Italian Letters, Vols. I and II

Or, The History of the Count de St. Julian

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Volume I

Letter I. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Palermo*

My dear lord,

It is not in conformity to those modes which fashion prescribes, that I am desirous to express to you my most sincere condolence upon the death of your worthy father. I know too well the temper of my Rinaldo to imagine, that his accession to a splendid fortune and a venerable title can fill his heart with levity, or make him forget the obligations he owed to so generous and indulgent a parent. It is not the form of sorrow that clouds his countenance. I see the honest tear of unaffected grief starting from his eye. It is not the voice of flattery, that can render him callous to the most virtuous and respectable feelings that can inform the human breast.

I remember, my lord, with the most unmingled pleasure, how fondly you used to dwell upon those instances of paternal kindness that you experienced almost before you knew yourself. I have heard you describe with how benevolent an anxiety the instructions of a father were always communicated, and with what rapture he dwelt upon the early discoveries of that elevated and generous character, by which my friend is so eminently distinguished. Never did the noble marquis refuse a single request of this son, or frustrate one of the wishes of his heart. His last prayers were offered for your prosperity, and the only thing that made him regret the stroke of death, was the anguish he felt at parting with a beloved child, upon whom all his hopes were built, and in whom all his wishes centred.

Forgive me, my friend, that I employ the liberty of that intimacy with which you have honoured me, in reminding you of circumstances, which I am not less sure that you revolve with a melancholy pleasure, than I am desirous that they should live for ever in your remembrance. That sweet susceptibility of soul which is cultivated by these affectionate recollections, is the very soil in which virtue delights to spring. Forgive me, if I sometimes assume the character of a Mentor. I would not be so grave, if the love I bear you could dispense with less.

The breast of my Rinaldo swells with a thousand virtuous sentiments. I am conscious of this, and I will not disgrace the confidence I ought to place in you. But your friend cannot but be also sensible, that you are full of the ardour of youth, that you are generous and unsuspecting, and that the happy gaiety of your disposition sometimes engages you with associates, that would abuse your confidence and betray your honour.

Remember, my dear lord, that you have the reputation of a long list of ancestors to sustain. Your house has been the support of the throne, and the boast of Italy. You are not placed in an obscure station, where little would be expected from you, and little would be the disappointment, though you should act in an imprudent or a vicious manner. The antiquity of your house fixes the eyes of your countrymen upon you. Your accession at so early a period to its honours and its emoluments, renders your situation particularly critical.

But if your situation be critical, you have also many advantages, to balance the temptations you may be called to encounter. Heaven has blessed you with an understanding solid, judicious,

and penetrating. You cannot long be made the dupe of artifice, you are not to be misled by the sophistry of vice. But you have received from the hands of the munificent creator a much more valuable gift than even this, a manly and a generous mind. I have been witness to many such benevolent acts of my Rinaldo as have made my fond heart overflow with rapture. I have traced his goodness to its hiding place. I have discovered instances of his tenderness and charity, that were intended to be invisible to every human eye.

I am fully satisfied that the marquis of Pescara can never rank among the votaries of vice and folly. It is not against the greater instances of criminality that I wish to guard you. I am not apprehensive of a sudden and a total degeneracy. But remember, my lord, you will, from your situation, be inevitably surrounded with flatterers. You are naturally fond of commendation. Do not let this generous instinct be the means of disgracing you. You will have many servile parasites, who will endeavour, by inuring you to scenes of luxury and dissipation, to divert your charity from its noblest and its truest ends, into the means of supporting them in their fawning dependence. Naples is not destitute of a set of young noblemen, the disgrace of the titles they wear, who would be too happy to seduce the representative of the marquisses of Pescara into an imitation of their vices, and to screen their follies under so brilliant and conspicuous an example.

My lord, there is no misfortune that I more sincerely regret than the loss of your society. I know not how it is, and I would willingly attribute it to the improper fastidiousness of my disposition, that I can find few characters in the university of Palermo, capable of interesting my heart. With my Rinaldo I was early, and have been long united; and I trust, that no force, but that of death, will be able to dissolve the ties that bind us. Wherever you are, the heart of your St. Julian is with you. Wherever you go, his best wishes accompany you. If in this letter, I have assumed an unbecoming austerity, your lordship will believe that it is the genuine effusion of anxiety and friendship, and will pardon me. It is not that I am more exempt from youthful folly than others. Born with a heart too susceptible for my peace, I am continually guilty of irregularities, that I immediately wish, but am unable to retract. But friendship, in however frail a bosom she resides, cannot permit her own follies to dispense her from guarding those she loves against committing their characters.

Letter II. *The Answer, Naples*

It is not necessary for me to assure my St. Julian, that I really felt those sentiments of filial sorrow which he ascribes to me. Never did any son sustain the loss of so indulgent a father. I have nothing by which to remember him, but acts of goodness and favour; not one hour of peevishness, not one instance of severity. Over all my youthful follies he cast the veil of kindness. All my imaginary wants received a prompt supply. Every promise of spirit and sensibility I was supposed to discover, was cherished with an anxious and unremitting care.

But such as he was to me, he was, in a less degree, to all his domestics, and all his dependents. You can scarcely imagine what a moving picture my palace—and must I call it mine? presented, upon my first arrival. The old steward, and the grey-headed lacqueys endeavoured to assume a look of complacency, but their recent grief appeared through their unpractised hypocrisy. "Health to our young master! Long life," cried they, with a broken and tremulous accent, "to the marquis of Pescara!" You will readily believe, that I made haste to free them from their restraint, and to assure them that the more they lamented my ever honoured father, the more they would endear themselves to me. Their looks thanked me, they clasped their hands with delight, and were silent.

The next morning as soon as I appeared, I perceived, as I passed along, a whole crowd of people plainly, but decently habited, in the hall. "Who are they?" said I. "I endeavoured to keep them off," said the old steward, "but they would not be hindered. They said they were sure that the young marquis would not bely the bounty of their old master, upon which they had so long depended for the conveniences and comfort of life." "And they shall not be kept off," said I; and advancing towards them, I endeavoured to convince them, that, however unworthy of his succession, I would endeavour to keep alive the spirit of their benefactor, and would leave them as little reason as possible to regret his loss. Oh! my St. Julian, who but must mourn so excellent a parent, so amiable, so incomparable a man!

But you talked to me of the flattering change in my situation. And shall I confess to you the truth? I find nothing in it that flatters, nothing that pleases me. I am told my revenues are more extensive. But what is that to me? They were before sufficiently ample, and I had but to wish at any time, in order to have them increased. But I am removed to the metropolis of the kingdom, to the city in which the court of my master resides, to the seat of elegance and pleasure. And yet, amidst all that it offers, I sigh for the rural haunts of Palermo, its pleasant hills, its fruitful vales, its simplicity and innocence. I sit down to a more sumptuous table, I am surrounded with a more numerous train of servants and dependents. But this comes not home to the heart of your Rinaldo. I look in vain through all the circle for an equal and a friend. It is true, when I repair to the levee of my prince, I behold many equals; but they are strangers to me, their faces are dressed in studied smiles, they appear all suppleness, complaisance and courtliness. A countenance, fraught with art, and that carries nothing of the soul in it, is uninteresting, and even forbidding in my eye.

Oh! how long shall I be separated from my St. Julian? I am almost angry with you for apologizing for your kind monitions and generous advice. If my breast glows with any noble sentiments, it is to your friendship I ascribe them. If I have avoided any of the rocks upon which heedless youth is apt to split, yours is all the honour, though mine be the advantage. More than one instance do I recollect with unfeigned gratitude, in which I had passed the threshold of error, in which I had already set my foot upon the edge of the precipice, and was reclaimed by your care. But what temptations could the simple Palermo offer, compared with the rich, the luxurious, and dissipated court of Naples?

And upon this scene I am cast without a friend. My honoured father indeed could not have been my companion, but his advice might have been useful to me in a thousand instances. My St. Julian is at a distance that my heart yearns to think of. Volcanos burn, and cataracts roar between us. With caution then will I endeavour to tread the giddy circle. Since I must, however unprepared, be my own master, I will endeavour to be collected, sober, and determined.

One expedient I have thought of, which I hope will be of service to me in the new scene upon which I am to enter. I will think how my friend would have acted, I will think that his eye is upon me, and I will make it a law to myself to confess all my faults and follies to you. As you have indulged me with your correspondence, you will allow me, I doubt not, in this liberty, and will favour me from time to time with those honest and unbiassed remarks upon my conduct, which it is consonant with your character to make.

Letter III. *The Same to the Same, Naples*

Since I wrote last to my dear count, I have been somewhat more in public, and have engaged a little in the societies of this city. You can scarcely imagine, my friend, how different the young gentlemen of Naples are from my former associates in the university. You would hardly suppose them of the same species. In Palermo, almost every man was cold, uncivil and inattentive; and seemed to have no other purpose in view than his own pleasure and accommodation. At Naples they are all good nature and friendship. Your wishes, before you have time to express them, are forestalled by the politeness of your companions, and each seems to prefer the convenience and happiness of another to his own.

With one young nobleman I am particularly pleased, and have chosen him from the rest as my most intimate associate. It is the marquis of San Severino. I shall endeavour by his friendship, as well as I can, to make up to myself the loss of my St. Julian, of whose society I am irremediably deprived. He does not indeed possess your abilities, he has not the same masculine understanding, and the same delightful imagination. But he supplies the place of these by an uninterrupted flow of good humour. All his passions seem to be disinterested, and it would do violence to every sentiment of his heart to be the author of a moment's pain to another.

Do not however imagine, my dear count, that my partiality to this amiable young nobleman renders me insensible to the defects of his character. Though his temper be all sweetness and gentleness, his views are not the most extensive. He considers much more the present ease of those about him, than their future happiness. He has not harshness, he has not firmness enough in his character, shall I call it? to refuse almost any request, however injudicious. He is therefore often led into improper situations, and his reputation frequently suffers in a manner that I am persuaded his heart does not deserve.

The person of San Severino is tall, elegant and graceful. His manners are singularly polite, and uniformly unembarassed. His voice is melodious, and he is eminently endowed by nature with the gift of eloquence. A person of your penetration will therefore readily imagine, that his society is courted by the fair. His propensity to the tender passion appears to have been very great, and he of consequence lays himself out in a gallantry that I can by no means approve.

Such, my dear count, appears to me to be the genuine and impartial character of my new friend. His good nature, his benevolence, and the pliableness of his disposition may surely be allowed to compensate for many defects. He can indeed by no means supply the place of my St. Julian. I cannot look up to him as a guide, and I believe I shall never be weak enough to ask his advice in the conduct of my life.

But do not imagine, my dear lord, that I shall be in much danger of being misled by him into criminal irregularities. I feel a firmness of resolution, and an ardour in the cause of virtue, that will, I trust, be abundantly sufficient to set these poor temptations at defiance. The world, before I entered it, appeared to me more formidable than it really is. I had filled it with the bugbears of a wild imagination. I had supposed that mankind made it their business to prey upon each other. Pardon me, my amiable friend, if I take the liberty to say, that my St. Julian was more suspicious

than he needed to have been, when he supposed that Naples could deprive me of the simplicity and innocence that grew up in my breast under his fostering hand at Palermo.

Letter IV. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Palermo*

I rejoice with you sincerely upon the pleasures you begin to find in the city of Naples. May all the days of my Rinaldo be happy, and all his paths be strewed with flowers! It would have been truly to be lamented, that melancholy should have preyed upon a person so young and so distinguished by fortune, or that you should have sighed amidst all the magnificence of Naples for the uncultivated plainness of Palermo. So long as I reside here, your absence will constantly make me feel an uneasy void, but it is my earnest wish that not a particle of that uneasiness may reach my friend.

Surely, my dear marquis, there are few correspondents so young as myself, and who address a personage so distinguished as you, that deal with so much honest simplicity, and devote so large a share of their communications to the forbidding seriousness of advice. But you have accepted the first effort of my friendship with generosity and candour, and you will, I doubt not, continue to behold my sincerity with a favourable eye.

Shall I venture to say that I am sorry you have commenced so intimate a connexion with the marquis of San Severino? Even the character of him with which you have favoured me, represents him to my wary sight as too agreeable not to be dangerous. But I have heard of him from others, a much more unpleasing account.

Alas, my friend, under how fair an outside are the most pernicious principles often concealed! Your honest heart would not suspect, that an appearance of politeness frequently covers the most rooted selfishness. The man who is all gentleness and compliance abroad, is often a tyrant among his domestics. The attendants upon a court put on their faces as they put on their clothes. And it is only after a very long acquaintance, after having observed them in their most unguarded hours, that you can make the smallest discovery of their real characters. Remember, my dear Rinaldo, the maxim of the incomparable philosopher of Geneva: “Man is not naturally amiable.” If the human character shews less pleasing and attractive in the obscurity of retreat, and among the unfinished personages of a college, believe me, the natives of a court are not a whit more disinterested, or have more of the reality of friendship. The true difference is, that the one wears a disguise, and the other appear as they are.

I do not mean however to impute all the faults I have mentioned to the marquis of San Severino. He is probably in the vulgar sense of the word good-natured. As you have already expressed it, he knows not how to refuse the requests, or contradict the present inclinations of those with whom he is connected. You say rightly that his gallantries are such as you can by no means approve. He is, if I am not greatly misinformed, in the utmost degree loose and debauched in his principles. The greater part of his time is spent in the haunts of intemperance, and under the roofs of the courtezan. I am afraid indeed he has gone farther than this, and that he has not scrupled to ruin innocence, and practise all the arts of seduction.

There is, my dear Rinaldo, a species of careless and youthful vice, that assumes the appearance of gentleness, and wears the garb of generosity. It even pretends to the name of virtue. But it casts down all the sacred barriers of religion. It laughs to scorn that suspicious vigilance, that trembling sensibility, that is the very characteristic of virtue. It represents those faults of which a man may be guilty without malignity, as innocent. And it endeavours to appropriate to itself all comprehensiveness of view, all true fortitude, and all liberal generosity.

Believe me, my friend, this is the enemy from which you have most to fear. It is not barefaced degeneracy that can seduce you. She must be introduced under a specious name, she must disguise herself like something that nature taught us to approve, and she must steal away the heart at unawares.

Letter V. *The Answer, Naples*

I can never sufficiently acknowledge the friendship that appears in every line of your obliging epistles. Even where your attachment is rouzed without a sufficient cause, it is only upon that account the more conspicuous.

I took the liberty, my dear count, immediately after receiving your last, to come to an explanation with San Severino. I mentioned to him the circumstances in your letter, as affairs that had been casually hinted to me. I told him, that I was persuaded he would excuse my freedom, as I was certain there was some misinformation, and I could not omit the opportunity of putting it in his power to justify himself. The marquis expressed the utmost astonishment, and vowed by all that was sacred, that he was innocent of the most important part of the charge. He told me, that it was his ill fortune, and he supposed he was not singular, to have enemies, that made it their business to misrepresent every circumstance of his conduct. He had been calumniated, cruelly calumniated, and could he discover the author of the aspersion, he would vindicate his honour with his sword. In fine, he explained the whole business in such a manner, as, though I could not entirely approve, yet evinced it to be by no means subversive of the general amiableness of his character. How deplorable is the situation in which we are placed, when even the generous and candid temper of my St. Julian, can be induced to think of a young nobleman in a light he does not deserve, and to impute to him basenesses from which his heart is free!

Soon after this interview I was introduced by my new friend into a society of a more mixed and equivocal kind than I had yet seen. Do not however impute to the marquis a surprize of which he was not guilty. He fairly stated to me of what persons the company was to be composed; and idle curiosity, and perhaps a particular gaiety of humour, under the influence of which I then was, induced me to accept of his invitation. If I did wrong, my dear count, blame me, and blame me without reserve. But if I may judge from the disposition in which I left this house, I only derived a new reinforcement to those resolutions, with which your conversation and example first inspired me.

It was in the evening, after the opera. The company was composed of several of our young nobility, and an equal number of female performers and other ladies of the same reputation. They almost immediately broke into *tête-à-têtes*, and of consequence one of the ladies addressed herself particularly to me. The vulgar familiarity of her manners, and the undisguised libidinousness of her conversation, I must own, disgusted me. Though I do not pretend to be devoid of the passions incident to my age, I was not at all pleased with the addresses of this female. As my companions were more active in the choice of an associate, it may perhaps be only candid to own, that she was not the most pleasing in the circle. The consciousness of the eyes of the whole party embarrassed me. And the aukward attempts I made to detach myself from my enamorata, as they proved unsuccessful, so they served to excite a general smile. San Severino however presently perceived my situation, and observing that I was by no means satisfied with my fortune, he with the utmost politeness broke away from the company, and attended me home.

How is it my dear friend that vice, whose property it should seem to be, to hesitate and to tremble, should be able to assume this air of confidence and composure? How is it that innocence, that surely should always triumph, is thus liable to all the confusion and perplexity of guilt? Why is virtue chosen, but because she is the parent of honour, because she enables a man to look in the face the aspersions of calumny, and to remain firm and undejected, amidst whatever fortune has of adverse and capricious? And are these advantages merely imaginary? Are composure and self-approbation common to the upright and the wicked? Or do those who are most hardened, really possess the superiority; and can conscious guilt bid defiance to shame, while rectitude is continually liable to hide her head in confusion?

Letter VI. *The Same to the Same, Naples*

You will recollect, my St. Julian, that I promised to confess to you my faults and my follies, and to take you for the umpire and director of my conduct. Perhaps I have done wrong. Perhaps, though unconscious of error, I am some how or other misled, and need your faithful hand to lead me back again to the road of integrity.

Why is it that I feel a reluctance to state to you the whole of my conduct? It is a sensation to which I have hitherto been a stranger, and in spite of me, it obliges me to mistrust myself. But I have discovered the reason. It is, that educated in solitude, and immured in the walls of a college, we had not learned to make allowances for the situations and the passions of mankind. You and I, my dear count, have long agreed, that the morality of priests is to be distrusted: that it is too often founded upon sinister views and private interest: that it has none of that comprehension of thought, that manly enthusiasm, which is characteristic of the genuine moral philosopher. What have penances and pilgrimages, what have beads and crosses, vows made in opposition to every instinct of nature, and an obedience subversive of the original independency of the human mind, to do with virtue?

Thus far, my amiable friend, you advanced, but yet I am afraid you have not advanced far enough. I am told there is an honesty and an honour, that preserves a man's character free from impeachment, which is perfectly separate from that sublime goodness that you and I have always admired. But to this sentiment I am by no means reconciled. To speak more immediately to the subject I intended.

What can be more justifiable, or reasonable, than a conformity to the original propensities of our nature? It is true, these propensities may by an undue cultivation be so much increased, as to be productive of the most extensive mischief. The man who, for the sake of indulging his corporeal appetites, neglects every valuable pursuit, and every important avocation, cannot be too warmly censured. But it is no less true, that the passion of the sexes for each other, exists in the most innocent and uncorrupted heart. Can it then be reasonable to condemn such a moderate indulgence of this passion, as interrupts no employment, and impedes no pursuit? This indulgence, in the present civilized state of society, requires no infringement of order, no depravation of character. The legislators of every country, whose wisdom may surely be considered as somewhat greater than that of its priests, have judiciously overlooked this imagined irregularity, and amongst all the penalties which they have ambitiously, and too often without either sentiment or humanity, heaped together against the offences of society, have suffered this to pass unnoticed. Why should we be more harsh and rigorous than they? It is inconsistent with all logic and all candour, to argue against the use of any thing from its abuse. Of what mischief can the moderate gratification of this appetite be the source? It does not indeed romantically seek to reclaim a class of women, whom every sober man acknowledges to be irreclaimable. But with that benevolence that is congenial to a comprehensive mind, it pities them with all their errors, and it contributes to preserve them from misery, distress, and famine.

From what I have now said, I believe you will have already suspected of what nature are those particulars in my conduct, which I set out with an intention of confessing. Whatever may be my merit or demerit in this instance, I will not hide from you that the marquis of San Severino was the original cause of what I have done. You are already sufficiently acquainted with the freedom of his sentiments upon this subject. He is a professed devotee of the sex, and he suffers this passion to engross a much larger share of his time than I can by any means approve. Incited by his exhortations, I have in some measure imitated his conduct, at the same time that I have endeavoured not to fall into the same excesses.

But I believe that I shall treat you more regularly in the manner of a confessor, and render you more master of the subject, by relating to you the steps by which I have been led to act and to justify, that which I formerly used to condemn. I have already told you, how aukward I felt my situation in the first society of the gayer kind, into which my friend introduced me. Though he politely freed me from my present embarassment, he could not help rallying me upon the rustic appearance I made. He apologized for the ill fortune I had experienced, and promised to introduce me to a mistress beautiful as the day, and sprightly and ingenious as Sappho herself.

What could I do? I was unwilling to break with the most amiable companion I had found in the city of Naples. I was staggered with his reasonings and his eloquence. Shall I acknowledge the truth? I was mortified at the singular and uncouth figure I had made. I felt myself actuated with a social sympathy, that made me wish to resemble those of my own rank and age, in any thing that was not seriously criminal. I was involuntarily incited by the warm description San Severino gave me of the beauty and attractions of the lady he recommended. Must we not confess, my St. Julian, setting the nature of the business quite out of the question, that there was something highly disinterested in the behaviour of the marquis upon this occasion? He left his companions and his pleasures, to accommodate himself to my weakness. He managed his own character so little, as to undertake to recommend to me a female friend. And he seems to have neglected the interest of his own pleasures entirely, in order to introduce me to a woman, inferior in accomplishments to none of her sex.

Letter VII. *The Same to the Same, Naples*

Could I ever have imagined, my dear count, that in so short a time the correspondence between us would have been so much neglected? I have yet received no answer to my last letter, upon a subject particularly interesting, and in which I had some reason to fear your disapprobation. My St. Julian lives in the obscurity of retreat, and in the solitude most favourable to literary pursuits. What avocations can have called off his attention from the interests of his friend? May I be permitted however to draw one conclusion from your silence, that you do not consider my situation as critical and alarming? That although you join the prudent severity of a monitor with the candid partiality of a friend, you yet view my faults in a venial light, and are disposed to draw over them the veil of indulgence?

I might perhaps deduce a fairer apology for the silence on my part from my new situation, the avocations incident to my rank and fortune, and the pleasures that abound in a city and a court so celebrated as that of Naples. But I will not attempt an apology. The novelty of these circumstances have diverted my attention more than they ought from the companion of my studies and the friend of my youth, but I trust I shall never forget him. I have met with companions more gay, and consorts more obsequious, but I have never found a character so worthy, and a friend so sincere.

Since I last addressed my St. Julian, I have been engaged in various scenes both of a pleasurable and a serious kind. I think I am guilty of no undue partiality to my own conduct when I assure you, that I have embarked in the lighter pursuits of associates of my own age without having at any time forgotten what was due to the lustre of my ancestry, and the favour of my sovereign. I have not injured my reputation. I have mingled business and pleasure, so as not to sacrifice that which occupies the first place, to that which holds only the second.

I trust that my St. Julian knows me too well, to suppose that I would separate philosophy and practice, reason and action from each other. It was by the instructions of my friend, that I learned to rise superior to the power of prejudice, to reject no truth because it was novel, to refuse my ear to no arguments because they were not backed by pompous and venerable names. In pursuance of this system, I have ventured in my last to suggest some reasons in favour of a moderate indulgence of youthful pleasures. Perhaps however my dear count will think, that I am going beyond what even these reasons would authorize in the instance I am about to relate.

You are not probably to be informed that there are a certain kind of necessary people, dependents upon such young noblemen as San Severino and his friends, upon whom the world has bestowed the denomination of pimps. One of these gentlemen seemed of late to feel a particular partiality to myself. He endeavoured by several little instances of officiousness to become useful to me. At length he told me of a young person extremely beautiful and innocent, whose first favours he believed he could engage to procure in my behalf.

At that idea I started. “And do you think, my good friend,” said I, “because you are acquainted with my having indulged to some of those pleasures inseparable from my age, that I would presume to ruin innocence, and be the means of bringing upon a young person so much remorse and

such an unhappy way of life, as must be the inevitable consequence of a step of this kind?" "My lord," replied the parasite, "I do not pretend to be any great casuist in these matters. His honour of San Severino does I know seldom give way to scruples of this kind. But in the instance I have mentioned there are several things to be said. The mother of the lady, who formerly moved in a higher sphere than she does at present, never maintained a very formidable character. This daughter is the fruit of her indiscriminate amours, and though I am perfectly satisfied she has not yet been blown upon by the breath of a mortal, her education has been such as to prepare her to follow the venerable example of her mother. Your lordship therefore sees that in this case, you will wrong no parent, and seduce no child, that you will merely gather an harvest already ripe, and which will be infallibly reaped by the first comer."

Though the reasons of my convenient gentleman made me hesitate, they by no means determined me to the execution of the plan he proposed. He immediately perceived the situation of my mind, and hinted that he might at least have the honour of placing me in a certain church, that afternoon at vespers, where I might have an opportunity of seeing, and perhaps conversing a little with the lady. To this scheme I assented.

She appeared not more than sixteen years of age. Her person was small, but her form was delicate. Her auburn tresses hung about her neck in great profusion. Her eyes sparkled with vivacity, and even with intelligence. Her dress was elegant and graceful, but not gaudy. It was impossible that such a figure should not have had some tendency to captivate me. Having contemplated her sufficiently at a distance, I approached nearer.

The little gipsey turned up her eyes askance, and endeavoured to take a sly survey of me as I advanced. I accosted her. Her behaviour was full of that charming hesitation which is uniformly the offspring of youth and inexperience. She received me with a pretty complaisance, but at the same time blushed and appeared fluttered she knew not why. I involuntarily advanced my hand towards her, and she gave me hers with a kind of unreflecting frankness. There was a good sense and a simplicity united in her appearance, and the few words she uttered, that pleased and even affected me.

Such, my dear friend, is the present state of my amour. I confess I have frequently considered seduction in an odious light. But here I think few or none of the objections against it have place. The mellow fruit is ready to drop from the tree, and seems to solicit some friendly hand to gather it.

Letter VIII. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Palermo*

My dear lord,

Avocations of no agreeable kind, and with which it probably will not be long before you are sufficiently acquainted, have of late entirely engrossed me. You will readily believe, that they were concerns of no small importance, that hindered me from a proper acknowledgment and attention to the communications of my friend. But I will dismiss my own affairs for the present, and make a few of the observations to which you invite me upon the contents of your letters.

Alas! my Rinaldo is so entirely changed since we used to wander together among the groves and vallies, and along the banks of that stream which I now see from my window, that I scarcely know him for the same. Where is that simplicity, where that undisguised attachment to virtue and integrity, where that unaccommodating system of moral truth, that used to live in the bosom of my friend? All the lines of his character seem to suffer an incessant decay. Shall I fear that the time is hastening when that sublime and generous spirit shall no longer be distinguished from the San Severinos, the men of gaiety and pleasure of the age? And can I look back upon this alteration, and apprehensions thus excited, and say, "all this has taken place in six poor months?"

Do not imagine, my dear lord, that I am that severe monitor, that rigid censor, that would give up his friend for every fault, that knows not how to make any allowance for the heedless levity of youth. I can readily suppose a man with the purest heart and most untainted principles, drawn aside into temporary error. Occasion, opportunity, example, an accidental dissipation of mind are inlets to vice, against which perhaps it is not in humanity to be always guarded.

Confidence, my dear friend, unsuspicious confidence, is the first source of error. In favour of the presumptuous man, who wantonly incurs danger and braves temptation, heaven will not interest itself. There can be no mistake more destitute of foundation, than that which supposes man exempt from frailty.

Had not my Rinaldo, trusting too much to his own strength, laid himself open to dangerous associates, he would now have contemplated those actions he has been taught to excuse, with disgust and horror. His own heart would never have taught him that commodious morality he has been induced to patronize. But he feared them not. He felt, as he assured me, that firmness of resolution, and ardour of virtue, that might set these temptations at defiance. Be ingenuous, my friend. Look back, and acknowledge your mistake. Look back, and acknowledge, that to the purest and most blameless mind indiscriminate communications are dangerous.

I had much rather my dear marquis had once deviated from that line of conduct he had marked out to himself, than that he had undertaken to defend the deviation, and exerted himself to unlearn principles that did him honour. You profess to believe that indulgences of this sort are unavoidable, and the temptations to them irresistible. And is man then reduced to a par with the brutes? Is there a single passion of the soul, that does not then cease to be blameless, when it is

no longer directed and restrained by the dictates of reason? A thousand considerations of health, of interest, of character, respecting ourselves; and of benefit and inconvenience to society, will be taken into the estimate by the wise and the good man.

But these considerations are superseded by that which cannot be counteracted. And does not the reciprocal power of motives depend upon the strength and vivacity with which they are exhibited to the mind? The presence of a superior would at any time restrain us from an unbecoming action. The sense of a decided interest, the apprehension of a certain, and very considerable detriment, would deprive the most flattering temptation of all its blandishments. And are not this sense and this apprehension in a great degree in the power of every man?

Tell me, my friend; Shall that action which in a woman is the utter extinction of all honour, be in a man entirely faultless and innocent? But the world is not quite so unjust. Such a conduct even in our sex tends to the diminution of character, is considered in the circle of the venerable and the virtuous as a subject of shame and concealment, and if persisted in, causes a person universally to be considered, as alike unfit for every arduous pursuit, and every sublime undertaking.

Is it possible indeed, that the society of persons in the lowest state of profligacy, can be desirable for a man of family, for one who pretends to honour and integrity? Is it possible that they should not have some tendency to pollute his ideas, to debase his sentiments, and to reduce him to the same rank with themselves? If the women you have described irreclaimable, let it at least be remembered that your conduct tends to shut up against them the door of reformation and return, and forces upon them a mode of subsistence which they might not voluntarily have chosen.

Thus much for your first letter. Your second calls me to a subject of greater seriousness and magnitude. My Rinaldo makes hasty strides indeed! Scarcely embarked in licentious and libertine principles, he seems to look forward to the last consummation of the debauchee. Seduction, my dear lord, is an action that will yield in horror to no crime that ever sprang up in the degenerate breast.

But it seems, the action you propose to yourself is divested of some of the aggravations of seduction. I will acknowledge it. Had my friend received this crime into his bosom in all its deformity, dear as he is to me, I would have thrown him from my heart with detestation. Yes, I am firmly persuaded, that the man who perpetrates it, however specious he may appear, was never conscious to one generous sentiment, never knew the meaning of rectitude and integrity, but was at all times wrapped up in that narrow selfishness, that torpid insensibility, that would not disgrace a fiend.

He undermines innocence surrounded with all her guard of ingenuous feelings and virtuous principles. He forces from her station a defenceless woman, who, without his malignant interposition, might have filled it with honour and happiness. He heaps up disgrace and misery upon a family that never gave him provocation, and perhaps brings down the grey hairs of the heads of it to the grave with calamity.

Of all hypocrites this man is the most consummate and the most odious. He dresses his countenance in smiles, while his invention teems with havoc and ruin. He pretends the sincerest good will without feeling one sentiment of disinterested and honest affection. He feigns the warmest attachment that he may the more securely destroy.

This, my friend, is not the crime of an instant, an action into which he is hurried by unexpected temptation, and the momentary violence of passion. He goes about it with deliberation. He lays his plans with all the subtlety of a Machiavel, and all the flagitiousness of a Borgia. He executes them gradually from day to day, and from week to week. And during all this time he dwells upon

the luxurious idea, he riots in the misery he hopes to create. He will tell you he loves. Yes, he loves, as the hawk loves the harmless dove, as the tyger loves the trembling kid. And is this the man in whose favour I should ever have been weak enough to entertain a partiality? I would tear him from my bosom like an adder. I would crush him like a serpent.

But your case has not the same aggravations. Here is no father who prizes the honour of his family more than life, and whose heart is bound up in the virtue of his only child. Here is no mother a stranger to disgrace, and who with unremitted vigilance had fought to guard every avenue to the destruction of her daughter. Even the victim herself has never learned the beauty of virgin purity, and does not know the value of that she is about to lose.

And yet, my Rinaldo, after all these deductions, there is something in the story of this uninstructed little innocent, even as stated by him who is ready to destroy her, that greatly interests my wishes in her favour. She does not know it seems all the calamity of the fate that is impending over her. She is blindfolded for destruction. She plays with her ruin, and views with a thoughtless and a partial eye the murderer of her virtue and her happiness.

And, oh, poor helpless nightingale, thought I, How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!

But if you do not accept the proposal that is made you, it is but too probable what her fate will be, and how soon the event will take place. And is this an excuse for my friend to offer? Thousands are the iniquities that are now upon the verge of action. An imagination the most fertile in horror can scarcely conceive the crimes that will probably be committed. And shall I therefore with malignant industry forestal the villain in all his black designs? You do not mean it.

Permit me yet to suggest one motive more. A connection like that you have proposed to yourself, might probably make you a father. Of all the charities incident to the human character, those of a parent are abundantly the most exquisite and venerable. And can a man of the smallest sensibility think with calmness, of bringing children into the world to be the heirs of shame? When he gives them life he entails upon them dishonour. The father that should look upon them with joy, as a benefit conferred upon society, and the support of his declining age, regards them with coldness and alienation. The mother who should consider them as her boast and her honour, cannot behold them without opening anew all the sluices of remorse, cannot own them without a blush.

This, my Rinaldo, is what you might do, and in doing it you would perpetrate an action that would occasion to an ingenuous mind an eternal regret. But there is another thing also that you might do, and that a mind, indefatigable in the pursuit of rectitude, as was once that of my friend, would not need to have suggested to it by another. Instead of treasuring up remorse, instead of preparing for an innocent and unsuspecting victim a life of misery and shame, you might redeem her from impending destruction. You might obtain for her an honest and industrious partner, and enable her to acquire the character of a virtuous matron, and a respectable mother of a family.

Reflect for a moment, my dear marquis, on this proposal, which I hope is yet in your power. Think you, that conscious rectitude, that the exultation of your heart when you recollect the temptation you have escaped, and the noble turn you have given it, will not infinitely overbalance the sordid and fleeting pleasure you are able to attain? Imagine to yourself that you see her offspring growing up under the care of a blameless mother, and coming forward to thank you for the benefit you bestowed upon them before they had a being. Is not this an object over which a heart susceptible to one manly feeling may reasonably triumph?

Letter IX. *The Count de St. Julian to Signor Hippolito Borelli, Messina*

You, my dear Hippolito, were the only one of my fellow-collegians, to whom I communicated all the circumstances of that unfortunate situation which obliged me to take a final leave of the university. The death of a father, though not endeared by the highest reciprocations of mutual kindness, must always make some impressions upon a susceptible mind. The wound was scarcely healed that had been made by the loss of a mother, a fond mother, who by her assiduous attentions had supplied every want, and filled up every neglect, to which I might otherwise have been exposed.

When I quitted Palermo, I resolved before I determined upon any thing, to proceed to the residence of my family at Leontini. My reception was, as I expected, cold and formal. My brother related to me the circumstances of the death of my father, over which he affected to shed tears. He then produced his testament for my inspection, pretended to blame me that though I were the elder, I had so little ingratiated myself in his favour, and added, that he could not think of being guilty of so undutiful a conduct, as to contravene the last dispositions of his father. If however he could be of any use to me in my future plans of life, he would exert himself to serve me.

The next morning I quitted Leontini. My reflexions upon the present posture of my affairs, could not but be melancholy. I was become as it were a native of the world, discarded from every family, cut off from every country. Born to a respectable rank and a splendid fortune, I was precluded in a moment from expectations so reasonable, and an inheritance which I might have hoped at this time to reap. Many there are, I doubt not, who have no faculties by which to comprehend the extent of this misfortune. The loss of possessions sufficiently ample, and of the power and dignity annexed to his character, who is the supporter of an ancient name, they would confess was to be regretted. But I had many resources left. My brother would probably have received me into his family, and I might have been preserved from the sensations of exigency and want. And could I think of being obliged for this to a brother, who had always beheld me with aversion, who was not of a character to render the benefits he conferred insensible to the receiver, and who, it was scarcely to be supposed, had not made use of sinister and ungenerous arts to deprive me of my inheritance? But the houses of the great were still open. My character was untainted, my education had been such as to enable me to be useful in a thousand ways. Ah, my Hippolito, the great are not always possessed of the most capacious minds. There are innumerable little slights and offences that shrink from description, but which are sufficient to keep alive the most mortifying sense of dependency, and to make a man of sensibility, and proud honour constantly unhappy. And must I, who had hoped to be the ornament and boast of my country, thus become a burden to my acquaintance, and a burden to myself?

Such were the melancholy reflexions in which I was engaged. I had left Leontini urged by the sentiments of miscarriage and resentment. I fled from the formality of condolence, and the useless parade of friendship. I would willingly have hid myself from every face I had hitherto

known. I would willingly have retired to a desart. My thoughts were all in arms. I revolved a thousand vigorous resolutions without fixing upon one.

I had now proceeded somewhat more than two leagues upon my journey, and had gained the centre of that vast and intricate forest which you remember to be situated at no great distance from Leontini. In this place there advanced upon me in a moment four of those bravoes, for which this place is particularly infamous, and who are noted for their daring and hazardous atchievements. Myself and my servant defended ourselves against them for some time. One of them was wounded in the beginning of the encounter. But it was impossible that we could have resisted long. My servant was hurt in several places, and I had received a wound in my arm. In this critical moment a cavalier, accompanied by several attendants, and who appeared to be armed, advanced at no great distance. The villains immediately took up their disabled companion, and retired with precipitation into the thickest part of the wood. My deliverer now ordered some of his attendants to pursue them, while himself with one servant remained to assist us.

Imagine, my dear friend, what were my emotions, when I discovered in my preserver, the marquis of Pescara! I recollected in a moment all our former intimacy, and in what manner it had so lately been broken off. Little did I think that I should almost ever have seen him again. Much less did I think that I should ever have owed him the most important obligations.

The expression of the countenance of both of us upon this sudden recognition was complicated. Amidst all the surprize and gratitude, that it was impossible not to testify, my eyes I am convinced had something in them of the reproach of violated friendship. I thought I could trace, and by what followed I could not be mistaken, in the air of my Rinaldo, a confession of wrong, united with a kind of triumph, that he had been enabled so unexpectedly and completely to regain that moral equilibrium which he had before lost.

It was not long before his servants returned from an unsuccessful pursuit, and we set forward for a village about a quarter of a league further upon the road from Leontini. It was there that I learned from my friend the occasion and subject of his journey. He had heard at Naples a confused report of the death of my father, and the unexpected succession of my brother. The idea of this misfortune involuntarily afflicted him. At the thought of my distress all his tenderness revived. “And was it,” it was thus that he described the progress of his reflections, “in the moment of so unexpected a blow, that my St. Julian neglected the circumstances of his own situation, to write to me that letter, the freedom of whose remonstrances, and the earnestness of whose exhortations so greatly offended me? How much does this consideration enhance the purity and disinterestedness of his friendship? And is it possible that I should have taken umbrage at that which was prompted only by tenderness and attachment? And did I ever speak of his interference in those harsh and reproachful terms which I so well knew would be conveyed to him again? Could I have been so blinded by groundless resentment, as to have painted him in all the colours of an inflexible dictator, and a presumptuous censor? Could I have imputed his conduct to motives of pride, affectation, and arrogance? How happy had I been, had his advice arrived sooner, and been more regarded?”

But it was not with self-blame and reproach only, that the recovery of my Rinaldo was contented. The idea of the situation of his friend incessantly haunted him. No pursuit, no avocation, could withdraw his attention, or banish the recollection from his mind. He determined to quit Naples in search of me. He left all those engagements, and all those pleasures of which he had of late been so much enamoured, and crossing the sea he came into Sicily. Learning that I had quitted Palermo, he resolved to pursue his search of me to Leontini. He had fixed his determi-

nation not to quit the generous business upon which he had entered, without discovering me in my remotest retreat, atoning for the groundless resentment he had harboured, and contributing every thing in his power to repair the injustice I had suffered from those of my own family. And in pursuance of these ideas he has made me the most disinterested and liberal proposals of friendship and assistance.

How is it, my Hippolito, that the same man shall be alternately governed by the meanest and most exalted motives: that he shall now appear an essence celestial and divine, and now debase himself by a conduct the most indefensible and unworthy? But such I am afraid is man. Mixed in all his qualities, and inconsistent in all his purposes. The most virtuous and most venerable of us all are too often guilty of things weak, sordid, and disgraceful. And it is to be hoped on the other hand, that there are few so base and degenerate, as not sometimes to perform actions of the most undoubted utility, and to feel sentiments dignified and benevolent. It is in vain that the philosopher fits in his airy eminence, and seeks to reduce the shapeless mass into form, and endeavours to lay down rules for so variable and inconstant a system. Nature mocks his efforts, and the pertinacity of events belies his imaginary hypotheses.

But I am guilty of injustice to my friend. An action which he has so sincerely regretted, and so greatly atoned, ought not to be considered with so much severity. I trust I am not misled by the personal interest I may appear to have in his present conduct. I think I should contemplate it with the same admiration, and allow it the same weight, if its benevolence entirely regarded another. Indeed I am still in the greatest uncertainty how to determine. I am still inclined to prefer my former plan, of entering resolutely upon new scenes and new pursuits, to that of taking up any durable residence in the palace of my friend. There is something misbecoming a man in the bloom of youth, and labouring under no natural disadvantages and infirmities, in the subsisting in any manner upon the bounty of another. The pride of my heart, a pride that I do not seek to extinguish, leads me to prefer an honest independence, in however mean a station, to the most splendid, and the most silken bondage.

Why should not he that is born a nobleman be also born a man? A man is a character superior to all those that civilization has invented. To be a man is the profession of a citizen of the world. A man of rank is a poor shivering, exotic plant, that cannot subsist out of his native soil. If the imaginary barriers of society were thrown down, if we were reduced back again to a state of nature, the nobleman would appear a shiftless and a helpless being; he only who knew how to be a man would show like the creature of God, a being sent into the world with the capacities of subsistence and enjoyment. The nobleman, an artificial and fantastic creation, would then lose all that homage in which he plumed himself, he would be seen without disguise, and be despised by all.

Oh, my Hippolito, in spite of all this parade of firmness and resolution, I cannot quit my native country but with the sincerest regret. I had one tie, why do I mention it? Never did I commit this confidence to any mortal. It was the dream of a poetical imagination. It was a vision drawn in the fantastic and airy colours that flow from the pencil of youth. Fondly I once entertained a hope. I lived upon it. But it is vanished for ever.

I shall go from hence with the marquis of Pescara to Naples. I shall there probably make a residence of several weeks. In that time I shall have fixed my plans, and immediately after shall enter upon the execution of them.

Letter X. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Cosenza*

My dear lord,

Every thing that has happened to me for some time past, appears so fortunate and extraordinary that I can scarcely persuade myself that it is not a dream. Is it possible that I should not have been born to uninterrupted misfortune? The outcast of my father almost as soon as I had a being, I was never sensible to the solace of paternal kindness, I could never open my heart, and pour forth all my thoughts into the bosom of him to whom I owed my existence. Why was I created with a mind so delicate as to be susceptible of a thousand feelings, and ruffled by a thousand crosses, that glide unheeded over the breasts of the majority of mankind? What filial duty did I neglect, what instance of obedience did I ever refuse, that should have made me be considered with a regard so rigorous and austere? And was it not punishment enough to be debarred of all the solace I might have hoped to derive from the cares of a guardian and a protector? How did I deserve to be deprived of that patrimony which was my natural claim, to be sent forth, after having formed so reasonable expectancies, after having received an education suitable to my rank, unassisted and unprovided, upon the theatre of the world?

I had pictured that world to myself as cold, selfish, and unfeeling. I expected to find the countenances of my fellow-creatures around me smiling and unconcerned, whatever were my struggles, and whatever were my disappointments. Philosophy had deprived me of those gay and romantic prospects, which often fill the bosom of youth. A temper too sensible and fastidious had taught me not to look for any great degree of sympathy and disinterested ardour among the bulk of my fellow-creatures.

I have now found that avoiding one extreme I encountered the other. As most men, induced by their self-importance, expect that their feelings should interest, and their situations arrest the attention of those that surround them; so I having detected their error counted upon less benevolence and looked for less friendship than I have found. My Rinaldo demanded to be pardoned for having neglected my advice, and misconstrued the motives of it. I had not less reason to intreat his forgiveness in my turn, for having weighed his character with so little detail, and so hastily decided to his disadvantage.

My friend will not suspect me of interested flattery, when I say, that I sincerely rejoice in a conduct so honourable to human nature as his has been respecting me. He had no motive of vanity, for who was there that interested himself in the fate of so obscure an individual; who in all the polite circles and *conversazioni* of Naples, would give him credit for his friendship, to a person so unlike themselves? He superseded all the feelings of resentment, he counted no distance, he passed over mountains and seas in pursuit of his exalted design.

But my Rinaldo, generous as he is, is not the only protector that fortune has raised to the forlorn and deserted St. Julian. You are acquainted with the liberal and friendly invitation I received from the duke of Benevento at Messina. His reception was still more cordial and soothing. He

embraced me with warmth, and even wept over me. He could not refrain from imprecations upon the memory of my father, and he declared with energy, that the son of Leonora della Colonna should never suffer from the arbitrary and capricious tyranny of a Sicilian count. He assured me in the strongest terms that his whole fortune was at my disposal. Then telling me that his dear and only child had been impatient for my arrival, he took me by the hand, and led me to the amiable Matilda.

A change like this could not but be in the highest degree consolatory and grateful to my wounded heart. The balm of friendship and affection is at all times sweet and refreshing. To be freed at once from the prospect of banishment, and the dread of dependence, to be received with unbounded friendship and overflowing generosity by a relation of my mother, and one who places the pride of his family in supporting and distinguishing me, was an alteration in my circumstances which I could not have hoped. I am not insensible to kindness. My heart is not shut against sensations of pleasure. My spirits were exhilarated; my hours passed in those little gratifications and compliances, by which I might best manifest my attachment to my benefactor; and I had free recourse to the society of his lovely daughter, whose conversation animated with guileless sallies of wit, and graced with the most engaging modesty, afforded me an entertainment, sweet to my breast, and congenial to my temper.

But alas, my dear marquis, it is still true what I have often observed, that I was not born for happiness. In the midst of a scene from which it might best be suspected to spring, I am uneasy. My heart is corroded with anguish, and I have a secret grief, that palls and discolours every enjoyment, and that, by being carefully shut up in my own bosom, is so much the more afflicting and irksome. Yes, my Rinaldo, this it was that gave a sting to the thought of removing to a foreign country. This was that source of disquiet, which has constantly given me an air of pensiveness and melancholy. In no intercourse of familiarity, in no hour of unrestricted friendship, was it ever disclosed. It is not, my friend, the dream of speculative philosophy, it has been verified in innumerable facts, it is the subject of the sober experience of every man, that communication and confidence alleviate every uneasiness. But ah, if it were before disquiet and melancholy, now it burns, it rages, I am no longer master of myself.

You remember, my dear Rinaldo, that once in the course of my residence at the university, I paid a visit to the duke of Benevento at Cosenza. It was then that I first saw the amiable Matilda. She appeared to me the most charming of her sex. Her cheeks had the freshness of the peach, and her lips were roses. Her neck was alabaster, and her eyes sparkled with animation, chastened with the most unrivalled gentleness and delicacy. Her stature, her forehead, her mouth—but ah, impious wretch, how canst thou pretend to trace her from charm to charm! Who can dissect unbounded excellence? Who can coolly and deliberately gaze upon the brightness of the meridian sun? I will say in one word, that her whole figure was enchanting, that all her gestures were dignity, and every motion was grace.

Young and unexperienced I drank without suspicion of the poison of love. I gazed upon her with extacy. I hung upon every accent of her voice. In her society I appeared mute and absent. But it was not the silence of an uninterested person: it was not the distraction of philosophic thought. I was entirely engaged, my mind was full of the contemplations of her excellence even to bursting. I felt no vacancy, I was conscious to no want, I was full of contentment and happiness.

As soon however as she withdrew, I felt myself melancholy and dejected. I fled from company. I sought the most impervious solitude. I wasted the live-long morn in the depth of umbrageous woods, amidst hills and meads, where I could perceive no trace of a human footstep. I longed to

be alone with the object of my admiration. I thought I had much to say to her, but I knew not what. I had no plan, my very wishes were not reduced into a system. It was only, that full of a new and unexperienced passion, it sought incessantly to break forth. It urged me to disburden my labouring heart.

Once I remember I obtained the opportunity I had so long wished. It came upon me unexpectedly, and I was overwhelmed by it. My limbs trembled, my eyes lost their wonted faculty. The objects before them swam along indistinctly. I essayed to speak, my very tongue refused its office. I felt that I perspired at every pore. I rose to retire, I sat down again irresolute and confounded.

Matilda perceived my disorder and coming towards me, enquired with a tender and anxious voice, whether I felt myself ill. The plaintive and interesting tone in which she delivered herself completed my confusion. She rang the bell for assistance, and the scene was concluded. When I returned to Palermo, I imagined that by being removed from the cause of my passion, I should insensibly lose the passion itself. Rinaldo, you know that I am not of that weak and effeminate temper to throw the reins upon the neck of desire, to permit her a clear and undisputed reign. I summoned all my reason and all my firmness to my aid. I considered the superiority of her to whom my affections were attached, in rank, in expectations, in fortune. I felt that my passion could not naturally be crowned with success. "And shall I be the poor and feeble slave of love? Animated as I am with ambition, aspiring to the greatest heights of knowledge and distinction, shall I degenerate into an amorous and languishing boy; shall I wilfully prepare for myself a long vista of disappointment? Shall I by one froward and unreasonable desire, stain all my future prospects, and discolour all those sources of enjoyment, that fate may have reserved for me?" Alas, little did I then apprehend that loss of fortune that was about to place me still more below the object of my wishes!

But my efforts were vain. I turned my attention indeed to a variety of pursuits. I imagined that the flame which had sprung up at Cosenza was entirely extinguished. I seemed to retain from it nothing but a kind of soft melancholy and a sober cast of thought, that made me neither less contented with myself, nor less agreeable to those whose partiality I was desirous to engage.

But I no sooner learned that reverse of fortune which disclosed itself upon the death of my father, than I felt how much I had been deceived. I had only drawn a slight cover over the embers of passion, and the fire now broke out with twice its former violence. I had nourished it unknown to myself with the distant ray of hope, I had still cheated my imagination with an uncertain prospect of success. When every prospect vanished, when all hopes were at an end, it burst every barrier, it would no longer be concealed. My temper was in the utmost degree unsuitable to a state of dependence, but it was this thought that made it additionally harsh and dreadful to my mind. I loved my country with the sincerest affection, but it was this that made banishment worse than ten thousand deaths. The world appeared to me a frightful solitude, with not one object that could interest all my attention, and fill up all the wishes of my heart.

From these apprehensions, and this dejection, I have been unexpectedly delivered. But, oh, my dear marquis, what is the exchange I have made? I reside under the same roof with the adorable Matilda. I see every day, I converse without restraint with her, whom I can never hope to call my own. Can I thus go on to cherish a passion, that can make me no promises, that can suggest to me no hopes? Can I expect always to conceal this passion from the most penetrating eyes? How do I know that I am not at this moment discovered, that the next will not lay my heart naked in the sight of the most amiable of women?

Cosenza! thou shalt not long be my abode. I will not live for ever in unavailing struggles. Concealment shall not always be the business of the simplest and most undisguised of all dispositions. I will not watch with momentary anxiety, I will not tremble with distracting apprehensions. Matilda, thy honest and unsuspecting heart by me shall never be led astray. If the fond wishes of a father are reserved for cruel disappointment, I will not be the instrument. My secret shall lie for ever buried in this faithful breast. It shall die with me. I will fly to some distant land. I will retire to some country desolated by ever burning suns, or buried beneath eternal snows. There I can love at liberty. There I can breathe my sighs without one tell-tale wind to carry them to the ears, with them to disturb the peace of those whom beyond all mankind I venerate and adore. I may be miserable, I may be given up to ever-during despair. But my patron and his spotless daughter shall be happy.

Alas, this is but the paroxysm of a lover's rage. I have no resolution, I am lost in perplexity. I have essayed in vain, I cannot summon together my scattered thoughts. Oh, my friend, never did I stand so much in need of a friend as now. Advise me, instruct me. To the honesty of your advice, and the sincerity of your friendship I can confide. Tell me but what to do, and though you send me to the most distant parts of the globe, I will not hesitate.

Letter XI. *The Same to the Same, Cosenza*

My most dear lord,

Expect me in ten days from the date of this at your palace at Naples. My mind is now become more quiet and serene than when I last wrote to you. I have considered of the whole subject of that letter with perfect deliberation. And I have now come to an unchangeable resolution.

It is this which has restored a comparative tranquility to my thoughts. Yes, my friend, there is a triumph in fortitude, an exultation in heroical resolve, which for a moment at least, sets a man above the most abject and distressing circumstances. Since I have felt my own dignity and strength, the tumultuous hurry of my mind is stilled. I look upon the objects around me with a calm and manly despair. I have not yet disclosed my intentions to the duke, and I may perhaps find some difficulty in inducing him to acquiesce in them. But I will never change them.

You will perceive from what I have said, that my design in coming to Naples is to prepare for a voyage. I do not doubt of the friendship and generous assistance of the duke of Benevento. I shall therefore enter upon my new scheme of life with a more digested plan, and better prospects.—But why do I talk of prospects!

I have attempted, and with a degree of success, to dissipate my mind within a few days past, by superintending the alterations about which you spoke to me, in your gardens at this place. You will readily perceive how unavoidably I am called off from an employment, which derives a new pleasure from the sentiments of friendship it is calculated to awaken, by the perverse and unfortunate events of my life.

Letter XII. *The Same to the Same, Cosenza*

Why is it, my dear marquis, that the history of my life is so party-coloured and extraordinary, that I am unable to foresee at the smallest distance what is the destiny reserved for me? Happiness and misery, success and disappointment so take their turns, that in the one I have not time for despair, and in the other I dare not permit to my heart a sincere and unmingled joy.

The day after I dispatched my last letter the duke of Benevento, whose age is so much advanced, was seized with a slight paralytic stroke. He was for a short time deprived of all sensation. The trouble of his family, every individual of which regards him with the profoundest veneration, was inexpressible. Matilda, the virtuous Matilda, could not be separated from the couch of her father. She hung over him with the most anxious affection. She watched every symptom of his disorder, and every variation of his countenance.

I am convinced, my dear Rinaldo, that there is no object so beautiful and engaging as this. A woman in all the pride of grace, and fulness of her charms, tending with unwearied care a feeble and decrepid parent; all her features informed with melting anxiety and filial tenderness, yet suppressing the emotions of her heart and the wilder expressions of sorrow; subduing even the stronger sentiments of nature, that she may not by an useless and inconsiderate grief supersede the kind care, and watchful attention, that it is her first ambition to yield. It is a trite observation, that beauty never appears so attractive as when unconscious of itself; and I am sure, that no self-forgetfulness can be so amiable, as that which is founded in the emotions of a tender and gentle heart. The disorder of the duke however was neither violent nor lasting. In somewhat less than an hour, the favourable symptoms began to appear, and he gradually recovered. In the mean time a certain lassitude and feebleness remained from the shock he received, which has not yet subsided.

But what language shall I find to describe to my Rinaldo the scene to which this event furnished the occasion?

The next day the duke sent for his daughter and myself into his chamber. As soon as we were alone he began to describe, in terms that affected us both, the declining state of his health. “I feel,” said he, “that this poor worn-out body totters to its fall. The grave awaits me. The summonses of death are such as cannot but be heard.

“Death however inspires me with no terror. I have lived long and happily. I have endeavoured so to discharge every duty in this world as not to be afraid to meet the supreme source of excellence in another. The greatness of him that made us is not calculated to inspire terror but to the guilty. Power and exalted station, though increased to an infinite degree, cannot make a just and virtuous being tremble.

“Heaven has blessed me with a daughter, the most virtuous of her sex. Her education has been adequate to the qualities which nature bestowed upon her. I may without vanity assert, that Italy cannot produce her parragon.—The first families of my country might be proud to receive her into their bosom, princes might sue for her alliance. But I had rather my Matilda should be happy than great.

“Come near, my dear count. I will number you also among the precious gifts of favouring heaven. Your reputation stands high in the world, and is without a blemish. From earliest youth your praises were music to my ears. But great as they were, till lately I knew not half your worth. Had I known it sooner, I would sooner have studied how to reward it. I should then perhaps have been too happy.

“Believe me, my St. Julian, I have had much experience. In successive campaigns, I have encountered hardships and danger. I have frequented courts, and know their arts. Do not imagine then, young and unsuspecting as you are, that you have been able to hide from me one wish of your heart. I know that you love my daughter. I have beheld your growing attachment with complacency. My Matilda, if I read her sentiments aright, sees you with a favourable eye. Pursue her, my son, and win her. If you can gain her approbation, doubt not that I will give my warmest benedictions to the auspicious union.”

You will readily believe, that my first care was to return my most ardent thanks to my protector and father. Immediately however I cast an anxious and enquiring eye upon the mistress of my heart. Her face was covered with blushes. I beheld in her a timidity and confusion that made me tremble. But my suspence was not long. I have since drawn from her the most favourable and transporting confession. Oh, my friend, she acknowledges that from the first moment she saw me, she contemplated me with partiality. She confesses, that her father by the declaration he has made, so far from thwarting her ambition and disappointing her wishes, has conferred upon her the highest obligation. How much, my dear Rinaldo, is the colour of my fortune changed. It was upon this day, at this very hour, I had determined to leave Cosenza for ever. I had consigned myself over to despair. I was about to enter upon a world where every face I beheld would have been a stranger to me. The scene would have been uniform and desolate. I should have left all the attachments of my youth, I should have left the very centre of my existence behind me. I should have ceased to live. I should only have drawn along a miserable train of perceptions from year to year, without one bright day, without one gay prospect, to illuminate the gloomy scene, and tell me that I was.

Is it possible then that every expectation, and the whole colour of my future life, can be so completely altered? Instead of despair, felicity. Instead of one dark, unvaried scene, a prospect of still increasing pleasure. Instead of standing alone, a monument of misfortune, an object to awaken compassion in the most obdurate, shall I stand alone, the happiest of mortals? Yes, I will never hereafter complain that nature denied me a father, I have found a more than father. I will never complain of calamity and affliction, in my Matilda I receive an over-balance for them all.

Letter XIII. *The Same to the Same, Cosenza*

Alas, my friend, the greatest sublunary happiness is not untinged with misfortune. I have no right however to exclaim. The misfortune to which I am subject, however nearly it may affect me, makes no alteration in the substance of my destiny. I still trust that I shall call my Matilda mine. I still trust to have long successive years of happiness. And can a mortal blessed as I, dare to complain? Can I give way to lamentation and sorrow? Yes, my Rinaldo. The cloud will quickly vanish, but such is the fate of mortals. The events, which, when sunk in the distant past, affect us only with a calm regret, in the moment in which they overtake us, overwhelm us with sorrow.

I mentioned in my last, that the disorder of the duke of Benevento was succeeded by a feebleness and languor that did not at first greatly alarm us. It however increased daily, and was attended with a kind of listlessness and insensibility that his physicians regarded as a very dangerous symptom. Almost the only marks he discovered of perception and pleasure, were in the attendance of the adorable Matilda. Repeatedly at intervals he seized her trembling hand, and pressed it to his dying lips.

As the symptoms of feebleness increased upon him incessantly, he was soon obliged to confine himself to his chamber. After an interval of near ten days he became more clear and sensible. He called several of his servants into the room, and gave them directions which were to be executed after his decease. He then sent to desire that I would attend him. His daughter was constantly in his chamber. He took both our hands and joining them together, bowed over them his venerable head, and poured forth a thousand prayers for our mutual felicity. We were ourselves too much affected to be able to thank him for all his tenderness and attention.

By these exertions, and the affection with which they were mingled, the spirits and strength of the duke were much exhausted. He almost immediately fell into a profound sleep. But as morning approached, he grew restless and disturbed. Every unfavourable symptom appeared. A stroke still more violent than the preceding seized him, and he expired in about two hours.

Thus terminated a life which had been in the highest degree exemplary and virtuous. In the former part of it, this excellent man distinguished himself much in the service of his country, and engaged the affection and attachment of his prince. He was respected by his equals, and adored by the soldiery. His humanity was equally conspicuous with his courage. When he left the public service for his retirement at this place, he did not forget his former engagements, and his connexion with the army. It is not perhaps easy for a government to make a complete and ample provision for those poor men whose most vigorous years were spent in defending their standard. Certain it is that few governments attend to this duty in the degree in which they ought, and a wide field is left for the benevolence of individuals. This benevolence was never more largely and assiduously exhibited than by the duke of Benevento. He provided for many of those persons of whose fidelity and bravery he had been an eyewitness, in the most respectable offices in his family, and among his retinue. Those for whom he could not find room in these ways he gratified with pensions. He afforded such as were not yet incapacitated for labour, the

best spur to an honest industry, the best solace under fatigue and toil, that of being assured that their decrepitude should never stand in need of the simple means of comfort and subsistence.

It may naturally be supposed that the close of a life crowded with deeds of beneficence, the exit of a man whose humanity was his principal feature, was succeeded by a very general sorrow. Among his domestics there appeared an universal gloom and dejection. His peasants and his labourers lamented him as the best of masters, and the kindest of benefactors. His pensionaries wept aloud, and were inconsolable for the loss of him, in whom they seemed to place all their hopes of comfort and content.

You might form some idea of the sorrow of the lovely Matilda amidst this troop of mourners, if I had been able to convey to you a better idea of the softness and gentleness of her character. As the family had been for some years composed only of his grace and herself, her circle of acquaintance has never been extensive. Her father was all the world to her. The duke had no enjoyment but in the present felicity and future hopes of his daughter. The pleasures of Matilda were centered in the ability she possessed of soothing the infirmities, and beguiling the tedious hours of her aged parent.

There is no virtue that adds so noble a charm to the finest traits of beauty, as that which exerts itself in watching over the tranquility of an aged parent. There are no tears that give so noble a lustre to the cheek of innocence, as the tears of filial sorrow. Oh, my Rinaldo! I would not exchange them for all the pearls of Arabia, I would not barter them for the mines of Golconda. No, amiable Matilda, I will not check thy chaste and tender grief. I prize it as the pledge of my future happiness. I esteem it as that which raises thee to a level with angelic goodness. Hence, thou gross and vulgar passion! that wouldst tempt me to kiss away the tears from her glowing cheeks. I will not soil their spotless purity. I will not seek to mix a thought of me with a sentiment not unworthy of incorporeal essences.

I shall continue at this place to regulate the business of the funeral. I shall endeavour to put all the affairs of the lovely heiress into a proper train. I will then wait upon my dear marquis at his palace in Naples. For a few weeks, a few tedious weeks, I will quit the daily sight and delightful society of my amiable charmer. At the expiration of that term I shall hope to set out with my Rinaldo for his villa at this place. Every thing is now in considerable forwardness, and will doubtless by that time be prepared for your reception.

Letter XIV. *The Count de St. Julian to Matilda della Colonna, Naples*

I will thank you a thousand times for the generous permission you gave me, to write to you from this place. I have waited an age, lovely Matilda, that I might not intrude upon your hours of solitude and affliction, and violate the feelings I so greatly respect. You must not now be harsh and scrupulous. You must not cavil at the honest expression of those sentiments you inspire. Can dissimulation ever be a virtue? Can it ever be a duty to conceal those emotions of the soul upon which honour has set her seal, and studiously to turn our discourse to subjects uninteresting and distant to the heart?

How happy am I in a passion which received the sanction of him, who alone could claim a voice in the disposal of you! There are innumerable lovers, filled with the most ardent passion, aiming at the purest gratifications, whose happiness is traversed by the cold dictates of artificial prudence, by the impotent distinctions of rank and family. Unfeeling parents rise to thwart their wishes. The despotic hand of authority tears asunder hearts united by the softest ties, and sacrifices the prospect of felicity to ridiculous and unmeaning prejudices. Let us, my Matilda, pity those whose fate is thus unpropitious, but let us not voluntarily subject ourselves to their misfortune. No voice is raised to forbid our union. Heaven and earth command us to be happy.

Alas, I am sufficiently unfortunate, that the arbitrary decorums of society have banished me from your presence. In vain Naples holds out to me all her pleasures and her luxury. Ill indeed do they pay me for the exchange. Its court, its theatres, its assemblies, and its magnificence, have no attractions for me. I had rather dwell in a cottage with her I love, than be master of the proudest palace this city has to boast.

In compliance with the obliging intreaties of the marquis of Pescara, I have entered repeatedly into the scene of her entertainments. But I was distracted and absent. A variety of topics were started of literature, philosophy, news, and fashion. The man of humour told his pleasant tale, and the wit flashed with his lively repartee. But I heard them not. Their subjects were in my eye tedious and uninteresting. They talked not of the natural progress of the passions. They did not dissect the characters of the friend and the lover. My heart was at Cosenza.

Fatigued with the crowded assembly and the fluttering parterre, I sought relief in solitude. Never was solitude so grateful to me. I indulged in a thousand reveries. Gay hope exhibited all her airy visions to my fancy. I formed innumerable prospects of felicity, and each more ravishing than the last. The joys painted by my imagination were surely too pure, too tranquil to last for ever. Oh how sweet is an untasted happiness! But ours, Matilda, shall be great, beyond what expectation can suggest. Ours shall teem with ever fresh delights, refined by sentiment, sanctified by virtue. Nothing but inevitable fate shall change it. May that fate be distant as I wish it!

But alas, capricious and unbounded fancy has sometimes exhibited a different scene. A heart, enamoured, rivetted to its object like mine, cannot but have intervals of solicitude and anxiety. If it have no real subject of uncertainty and fear, it will create to itself imaginary ones. But I

have no need of these. I am placed at a distance from the mistress of my heart, which may seem little to a cold and speculative apprehension, but which my soul yearns to think of. My fate has not yet received that public sanction which can alone put the finishing stroke to my felicity. I cannot suspect, even in my most lawless flights, the most innocent and artless of her sex of inconstancy. But how many unexpected accidents may come between me and my happiness? How comfortless is the thought that I can at no time say, "Now the amiable Matilda is in health; now she dwells in peace and safety?" I receive an account of her health, a paquet reaches me from Cosenza. Alas, it is two tedious days from the date of the information. Into two tedious days how many frightful events may be crowded by tyrant fancy!

Letter XV. *The Same to the Same, Naples*

I have waited, charming Matilda, with the most longing impatience in hopes of receiving a letter from your own hand. Every post has agitated me with suspense. My expectation has been continually raised, and as often defeated. Many a cold and unanimated epistle has intruded itself into my hands, when I thought to have found some token full of gentleness and tenderness, which might have taught my heart to overflow with rapture. If you knew, fair excellence, how much pain and uneasiness your silence has given me, you could not surely have been so cruel. The most rigid decorum could not have been offended by one scanty billet that might just have informed me, I still retained a tender place in your recollection. One solitary line would have raised me to a state of happiness that princes might envy.

A jealous and contracted mind placed in my situation, might fear to undergo the imputation of selfishness and interest. He would represent to himself, how brilliant was your station, how exalted your rank, how splendid your revenues, and what a poor, deserted, and contemptible figure I made in the eyes of the world, when your father first honoured me with his attention. My Matilda were a match for princes. Her external situation in the highest degree magnificent. Her person lovely and engaging beyond all the beauty that Italy has to boast. Her mind informed with the most refined judgment, the most elegant taste, the most generous sentiments. When the dictates of prudence and virtue flow from her beauteous lips, philosophers might listen with rapture, sages might learn wisdom. And is it possible that this all-accomplished woman can stoop from the dignity of her rank and the greatness of her pretensions, to a person so obscure, so slenderly qualified as I am?

But no, my Matilda, I am a stranger to these fears, my breast is unvisited by the demon of suspicion. I employ no precaution. I do not seek to constrain my passion. I lay my heart naked before you. I shall ever maintain the most grateful sense of the benevolent friendship of your venerable father, of your own unexampled and ravishing condescension. But love, my amiable Matilda, knows no distinction of rank. We cannot love without building our ardour upon the sense of a kind of equality. All obligations must here in a manner cease but those which are mutual. Those hearts that are sensible to the distance of benefactor and client, are strangers to the sweetest emotions of this amiable passion.

But who is there that is perfectly master of his own character? Who is there that can certainly foretel what will be his feelings and sentiments in circumstances yet untried? Do not then, fairest, gentlest, of thy sex, torture the lover that adores you. Do not persist in cold and unexpressive silence. A thousand times have those lips made the chaste confession of my happiness. A thousand times upon that hand have I sealed my gratitude. Yet do I stand in need of fresh assurances. Mutual attachment subsists not but in communication and sympathy. I count the tedious moments. My wayward fancy paints in turn all the events that are within the region of possibility. Too many of them there are, against the apprehension of which no precaution can secure me. Do not, my lovely Matilda, do not voluntarily increase them. Is not the comfortless

distance to which I am banished a sufficient punishment, without adding to it those uneasinesses it is so much in your power to remove?

Letter XVI. *Matilda della Colonna to the Count de St. Julian, Cosenza*

Is it possible you can put an unfavourable construction upon my silence? You are not to be informed that it was nothing more than the simplest dictates of modesty and decency required. I cannot believe, that if I had offended against those dictates, it would not have sunk me a little in your esteem. Your sex indeed is indulged with a large and extensive licence. But in ours, my dear friend, propriety and decorum cannot be too assiduously preserved. Our reputation is at the disposal of every calumniator. The minutest offence can cast a shade upon it. A long and uninterrupted course of the most spotless virtue can never restore it to its first unsullied brightness. Many and various indeed are the steps by which it may be tarnished, short of the sacrifice of chastity, and the total dereliction of character.

There is no test of gentleness and integrity of heart more obvious, than the discharge of the filial duties. A truly mild and susceptible disposition will sympathize in the concerns of a parent with the most ardent affection, will be melted by his sufferings into the tenderest sorrow. The child whose heart feels not with peculiar anguish the distresses of him, from whom he derived his existence, to whom he owes the most important obligations, and with whom he has been in habits of unbounded confidence from earliest infancy, must be of a character harsh, savage, and detestable. How can he be expected to melt over the tale of a stranger? How can his hand be open to relief and munificence? How can he discharge aright the offices of a family, and the duties of a citizen?

Recollect, my friend, never had any child a parent more gentle and affectionate than mine. I was all his care and all his pride. He knew no happiness but that of gratifying my desires, and outrunning my wishes. He was my all. I have for several years, and even before I was able properly to understand her value, lost a tender mother. In my surviving parent then all my attachments centered. He was my protector and my guide, he was my friend and my companion. All other connexions were momentary and superficial. And till I knew my St. Julian, my warmest affections never strayed from my father's roof.

Do not however imagine, that in the moment of my sincerest sorrow, I scarcely for one hour forget you. My sentiments have ever been the same. They are the dictates of an upright and uncorrupted heart, and I do not blush to own them.

Undissipated in an extensive circle of acquaintance, untaught by the prejudices of my education to look with a favourable eye upon the majority of the young nobility of the present age, I saw you with a heart unexperienced and unworn with the knowledge and corruptions of the world. I saw you in your character totally different from the young persons of your own rank. And the differences I discovered, were all of them such, as recommended you to my esteem. My unguarded heart had received impressions, even before the voice of my father had given a sanction to my inclinations, that would not easily have been effaced. When he gave me to you, he gave you a willing hand. Your birth is noble and ancient as my own. Fortune has no charms for me. I

have no attachment to the brilliant circle, and the gaiety of public life. My disposition, naturally grave and thoughtful, demands but few associates, beside those whose hearts are in some degree in unison with my own. I had rather live in a narrow circle united with a man, distinguished by feeling, virtue, and truth, than be the ornament of courts, and the envy of kingdoms.

Previous to my closing this letter, I sent to enquire of the *maître d'hôtel* of the villa of the marquis, in what forwardness were his preparations for the intended visit of his master. He informs me that they will be finished in two days at farthest. I suppose it will not be long from that time, before his lordship will set out from Naples. You of course are inseparable from him.

END OF VOLUME I *Italian Letters*

VOLUME II

Letter I. *The Marquis of Pescara to the Marquis of San Severino, Cosenza*

My dear lord,

I need not tell you that this place is celebrated for one of the most beautiful spots of the habitable globe. Every thing now flourishes. Nature puts on her gayest colours, and displays all her charms. The walks among the more cultivated scenes of my own grounds, and amidst the wilder objects of this favoured region are inexpressibly agreeable. The society of my pensive and sentimental friend is particularly congenial with the scenery around me. Do not imagine that I am so devoid of taste as not to derive exquisite pleasure from these sources. Yet believe me, there are times in which I regret the vivacity of your conversation, and the amusements of Naples.

Is this, my dear Ferdinand, an argument of a corrupted taste, or an argument of sound and valuable improvement? Much may be said on both sides. Of the mind justly polished, without verging to the squeamish and effeminate, nature exhibits the most delightful sources of enjoyment. He that turns aside from the simplicity of her compositions with disgust, for the sake of the over curious and laboured entertainments of which art is the inventor, may justly be pronounced unreasonably nice, and ridiculously fastidious.

But then on the other hand, the finest taste is of all others the most easily offended. The mind most delicate and refined, requires the greatest variety of pleasures. So much for logic. Let me tell you, however, be it wisdom or be it folly, I owe it entirely to you. It is a revolution in my humour, to which I was totally a stranger when I left Palermo.

I have not yet seen this rich and celebrated heiress of whom you told me so much. It is several years since I remember to have been in company where she was, and it is more than probable that I should not even know her. If however I were to give full credit to the rhapsodies of my good friend the count, whose description of her, by the way, has something in it of romantic and dignified, which pleases me better than yours, as luscious as it is, I should imagine her a perfect angel, beautiful as Venus, chaste as Diana, majestic as the mother of the gods, and enchanting as the graces. I know not why, but since I have studied the persons of the fair under your tuition, I have felt the most impatient desire to be acquainted with this *nonpareil*.

No person however has yet been admitted into the sanctuary of the goddess, except the person destined by the late duke to be her husband. He himself has seen her but for a second time. It should seem, that as many ceremonies were necessary in approaching her, as in being presented to his holiness; and that she were as invisible as the emperor of Ispahan. I am however differently affected by the perpetual conversations of St. Julian upon the subject, than I am apt to think you would be. You would probably first laugh at his extravagance, and then be fatigued to death with his perseverance. For my part, I am agreeably entertained with the romance of his sentiments, and highly charmed with their disinterestedness and their virtue.

Yes, my dear marquis, you may talk as you please of the wildness and impracticability of the sentiments of my amiable solitaire, they are at least in the highest degree amusing and beautiful.

There is a voice in every breast, whose feelings have not yet been entirely warped by selfishness, responsive to them. It is in vain that the man of gaiety and pleasure pronounces them impracticable, the generous heart gives the lie to his assertions. He must be under the power of the poorest and most despicable prejudices, who would reduce all human characters to a level, who would deny the reality of all those virtues that the world has idolized through revolving ages. Nothing can be disputed with less plausibility, than that there are in the world certain noble and elevated spirits, that rise above the vulgar notions and the narrow conduct of the bulk of mankind, that soar to the sublimest heights of rectitude, and from time to time realize those virtues, of which the interested and illiberal deny the possibility.

I can no more doubt, than I do of the truth of these apothegms, that the count de St. Julian is one of these honourable characters. He treads without the airy circle of dissipation. He is invulnerable to the temptations of folly; he is unshaken by the examples of profligacy. They are such characters as his that were formed to rescue mankind from slavery, to prop the pillars of a declining state, and to arrest Astraea in her re-ascent to heaven. They are such characters whose virtues surprize astonished mortals, and avert the vengeance of offended heaven.

Matilda della Colonna is, at least in the apprehension of her admirer, a character quite as singular in her own sex as his can possibly appear to me. They were made for each other. She is the only adequate reward that can be bestowed upon his exalted virtues. Oh, my Ferdinand, there must be a happiness reserved for such as these, which must make all other felicity comparatively weak and despicable. It is the accord of the purest sentiments. It is the union of guiltless souls. Its nature is totally different from that of the casual encounter of the sexes, or the prudent conjunctions in which the heart has no share. In the considerations upon which it is founded, corporeal fitnesses occupy but a narrow and subordinate rank, personal advantages and interest are admitted for no share. It is the sympathy of hearts, it is the most exalted species of social intercourse.

Letter II. *The Count de St. Julian to Signor Hippolito Borelli, Cosenza*

My dear Hippolito,

I have already acquainted you as they occurred, with those circumstances, which have introduced so incredible an alteration in my prospects and my fortune. From being an outcast of the world, a young man without protectors, a nobleman without property, a lover despairing ever to possess the object of his vows, I am become the most favoured of mortals, the happiest of mankind. There is no character that I envy, there is no situation for which I would exchange my own. My felicity is of the colour of my mind; my prospects are those, for the fruition of which heaven created me. What have I done to deserve so singular a blessing? Is it possible that no wayward fate, no unforeseen and tremendous disaster should come between me and my happiness?

My Matilda is the most amiable of women. Every day she improves upon me. Every day I discover new attractions in this inexhaustible mine of excellence. Never was a character so simple, artless and undisguised. Never was a heart so full of every tender sensibility. How does her filial sorrow adorn, and exalt her? How ravishing is that beauty, that is embellished with melancholy, and impearled with tears?

Even when I suffer most from the unrivalled delicacy of her sentiments, I cannot but admire. Ah, cruel Matilda, and will not one banishment satisfy the inflexibility of thy temper, will not all my past sufferings suffice to glut thy severity? Is it still necessary that the happiness of months must be sacrificed to the inexorable laws of decorum? Must I seek in distant climes a mitigation of my fate? Yes, too amiable tyrant, thou shalt be obeyed. It will be less punishment to be separated from thee by mountains crowned with snow, by impassable gulphs, by boundless oceans, than to reside in the same city, or even under the same roof, and not be permitted to see those ravishing beauties, to hear that sweet expressive voice.

You know, my dear Hippolito, the unspeakable obligations I have received from my amiable friend, the marquis of Pescara. Though these obligations can never be fully discharged, yet I am happy to have met with an opportunity of demonstrating the gratitude that will ever burn in my heart. My Rinaldo even rates the service I have undertaken to perform for him beyond its true value. Would it were in my power to serve him as greatly, as essentially as I wish!

The estate of the house of Pescara in Castile is very considerable. Though it has been in the possession of the noble ancestors of my friend for near two centuries, yet, by the most singular fortune, there has lately arisen a claimant to more than one half of it. His pleas, though destitute of the smallest plausibility, are rendered formidable by the possession he is said to have of the patronage and favour of the first minister. In a word, it is become absolutely necessary for his lordship in person, or some friend upon whose integrity and discretion he can place the firmest dependence, to solicit his cause in the court of Madrid. The marquis himself is much disinclined to the voyage, and though he had too much delicacy in his own temper, and attachment to my

interest, to propose it himself, I can perceive that he is not a little pleased at my having voluntarily undertaken it.

My disposition is by nature that of an insatiable curiosity. I was not born to be confined within the narrow limits of one island, or one petty kingdom. My heart is large and capacious. It rises above local prejudices; it forms to itself a philosophy equally suited to all the climates of the earth; it embraces the whole human race. The majority of my countrymen entertain the most violent aversion for the Spanish nation. For my own part I can perceive in them many venerable and excellent qualities. Their friendship is inviolable, their politeness and hospitality of the most disinterested nature. Their honour is unimpeached, and their veracity without example. Even from those traits in their character, that appear the most absurd, or that are too often productive of the most fatal consequences, I expect to derive amusement and instruction. I doubt not, however pure be my flame for Matilda, that the dissipation and variety of which this voyage will be productive, will be friendly to my ease. I shall acquire wisdom and experience. I shall be better prepared to fill up that most arduous of all characters, the respectable and virtuous father of a family.

In spite however of all these considerations, with which I endeavour to console myself in the chagrin that preys upon my mind, the approaching separation cannot but be in the utmost degree painful to me. In spite of the momentary fortitude, that tells me that any distance is better than the being placed within the reach of the mistress of my soul without being once permitted to see her, I cannot help revolving with the most poignant melancholy, the various and infinitely diversified objects that shall shortly divide us. Repeatedly have I surveyed with the extremest anguish the chart of those seas that I am destined to pass. I have measured for the twentieth time the course that is usually held in this voyage. Every additional league appears to me a new barrier between me and my wishes, that I fear to be able to surmount a second time.

And is it possible that I can leave my Matilda without a guardian to protect her from unforeseen distress, without a monitor to whisper to her in every future scene the constancy of her St. Julian? No, my Hippolito, the objection would be insuperable. But thanks, eternal thanks to propitious heaven! I have a friend in whom I can confide as my own soul, whose happiness is dearer to me than my own. Yes, my Rinaldo, whatever may be my destiny, in whatever scenes I may be hereafter placed, I will recollect that my Matilda is under thy protection, and be satisfied. I will recollect the obligations you have already conferred upon me, and I will not hesitate to add to them that, which is greater than them all.

Letter III. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Naples*

Best of friends,

Every thing is now prepared for my voyage. The ship will weigh anchor in two days at farthest. This will be the last letter you will receive from me before I bid adieu to Italy.

I have not yet shaken off the melancholy with which the affecting leave I took of the amiable Matilda impressed me. Never will the recollection be effaced from my memory. It was then, my Rinaldo, that she laid aside that delicate reserve, that lovely timidity, which she had hitherto exhibited. It was then that she poured forth, without restraint, all the ravishing tenderness of her nature. How affecting were those tears? How heart-rending the sighs that heaved her throbbing bosom? When will those tender exclamations cease to vibrate in my ear? When will those piercing cries give over their task, the torturing this constant breast? You, my friend, were witness to the scene, and though a mere spectator, I am mistaken if it did not greatly affect you.

Hear me, my Rinaldo, and let my words sink deep into your bosom. Into your hands I commit the most precious jewel that was ever intrusted to the custody of a friend. You are the arbiter of my fate. More, much more than my life is in your disposal. If you should betray me, you will commit a crime, that laughs to scorn the frivolity of all former baseness. You will inflict upon me a torture, in comparison of which all the laborious punishments that tyrants have invented, are couches of luxury, are beds of roses.

Forgive me, my friend, the paroxysm of a lover's rage. I should deserve all the punishments it would be in your power to inflict, if I harboured the remotest suspicion of your fidelity. No, I swear by all that is sacred, it is my richest treasure, it is my choicest consolation. Wherever I am, I will bear it about with me. In every reverse of fortune I will regard it as the surest pledge of my felicity. Mountains shall be hurled from their eternal bases, lofty cities shall be crumbled into dust, but my Rinaldo shall never be false.

It is this consideration that can only support me. The trials I undergo are too great for the most perfect fortitude. I quit a treasure that the globe in its inexhausted variety never equalled. I retire to a distance, where months may intervene ere the only intelligence that can give pleasure to my heart, shall reach me. I shall count however with the most unshaken security upon my future happiness. Walls of brass, and bars of iron could not give me that assured peace.

Letter IV. *Matilda della Colonna to the Count de St. Julian, Cosenza*

Why is it, my friend, that you are determined to fly to so immense a distance? You call me cruel, you charge me with unfeelingness and inflexibility, and yet to my prayers you are deaf, to my intreaties you are inexorable.

I have satisfied all the claims of decorum. I have fulfilled with rigid exactness the laws of decency. One advantage you at least gain by the distance you are so desirous to place between us. My sentiments are less guarded. Reputation and modesty have fewer claims upon a woman, who can have no intercourse with her lover but by letter. My feelings are less restrained. For the anxiety, which distance inspires, awakens all the tenderness of my nature, and raises a tempest in my soul that will not be controled.

Oh, my St. Julian, till this late and lasting separation, I did not know all the affection I bore you. Ever since you were parted from my aching eyes, I have not known the serenity of a moment. The image of my friend has been the constant companion of my waking hours, and has visited me again in my dreams. The unknown dangers of the ocean swell in my eyes to ten times their natural magnitude. Fickle and inconstant enemy, how much I dread thee! Oh wast the lord of all my wishes in safety to the destined harbour! May all the winds be still! May the tempests forget their wonted rage! May every guardian power protect his voyage! Open not, oh ocean, thy relentless bosom to yield him a watery grave! For once be gentle and auspicious! Listen and grant a lover's prayer! Restore him to my presence! May the dear sight of him once more refresh these longing eyes! You will find this letter accompanied with a small parcel, in which I have inclosed the miniature of myself, which I have often heard you praise as a much better likeness than the larger pictures. It will probably afford you some gratification during that absence of which you so feelingly complain. It will suggest to you those thoughts upon the subject of our love that have most in them of the calm and soothing. It will be no unpleasant companion of your reveries, and may sometimes amuse and cheat your deluded fancy.

Letter V. *The Answer, Alicant*

I am just arrived at this place, after a tedious and disagreeable voyage. As we passed along the coast of Barbary we came in sight of many of the corsairs with which that part of the world is infested. One of them in particular, of larger burden than the rest, gave us chace, and for some time we thought ourselves in considerable danger. Our ship however proved the faster sailer, and quickly carried us out of sight. Having escaped this danger, and nearly reached the Baleares, we were overtaken by a tremendous storm. For some days the ship was driven at the mercy of the winds; and, as the coast of those islands is surrounded with invisible rocks, our peril was considerable.

In the midst of danger however my thoughts were full of Matilda. Had the ocean buried me in its capacious bosom, my last words would have been of you, my last vows would have been made for your happiness. Had we been taken by the enemy and carried into slavery, slavery would have had no terrors, but those which consisted in the additional bars it would have created between me and the mistress of my heart. It would have been of little importance whether I had fallen to the lot of a despot, gentle or severe. It would have separated us for years, perhaps for ever. Could I, who have been so much afflicted by the separation of a few months, have endured a punishment like this? That soft intercourse, that wafts the thoughts of lovers to so vast a distance, that mimics so well an actual converse, that cheats the weary heart of all its cares, would have been dissolved for ever. Little then would have been the moment of a few petty personal considerations; I should not long have survived.

I only wait at this place to refresh myself for a few days, from a fatigue so perfectly new to me, and then shall set out with all speed for Madrid. My Matilda will readily believe that that business which detains me at so vast a distance from my happiness, will be dispatched with as much expedition as its nature will admit. I will not sacrifice to any selfish considerations the interest of my friend, I will not neglect the minutest exertion by which it may be in my power to serve his cause. But the moment I have discharged what I owe to him, no power upon earth shall delay my return, no not for an hour.

I have seen little as yet of that people of whom I have entertained so favourable ideas. But what I have seen has perfectly equalled my expectation. Their carriage indeed is cold and formal, beyond what it is possible for any man to have a conception of, who has not witnessed it. But those persons to whom I had letters have received me with the utmost attention and politeness. Sincerity is visible in all they do, and constancy in all their modes of thinking. There is not a man among them, who has once distinguished you, and whose favour it is possible for you to forfeit without having deserved it. Will not an upright and honest mind pardon many defects to a virtue like this?

Oh, my Matilda, shall I recommend to you to remember your St. Julian, to carry the thoughts of him every where about with you? Shall I make to you a thousand vows of unalterable attachment? No, best of women, I will not thus insult the integrity of your heart. I will not thus profane the purity of our loves. The world in all its treasure has not a second Matilda, and if it had, my

heart is fixed, all the tender sensibilities of my soul are exhausted. Your St. Julian was not made to change with every wind.

Letter VI. *Matilda della Colonna to the Count de St. Julian, Cosenza*

I begin this letter without having yet received any news from you since you quitted the port of Naples. The time however that was requisite for that purpose is already more than expired. Oh, my friend, if before the commencement of this detested voyage, the dangers that attended it appeared to me in so horrid colours, how think you that I support them now? My imagination sickens, my poor heart is distracted at the recollection of them. Why would you encounter so many unnecessary perils? Why would you fly to so remote a climate? Many a friend could have promoted equally well the interests of the marquis of Pescara, but few lives are so valuable as thine. Many a friend could have solicited this business in the court of Madrid, but believe me, there are few that can boast that they possessed the heart of a Matilda. Simple and sincere, I do not give myself away by halves. With a heart full of tenderness and sensibility, I am affected more, much more than the generality of my sex, with circumstances favourable or adverse. Ah cruel, cruel St. Julian, was it for a lover to turn a deaf ear to the intreaties of a mistress, that lived not but to honour his virtues, and to sympathize in his felicity? Did I not for you lay aside that triple delicacy and reserve, in which I prided myself? Were not my sighs and tears visible and undisguised? Did not my cries pierce the lofty dome of my paternal mansion, and move all hearts but yours?

They tell me, my St. Julian, that I am busy to torment myself, that I invent a thousand imaginary misfortunes. And is this to torment myself to address my friend in these poor lines? Is this to deceive myself with unreal evils? Even while Matilda cherishes the fond idea of pouring out her complaints before him, my St. Julian may be a lifeless corse. Perhaps he now lies neglected and unburied in the beds of the ocean. Perhaps he has fallen a prey to barbarous men, more deaf and merciless than the warring elements. Distracting ideas! And does this head live to conceive them? Is this hand dull and insensible enough to write them?

Believe me, my friend, my heart is tender and will easily break. It was not formed to sustain a series of trials. It was not formed to encounter a variety of distress. Oh, fly then, hasten to my arms. All those ideas of form and decency, all the artificial decorums of society that I once cherished, are dissolved before the darker reflections, the apprehensive anxieties that your present situation has awakened. Yes, my St. Julian, come to my arms. The moment you appear to claim me I am yours. Adieu to the management of my sex. From this moment I commit all my concerns to your direction. From this moment, your word shall be to me an irrevocable law, which without reasoning, and without refinement, I will implicitly obey.

* * * * *

I have received your letter. The pleasure it affords me is exquisite in proportion to my preceding anguish. From the confession of the bravest of men it now appears that my apprehensions were not wholly unfounded. And yet upon reviewing what I have written, I almost blush for my weakness. But it shall not be effaced. Disguise is little becoming between lovers at so immense

a distance. No, my friend, you shall know all the interest you possess in my heart. I will at least afford you that consolation amidst the pangs of absence. May heaven be propitious in what yet remains before you! I will even weary it with my prayers. May it return you to my arms safe and unhurt, and no other calamity shall wring from me a murmur, or a sigh!

One thing however it is necessary I should correct. I do not mean to accuse you for the voyage you have undertaken, however it may distress me. In my calmer moments I feel for the motives of it the warmest approbation. It was the act of disinterested friendship. Every prejudice of the heart pleaded against it. Love, that passion which reigns without a rival in your breast, forbad the compliance. It was a virtue worthy of you. There needed but this to convince me that you were infinitely superior to the whole race of your fellow mortals.

Letter VII. *The Answer, Buen Retiro*

Ten thousand thanks to the most amiable of women for the letter that has just fallen into my hands. Yes, Matilda, if my heart were pierced on every side with darts, and my life's blood seemed ready to follow every one of them, your enchanting epistle would be balm to all my wounds, would sooth all my cares. Tenderest, gentlest of dispositions, where ever burned a love whose flame was pure as thine? Where ever was truth that could vie with the truth of Matilda? Hereafter when the worthless and the profligate exclaim upon the artifices of thy sex, when the lover disappointed, wrung with anguish, imprecates curses on the kind, name but Matilda, and every murmur shall be hushed; name but Matilda, and the universal voice of nature shall confess that the female form is the proper residence, the genuine temple of angelic goodness.

I had upon the whole a most agreeable journey from Alicant to Madrid. It would be superfluous to describe to a mind so well informed as yours, the state of the country. You know how thin is its population, and how indolent is the character of its inhabitants. Satisfied with possessing the inexhaustible mines of Mexico and Peru, they imagine that the world was made for them, that the rest of mankind were destined to labour that they might be maintained in supineness and idleness. The experience of more than two centuries has not been able to convince them of their error, and amidst all their poverty, they still retain as much pride as ever. The country however is naturally luxuriant and delicious; and there are a considerable number of prospects in the provinces through which I have passed that will scarcely yield to any that Italy has to boast. As soon as I arrived at the metropolis I took up my residence at this place, which is inexpressibly crowded with the residences of the nobility and grandees. It is indeed one of the most beautiful spots in nature, as it concentres at once the simplest rusticity with the utmost elegance of refinement and society. My reception has been in the highest degree flattering, and I please myself with the idea that I have already made some progress in the business of the marquis of Pescara.

You are not insensible that my character, at least in some of its traits, is not uncongenial to that of a Spaniard. Whether it be owing to this or any other cause I know not, but I believe never was any man, so obscure as myself, distinguished in so obliging a manner by the first personages in the kingdom. In return I derive from their society the utmost satisfaction. Their lofty notions of honour, their gravity, their politeness, and their sentimental way of thinking, have something in them that affords me infinite entertainment and pleasure. Oh, Matilda, how much more amiable is that character, that carries the principles of honour and magnanimity to a dangerous extreme, than that which endeavours to level all distinctions of mankind, and would remove and confound the eternal barriers of virtue and vice!

One of the most agreeable connexions I have made is with the duke of Aranda. The four persons of whom his family is composed, his grace, the duchess, their son and daughter, are all of them characters extremely interesting and amiable. The lady Isabella is esteemed the first beauty of the court of Madrid. The young count is tall, graceful, and manly, with a fire and expression in his fine blue eyes beyond any thing I ever saw. He has all the vivacity and enterprize of youth,

without the smallest tincture of libertinism and dissipation. I know not how it is, but I find myself perfectly unable to describe his character without running into paradox. He is at once serious and chearful. His seriousness is so full of enthusiasm and originality, that it is the most unlike in the world to the cold dogmatism of pedantry, or the turgid and monotonous stile of the churchman. His chearfulness is not the gaiety of humour, is not the brilliancy of wit, it is the result of inexhaustible fancy and invincible spirit. In a word, I never met with a character that interested me so much at first sight, and were it not that I am bound by insuperable ties to my native soil, it would be the first ambition of my heart to form with him the ties of an everlasting friendship.

Once more, my Matilda, adieu. You are under the protection of the most generous of men, and the best of friends. I owe to the marquis of Pescara, a thousand obligations that can never be compensated. Let it be thy care thou better half of myself to receive him with that attention and politeness, which is due to the worth of his character, and the immensity of his friendship. There is something too sweet and enchanting in the mild benevolence of Matilda, not to contribute largely to his happiness. It is in your power, best of women, by the slightest exertions, to pay him more than I could do by a life of labour.

Letter VIII. *The Same to the Same, Buen Retiro*

I little thought during so distressing a period of absence, to have written you a letter so gay and careless as my last. I confess indeed the societies of this place afforded me so much entertainment, that in the midst of generous friendship and unmerited kindness, I almost forgot the anguish of a lover, and the pains of banishment.

Alas, how dearly am I destined to pay for the most short-lived relaxation! Every pleasure is now vanished, and I can scarcely believe that it ever existed. I enter into the same societies, I frequent the same scenes, and I wonder what it was that once entertained me. Yes, Matilda, the enchantment is dissolved. All the gay colours that anon played upon the objects around me, are fled. Chaos is come again. The world is become all dreary solitude and impenetrable darkness. I am like the poor mariner, whose imagination was for a moment caught with the lofty sound of the thunder, round whom the sheeted lightning gilded the foaming waves, and who then sinks for ever in the abyss.

It is now four eternal months, and not one line from the hand of Matilda has blessed these longing eyes, or cooled my burning brain. Opportunity after opportunity has slipped away, one moment swelled with hope has succeeded another, but to no purpose. The mail has not been more constant to its place of destination than myself. But it was all disappointment. It was in vain that I raged with unmeaning fury, and demanded that with imprecation which was not to be found. Every calm was misery to me. Every tempest tore my tortured heart a thousand ways. For some time every favourable wind was balm to my soul, and nectar to my burning frame. But it is over now—. How, how is it that I am to account for this astonishing silence? Has nature changed her eternal laws, and is Matilda false? Has she forgotten the poor St. Julian, upon whom she once bestowed her tenderness with unstinted prodigality? Can that angel form hide the foulest thoughts? Have those untasted lips abjured their virgin vows? And has that hand been given to another? Hence green-eyed jealousy, accursed fiend, with all thy train of black suspicions! No, thou shall not find a moment's harbour in my breast. I will none of thee. It were treason to the chastest of hearts, it were sacrilege to the divinest form that ever visited this lower world, but to admit the possibility of Matilda's infidelity.

And where, ah where, shall I take refuge from these horrid thoughts? To entertain them were depravity were death. I fly from them, and where is it that I find myself? Surrounded by a thousand furies. Oh, gracious and immaculate providence, why hast thou opened so many doors to tremendous mischief? Innumerable accidents of nature may tear her from me for ever. All the wanton brutalities that history records, and that the minds of unworthy men can harbour, start up in dreadful array before me.

Cruel and inflexible Matilda! thou once wert bounteous as the hand of heaven, wert tender as the new born babe. What is it that has changed thy disposition to the hard, the wanton, the obdurate? Behold a lover's tears! Behold how low thou hast sunk him, whom thou once didst dignify by the sweet and soothing name of *thy friend*! If ever the voice of anguish found a passage to your heart, if those cheeks were ever moistened with the drops of sacred pity, oh, hear me now!

But I will address myself to the rocks. I will invoke the knotted oaks and the savage wolves of the forest. They will not refuse my cry, but Matilda is deaf as the winds, inexorable as the gaping wave.

In the state of mind in which I am, you will naturally suppose that I am full of doubt and irresolution. Twice have I resolved to quit the kingdom of Spain without delay, and to leave the business of friendship unfinished. But I thank God these thoughts were of no long duration. No, Matilda, let me be set up as a mark for the finger of scorn, let me be appointed by heaven as a victim upon which to exhaust all its arrows. Let me be miserable, but let me never, never deserve to be so. Affliction, thou mayest beat upon my heart in one eternal storm! Trouble, thou mayest tear this frame like a whirlwind! But never shall all thy terrors shake my constant mind, or teach me to swerve for a moment from the path I have marked out to myself! All other consolation may be taken from me, but from the bulwark of innocence and integrity I will never be separated.

Letter IX. *The Marquis of Pescara to the Count de St. Julian, Cosenza*

I can never sufficiently thank you for the indefatigable friendship you have displayed in the whole progress of my Spanish affairs. I have just received a letter from the first minister of that court, by which I am convinced that it cannot be long before they be terminated in the most favourable manner. I scarcely know how, after all the obligations you have conferred upon me, to intreat that you would complete them, by paying a visit to Zamora before you quit the kingdom, and putting my affairs there in some train, which from the negligence incident to a disputed title, can scarcely fail to be in disorder.

Believe me there is nothing for which I have more ardently longed, than to clasp you once again in my arms. The additional procrastination which this new journey will create, cannot be more afflicting to you than it is to me. Abridge then, I intreat you, as much as possible, those delays which are in some degree inevitable, and let me have the agreeable surprize of holding my St. Julian to my breast before I imagined I had reason to expect his return.

Letter X. *The Answer, Zamora*

My dear lord,

It is with the utmost pleasure that I have it now in my power to assure you that your affair is finally closed at the court of Madrid, in a manner the most advantageous and honourable to your name and family. You will perceive from the date of this letter that I had no need of the request you have made in order to remind me of my duty to my friend. I was no sooner able to quit the capital with propriety, than I immediately repaired hither. The derangement however of your affairs at this place is greater than either of us could have imagined, and it will take a considerable time to reduce them to that order, which shall render them most beneficial to the peasant, and most productive to the lord.

The employment which I find at this place, serves in some degree to dissipate the anguish of my mind. It is an employment embellished by innocence, and consecrated by friendship. It is therefore of all pursuits that which has the greatest tendency to lull the sense of misery.

Rinaldo, I had drawn the pangs of absence with no flattering pencil. I had expressed them in the most harsh and aggravated colours. But dark and gloomy as were the prognostics I had formed to myself, they, alas, were but shadows of what was reserved for me. The event laughs to scorn the conceptions I had entertained. Explain to me, best, most faithful of friends, for you only can, what dark and portentous meaning is concealed beneath the silence of Matilda. So far from your present epistle assisting the conjectures of my madding brain, it bewilders me more than ever. My friend dates his letter from the very place in which she resides, and yet by not a single word does he inform me how, and what she is.

It is now six tedious months since a single line has reached me from her hand. I have expostulated with the voice of apprehension, with the voice of agony, but to no purpose. Had it not been for the tenfold obligation in which I am bound to the best of friends, I had long, very long ere this, deserted the kingdom of Spain for ever. The concerns of no man upon earth, but those of my Rinaldo, could have detained me. Had they related to myself alone, I had not wasted a thought on them. And yet here I am at a greater distance from the centre of my solicitude than ever.

You, my friend, know not the exquisite and inexpressible anguish of a mind, in doubt about that in which he is most interested. I have not the most solitary and slender clue to guide me through the labyrinth. All the events, all the calamities that may have overtaken me, are alike probable and improbable, and there is not one of them that I can invent, which can possibly have escaped the knowledge of that friend, into whose hands I committed my all. Sickness, infidelity, death itself, all the misfortunes to which humanity is heir, are alike certain and palpable.

Oh, my Rinaldo, it was a most ill-judged and mistaken indulgence, that led you to suppress the story of my disaster. Give me to know it. It may be distressful, it may be tremendous. But be it as it will, there is not a misfortune in the whole catalogue of human woes, the knowledge of which would not be elysium to what I suffer. To be told the whole is to know the worst. Time is the medicine of every anguish. There is no malady incident to a conscious being, which if it

does not annihilate his existence, does not, after having attained a crisis, insensibly fall away and dissolve. But apprehension, apprehension is hell itself. It is infinite as the range of possibility. It is immortal as the mind in which it takes up its residence. It gains ground every moment. Compounded as it is of hope and fear, there is not a moment in which it does not plume the wings of expectation. It prepares for itself incessant, eternal disappointment. It grows for ever. At first it may be trifling and insignificant, but anon it swells its giant limbs, and hides its head among the clouds.

Lost as I am to the fate, the character, the present dispositions of Matilda, I have now no prop to lean upon but you. Upon you I place an unshaken confidence. In your fidelity I can never be deceived. I owe you greater obligations than ever man received from man before. When I was forlorn and deserted by all the world, it was then you flew to save me. You left the blandishments that have most power over the unsuspecting mind of youth, you left the down of luxury, to search me out. It was you that saved my life in the forest of Leontini. They were your generous offers that afforded me the first specimens of that benevolence and friendship, which restored me from the annihilation into which I was plunged, to an existence more pleasant and happy than I had yet known.

Rinaldo, I committed to your custody a jewel more precious than all the treasures of the east. I have lost, I am deprived of her. Where shall I seek her? In what situation, under what character shall I discover her? Believe me, I have not in all the paroxysms of grief, entertained a doubt of you. I have not for a moment suffered an expression of blame to escape my lips. But may I not at least know from you, what it is that has effected this strange alteration, to what am I to trust, and what is the fate that I am to expect for the remainder of an existence of which I am already weary?

Yes, my dear marquis, life is now a burden to me. There is nothing but the dear business of friendship, and the employment of disinterested affection that could make it supportable. Accept at least this last exertion of your St. Julian. His last vows shall be breathed for your happiness. Fate, do what thou wilt me, but shower down thy choicest blessings on my friend! Whatever thou deniest to my sincere exertions in the cause of rectitude, bestow a double portion upon that artless and ingenuous youth, who, however misguided for a moment, has founded even upon the basis of error, a generous return and an heroic resolution, which the most permanent exertions of spotless virtue scarce can equal!

Letter XI. *Signor Hippolito Borelli to the Count de St. Julian, Palermo*

My dear lord,

I have often heard it repeated as an observation of sagacity and experience, that when one friend has a piece of disagreeable intelligence to disclose to another, it is better to describe it directly, and in simple terms, than to introduce it with that kind of periphrasis and circumlocution, which oftener tends to excite a vague and impatient horror in the reader, than to prepare him to bear his misfortune with decency and fortitude. There are however no rules of this kind that do not admit of exceptions, and I am too apprehensive that the subject of my present letter may be classed among those exceptions. St. Julian, I have a tale of horror to unfold! Lay down the fatal scrowl at this place, and collect all the dignity and resolution of your mind. You will stand in need of it. Fertile and ingenious as your imagination often is in tormenting itself, I will defy you to conceive an event more big with horror, more baleful and tremendous in all its consequences.

My friend, I have taken up my pen twenty times, and laid it down as often again, uncertain in what manner to break my intelligence, and where I ought to begin. I have been undetermined whether to write to you at all, or to leave you to learn the disaster and your fate, as fortune shall direct. It is an ungrateful and unpleasant task. Numbers would exclaim upon it as imprudence and folly. I might at least suspend the consummation of your affliction a little longer, and leave you a little longer to the enjoyment of a deceitful repose.

But I am terrified at the apprehension of how this news may overtake you at last. I have always considered the count de St. Julian as one of the most amiable of mankind. I have looked up to him as a model of virtue, and I have exulted that I had the honour to be of the same species with so fair a fame, and so true a heart. I would willingly lighten to a man so excellent the load of calamity. Why is it, that heaven in the mysteriousness of its providence, so often visits with superior affliction, the noblest of her sons? I should be truly sorry, that my friend should act in a manner unworthy of the tenor of his conduct, and the exaltation of his character. You are now, my lord at a distance. You have time to revolve the various circumstances of your condition, and to fix with the coolest and most mature deliberation the conduct you shall determine to hold.

I remember in how pathetic a manner you complained, in the last letter I received from you before you quitted Italy, of the horrors of banishment. Little did my friend then know the additional horrors that fate had in store for him. Two persons there were whom you loved above all the world, in whom you placed the most unbounded confidence. My poor friend would never have left Italy but to oblige his Rinaldo, would never have quitted the daughter of the duke of Benevento, if he could not have intrusted her to the custody of his Rinaldo. What then will be his astonishment when he learns that two months have now elapsed since the heiress of this illustrious house has assumed the title of the marchioness of Pescara?

Since this extraordinary news first reached me, I have employed some pains to discover the means by which an event so surprising has been effected. I have hitherto however met with a

very partial success. There hangs over it all the darkness of mystery, and all the cowardice of guilt. There cannot be any doubt that that friend, whom for so long a time you cherished in your bosom, has proved the most detestable of villains, the blot and the deformity of the human character. How far the marchioness has been involved in his guilt, I am not able to ascertain. Surely however the fickleness and inconstancy of her conduct cannot be unstained with the pollution of depravity. After the most diligent search I have learned a report, which was at that time faintly whispered at Cosenza, that you were upon the point of marriage with the only daughter of the duke of Aranda. Whether any inferences can be built upon so trivial a foundation I am totally ignorant.

But might I be permitted to advise you, you ought to cast these base and dishonourable characters from your heart for ever. The marquis is surely unworthy of your sword. He ought not to die, but in a manner deeply stamped with the infamy in which he has lived. I will not pretend to alledge to a person so thoroughly master of every question of this kind, how poor and inadequate is such a revenge: what a barbarous and unmeaning custom it is, that thus puts the life of the innocent and injured in the scale with that of the destroyer, and leaves the decision of immutable differences to skill, to fortune, and a thousand trivial and contemptible circumstances. You are not to be told how much more there is of true heroism in refusing than in giving a challenge, in bearing an injury with superiority and virtuous fortitude, than in engaging in a Gothic and savage revenge.

It is not easy perhaps to find a woman, deserving enough to be united for life to the fate of my friend. Certain I am, if I may be permitted to deliver my sentiments, there is a levity and folly conspicuous in the temper of her you have lost, that renders her unworthy of being lamented by a man of discernment and sobriety. What to desert without management and without regret, one to whom she had vowed eternal constancy, a man, of whose amiable character, and glorious qualities she had so many opportunities of being convinced? Oh, shame where is thy blush? If iniquity like this, walks the world with impunity, where is the vice that shall be branded with infamy, to deter the most daring and profligate offender? Let us state the transaction in a light the most favourable to the fair inconstant. What thin veil, what paltry arts were employed by this mighty politician to confound and mislead an understanding, clear and penetrating upon all other subjects, blind and feeble only upon that in which the happiness of her life was involved?

My St. Julian, the exertion of that fortitude with which nature has so richly endowed you, was never so completely called for in any other instance. This is the crisis of your life. This is the very tide, which accordingly as it is improved or neglected, will give a colour to all your future story. Let not that amiable man, who has found the art of introducing heroism into common life, and dignifying the most trivial circumstances by the sublimity and refinedness of his sentiments, now, in the most important affair, sink below the common level. Now is the time to display the true greatness of your mind. Now is the time to prove the consistency of your character.

A mind, destitute of resources, and unendowed with that elasticity which is the badge of an immortal nature, when placed in your circumstances, might probably sink into dereliction and despair. Here in the moral and useful point of view would be placed the termination of their course. What a different prospect does the future life of my St. Julian suggest to me? I see him rising superior to misfortune. I see him refined like silver from, the furnace. His affections and his thoughts, being detached by calamity from all consideration of self, he lays out his exertions in acts of benevolence. His life is one tissue of sympathy and compassion. He is an extensive benefit to mankind. His influence, like that of the sun, cheers the hopeless, and illuminates the

desolate. How necessary are such characters as these, to soften the rigour of the sublunary scene, and to stamp an impression of dignity on the degeneracy of the human character?

Letter XII.[1] *Matilda della Colonna to the Count de St. Julian, Cosenza*

I rise from a bed, which you have surrounded with the severest misfortunes, to address myself to you in this billet. It is in vain, that in conformity to the dull round of custom, I seek the couch of repose, sleep is for ever fled from my eyes. I seek it on every side, but on swift wings it flits far, very far, from me. It is now the dead of night. All eyes are closed but mine. The senses of all other creatures through the universe of God, are steeped in forgetfulness. Oh, sweet, oblivious power, when wilt thou come to my assistance, when wilt thou shed thy poppies upon this distracted head!

There was a time, when no human creature was so happy as the now forlorn Matilda. My days were full of gaiety and innocence. My thoughts were void of guile, and I imagined all around me artless as myself. I was by nature indeed weak and timid, trembling at every leaf, shuddering with apprehension of the lightest danger. But I had a protector generous and brave, that spread his arms over me, like the wide branches of a venerable oak, and round whom I clung, like ivy on the trunk. Why didst thou come, like a cold and murderous blight, to blast all my hopes of happiness, and to shatter my mellow hangings?

I have often told you that my heart was not tough and inflexible, to be played upon with a thousand experiments, and encounter a thousand trials. But you would not believe me. You could not think my frame was so brittle and tender, and my heart so easily broken. Inexorable, incredulous man! you shall not be long in doubt. You shall soon perceive that I may not endure much more.

How could you deceive me so entirely? I loved you with the sincerest affection. I thought you artless as truth, as free from vice and folly as etherial spirits. When your hypocrisy was the most consummate, your countenance had then in my eye, most the air of innocence. Your visage was clear and open as the day. But it was a cloak for the blackest thoughts and the most complicated designs. You stole upon me unprepared, you found all the avenues to my heart, and you made yourself the arbiter of my happiness before I was aware.

You hear me, thou arch impostor! There are punishments reserved for those, who undermine the peace of virtue, and steal away the tranquility of innocence. This is thy day. Now thou laughest at all my calamity, thou mockest all my anguish. But do not think that thy triumph shall be for ever. That thought would be fond and false as mine have been. The empire of rectitude shall one day be vindicated. Matilda shall one day rise above thee.

But perhaps, St. Julian, it is not yet too late. The door is yet open to thy return. My claim upon thy heart is prior, better every way than that of donna Isabella. Leave her as you left me. It will cost you a repentance less severe. The wounds you have inflicted may yet be healed. The mischiefs you have caused are not yet irreparable. These fond arms are open to receive you. To

[1] This letter was written several months earlier than the preceding, but was intercepted by the marquis of Pescara.

this unresentful bosom you may return in safety. But remember, I intreat you, the opportunity will be of no long duration. Every moment is winged with fate. A little more hesitation, and the irrevocable knot is tied, and Spain will claim you for her own. A little more delay, and this fond credulous heart, that yet exerts itself in a few vain struggles, will rest in peace, will crumble into dust, and no longer be sensible to the misery that devours it. Dear, long expected moment, speed thy flight! To how many more calamitous days must these eyes be witness? In how many more nights must they wander through a material darkness, that is indeed meridian splendour, when compared with the gloom in which my mind is involved?

Do not imagine that I have been easily persuaded of the truth of your infidelity. I have not indulged to levity and credulity. I have heaped evidence upon evidence. I have resisted the proofs that offered on every side, till I have become liable to the character of stupid and insensible. Would it were possible for me to be deceived! But no, the delusion is vanished. I doubt, I hesitate, no longer. All without is certainty, and all within is unmingled wretchedness.

* * * * *

St. Julian, I once again resume my pen. I was willing you should be acquainted with all the distress and softness of my heart. I was willing to furnish you with every motive to redeem the character of a man, before it were too late. Do not however think me incapable of a spirited and a steady resolution. It were easy for me to address a letter to the family of Aranda, I might describe to them all my wrong, and prevent that dreaded union, the thought of which distresses me. My letter might probably arrive before the mischief were irretrievable. It is not likely that so illustrious a house, however they may have previously condescended to the speciousness of your qualities, would persist in their design in the face of so cogent objections. But I am not capable of so weak and poor spirited a revenge.

Return, my lord, yet return to her you have deserted. Let your return be voluntary, and it shall be welcome as the light of day to these sad and weeping eyes, and it shall be dear and precious to my soul, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart. But I will not force an unwilling victim. Such a prize would be unworthy of the artless and constant spirit of Matilda. Such a husband would be the bane of my peace, and the curse of my hapless days. That he were the once loved St. Julian, would but aggravate the distress, and rankle the arrow. It would continually remind me of the dear prospects, and the fond expectations I had once formed, without having the smallest tendency to gratify them.

Letter XIII. *The Marquis of Pescara to the Marquis of San Severino, Cosenza*

My dear lord,

Why is it that a heart feeble and unheroic as mine, should be destined to encounter so many temptations? I might have passed through the world honourable and immaculate, had circumstances been a little more propitious. As it is, I shall probably descend to the grave with a character, at least among the scrupulous and the honest, reproachful and scandalous. Now this I can never account for. My heart is a stranger to all the dark and malignant passions. I am not cursed with an unbounded ambition. I am a stranger to inexorable hate and fell revenge. I aim at happiness and gratification. But if it were in my power I would have all my fellow-creatures happy as myself.

Why is the fair Matilda so incomparably beautiful and so inexpressibly attractive? Had her temper been less sweet and undesigning, had her understanding been less delicate and refined, had not the graces dwelt upon those pouting lips, my heart had been sound and unhurt to this very hour. But to see her every day, to converse with her at all opportunities, to be regarded by her as her only friend and chosen protector, tell me, ye gods, what heart, that was not perfectly invulnerable, that was not totally impregnated with the waters of the Styx, could have come off victorious from trials like these?

And yet, my dear Ferdinand, to see the distress of the lovely Matilda, to see her bosom heave with anguish, and her eyes suffused with tears, to hear the heart-rending sighs continually bursting from her, in spite of the fancied resolution, and the sweet pride that fill her soul, how callous, how void of feeling and sympathy ought the man to be, in whom objects like these can call up no relentings? Ah, my lord, when I observe how her tender frame is shaken with misfortune, I am sometimes ready to apprehend that it totters to its fall, that it is impossible she should survive the struggling, tumultuous passions that rage within her. What a glorious prize would then be lost? What would then become of all the deep contrivances, the mighty politics, that your friendship suggested?

And yet, so wayward is my fate, those very objects which might be expected to awaken the sincerest penitence and regret, now only serve to give new strength to the passion that devours me, and to make my flame surmount every obstacle that can oppose its progress. Yes, Matilda, thou must be mine. Heaven and earth cannot now overturn the irrevocable decree. It has been the incessant object of my attention to throw in those artful baits which might best divert the current of her soul. I have assiduously inflamed her resentment to the highest pitch, and I flatter myself that I have made some progress towards the concluding stroke.

There is no situation in which we stand in greater need of sympathy and consolation, than in those moments of forlornness and desertion to which the poor Matilda imagines herself reduced. At these times my friendship has been most unwearied in its exertions. I have answered sigh with sigh, and mingled my tears with those of the lovely mourner. Believe me, Ferdinand, this has not

been entirely affectation and hypocrisy. There is a vein of sensibility in the human heart, that will not permit us to behold an artless and an innocent distress, at least when surrounded with all the charms of beauty, without feeling our souls involuntarily dilated, and our eyes unexpectedly swimming in tears.

But I have another source of disquietude which is unaccompanied with any alleviating circumstances. A letter from the count de St. Julian to his Matilda has just been conveyed to my hands. It is filled with the most affecting and tender complaints of her silence that can possibly be imagined. He has too exalted a notion of the fair charmer to attribute this to lightness and inconstancy. His inventive fancy conjures up a thousand horrid phantoms, and surrounds the mistress of his soul with I know not what imaginary calamities. But that passage of the whole epistle that overwhelms me most, is one, in which, in spite of all the anguish of his mind, in spite of appearances, he expresses the most unsuspecting confidence in his false and treacherous friend. He still recommends me to his Matilda as her best protector and surest guardian. Ah, my St. Julian, how didst thou deserve to be cursed with an associate, hollow and deceitful as Rinaldo?

Yes, marquis, in spite of all the arguments you have alledged to me upon the subject, I still regard my first and youthful friend, as the most exalted and the foremost of human beings. You may talk of pride, vanity, and stoicism, the heart that listens to the imputation feels its sophistry. It is not vanity, for his virtuous actions are rather studiously hid from observation, than ostentatiously displayed. Is it pride? It is a pride that constitutes the truest dignity. It is a pride worthy of heroes and of gods. What analogy does it bear with the pride of avarice, and the pride of rank; how is it similar to the haughty meanness of patronage, and the insatiable cravings of ambition?

But I must not indulge to reflexions like these. It is to no purpose for the disinterested tenderness, the unstoical affection of my St. Julian to start up in array before me. Hence remorse, and all her kindred passions! I am cruel, obdurate, and unrelenting. Yes, most amiable of men, you might as well address your cries to the senseless rocks. You might as well hope with your eloquent and soft complainings to persuade the crocodile that was ready to devour you. I have passed the Rubicon. I have taken the irrevocable step. It is too late, ah, much too late to retreat!

Letter XIV. *The Marquis of San Severino to the Marquis of Pescara, Naples*

Joy, uninterrupted, immortal joy to my dear Rinaldo. May all your days be winged with triumph, and all your nights be rapture. Believe me, I feel the sincerest congratulation upon the desired event of your long expected marriage. My lord, you have completed an action that deserves to be recorded in eternal brass. Why should politics be confined to the negotiations of ambassadors, and the cabinets of princes? I have often revolved the question, and by all that is sacred I can see no reason for it. Is it natural that the unanimating and phlegmatic transactions of a court should engage a more unwearied attention, awaken a brighter invention, or incite a more arduous pursuit than those of love? When beauty solicits the appetite, when the most ravishing tenderness and susceptibility attract the affections, it is then that the heart is most distracted and regardless, and the head least fertile in artifice and stratagem.

My joy is the more sincere, as I was compelled repeatedly to doubt of your perseverance. What sense was there in that boyish remorse, and those idle self-reproaches, in which you frequently employed yourself? No, Rinaldo, a man ought never to enter upon an heroical and arduous undertaking without being perfectly composed, and absolutely sure of himself. What a pitiful figure would my friend have made, had he stopped in the midway, and let go the angelic prize when it was already within his grasp? If it had not been for my repeated exhortations, if I had not watched over you like your guardian genius, would you have been now flushed with success, and crowned with unfading laurel?

Letter XV. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara, Livorno*

My lord,

I hoped before this time to have presented before you the form of that injured friend, which, if your heart is not yet callous to every impression, must be more blasting to your sight, than all the chimeras that can be conjured up by a terrified imagination, or a guilty conscience. I no sooner received the accursed intelligence at Zamora, than I flew with the speed of lightning. I permitted no consideration upon earth to delay me till I arrived at Alicant. But the sea was less favourable to the impatience of my spirit. I set sail in a boisterous and unpromising season. I have been long tossed about at the mercy of the ocean. I thank God, after having a thousand times despaired of it, that I have at length set foot in a port of Italy. It is distant indeed, but the ardour of my purpose were sufficient to cut short all intermission.

My lord, I trusted you as my own soul. No consideration could have moved me to entertain a moment's suspicion of your fidelity. I placed in your hand the most important pledge it ever was my fortune to possess. I employed no guard. I opened to you an unsuspecting bosom, and you have stung me to the heart. I gave you the widest opportunity, and it is through my weak and groundless confidence that you have reached me. You have employed without scruple all those advantages it put into your hands. You have undermined me at your ease. I left you to protect my life's blood, my heart of heart, from every attack, to preserve the singleness of her affections, and the constancy of her attachment. It was yours to have breathed into her ear the sighs of St. Julian. It was yours ambitiously to expatiate upon his amiable qualities. You were every day to have added fuel to the flame. You were to have presented Matilda to my arms, more beautiful, more tender, more kind, than she had ever appeared. From this moment then, let the name of trust be a by-word for the profligate to scoff at! Let the epithet of friend be a mildew to the chaste and uncorrupted ear! Let mutual confidence be banished from the earth, and men, more savage than the brute, devour each other!

Was it possible, my lord, that you should dream, that the benefits you had formerly conferred upon me, could deprive my resentment of all its sting under the present provocation! If you did, believe me, you were most egregiously mistaken. It is true I owed you much, and heaven has not cursed me with a heart of steel. What bounds did I set to my gratitude? I left my natal shore, I braved all the dangers of the ocean, I fought in foreign climes the power of requital. I fondly imagined that I could never discharge so vast obligations. But the invention of your lordship is more fertile than mine. You have found the means to blot them in a moment. Yes, my lord, from henceforth all contract between us is canceled. You have set us right upon our first foundations. Friendship, affection, pity, I give you to the winds! Come to my bosom, unmixed malignity, black-boiling revenge! You are now the only inmates welcome to my heart.

Oh, Rinaldo, that character once so dear to me, that youth over whose opening inclinations I watched with so unremitting care, is it you that are the author of so severe a misfortune? I

held you to my breast. I poured upon your head all that magazine of affection and tenderness, with which heaven had dowered me. Never did one man so ardently love another. Never did one man interest himself so much in another's truth and virtue, in another's peace and happiness. I formed you for heroism. I cultivated those features in your character which might have made you an ornament to your country and mankind. I strewed your path with flowers, I made the couch beneath you violets and roses. Hear me, yet hear me! Learn to perceive all the magnitude of your crime. You have murdered your friend. You have wounded him in the tenderest part. You have seduced the purest innocence and the most unexampled truth. For is it possible that Matilda, erewhile the pattern of every spotless excellence, could have been a party in the black design?

But it is no longer time for the mildness of censure and the sobriety of reproach. I would utter myself in the fierce and unqualified language of invective. You have sinned beyond redemption. I would speak daggers. I would wring blood from your heart at every word. But no; I will not waste myself in angry words. I will not indulge to the bitterness of opprobrium. Nothing but the anguish of my soul should have wrung from me these solitary lines. Nothing but the fear of not surviving to my revenge, should have prevented me from forestalling them in person.—I will meet thee at Cerenzo.

Letter XVI. *The Marquis of San Severino to the Marchioness of Pescara, Cerenzo*

Madam,

I am truly sorry that it falls to my lot to communicate to you the distressing tidings with which it is perfectly necessary you should be acquainted. The marquis, your husband, and my most dear friend, has this morning fallen in a duel at this place. I am afraid it will be no alleviation of the unfortunate intelligence, if I add, that the hand by which he fell, was that of the count de St. Julian.

His lordship left Cosenza, I understand, with the declared intention of honouring me with a visit at Naples. He accordingly arrived at my palace in the evening of the second day after he left you. He there laid before me a letter he had received from the count, from which it appeared that the misunderstanding was owing to a rivalship of no recent date in the affections of your ladyship. It is not my business to enter into the merits of the dispute. You, madam, are doubtless too well acquainted with the laws of modern honour, pernicious in many instances, and which have proved so fatal to the valuable life of the marquis, not to know that the intended rencounter, circumstanced as it was, could not possibly have been prevented.

As we were informed that the count de St. Julian was detained by sickness at Livorno, we continued two days longer at Naples before we set out for our place of destination at Cerenzo. We arrived there on the evening of the twenty-third, and the count de St. Julian the next day at noon. We were soon after waited upon in form by signor Hippolito Borelli, who had been a fellow student with each of these young noblemen at the university of Palermo. He requested an interview with me, and informing me that he attended the count in quality of second, we began to adjust those minutiae, which are usually referred to the decision of those who exercise that character.

The count and the marquis had fixed their quarters at the two principal hotels of this place. Of consequence there was no sort of intercourse between them during the remainder of the day. In the evening we were attended by the baron of St. Angelo, who had heard by chance of our arrival. We spent the remainder of the day in much gaiety, and I never saw the marquis of Pescara exert himself more, or display more collectedness and humour, than upon this occasion. After we separated, however, he appeared melancholy and exhausted. He was fatigued with the repeated journies he had performed, and after having walked up and down the room, for some time, in profound thought, he retired pretty early to his chamber.

The next day at six in the morning we repaired according to appointment to the ramparts. We found the count de St. Julian and his friend arrived before us. As we approached, the marquis made a slight congee to the count, which was not returned by the other. “My lord,” cried the marquis,—“Stop,” replied his antagonist, in a severe and impatient tone. “This is no time for discussions. It was not that purpose that brought me hither.” My lord of Pescara appeared somewhat hurt at so peremptory and unceremonious a rejoinder, but presently recovered him-

self. Each party then took his ground, and they fired their pistols without any other effect, than the shoulder of the count being somewhat grazed by one of the balls.

Signor Borelli and myself now interposed, and endeavoured to compromise the affair. Our attempt however presently appeared perfectly fruitless. Both parties were determined to proceed to further action. The marquis, who at first had been perfectly calm, was now too impatient and eager to admit of a moment's delay. The count, who had then appeared agitated and disturbed, now assumed a collected air, a ferociousness and intrepidity, which, though it seemed to wait an opportunity of displaying itself, was deaf as the winds, and immoveable as the roots of Vesuvius.

They now drew their swords. The passes of both were for some time rendered ineffectual. But at length the marquis, from the ardour of his temper seemed to lay aside his guard, and the count de St. Julian, by a sudden thrust, run his antagonist through the body. The marquis immediately fell, and having uttered one groan, he expired. The sword entered at the left breast, and proceeded immediately to the heart.

The count, instead of appearing at all disturbed at this event, or attempting to embrace the opportunity of flight, advanced immediately towards the body, and bending over it, seemed to survey its traits with the profoundest attention. The surgeon who had attended, came up at this instant, but presently perceived that his art was become totally useless. During however this short examination, the count de St. Julian recovered from his reverie, and addressing himself to me, "My lord," said he, "I shall not attempt to fly from the laws of my country. I am indeed the challenger, but I have done nothing, but upon the matures! deliberation, and I shall at all times be ready to answer my conduct." Though I considered this mode of proceeding as extremely singular I did not however think it became me, as the friend of the marquis of Pescara, to oppose his resolution. He has accordingly entered into a recognizance before the gonfaloniere, to appear at a proper time to take his trial at the city of Naples.

Madam, I thought it my duty to be thus minute in relating the particulars of this unfortunate affair. I shall not descend to any animadversions upon the conduct and language of the count de St. Julian. They will come to be examined and decided upon in a proper place. In the mean time permit me to offer my sincerest condolences upon the loss you have sustained in the death of my amiable friend. If it be in my power to be of service to your ladyship, with respect to the funeral, or any other incidental affairs, you may believe that I shall account it my greatest honour to alleviate in any degree the misfortune you have suffered. With the sincerest wishes for the welfare of yourself and your amiable son, I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your most obedient and very faithful servant,

The marquis of San Severino.

Letter XVII. *The Answer, Cosenza*

My lord,

You were not mistaken when you supposed that the subject of your letter would both afflict and surprize me in the extremest degree. The unfortunate event to which it principally relates, is such as cannot but affect me nearly. And separate from this, there is a veil of mystery that hangs over the horrid tale, behind which I dare not pry, but with the most trembling anxiety, but which will probably in a very short time be totally removed.

Your lordship, I am afraid, is but too well acquainted with the history of the correspondence between myself and my deceased lord. I was given to understand that the count de St. Julian was married to the daughter of the duke of Aranda. I thought I had but too decisive evidence of the veracity of the story. And you, my lord, I remember, were one of the witnesses by which it was confirmed. Yet how is this to be reconciled with the present catastrophe? Can I suppose that the count, after being settled in Spain, should have deserted these connexions, in order to come over again to that country in which he had forfeited all pretensions to character and reputation, and to commence a quarrel so unjust and absurd, with the man to whom he was bound by so numerous obligations?

My lord, I have revolved all the circumstances that are communicated to me in your alarming letter. The oftener I peruse it, and the more maturely I consider them, the more does it appear that the count de St. Julian has all the manners of conscious innocence and injured truth. It is impossible for an impostor to have acted throughout with an air so intrepid and superior. Your lordship's account, so far as it relates to the marquis, is probably the account of a friend, but it is impossible not to perceive, that his behaviour derives no advantage from being contrasted with that of his antagonist.

You will readily believe, that it has cost me many efforts to assemble all these thoughts, and to deliver these reasonings in so connected a manner. At first my prejudices against the poor and unprotected stranger were so deeply rooted, that I had no suspicion of their injustice. I regarded the whole as a dream; I considered every circumstance as beyond the cognizance of reason, and founded entirely in madness and frenzy. I painted to myself the count de St. Julian, whom I had known for a character so tender and sincere, as urged along with all the stings of guilt, and agitated with all the furies of remorse. I at once pitied his sufferings, and lamented their mortal and destructive consequences. I regarded yourself and every person concerned in the melancholy affair, as actuated by the same irrational spirit, and united to overwhelm one poor, trembling, and defenceless woman.

But the delusion was of no long continuance. I soon perceived that it was impossible for a maniac to be suffered to proceed to so horrid extremities. I perceived in every thing that related to the count, a spirit very different from that of frenzy. It is thus that I have plunged from uncertainty to uncertainty. From adopting a solution wild and absurd, I am thrown back upon a darkness still more fearful, and am lost in conjectures of the most tremendous nature.

And where is it that I am obliged to refer my timid enquiries? Alas, I have no friend upon whose bosom to support myself, I have no relation to interest in my cause. I am forlorn, forsaken and desolate. By nature not formed for defence, not braced to encounter the storms of calamity, where shall I hide my unprotected head? Forgive me, my lord, if I am mistaken; pardon the ravings of a distracted mind. It is possible I am obliged to recur to him from whom all my misfortunes took their source, who has guided unseen all those movements to which this poor and broken heart is the sacrifice. Perhaps the words that now flow from my pen, are directed to the disturber of my peace, the interceptor of all that happiness most congenial to my heart, the murderer of my husband!

Where, in the mean time, where is this countess, this dreaded rival? You, my lord, have perhaps ere this time seen her. Tell me, what are those ineffable charms that seduced a heart which was once so constant? St. Julian was never mercenary, and I have a fortune that might have filled out his most unbounded wishes. What is that strange fascination, what that indescribable enchantment, that sunk a character so glorious, that libertines venerated, and the friends of virtue adored, to a depth so low and irretrievable? I have thought much of it, I have turned it every way in my mind, but I can never understand it. The more I reflect the further I am bewildered.

But whither am I wandering? What strange passion is it, that I so carefully suppressed, over which I so loudly triumphed, that now bursts its limits? How fatal and deplorable is that train of circumstances, that brings a name, that was once inscribed on my heart, to my remembrance, accompanied with attendants, that awaken all my tenderness, and breathe new life into each forgotten endearment! Is it for me, a wife, a mother, to entertain these guilty thoughts? And can they respect him by whose fatal hand my husband fell? How low is the once spotless Matilda della Colonna sunk!

But I will not give way to this dereliction and despair. I think my heart is not made of impenetrable stuff. I think I cannot long survive afflictions thus complicated, and trials thus severe. But so long as I remain in this world of calamity, I will endeavour to act in a manner not unworthy of myself. I will not disgrace the race from which I sprung. Whatever others may do, I will not dishonour the family to which I am united. I may be miserable, but I will not be guilty. I may be a monument of anguish, but I will not be an example of degeneracy.

Gracious heaven! if I have been deceived, what a train of artifice and fraud rushes upon my terrified recollection? How carefully have all my passions, in the unguarded hour of anguish and misery, been wrought and played upon? All the feelings of a simple and undissembling mind have been roused by turns, to excite me to a deed, from which rectitude starts back with horror, which integrity blushes to look on! And have I been this poor and abject tool in the hand of villains? And are there hearts cool and obdurate enough, to watch all the trembling starts of wretchedness, to seduce the heart that has given itself up to despair? Can they look on with frigid insensibility, can they behold distress with no other eye but that of interest, with no other watch but that which discovers how it may be disgraced for ever? Oh, wretched Matilda! whither, whither hast thou been plunged!

My memory is up in arms. I cannot now imagine how I was induced to so decisive and adventurous a step. But I was full of the anguish of disappointment, and the resentment of despair. How assiduously was I comforted? What sympathy, what angelic tenderness seemed to flow from the lips of him, in whose heart perhaps there dwelt every dishonourable and unsated passion? It was all a chaos. My heart was tumultuous hurry, without leisure for retrospect, without a moment for deliberation. And do I dare to excuse myself? Was I not guilty, unpardonably guilty? Oh, a

mind that knew St. Julian should have waited for ages, should have revolved every circumstance a thousand times, should have disbelieved even the evidence of sense, and the demonstration of eternal truth! Accursed precipitation! Most wicked speed! No, I have not suffered half what I have deserved. Heap horrors on me, thou dreadful dispenser of avenging providence! I will not complain. I will expire in the midst of agonies without a groan!

But these thoughts must be banished from my heart for ever. Wretched as I am, I am not permitted the consolation of penitence, I am not free to accuse and torment myself. No, that step has been taken which can never be repealed. The marquis of Pescara was my husband, and whatever were his true character, I will not crush his memory and his fame. I have, I fear, unadvisedly entered into connexions, and entailed upon myself duties. But these connexions shall now be sacred; these duties shall be discharged to the minutest tittle. Oh, poor and unprotected orphan, thou art cast upon the world without a friend! But thou shalt never want the assiduity of a mother. Thou, at least, are guileless and innocent. Thou shalt be my only companion. To watch over thee shall be the sole amusement that Matilda will henceforth indulge herself. That thou wilt remind me of my errors, that I shall trace in thee gradually as thy years advance, the features of him to whom my unfortunate life owed all its colour, will but make thee a more proper companion, an object more congenial to the sorrows of my soul.

Letter XVIII. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marchioness of Pescara, Cerenzo*

Madam,

You may possibly before this letter comes to your hands have learned an event that very nearly interests both you and me. If you have not, it is not in my power at this time to collect together the circumstances, and reduce them to the form of a narration. The design of my present letter is of a very different kind. Shall I call that a design, which is the consequence of an impulse urging me forward, without the consent of my will, and without time for deliberation?

I write this letter with a hand dyed with the blood of your husband. Let not the idea startle you. Matilda is advanced too far to be frightened with bugbears. What, shall a mind inured to fickleness and levity, a mind that deserted, without reason and without remorse, the most constant of lovers, and that recked not the consequences, shall such a mind be terrified at the sight of the purple blood, or be moved from its horrid tranquility by all the tragedies that an universe can furnish?

Matilda, I have slain your husband, and I glory in the deed. I will answer it in the face of day. I will defy that man to come forward, and when he views the goary, lifeless corse, say to me with a tone of firmness and conviction, "Thou hast done wrong."

And now I have but one business more with life. It is to arraign the fair and traiterous author of all my misfortunes. Start not at the black catalogue. Flinch not from the detail of infernal mischief. The mind that knows how to perpetrate an action, should know how to hear the story of it repeated, and to answer it in all its circumstances.

Matilda, I loved you. Alas, this is to say little! All my thoughts had you for their centre. I was your slave. With you I could encounter tenfold calamity, and call it happiness. Banished from you, the world was a colourless and confused chaos. One moment of displeasure, one interval of ambiguous silence crouded my imagination with every frantic apprehension. One smile, one word of soft and soothing composition, fell upon my soul like odoriferous balm, was a dulcet and harmonious sound, that soothed my anguish into peace, that turned the tempest within me to that still and lifeless calm, where not a breath disturbs the vast serene.

And this is the passion you have violated. You have trampled upon a lover, who would have sacrificed his life to save that tender and enchanting frame from the impression of a thorn. And yet, Matilda, if it had been only a common levity, I would have pardoned it. If you had given your hand to the first chance comer, I would have drenched the cup of woe in solitude and darkness. Not one complaint from me should have reached your ear. If you could have found tranquility and contentment, I would not have been the avenging angel to blast your prospects.

But there are provocations that the human heart cannot withstand. I did not come from the hand of nature callous and intrepid, I was the stoic of philosophy and reason. To lose my mistress and my friend at once. To lose them!—Oh, ten thousand deaths would have been mercy to the loss! Had they been tossed by tempests, had they been torn from my eyes by whirlwinds, I

would have viewed the scene with eye-balls of stiffened horn. But to find all that upon which I had placed my confidence, upon which I rested my weary heart, foul and false at once: to have those bosoms, in which I fondly thought I reigned adored, combined in one damned plot to overwhelm and ruin me—Indeed, Matilda, it was too much!

Well, well. Be at peace my soul. I have taken my revenge. But revenge is not a passion congenial to the spirit of St. Julian. It was once soft and tender as a babe. You might have bended and moulded it into what form you pleased. But I know not how it is, it is now remorseless and unfeeling as a rock. I have swam in horror, and I am not satiated. I could hear tales of distress, and I could laugh at their fancied miseries. I could view all the tragedies of battle, and walk up and down amidst seas of blood with tranquility. It is well. I did not think I could have done all this. But inexplicable and almighty providence strengthens, indurates the heart for the scenes of detestation to which it is destined.

And is it Rinaldo that I have slain? That friend that I held a thousand times to my bosom, that friend over whose interests I have watched without weariness? Many a time have I dropped the tear of oblivion over his youthful wanderings. I exulted in the fruits of all my toil. Yes, Matilda, I have seen the drops of sacred pity bedew his cheek. I have seen his bosom heave with generous resentment, and heroic resolution. Oh, there was a time, when the author of nature might have looked down upon his work, and said, "This is a man." What benefits did not I receive from his munificent character, and wide extended hand?

And who made me his judge and his avenger? What right had I to thrust my sword into his heart? He now lies a lifeless corse. Upon his breast I see the gaping and death-giving wound. The blood bursts forth in continued streams. His hair is clotted with it. That cheek, that lately glowed, is now pale and sallow. All his features are deformed. The fire in his eye is extinguished for ever. Who has done this? What wanton and sacrilegious hand has dared deface the work of God? It could not be his preceptor, the man upon whom he heaped a thousand benefits? It could not be his friend? Oh, Rinaldo, all thy errors lie buried in the damp and chilly tomb, but thy blood shall for ever rise to accuse me!

Letter XIX. *The Marquis of San Severino to the Marchioness of Pescara, Naples*

Madam,

I have just received a letter from your ladyship which gives me the utmost pain. I am sincerely afflicted at the unfortunate concern I have had in the melancholy affairs that have caused you so much uneasiness. I expected indeed that the sudden death of so accomplished and illustrious a character as your late husband, must have produced in a breast susceptible as yours, the extremest distress. But I did not imagine that you would have been so overwhelmed with the event, as to have forgotten the decorums of your station, and to have derogated from the dignity of your character. Madam, I sincerely sympathize in the violence of your affliction, and I earnestly wish that you may soon recover that self-command, which rendered your behaviour upon all occasions a model of elegance, propriety and honour.

Your ladyship proposes certain questions to me in your epistle of a very singular nature. You will please to remember, that they will for the most part be brought in a few days before a court of judicature. I must therefore with all humility intreat you to excuse me from giving them a direct answer. There would be an impropriety in a person, so illustrious in rank, and whose voice is of considerable weight in the state, forestalling the inferior courts upon these subjects. One thing however I am at liberty to mention, and your ladyship may be assured, that in any thing in my power I should place my highest felicity in gratifying you. There was indeed some misinformation upon the subject; but I have now the honour to inform you from authority upon which I depend, that the count de St. Julian is now, and has always remained single. I believe there never was any negociation of marriage between him and the noble house of Aranda.

Madam, it gives me much uneasiness, that your ladyship should entertain the smallest suspicion of any impropriety in my behaviour in these affairs. I believe the conduct of no man has been more strictly conformed, in all instances, to the laws of decorum than my own. Objects of no small magnitude, have upon various occasions passed under my inspection, and you will be so obliging as to believe that upon no occasion has my veracity been questioned, or the integrity of my character suffered the smallest imputation. The rectitude of my actions is immaculate, and my honour has been repeatedly asserted with my sword.

Your ladyship will do me the favour to believe, that though I cannot but regard your suspicions as equally cruel and unjust, I shall never entertain the smallest resentment upon their account. I have the honour to be, with all possible deference and esteem,

Madam,

Your ladyship's most faithful servant,

The marquis of San Severino.

Letter XX. *The Count de St. Julian to Signor Hippolito Borelli, Leontini*

My dear friend,

Travelling through the various countries of Europe, and expanding your philosophical mind to embrace the interests of mankind, you still are so obliging as to take the same concern in the transactions of your youthful friend as ever. I shall therefore confine myself in the letter which I now steal the leisure to write, to the relation of those events, of which you are probably as yet uninformed. If I were to give scope to the feelings of my heart, with what, alas, should I present you but a circle of repetitions, which, however important they may appear to me, could not but be dull and tedious to any person less immediately interested?

As I pursued with greater minuteness the enquiries I had begun before you quitted the kingdom of the two Sicilies, I found the arguments still increasing upon me, which tended to persuade me of the innocence of Matilda. Oh, my friend, what a letter did I address to her in the height of my frenzy and despair? Every word spoke daggers, and that in a moment when the tragical event of which I was the author, must naturally have overwhelmed her with astonishment and agony. Yes, Hippolito, this action must remain an eternal blot upon my character. Years of penitence could not efface it, floods of tears could not wash it away.

But before I had satisfied my curiosity in this pursuit, the time approached in which it was necessary for me to take a public trial at Naples. This scene was to me a solemn one. The blood of my friend sat heavy at my heart. It is true no provocation could have been more complicated than that I had received. Take it from me, Hippolito, as my most mature and serious determination, that a Gothic revenge is beneath the dignity of a man. It did not become me, who had aimed at the character of unaccommodating virtue, to appear in defence of an action that my heart disallowed. To stand forward before the delegated power of my country with the stain of blood upon me, was not a scene for a man of sensibility to act in. But the decision of my judges was more indulgent than the verdict of my own mind.

One of the persons who was most conspicuous upon this occasion, was the marquis of San Severino. Hippolito, it is true, I have been hurried into many actions that have caused me the severest regret. But I would not for ten thousand worlds have that load of guilt upon my mind, that this man has to answer for. And yet he bore his head aloft. He was placid and serene. He was even disengaged and gay. He talked in as round a tone, of honour and integrity, of veracity and virtue, as if his life were spotless, and his heart immaculate. The circumstances however that came out in the progress of the affair, were in the highest degree disadvantageous to him. The general indignation and hatred seemed gradually to swell against him, like the expansive surges of the ocean. A murmur of disapprobation was heard from every side, proceeded from every mouth. Even this accomplished villain at length hung his head. When the court was dissolved, he was encountered with hisses and scorn from the very lowest of the people. It was only by the

most decisive exertions of the guards of the palace, that he was saved from being torn to pieces by the fury of the populace.

You will be surprized to perceive that this letter is dated at the residence of my fathers. Fourteen days ago I was summoned hither by the particular request of my brother, who had been seized with a violent epidemical distemper. It was extremely sudden in its operation, and before I arrived he was no more. He had confessed however to one of the friends of our house, before he expired, that he had forged the will of my father, instigated by the surprize and disappointment he had felt, when he understood that that father, whom he had employed so many unjustifiable means to prepossess, had left his whole estate, exclusive of a very small annuity, to his eldest son. Since I have been here, I have been much employed in arranging the affairs of the family, which, from the irregular and extemporary manner in which my brother lived, I found in considerable disorder.

Letter XXI. *The Count de St. Julian to the Marchioness of Pescara, Leontini*

Madam,

I have waited with patience for the expiration of twelve months, that I might not knowingly be guilty of any indecorum, or intrude upon that sorrow, which the tragical fate of the late marquis so justly claimed. But how shall I introduce the subject upon which I am now to address you? Where shall I begin this letter? Or with what arguments may I best propitiate the anger I have so justly incensed, and obtain that boon upon which the happiness of my future life is so entirely suspended?

Among all the offences of which I have been guilty, against the simplest and gentlest mind that ever adorned this mortal stage, there is none which I less pardon to myself, than that unjust and precipitate letter, which I was so inconsiderate as to address to you immediately after I had steeped my hand in the murder of your husband. Was it for me, who had so much reason to be convinced of the innocence and disinterested truth of Matilda, to harbour suspicions so black, or rather to affront her with charges, the most hideous and infamous? What crime is there more inexcusable, than that of attributing to virtue all the concomitants of vice, of casting all those bitter taunts, all that aggravated and triumphant opprobrium in the face of rectitude, that ought to be reserved only for the most profligate of villains? Yes, Matilda, I trampled at once upon the exemptions of your sex, upon the sanctity of virtue, upon the most inoffensive and undesigning of characters. And yet all this were little.

What a time was it that I chose for an injury so atrocious! A beautiful and most amiable woman had just been deprived, by an unforeseen event, of that husband, with whom but a little before she had entered into the most sacred engagements. The state of a widow is always an afflictive and unprotected one. Rank does not soften, frequently aggravates the calamity. A tragedy had just been acted, that rendered the name of Matilda the butt of common fame, the subject of universal discussion. How painful and humiliating must this situation have been to that anxious and trembling mind; a mind whose highest ambition coveted only the tranquility that reigns in the shade of retreat, the silence and obscurity that the wisest of philosophers have asserted to be the most valuable reputation of her sex? Such was the affliction, in which I might then have known that the mistress of my heart was involved.

But I have since learned a circumstance before which all other aggravations of my inhumanity fade away. The moment that I chose for wanton insult and groundless arraignment, was the very moment in which Matilda discovered all the horrid train of hypocrisy and falsehood by which she had been betrayed. What a shock must it have given to her gentle and benevolent mind, that had never been conscious to one vicious temptation, that had never indulged the most distant thought of malignity, to have found herself surprized into a conduct, to the nature of which she had been a stranger, and which her heart disavowed? Of all the objects of compassion that the universe can furnish, there is none more truly affecting, than that of an artless and unsuspecting

mind insnared by involuntary guilt. The astonishment with which it is overwhelmed, is vast and unqualified. The remorse with which it is tortured, are totally unprepared and unexpected, and have been introduced by no previous gradation. It is true, the involuntarily culpable may in some sense be pronounced wholly innocent. The guilty mind is full of prompt excuses, and ready evasions, but the untainted spirit, not inured to the sophistry of vice, cannot accommodate itself with these subterfuges. If such be the state of vulgar minds involved in this unfortunate situation, what must have been that of so soft and inoffensive a spirit?

Oh, Matilda, if tears could expiate such a crime, ere this I had been clear as the guileless infant. If incessant and bitter reproaches could overweigh a guilt of the first magnitude, mine had been obliterated. But no; the words I wrote were words of blood. Each of them was a barbed arrow pointed at the heart. There was no management, there was no qualification. And when we add to this the object against which all my injuries were directed, what punishment can be discovered sufficiently severe? The mind that invented it, must have been callous beyond all common hardness. The hand that wrote it must be accursed for ever.

And yet, Matilda, it is not merely pardon that I seek. Even that would be balm to my troubled spirit. It would somewhat soften the harsh outlines, and the aggravated features of a crime, which I shall never, never forgive to my own heart. But no, think, most amiable of women, of the height of felicity I once had full in view, and excuse my present presumption. While indeed my mind was guiltless, and my hand unstained with blood, while I had not yet insulted the woman to whose affections I aspired, nor awakened the anger of the gentlest nature, of a heart made up of goodness, and tenderness and sympathy, I might have aspired with somewhat less of arrogance. Neither your heart nor mine, Matilda, were ever very susceptible to the capricious distinctions of fortune.

But, alas, how hard is it for a mind naturally ambitious to mould and to level itself to a state of degradation. Believe me, I have put forth an hundred efforts, I have endeavoured to blot your memory from a soul, in which it yet does, and ever will reign unrivalled. No, it is to fight with impassive air, it is to lash the foaming tempest into a calm. Time, which effaces all other impressions, increases that which is indelibly written upon my heart. A man whose countenance is pale and wan, and who every day approaches with hasty and unremitted strides to the tomb, may forget his situation, may call up a sickly smile upon his countenance, and lull his mind to lethargy and insensibility. Such, Matilda, is all the peace reserved for me, if yet I have no power in influencing the determinations of your mind. Stupidity, thou must be my happiness! Torpor, I will bestow upon thee all the endearing names, that common mortals give to rapture!

And yet, Matilda, if I retain any of that acute sensibility to virtue and to truth, in which I once prided myself, there can be no conduct more proper to the heir of the illustrious house of Colonna, than that which my heart demands. You have been misguided into folly. What is more natural to an ingenuous heart, than to cast back the following scandal upon the foul and detested authors, with whom the wrong originated. You have done that, which if all your passions had been hushed into silence, and the whole merits of the cause had lain before you, you would never have done. What reparation, Matilda, does a clear and generous spirit dictate, but that of honestly and fearlessly acknowledging the mistake, treading back with readiness and haste the fatal path, and embracing that line of conduct which a deliberate judgment, and an informed understanding would always have dictated?

Is it not true,—tell me, thou mistress of my soul,—that upon your determination in this one instance all your future reputation is suspended? Accept the hand of him that adores you, and

the truth will shine forth in all its native splendour, and none but the blind can mistake it. Refuse him, and vulgar souls will for ever confound you with the unfortunate Rinaldo, and his detested seducer. Fame, beloved charmer, is not an object that virtuous souls despise. To brave the tongue of slander cannot be natural to the gentle and timid spirit of Matilda.

But, oh, I dare not depend upon the precision of logic, and the frigidity of argumentation. Let me endeavour to awaken the compassion and humanity of your temper. Recollect all the innocent and ecstatic endearments with which erewhile our hours were winged. Never was sublunary happiness so pure and unmingled. It was tempered with the mildest and most unbounded sympathy, it was refined and elevated with all the sublimity of virtue. These happy, thrice happy days, you, and only you, can recall. Speak but the word, and time shall reverse his course, and a new order of things shall commence. Think how much virtue depends upon your fiat. Satisfied with felicity ourselves, our hearts will overflow with benevolence for the world. Never will misery pass us unrelieved, never shall we remit the delightful task of seeking out the modest and the oppressed in their obscure retreat. We will set mankind an example of integrity and goodness. We will retrieve the original honours of the wedded state. Methinks, I could rouze the most lethargic and unanimated with my warning voice! Methinks, I could breathe a spirit into the dead! Oh, Matilda, let me inspire ambition into your breast! Let me teach that tender and right gentle heart, to glow with a mutual enthusiasm!

Letter XXII. *The Answer, Cosenza*

My lord, It is now three weeks since I received that letter, in which you renew the generous offer of your hand. Believe me, I am truly sensible of the obligation, and it shall for ever live in my grateful heart. I am not now the same Matilda you originally addressed. I have acted towards you in an inexcusable manner. I have forfeited that spotless character which was once my own. All this you knew, and all this did not deter you. My lord, for this generosity and oblivion, once again, and from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

But it is not only in these respects, that the marchioness of Pescara differs from the daughter of the duke of Benevento. Those poor charms, my lord, which were once ascribed to me, have long been no more. The hand of grief is much more speedy and operative in its progress than the icy hand of age. Its wrinkles are already visible in my brow. The floods of tears I have shed have already furrowed my cheeks. But oh, my lord, it is not grief; that is not the appellation it claims. They are the pangs of remorse, they are the cries of never dying reproach with which I am agitated. Think how this tarnishes the heart and blunts the imagination. Think how this subdues all the aspirations of innocence, and unnerves all the exertions of virtue. Perhaps I was, flattery and friendship had at least taught me to think myself, something above the common level. But indeed, my lord, I am now a gross and a vulgar soul. All the nicer touches are fretted and worn away. All those little distinctions, those minuter delicacies I might once possess are obliterated. My heart is coarse and callous. Others, of the same standard that I am now, may have the same confidence in themselves, the same unconsciousness of a superior, as nature's most favoured children. But I am continually humbled by the sense of what I was.

These things, my lord, I mention as considerations that have some weight with me, and ought perfectly to reconcile you to my unalterable determination. But these, I will ingenuously confess, are not the considerations that absolutely decide me. You cannot but sufficiently recollect the title I bear, and the situation in which I am placed. The duties of the marchioness of Pescara are very different from those by which I was formerly bound. Does it become a woman of rank and condition to fling dishonour upon the memory of him to whom she gave her hand, or, as you have expressed it, to cast back the scandal to which she may be exposed upon the author with whom it originated? No, my lord: I must remember the family into which I have entered, and I will never give them cause to curse the day upon which Matilda della Colonna was numbered among them. What, a wife, a widow, to proclaim with her own mouth her husband for a villain? You cannot think it. It were almost enough to call forth the mouldering ashes from the cincture of the tomb.

My lord, it would not become me to cast upon a name so virtuous and venerable as yours, the whisper of a blame. I will not pretend to argue with you the impropriety and offence of a Gothic revenge. But it is necessary upon a subject so important as that which now employs my pen, to be honest and explicit. It is not a time for compliment, it is not a moment for disguise and fluctuation. Whatever were the merits of the contest, I cannot forget that your hand is deformed with the blood of my husband. My lord, you have my sincerest good wishes. I bear you none

of that ill will and covert revenge, that are equally the disgrace of reason and Christianity. But you have placed an unsuperable barrier between us. You have sunk a gulph, fathomless and immeasurable. For us to meet, would not be more contrary to the factitious dignity of rank, than shocking to the simple and unadulterated feelings of our nature. The world, the general voice would cry shame upon it. Propriety, decency, unchanged and eternal truth forbid it.

Yet once more. I have a son. He is all the consolation and comfort that is left me. To watch over his infancy is my most delightful, and most virtuous task. I have filled the character, neither of a mistress, nor a wife, in the manner my ambition aimed at. I have yet one part left, and that perhaps the most venerable of all, the part of a mother. Excellent, and exalted name! thee I will never disgrace! Not for one moment will I forget thee, not in one iota shalt thou be betrayed!

My lord, I write this letter in my favourite haunt, where indeed I pass hour after hour in the only pleasure that is left me, the nursery of my child. At this moment I cast my eyes upon him, and he answers me with the most artless and unapprehensive smile in the world. No, beloved infant! I will never injure thee! I will never be the author of thy future anguish! He seems, St. Julian, to solicit, that I would love him always, and behold him with an unaltered tenderness. Yes, my child, I will be always thy mother. From that character I will never derogate. That name shall never be lost in another, however splendid, or however attractive. Were I to hear you, my lord, they would tear him from my arms, and I should commend their justice. I should see him no more. These eyes would no longer be refreshed with that artless and adorable visage. I should no longer please myself with pouring the accents of my sorrow into his unconscious ear. Obdurate, unfeeling, relentless, unnatural mother! These would be the epithets by which I should best be known. These would be the sentiments of every heart. This would be the unbought voice, even of those vulgar souls, in which penury had most narrowed the conceptions, and repressed the enthusiasm of virtue. It is true, my lord, Matilda is sunk very low. The finger of scorn has pointed at her, and the whisper of unfeeling curiosity respecting her, has run from man to man. But yet it shall have its limits. My resolution is unalterable. To this I will never come.

My lord, among those arguments which you so well know how to urge, you have told me, that the cause you plead, is the cause of benevolence and charity. You say, that felicity would open our hearts, and teach our bosoms to overflow. But surely this is not the general progress of the human character. I had been taught to believe, and I hope I have found it true, that misfortune softens the disposition, and bids compassion take a deeper root. It shall be ever my aim, to make this improvement of those wasting sorrows, with which heaven has seen fit to visit me. For you, I am not to learn what is your generous and god like disposition. My lord, I will confess a circumstance, for which I know not whether I ought to blush. Animated by that sympathetic concern, which I once innocently took in all that related to you, I have made the most minute enquiries respecting your retreat at Leontini. I shall never be afraid, that the man, whose name dwells in the sweetest accents upon the lips of the distressed, and is the consolation and the solace of the helpless and the orphan, will degenerate into hardness. Go on, my lord! You are in the path of virtue. You are in the line that heaven chalked out for you. You will be the ornament of humanity, and your country's boast to the latest posterity.

William Godwin
Italian Letters, Vols. I and II
Or, The History of the Count de St. Julian
1784

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