sex, and she likewise excited universal admiration in the other. The notice she attracted filled her vain ambitious heart with exultation, and it was with infinite regret she left the gay covered lake, to return to the Pallazzo of her lover.

Flattered by the attention she had excited, the philosophic Berenza viewed her involuntarily with a feeling of increased approbation; for true it is man is too apt to be guided in his estimate of things by the degree of estimation they may obtain from others, and to be influenced in his opinion by the standard (often depraved) of the public taste.

Supper

Supper being prepared for them, the Conte began wholly to relax from the restraint he had imposed upon his manner; he seated himself with a smiling air by the delighted Victoria, who instantly availed herself of the gaiety and unreserve of his manner to ask an explanation of what had more than once obtruded itself upon her mind. Looking somewhat archly in his countenance, she said—

“Tell me, Berenza, if the question be not improper, why with so much caution and mystery you first acknowledged your recognition of me, and conducted me hither, yet now carelessly exhibit yourself with me in public?”

“Oh woman, curious woman!” said the Conte, laughing;—“but I will tell thee, Victoria.”

“Frederic

“ Frederic Alvarez, a friend of mine, and a Spanish nobleman of high rank, had a mistress called Megalena Strozzi; by birth a Florentine. Of this mistress he was passionately fond, and often pressed me to be introduced to her, but having many other engagements, I always declined.

“ At length one day he succeeded in securing me, and I was reluctantly dragged into the presence of his syren. Mark the untoward result. On the honour of a Venetian, I solemnly assure you, I paid her no extraordinary attention, nor any whatever of a nature that could be considered dishonourable towards my friend; yet she exerted her utmost artifice, she used every blandishment to allure me. Megalena was beautiful; she was beside elegant, and accomplished. I am not, as I think, either a philosopher, or a stoic, but

but a man refining on my own sensations. I yielded, I own, to the witcheries of Megalena, and I felt no compunctious visitings from a consciousness of treacherous conduct toward my friend—I had not attempted to seduce his mistress; it was she, on the contrary, who had so powerfully addressed my feelings and *my* senses, that was in the fullest acceptation of the term the seductress. At length, however, the jealous Alvarez discovered the infidelity of her to whom he was devoted heart and soul; he sought me out, foaming with rage and outraged love, and gave me my choice to meet him in honourable combat, or be passively run through the body. Breathing death and vengeance, it was vain to reason with him. I therefore preferred the former offer, and we met. Fury rendered his hand unsteady, and when I succeeded in drawing a little blood from his arm, some of our mutual friends, who

who were privy to the affair, endeavoured to explain to Alvarez the folly of fighting for an abandoned wanton. He heard them with a gloomy air, but appeared convinced by their arguments. I offered him my hand, but he refused it with rage, and soon after left Venice. Since that period I have occasionally visited Megalena, but never could I prevail upon myself to consider her as a mistress, from the very obvious and unerring reflection, that a female who could abandon a sincere and doting lover for *me*, would as readily abandon *me* for any other who might attract her wandering eye. Still, however, the jealous, the alternate fits of love and resentment which she thought proper to exhibit whenever I presented myself before her, have long been a source of extreme unpleasantness to me. She has frequently sworn, with a frantic air, that though she bears with my insulting indifference

rence

rence towards her, that should she ever have reason to attribute my coldness to regard for another, my death alone would satiate her vengeance. Thus, though I know the irregularity of her life, and that her undisciplined passions hurry her into the most abject excesses, I do not wish, insolent and unjustifiable as such conduct would be, to induce her phrensied attacks against my life, or peace. I therefore, in my research after you, used all possible precaution; nor did I, though you saw me not, even for once lose sight of you. My reason for placing a fillet over your eyes was merely to enjoy your astonishment when it should be removed, for I introduced you by a private way into my house. "I believe, fair Victoria," pursued the Conte, smiling, and taking her hand, "I have now explained all that may have appeared mysterious to you."

"You have, my Lord," answered Victoria,

toria; "but you *still*—still visit Megalena then?" she pursued, while her jealous eyes wandered.

"I have, as I said," replied the Conte, smiling, "been accustomed to visit her."

"And—and you *still* intend, my lord Berenza——"

"My *future* intentions," replied Berenza, seriously, "will be considerably influenced by *you*."

"But, my lord," said the artful Victoria, with an air of innocence, unwilling to proceed too far, "you love me too well, I hope, to think of another while I am with you?"

"Sweet Victoria," exclaimed Berenza, "that is spoken like yourself. The Signora  
nora

nora Megalena must now be tranquil— she *must*, for she will see us together, and it will be beyond her power to separate us. Yesterday I had visited at her house; she knew the colour of my habit for the Carnival; her eyes, no doubt, followed me every where; and had she perceived my attention attracted to you, she would either have had you entrapped, and conveyed out of my reach, or have followed me even into my apartment like a vengeful fury; therefore it was I conveyed you into the Pallazzo by a secret way, wholly unknown even to her. But let us dismiss this unworthy subject. Once for all, Victoria, be assured it is not in the power of a Megalena to attract me from thee. I have known her, 'tis true: she has been the companion of my looser hours; but she was never the mistress, the beloved acknowledged *friend* of Berenza. No, it is not enough for me that *my* mistress should

should be *admired* by men; they must *envy* me in their hearts the possession of her. She whom Berenza can love must tower above her sex; she must have nothing of the tittering coquet, the fastidious prude, or the affected idiot: she must abound in the graces of *mind* as well as of *body*; for I prize not the woman who can yield only to my arms a lovely insipid *form*, which the veriest boor in nature can enjoy in as much perfection as myself. *My* mistress, too, must be *mine* exclusively, heart and soul: others may gaze and sigh for her, but must not dare approach. It is she too, who, while her beauty *attracts*, must have dignity sufficient to repel them. If she forfeit for a moment her *self-possession*, I cast her for ever from my bosom. But if," he added, with increasing energy, "it be within the verge of possibility that she forfeit her honour, then—oh! then, her  
blood

blood alone can wash out her offence!—  
Victoria!” grasping her hand, “dost thou  
mark me?—hast *thou* courage, hast thou  
firmness, to become the friend, the mis-  
tress of Berenza?”

Victoria smiled with ineffable dignity:  
she laid her hand upon the arm of Be-  
renza, and said—

“Yes, I have courage to become every  
thing to you. Why these doubts, these  
stipulations, Berenza?” she pursued with  
a serious air.

“But thou must *love* me, Victoria, *me*  
*alone*,” said Berenza, fixing his eyes upon  
her countenance.

“And do I not, my lord, love *you*  
*alone*?” she said.

“Not

“ Not certainly—not *enough*,” he replied. “ Thou art a stranger to the turnings and windings of thine *own* heart,” mentally added he; then rising hastily, he took the hand of Victoria—“ Retire,” he said, in a gentle voice, “ retire to repose, and to-morrow we shall meet again.”

He led her to the door, and saluted her hand. How few in character resemble Berenza!—yet in such perfection are some minds regulated, ultimately enhancing by their forbearance the pleasures they obtain.

## CHAP. X.

SOME time passed on thus, and still Berenza, languishing for positive *conviction* of Victoria's love for him, continued to treat her as a beloved and innocent sister, rather than as a destined mistress; for though his taste in female beauty led him to view that of Victoria with the eye of an enraptured amateur, still was he too scrupulously refined to accept the privilege fortune had thrown in his way, or anticipate, by premature encroachment, the smallest of the pleasures he promised himself for the future, when she should *prove* to him (delightful idea!) that her heart was intrinsically

trinsically his. Charmed as he was with the boldness of her natural character, charmed as he was with the graces of her face and figure; yet was Berenza a man of too *proud* a mind to be swayed to a conduct that his peculiar delicacy contemned. In vain would he sometimes seek for a trait of innocent tenderness in the countenance of Victoria; something that should *convince* him he was beloved. No, her's was not the countenance of a Madona—it was not of angelic mould; yet, though there was a fierceness in it, it was not certainly a repelling, but a beautiful fierceness—dark, noble, strongly expressive, every lineament bespoke the mind which animated it. True, no mild, no gentle, no endearing virtues, were depicted there; but while you gazed upon her, you observed not the want of any charm. Her smile was fascination itself; and in her

large dark eyes, which sparkled with incomparable radiance, you read the traces of a strong and resolute mind, capable of attempting any thing undismayed by consequences; and well and truly did they speak. Her figure, though above the middle height, was symmetry itself; she was as the tall and graceful antelope; her air was dignified and commanding, yet free from stiffness; she moved along with head erect, and with step firm and majestic; nor was her carriage ever degraded by levity or affectation. Living under his roof, almost perpetually in his company, she became daily a more dangerous object to the peace and to the forbearance of Berenza; yet even in those times, when his ideas and actions were least subject to the controul of his reason, it was but for an instant to admit the tormenting reflection, that perhaps she felt not for him a  
genuine

genuine and ardent affection, for a sudden gloom to take possession of him, and overspread his countenance.

The singularity of his conduct surprised Victoria: she endeavoured to investigate the cause, and to trace, if possible, the workings of his mind. To this end she watched, with scrutinizing eye, every movement, every look; she listened to and weighed every word he spoke; then, combining the whole, discovered ere long the secret which pressed upon his feelings.

“What, then,” would she exclaim, confiding her reflections to her pillow, “Berenza fears that I love him not? This idea, then, is the grand source of his constrained mysterious conduct towards me.” Then reverting to herself, she examined the state of her heart respecting him.

L 3

“And

“ And do I *not* then love Berenza ?” she said :—“ I know not ; nor what may be the precise nature of love ; but this I know, that I prefer him to all men ; that I think him elegant and accomplished ; and that, if death snatched him from me, I should grieve. True, my sensations towards him have nothing ardent in them, nor do I feel that oppression of soul, that doubt, that uneasiness, respecting his attachment for *me*, that he seems to entertain of mine. Yes, I feel it is requisite to my future prospects, to those plans and views, yet vague and indefinite, which are floating in my brain, that he should not entertain any, not the smallest doubts of my regard for him. I must endeavour, then, to suit my conduct to the fastidious delicacy of his ideas.”

So reasoned, from combined inferences, the subtle Victoria. True indeed it was,

was, she did not *love* the scrupulous, the refined. Berenza: she was incapable of loving such a man; nay, she was by nature unfitted to admit so soft, so pure a sentiment as *real* love. Victoria's heart was a stranger to every gentle, noble, or superior feeling. The ambitious, the selfish, the wild, and the turbulent were her's. Her's were the *stormy* passions of the soul, goading on to ruin and despair — Berenza's were mild, philosophic, though proudly tenacious. His were as the even stream, calm, yet deep—her's as the foaming cataract, rushing headlong from the rocky steep, and raging in the abyss below! She was not susceptible of a single sentiment, vibrating from a tender movement of the heart: she could not feel gratitude; she could not, therefore, feel affection. She could inflict pain without remorse, and she could bitterly revenge the slightest attempt to

inflict it on herself. The wildest passions predominated in her bosom; to gratify them she possessed an unshrinking relentless soul, that would not startle at the darkest crime. Unhappy girl! whom Nature organised when offended with mankind, and whom education, that *might* have corrected, tended only to confirm in depravity.

Berenza, as before has been remarked, was the only man who had ever paid her particular attention, consequently it was natural that what feeling of preference she was capable of entertaining should be given to him. She voluntarily sought his protection, because she knew not whom else to solicit. She remained under his roof, for she knew not of another; and though any heart but her's would have been deeply and enthusiastically affected by the nobleness and delicacy of conduct  
he

he had, under all these circumstances, observed towards her, yet did she remain wholly unimpressed; nor was a single idea awakened by it that did not revert to self. She saw only that it would be necessary and politic to answer his sincere and honourable love at least with an *appearance* equally ardent and sincere. The peculiar cast of Berenza's disposition was in reality melancholy; sombre, and reflective, though in society seeming gay and careless; she then must become melancholy, retired, and abstracted. Berenza would hence be induced to scrutinize the cause. Artifice on her side, and natural self-love on his, would easily make him attribute it to the effects of a violent and concealed love: thus would an explanation be the result; and the reserve, the doubts, the hesitations of Berenza at an end.

Her plan arranged, she entered on it

L 5

gra-

gradually: her eyes, no longer full of a wild and beautiful animation, were taught to languish, or to fix for hours with musing air upon the ground; her gait, no longer firm and elevated, became hesitating and despondent. She no longer engrossed the conversation; she became silent, apparently absent, and plunged in thought. It was now Berenza, who had to call *her* from a melancholy abstraction, to enquire if any hidden uneasiness preyed upon her mind. Victoria saw, exultingly saw, the gradual operation of her plan. New and rapturous ideas, scarcely admitted even to himself, began to occupy the soul of Berenza; but as yet he spoke not, he hoped not; — he was slow, because he was fearful to believe.

It was one night, after a day of well-acted gloom and oppression of spirits, that Victoria, having left the apartment  
occu-

occupied by the Conte, retired into the saloon, and throwing herself upon a sofa near one of the windows, enjoyed the delicious fresco of the evening. She had not been long in this situation, before Berenza, unable to bear her absence, determined to seek her in the saloon, and perceiving her reclined upon a sofa, imagined she slept. Closing gently the door, therefore, he softly approached her. In an instant, an idea had glanced across the mind of Victoria: she determined to avail herself of this circumstance, and of Berenza's mistake. Shutting her eyes, she affected in reality to be asleep: the Conte drew near, and gazing upon her for a few moments, he seated himself beside her.

“ Oh, Victoria!” in a low voice, he tenderly said, “ why, why, my love, art thou unhappy? Oh, that I—that I might  
 L 6 only

only hope I were the envied cause!—Ah, were it indeed so, Berenza would be too happy!”

He paused. Victoria, as if disturbed in her sleep, heaved a broken sigh, faintly giving utterance to the name of “Berenza.”

Berenza scarcely ventured to breathe.

“Why wilt thou not love me Berenza?” she murmured.

Berenza’s heart beat high; he drew his breath quick.

Victoria was sensible of his emotion—“One word more,” thought she.

“Indeed—indeed, Berenza—I love thee!” she articulated, starting up, and stretch-

stretching out her arms, as if under the impression of her dream, attempting to embrace him; when opening her eyes, and affecting surprise and shame at the sight of Berenza, she covered her face with her hands, and turned aside.

The violent emotion of Berenza was such, that for some moments he was deprived of the power of speech. The blood rushed from his heart to his head; his senses became confused, when, seizing wildly in his arms the artful Victoria, he exclaimed, in hurried accents—"Thou art mine!—Yes, I now *know* that thou art mine."

Proud of her achievement, it was Victoria's care that her lover should not recover from his delusion: well did she support the character she had assumed; and

and the tender refined Berenza became *convinced*, that he possessed the first pure and genuine affections of an innocent and lovely girl!

CHAP.

## CHAP. XI.

**B**ERENZA became daily more attached to Victoria: his scrupulous doubts, his reserves, wholly vanished, and fondly he flattered himself, that he was as much the possessor of her dearest affections, as she was the mistress over his. Still, though his love for her was carried in some respects to a romantic height, his pride forbade him to marry her. There was a certain stigma in his idea attached to her, through the misconduct of her mother, which it was impossible for his delicate mind to overlook. Of this sentiment, however, the haughty Victoria was unconscious,

conscious, and she simply imagined that her present union with the Conte was chosen by him expressly for the purpose of convincing her, that his devotion towards her needed not the aid of artificial ties to rivet it. Under this impression, her vain spirit was flattered; and little did she ever suppose, that while the proud Venetian deemed her *worthy* of becoming his *mistress*, he conceived her unfit for the high distinction of becoming his *wife*.

It was one beautiful evening, that, accompanied by the admired Victoria, Benzenza, in his splendid gondola, mixed with the gay concourse upon the Laguna. Every one appeared exhilarated; and, Victoria, gazing around, felt in the moment that she excited the admiration so dear to her soul, that she required nothing more in the power of man to bestow.

While

While her eyes still wandered, exacting attention from all, a gondola passed close by that of Berenza's: it contained only one female besides the gondolieri, who, in the moment of rapidly passing, fixed her eyes upon Victoria with a rage and malignity so exquisitely bitter, that it was impossible, momentary as was the glance, that its expression could be mistaken. For an instant Victoria was awakened from her dream of vanity: she looked at Berenza; but perceiving, from the unaltered expression of his countenance, that he had not observed the circumstance, she thought it too insignificant to advert to, and other objects soon made her forget it altogether.

At length they returned home, and the evening was concluded with a convivial party and a dance, to which many were invited

invited that had not been present during the early part of the evening.

At a late hour the company separated, and Victoria and the Conte retired to repose. Victoria, however, felt no inclination to sleep: the festive scenes of the evening passed in mirthful review before her, the music still sounded in her ears, and the dancers still figured in her sight. She skimmed over in her mind the adulation, the elegant and well-turned compliments she had received, and in idea again she enjoyed and smiled at them. Then she reverted to her evening's amusement on the Laguna; and, on reverting to that, she suddenly remembered the look she had received from the female who had passed so swiftly by. She was on the point of mentioning to the Conte this circumstance; but perceiving, that, over-  
come

come by wine and the fatigue of the evening, he slept, she would not awaken him, and pursued the diversified current of her ideas. Still, however, she could not lose the remembrance of this malignant glance, and was embarrassing herself in vain conjectures as to the cause which should induce any one to view her with particular rancour, when a gentle rustling at the further end of the chamber caught her attention: this interrupted her thoughts, and called them to external objects. The bed on which she lay was surmounted by a superb canopy, the curtains were drawn on each side, but remained opened at the foot. The rustling increased; she fixed her eyes on the opposite side of the room, where a large window jutted out and opened into a balcony on the outside: the window itself was concealed by a thick curtain; by degrees this curtain was moved a little on one side; half the figure

figure of a man became visible, and presently the whole. The chamber was faintly enlightened by a lamp; and she observed, as softly, though with long strides, the figure approached, that his face was concealed by a mask: at length he reached the side of the bed at which the Conte slept, and gently divided the curtains.

Victoria firmly now believed some evil was intended, yet feared to awaken Berenza, lest his surprise and alarm, by depriving him of requisite presence of mind, should hasten any attempt against him, which she hoped herself, by being awake and remaining tranquil, to circumvent.

The intruder now stood at the side of the bed, and paused; then stooping down, he examined earnestly the face of the Conte: the countenance of Victoria he could not see, for her arm was thrown  
over

over her head in such a manner that her hand concealed her eyes, though she could observe all that passed; and the lower part of her face was shaded by the covering. The stranger, however, appeared to imagine that she slept; for, drawing a dagger from his bosom, he waved it to and fro near the closed eyes of the unconscious Berenza; then gently uncovering his bosom, approached the point of the dagger towards it. His hand appeared to tremble; he stifled a sigh, and retreated a few steps; then again he drew near: with his left hand he held back the curtain, and raising his right, as if with sudden resolution, he prepared to strike! Just as the dagger was descending, the undaunted and watchful Victoria caught his wrist: the force of the intended blow being thus broken, the assassin, who was in an inclining attitude, lost his equilibrium, and falling across the bed, the  
point

point of the dagger entered the shoulder of Victoria. At this instant the Conte awakened: his first impulse was to seize the man, but he struggled violently, and Berenza being unable to obtain a firm hold, shackled as he was by the weight of his body, which lay across him, he contrived swiftly to disengage himself. As he did so, he could not, however, prevent his mask from falling off: he sought to recover it, and rush from the spot; but, ere he could achieve his purpose, the eyes of the wounded and fainting Victoria were rivetted upon a countenance that memory immediately identified for her brother!—that brother who, on the desertion of his mother from her home, had fled the paternal roof, and now was recognised as an intended murderer.

“**Monstrous assassin!**” she feebly exclaimed; while Leonardo, with horror depicted

depicted in his countenance, fled across the apartment, and, gaining the window, appeared to precipitate himself from it.

Berenza, now released, started from the bed; but, as he was flying after the assassin, a faint groan from Victoria arrested him: he turned, and beheld the bed-clothes dyed in blood. The sight distracted him—"You are wounded, my life!" he frantically exclaimed.

"Only slightly, my lord," murmured Victoria; "but I do--I do not regret it!"

Berenza, in agony, vociferated for assistance: he dispatched the servants fifty different ways for medical aid; then taking Victoria in his arms, he examined the wound, while the big tears of love and anguish fell upon her bosom.

"Ah,

“ Ah, do not weep, Berenza !” faintly ejaculated Victoria. “ I would suffer ten thousand times more to prove my *love* to thee—nay, I rejoice to prove it !” And, in fact, Victoria *did* rejoice ; for she felt that the wound obtained in defence of her lover’s life (and of which her firm mind entertained no apprehensions) would bind him inseparably to her ;—the triumph she experienced, then, when she beheld his violent anguish, more than repaid her for the pain she felt. She essayed to take his hand, and press it to her bosom ; but all her firmness, all her contempt of pain, could not conquer the weakness of nature, and she fainted from loss of blood.

The Conte was half mad. The medical men arrived ; they dressed the wound ; they announced that it was not dangerous, and that repose and quiet would, in all probability, avert the appearance of  
fever.

fever. By degrees she was recovered from her temporary insensibility. The Conte seated himself by her bedside, and gazed in agony upon her. She turned her eyes upon him, the brilliancy of which had given place to a seducing languor, that penetrated Berenza's inmost soul, and in his mind he vowed that his whole life henceforth should be dedicated to her happiness. He now felt that she was dearer, far dearer to him, than he had ever imagined. On the noble and enthusiastic soul of Berenza the conduct of Victoria had wrought the most powerful effect—such cool intrepidity, such contempt of her own life in the defence of his—the patience, nay the pleasure with which she bore the unhappy consequences of her courage:—“What woman in existence,” thought he, “would have done thus much for me?” These reflections swelled his heart with a love almost idolatrous, and

his violent feeling sought relief in an irrepressible gush of tears.

Victoria determined carefully to conceal from her lover her conviction that the intended assassin was her brother. A certain indefinable feeling prevented her from confessing her knowledge, and she was fain to rejoice in his escape ; but of his motives for an attempt so heinous she could form not the smallest idea. As for Berenza, he merely concluded that he was some daring and determined robber, who might easily have obtained an entrance into the house during the careless festivity that had generally prevailed during the evening ; but respecting a circumstance that he now deemed immaterial, he gave himself but little concern." His whole thoughts were centered in Victoria, and he looked forward with impatient anxiety to the much desired period of her recovery.

recovery. Scarcely could he be prevailed on to quit her bedside, even to obtain necessary repose, and what little food he could be induced to take, was taken without stirring from her chamber.

In a few days, however, to reward such unwearied anxiety, Victoria was enabled to leave her bed, and by marks of attachment, apparently more strong than ever, repaid the care and tenderness of her lover. Raised by her seducing manners to a pitch of enthusiasm, Berenza sometimes wavered in his pride, and almost determined that he would make her his wife, the moment that her re-established health should permit him to do so.

One day, while sitting with her in her apartment, (a fortnight having nearly elapsed since the accident which had confined her there), a letter was delivered

livered by a servant into his hands—opening it he read as follows :—

“ Wretch ! by the time you receive this, I shall be far from pursuit, if such your meanness or your revenge should lead you to attempt. Know that it was *I* who directed to your faithless and unworthy breast that hand which failed in executing its office !—it was *I* who intended, and who hoped, that the accursed stiletto, which erred in its duty, should have found a bloody sheath in the recesses of your heart ! Yes, miscreant, it was *Megalina Strozzi*, who beheld you on the Laguna, accompanied by the minion, whose temerity robbed her of your love—oh ! and if a look could *kill*, mine should have blasted *her* to the earth ! What, durst you openly exhibit your novelty, and believe that your audacity would remain unpunished ? Did you not know me ? You should have  
carefully

carefully guarded your late found gem; you should not have suffered her to sparkle in the light of day, in the eyes of Strozzi! But she, and even you, for the present have eluded my vengeance—yet ha! my heart beats, it revives in the faint hope, that she perhaps may *not* have escaped!—if it be not so, nothing shall bind me to life, but the dearly cherished hope that the time will *yet* arrive, when no barrier shall intercept the blow I would aim at your life—no, not even the hated form of your *newly* acquired love. Coudest thou indeed hope, fond fool, that with impunity thou mightest despise the passion and insult the feelings of

MEGALINA STROZZI.”

“Vile and abandoned wanton!” exclaimed Berenza, “is it then even so? and is it to thee, and to thy absurd and insolent jealousy, that I am to attribute

M 3

my

my present misfortune? But it is well," he continued, "the worthless fury will molest us no more; she has left Venice." As he concluded, he gave the letter to Victoria, who, after hastily perusing it, exclaimed—

"That look! that look then, which so strongly impressed my mind, is now accounted for—it was Megalena Strozzi, who would have blasted me to the earth." Then turning towards Berenza, she explained to him the circumstance to which she alluded, and which, at the moment of its occurrence, so forcibly called her attention—nay, had even employed her thoughts just before the projected attempt upon his life took place. While she spoke, Berenza did indeed recognize the vindictive Florentine; but anxiously, though silently, did Victoria ransack her brain, to discover what connection could possibly subsist

subsist between this female and her brother ; a connection evidently of no slight nature, that could already so deeply have influenced his character and conduct as to drive him to the intended commission of murder ! to the very brink of destruction, for her sake. Recurring frequently to vain surmises upon this subject, and rapidly recovering from the effects of her wound, for the present let us leave her, to explain certain events which will carry us back to an earlier period of this history.

## CHAP. XII.

It may be remembered, that when detailing the misfortunes which befel the family of Loredani, in consequence of the desertion of Laurina from her husband and children, to the arms of an adulterer, we related at that epoch the sudden flight of the young Leonardo from his paternal roof, to which he had never more returned. It is *his* progress from that time, and the events which led him ultimately to determine on the commission of the most horrible of crimes, that we are now going briefly to revert to.

The

The high and susceptible feelings which actuated the bosom of this youth, when little more than sixteen years of age, caused him (under their uncontrollable influence) to rush from the house of his father as soon as he learned the unfortunate dereliction from the path of honour of his other parent. Scarcely to the youth himself were his sensations definable; but his naturally soaring spirit, unbroken by restraint, strengthened too by the high notions of family honour, which the Marchese had delighted to inculcate in the heir of his house and fortunes, gave him a feeling confused and agonized, that to remain longer on the spot where his mother had heaped disgrace upon her ruined family, would be vile and unworthy. Impressed with this idea, he took his rash determination; it was to fly from Venice, never, perhaps, to behold it more! In the shortest possible time he endeavoured to accelerate his

M 5

distance

distance from a city now grown hateful to him, and to lose by motion, and change of scene, the uneasy reflections that oppressed his proud but noble heart. Even to fly from Venice was not enough; to remain near it was death to his soul. Nor did he for an hour intermit the rapidity of his movements, until almost without knowing, certainly without designing it, he found himself in the delightful country of Tuscany. Awakened to cooler recollection, "Here then," he energetically exclaimed, "here then, I may *breathe* without an oppression of the heart!"—(and here too, necessity compelled him to rest; for the enthusiastic youth, careless of the future, when he left his luxurious home, was but scantily supplied with money, and all he had possessed was by this time expended.) "And what then," he cried, as sober reason suggested this reflection to his mind; "better to die an exile in the  
furthest

furthest corner of the globe—better to die in poverty and want, than live in a luxury which the soul despises!”

It was evening, and the young Leonardo reclined pensively on the bank of the majestic Arno—the sun had sunk in the west, and misty shadows were collecting upon the mountains. For the first time he began to reflect upon his situation, whither he must now continue to bend his steps, and how he should support life, having thus cast himself upon a friendless world. His thoughts became painful and embarrassing—he sought again to lose them in activity, and sprang hastily from his recumbent posture. He had not proceeded far ere he beheld a large and elegant mansion, which, from the extreme beauty of its architecture, standing too wholly by itself, rivetted his attention: he continued to approach, and when he

M 6

drew

drew near stopped involuntarily to contemplate it. While he was thus employed, a gentleman of a noble and superior appearance came from the house, and being attracted by the animated countenance and figure of Leonardo, he was induced to approach him, and enquire by what chance he had wandered to this beautiful solitude. Leonardo replied firmly, and without hesitation, that he was a youth whom misfortunes, not to be explained, had driven from his home, and that he was straying, he neither knew, nor was solicitous whither.

Struck by the singularity of this reply, in which there was something to interest an expanded mind, the stranger, who was called Signor Zappi, felt impelled to increase if possible his acquaintance with the youth, whom chance had thus introduced to his attention.

“ Well,

“ Well, my young friend,” he said, “ if you will enter my mansion, which seems to have attracted your notice, we may have some conversation that perhaps may not prove unsatisfactory to either of us. Your appearance and manner please me, and I should feel happy to know more of you.”

To this frank invitation the warm hearted youth readily assented, and accepting with an ingenuous air the proffered hand of Signor Zappi, they entered the house together.

Leonardo was conducted into an elegant apartment, where desiring him to be seated, Signor Zappi enquired of him if he stood in need of refreshment. Leonardo replied in the negative. Some indifferent conversation then ensued; when (though with the utmost delicacy) his

his liberal host expressed a desire to be informed of his name.

The youth blushed.—“ My name,” he replied, “ is Leonardo—that which is subjoined to it, I must be excused from revealing. Circumstances have impelled me to leave my home ; and as I feel it impossible, Signor, utterly impossible,” he added, rising hastily from his chair, “ to gratify a curiosity so proper, and so natural, for you to feel respecting one you have admitted beneath your roof, I will, with your permission, take my leave, and no longer intrude upon your hospitality.”

“ That must not be indeed, my young friend,” answered Signor Zappi—“ There is that in your appearance and manner, as I have said, which interests me considerably—keep then your secret, if you wish

wish it; and since you are avowedly at present a child of fortune, indifferent and undecided whither you bend your course, remain for a short time where chance has directed you, and forbear (young and enthusiastic as you appear) to cast yourself upon the careless world."

Leonardo's heart was penetrated with gratitude at the kind words of the benevolent stranger. His dreadful, and as he conceived it disgraceful, family secret, his pride shrunk from acknowledging; but feeling in an instant the good fortune he experienced in having met, in the forlornness of his situation, one who appeared inclined to befriend him, he cast himself at the feet of Zappi, unable to restrain his tears. This excellent being, whose philanthropic heart led him to seek every opportunity, not only of befriend-  
ing his species, but if possible of preserv-  
ing

ing them from ill, was deeply affected. That the nature of the youth was noble, he easily conceived—that some sentiment of a high and honourable (though, perhaps, misguided) tendency had induced him to fly his home, he likewise believed; therefore, gently raising him in his arms, he said—

“Come then, Leonardo—I desire to know you by no *other* name—Come, let us quit this room; and, as the son of a friend, I will introduce you to my wife and daughter.”

The wife of Zappi, however, chanced to be in every respect the reverse of her husband; for she possessed an intriguing spirit, and a profligate heart. But it is not intended to dwell minutely upon every progressive incident that befel the young Leonardo; to skim lightly, on the contrary,

trary, over all, excepting that which led to his connection with Megalina Strozzi, is the present purpose.

The Signor Zappi then daily grew more attached to the youth of his adoption;—when absent, his conversation to his wife teemed with his praises; when present, he continually sought modes of drawing forth his character, and every trait he discovered added to the warm impression that his pristine ingenuousness had made upon his benevolent mind.

It so happened, unfortunately, that Zappi was not singular in his admiration of the youth, for he had not been very long an inmate in his house, before the Signora Zappi became a warmer eulogist in his favour than even her husband: she paid him beside the most pointed attentions. Yet it was not  
his

his ardent character, his talents, or his virtues which attracted *her* distinguished regard;—no, it was the charms of his person, the beauty of his form and face, which had drawn towards him her attention; and true it is, they displayed a manliness and grace far above his years. Yet not similarly disposed in her favour was the object of her growing passion; his admiration, his thoughts, and all he knew of love, was bestowed upon Amamia, her lovely and more approximating daughter. This, to her dismay, the wife of Zappi soon discovered; but, bent upon carrying her point, she resorted to all the fascination of dress, to all the allurements of softness, and the most tender attentions;—that all this too might the more forcibly impress his mind, she, as much as possible, upon various pretexts, removed the fair Amamia from his view. Still all was unavailing. The youth felt gratitude for the kindnesses

kindnesses shewn him by the wife of his friend, but he felt no more.

About a year had now elapsed since his first introduction to the house of Zappi, yet still the secret of his alienation from home was locked in the recesses of his heart, guarded by an impenetrable ægis of punctilious pride and delicacy. The good Zappi, indeed, had long ceased to hint at any desire for information upon the subject; he felt happy in the society of the youth, and he required no painful acknowledgments on his side for the friendship he had delighted to shew him. He had never yet, from any act, or any conduct of Leonardo, had occasion to regret his inmates in his family: no trait of vice, of meanness, or ingratitude had ever yet exhibited themselves in his character. Zappi was a plain and pure professor of morality,

lity, as well as a benevolent being, and if he had had reason to suspect aught amiss in the *heart* of his young friend, painful as would have been the task, he would have felt it his duty to drive him from beneath his roof, lest, by appearing to protect and cherish vice, he should inculcate lessons of dangerous tendency into the mind of his daughter, and by an inevitable progression, *injure* rather than *benefit* society.

The passion of Zappi's wife had by this time grown to such a height, that she felt it utterly impossible longer to conceal it from the object that had inspired it; — She determined, therefore, whatever the consequence, to make it known to him. For this purpose, she seized an opportunity, when her husband and the fair Amamia were absent, to follow him into the garden, whither he had retired,

retired, to think, without interruption, and with all the enthusiasm of an innocent *first* love, upon his mistress. As he reclined upon a seat, he beheld coming towards him the mother of her he loved, and respectfully he would have arisen; but as she drew near him, gently laying her hand upon his shoulder, she prevented him from doing so, and seated herself beside him.

“ You were absorbed in thought, Leonardo,” said she.

“ I was indeed,” answered the youth, blushing.

“ You were thinking of her you love, I would wager,” pursued the wanton wife of Zappi, and heaved a sigh, fixing upon him her eyes at the same time, in which were depicted the troubled emotions of  
her

her agitated soul. Leonardo, who was thinking of Amamia, re-echoed her sigh. The sigh was electric fluid through her breast, and fanned the fires which were raging in her heart. She took his hand, and fervently pressing it, said—

“ You are beloved in return—yes, Leonardo, most charming of youths, you are indeed beloved.”

“ Are you certain,” replied the transported boy, springing from his recumbent attitude.

“ Oh, I am but too certain,” frantically replied the degraded female, falling at his feet, and thrown completely off her guard—“ you are beloved—oh, how madly, by *me*.”

“ By you, Signora?” cried the astonished

nished youth, “you jest surely—Rise, rise, I beseech you, from your unbecoming posture—unbecoming towards me,” he sternly added.

“Oh, Leonardo, I love, I adore you!” cried the abandoned wife. “Spurn me not then, I conjure you, for I cannot, cannot conquer the fatal passion with which you have inspired me.”

“Signora Zappi, you strike me with horror!” exclaimed the youth.—“It is your *daughter*, it is your blooming daughter, that I love.

“What—and will you never love me, boy?” in an accent of rage and grief, she cried.

“No, never while I have breath—  
*never!*”

*never!*” emphatically replied Leonardo, disengaging himself from her wild embrace. “ Allow me, if possible, to *respect* you.”

“ Curses then seize thee, miscreant !” shrieked the wife of Zappi, in an agony of rage and disappointment, and casting him from her with vehemence: “ I will live to blast thee for this !”

“ Most infamous of women !” returned Leonardo passionately, “ let me fly from thy loathed presence—let me again in the wide world seek a refuge from infamy and shame ; for infamy it is to be the object of thy love !”

So saying, with impetuosity he rushed from the spot, and would have fled from the house altogether, but that a thought of *Amamia* darting across his mind, he  
felt

felt an irresistible desire to see her once more, ere he quitted for ever a roof that had sheltered him so long: he therefore hastened to his chamber, where he determined to abide till the arrival of Zappi and his daughter.

Mean time, his disappointed enamourata, rendered half frantic by the contempt and indignation with which her abandoned overtures had been received, resolved, in the tumultuous vengeance of her soul, to destroy and blacken the youth whose virtue she had failed to corrupt; or, it was not virtue that actuated him, but merely that the temptation offered him was not sufficient to seduce it; still the reflection was, in either case, maddening and humiliating, and how she might most bitterly cause him to repent his conduct was now her sole consideration. At length the demon of hate and revenge

suggested to her a plan sufficiently diabolical.

With eager and triumphant malice she instantly began tearing her apparel to tatters; then taking some gravel between her hands, careless of pain, in pursuance of her revenge, she rubbed it with violence over her face and hands till the blood flowed; and in this state determined to await the return of her husband. Presently she heard him arrive: she flew round the garden; and, as he entered the house, met him at the door, and cast herself, as if in an agony of shame and horror, before him.

Zappi, who tenderly loved his wife, was shocked and dismayed; he caused her to be carried into the house, and laid upon a bed, and then tremblingly entreated to be informed what terrible event had befallen her.

The

The false and unworthy wife then motioned for every one to withdraw ; and pressing, with seeming love and agitation, his hand to her lips, she replied thus to his anxious enquiries—

“ Oh, my beloved husband ! that scorpion we have nourished so long, behold, what has been our reward ! It is to that audacious, that hypocritical stripling, you must attribute what you now behold. Finding me alone in the garden, he first presumed to insult me with professions of a dishonourable love—I rebuked the saucy boy, and attempted to rise, when suddenly seizing me in his arms, I soon found my strength unequal to his. I shrieked aloud : he became, I suppose, apprehensive of discovery, and fled from the garden, leaving his infamous purpose unaccomplished !”

The wife of Zappi ceased; and, bursting into tears as if oppressed with a sense of shame, covered her face with her hands.

“ Depraved, ungrateful viper!” exclaimed the deluded Zappi, “ could I ever have imagined of thee this? But instantly shall he—no, first he shall appear before us, and be forced to reply whether sudden madness, or deliberate villainy, impelled to this criminal attempt.”

So saying, Zappi, summoning a servant, bade him tell the young Leonardo that his presence was immediately desired.

At this mandate the infamous wife of Zappi felt somewhat alarmed; but, resolving to persevere in her plot, she offered no objection. In the course of a few  
moments

moments the youth entered the room : he started on beholding the maimed figure of his accuser ; but his step was firm and unhesitating ; his eye was open, and on his blooming cheek guilt had set no mark.

“ Wretch ! ” began Signor Zappi, unmindful of these appearances tallying so little with imputed crime, “ wretch ! dare you to appear before me with that audacious front ? See there your work, young but most infamous monster ! So green in years, so old in the basest profligacy, what—might not the wife of your benefactor have been held sacred by you ? Durst you endeavour to break through the nearest and the dearest connections that are respected between man and man ? Could you trample thus on every principle of honour, and of gratitude ? attempt the subversion of moral order, and trespass upon sacred social affinities ? Worthless

profligate, and unfeeling boy! quit instantly a roof which has sheltered you too long, and never let me more behold your face.”

During this bitter language, which was addressed to him, Leonardo made no attempt to speak: he folded his arms upon his bosom, and as the deluded Zappi proceeded, he saw the depth of the plot which had been imagined against him by his depraved wife. The instinctive pride, however, of his nature, spurned at the unmerited imputations which had been cast upon him, and the poignant invective with which they were accompanied: he scorned, proudly scorned, to attempt a vindication; and, perhaps, a magnanimous sentiment of gratitude made him desire to spare his friend and benefactor too accurate information of his wife's depravity, if such his indignation would have

have allowed him to listen to; therefore, when he perceived that he had concluded, in a gentle but firm voice, he thus replied—

“ I am ready, Signor Zappi, to depart your house. I thank you for all the favours you have conferred on me, and wish you may never experience from others greater ingratitude than you have met from me.”

So saying, he bowed respectfully, and moved towards the door; yet, ere he quitted the room, turning his eyes full upon the wife of Zappi, he looked at her for a moment with such dignity and scorn blended, that her soul trembled within her, and involuntarily she passed her hand over her eyes. With firm and majestic step he then retired.

His first impulse led him to the chamber he had been taught to call his: there, with swelling heart, but tearless eye, he placed, with indignant eagerness, upon a table, every trinket he had about him, which his benefactor, in the plenitude of fond affection, had bestowed upon him. Of money he retained not a marevedi. Then unlocking a drawer, where, on first becoming an inmate in the house of Signor Zappi, he had deposited (from a certain feeling at the moment indefinable) the clothes which he had worn on entering it, and the only ones he possessed: he cast off hastily those in which he was now clad, and substituted for them such of his own as his increased height and bulk would allow him to make use of. Bitterly did it corrode the heart of the youth, that he could not in like manner return every benefit he had received; yet, since that was impossible, he could only deter-

determine to retain nothing that might be resigned. Then surveying himself from head to foot, with a mingled feeling he exclaimed—"These are my own; *all*, too, that I can well call *mine*.—Oh, mother, mother!—for *this* may I thank thee!"

Becoming now more violently agitated from succeeding reflections, he rushed from the chamber, and fled hastily through the house. Once he stopped, with the fond wish to take a last leave of the fair Amamia; but on the recollection that he must either expose to her the infamy of her mother, or himself appear culpable in her eyes, he conquered the impulse, and pursued his way hastily across the garden.

Anxious to lose sight of the house, he halted not till he found himself at a considerable distance from it, and had walked

at a rapid pace for several hours. Actual weariness at length compelled him for a moment to rest. The energy of his mind had till now supported him: he became conscious that he had walked many miles; nature felt overpowered, and reluctantly he seated himself at the foot of a tree. Uneasy reflections began to enter his mind: with his head reclining on his hand, involuntarily he suffered a deep gloom to take possession of him. It was past noon when he quitted the abode of Zappi: he now strained his tearful eyes, and beheld the east beginning to be obscured by the shades of evening. His oppression increased, but his strength of mind shewed him the necessity of combating it. He started on his feet, and turned his face to the west: there he beheld the glorious sun, declining indeed, but declining in a blaze of radiance; the sky around represented a thousand brilliant

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liant figures ; the tops of the mountains, catching the last rays, reflected many different degrees of light and shade. The youth felt no longer overcome by melancholy ; his heart cheered ; painful ideas gave place to indefinite hopes ; and he determined that he would no more indulge in the weakness of useless regret.

Pursuing a path that chance alone directed, he soon found himself winding among those beautiful mountains, whose fruitful bosoms are covered with olive and the luxurious vine. Wherever a beautiful villa met his eye, instinctively he turned aside. The shades of evening began to thicken, and the young exile from home was still unsheltered for the night. At length, wandering onwards, he beheld, situated in a kind of glen, a small and low roofed cottage : to perceive it fully, it was even necessary to ascend a considerable

rable way the mountain at the foot of which it humbly rose. It was embosomed by trees, and surrounded by a garden, seeming the abode of industrious poverty, rather than the seclusion of romantic whim. At all events, Leonardo shunned it not, but resolved to investigate it nearer, and ascertain by whom it was inhabited. As he continued to approach, the voice of moaning and distress sounded on his ear. This hastened his steps, and he speedily gained the little narrow path which led to the cottage. There, seated on the outside of the door, he beheld an aged female, weeping and wringing her hands. Sorrow was in unison with the heart of the youth, and in a gentle voice he asked, if her grief might admit of consolation and assistance.

“ Alas, no !” she answered, redoubling her tears : “ death admits no remedy ; it  
4 has

has deprived me of my only hope and comfort in this world—of my poor Hugo, my darling son.—Oh, Signor, that he should go before me! Who now will support my tottering limbs?—who provide for the short remnant of my days?—who work for, who befriend, the poor forsaken Nina?”

“But weep not so bitterly, good mother,” said Leonardo. “Admit me into your cottage; and if you will be kind enough to give me a draught of milk, we will talk further upon the subject of your sorrow. Perhaps things may not prove so bad as you at this moment apprehend.”

The voice of consolation is always sweet, but doubly sweet when coming from buoyant youth to age. The poor Nina rose with the utmost alacrity she  
pos-

possessed from her seat, and hobbling into her cottage, she set in silence before him (while her tears continued, though more slowly, to flow) the best that her cottage afforded.

When Leonardo had a little satisfied his hunger (for the almost unremitting fatigue he had undergone, for the last seven or eight hours, had completely exhausted him,) he took the hand of his aged hostess, who involuntarily had seated herself beside him, and said—

“ Tell me, my good mother, how old was your son Hugo ?”

“ He was twenty, Signor, on the blessed day of Saint Gualbert.”

“ And tell me, Nina——”

But

But Nina would not allow him to proceed—

“ Oh, Santo Pedro! was he not every thing to poor Nina? — Signor, I have a little garden, and Hugo it was who turned it to account. I have a vineyard too, and Hugo looked to it. But he would seldom leave his aged mother, Signor: for — ‘ Mother,’ would he say, ‘ it is better to give this, or that, or a little, upon what we dispose of to Pietro, or Varro, and let them manage for us, than for me to leave you, mother, who can’t well help yourself.’ — Signor, I have lately got a little the better of a terrible pain in my poor limbs; and now—oh, misericordo! — to lose my staff, my dear boy!—Oh, Signor! I vex my heart, and think he worked beyond his strength; for he was always weak and sickly from a dea child.

Here

Here poor Nina was interrupted by her tears, at the recollection of what her son had been to her.

An idea had entered the mind of Leonardo while she spoke, which every moment acquired fresh force from a view of its eligibility—a garden to cultivate—a vineyard to attend to—no occasion for public exposition in the market, or even the town—her son in a declining state too, and yet capable of doing all that was necessary to be done—“Surely I——”

He turned towards Nina, who was still bitterly lamenting—

“Come, worthy Nina, dry up your tears—what if I could supply to you the place of your son, would you allow me to remain under your roof, and accept of my best endeavours?”

“Oh!

“ Oh! Cielo be praised, be adored for this!” joyfully exclaimed the aged Nina, dropping on her knees, and fervently kissing the ground. “ Oh! as I live, my heart began to feel lighter the instant I set my eyes upon you; and though I did continue to weep, Signor,” weeping again, “ for my dear lost son Hugo, yet I vow and protest, by the blessed Maria, I felt as if a ray of light shot through my breast.”

“ Well, rise now, my good Nina, and let us talk further.”

Nina, trembling, arose.

“ You must give me some instructions, my good Nina; for though I understand sufficient of gardening, there are many things I shall require you to explain to mé.”

This

This Nina, her heart almost bursting with conflicting joy and regret (joy that she had found a protector, and regret that she had lost one,) readily promised. Some necessary conversation then ensued; and Leonardo, feeling within himself no doubt of success in his new situation, consented at an early hour to retire to repose, sensible of intense fatigue from the exertion of the day.

The aged Nina conducted him to the little chamber which had appertained to her deceased son; and, with a heart infinitely lightened, Leonardo took possession of the homely bed which it contained.

As he reclined his head upon the pillow—"This is the second time," he exclaimed, "that the heir of Loredani has been indebted to the benevolence of  
strangers

strangers for shelter, that the humanity of strangers has compassionated his forlornness, and that the bounty of strangers has cherished and protected him. Oh, mother—mother unkind! to thee, and thee alone, do I owe all this!”

With this bitter though just reflection burning at his heart, he fell asleep; and had the son of Laurina *expired* in that sleep, he would have appeared at the bar of Heaven with an accusation against his mother registered in his heart.—Let other mothers tremble at this reflection, and pause on meditated guilt.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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G. Woodfall, Printer, Paternoster-row.

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