

opposite wall, at a few feet from the bed. A long, aquiline, and pointed nose drooping towards a short and withered chin, divided the livid and fleshless countenance, so as to make it resemble a gaping shell. The lips were anatomically attached to the gums, since he had no teeth, and were pressed together, as if convulsively, so that the nostrils were dilated by the strength of the contraction, and the eyes acquired yet sterner brilliancy from the compression of the lips. The skin which covered the muscles of the neck was corrugated into large perpendicular folds, through which the long neck resembled a column channeled by decay. The only furniture of the room was a miserable bed, two rough wooden chairs, and a small table. At the head of the bed was fixed an oaken crucifix, and on each side a nail, from the one of which hung an earthen vessel containing holy water, and on the other was stuck a small taper. I had made a single step into the chamber, when I stopped mechanically to contemplate both the sick man, and all the objects which surrounded me, more particularly the cabinet to which Don Andrea's eyes directed me. I quickly recollected myself, and advanced to his bed-side. First I began to encourage him; then to ask him if he were disposed to confess; if he were prepared to quit this world in peace, and so proceeded to speak of all that my priestly office, under these circumstances, suggested to me. He answered neither by word, nor gesture. It seemed as if I had touched chords not adapted to the instrument, whose harmony absorbed all his faculties; or as if I had spoken of love to a heartless woman, to whom the understanding of its divine language is as impossible as the numbers of Pythagoras to me. He had but one sensation, and all the rest of his vital faculties were concentrated in that, as the solar rays in a lens. After having vainly lost several hours, I left him. Returning on the following day, my mission met with no more favourable issue. I resolved, however, not to leave him, cheered by the hope of succeeding in wresting some word from his lips, which were sealed either by convulsion or mystery. It was near evening, when with a long, fleshless arm, like that of a skeleton, he pointed out to me, without however taking his eyes from the cabinet, a pen, which lay amongst vials and boxes on the little table. If I had previously conceived the hope, I now felt a certainty of obtaining a confession; and supposed that as he felt himself unable to speak, he meant to make it in writing. Persuaded of this, I anxiously gave him the pen, and a slip of paper which had been provided for the physician. After

having rested for some minutes the arm, which, when he had pointed out the pen, had fallen powerless on the sheet, he began tracing with paralytic hand some words scattered here and there, almost illegible, and so disjoined as not to form an intelligible sentence, but in every word might be traced a volume of "strange matter." The words were as follows:—"To die—without friends—children—they would have hastened my death—with pains—with pleasure unsuited to the falling strength of age—tears—or mirth—little does it matter—every way parricide."

I cannot express to you the surprise which these words, written in lieu of a confession, occasioned me. Yet they were indeed a confession of what was passing in his mind; a terrible confession, through which I beheld a heart madly fighting with itself, and trying to stifle remorse by a sophism. The weight of a long selfish life pressed upon it. To look backward was to doubt, and yet from habit was also to resolve not to doubt: to look forward was impossible, for "where the treasure is, there is the heart also."—The night was reaching its goal. The snow drifted by the strength of the wind, beat against the narrow casement. Some drops of water, which trickled through the ceiling, stained the walls with dark and dingy stripes. The wind howled along the gloomy galleries of the house, when a rattling of wheels, as of a carriage hurried by the driver, reached my ear. The noise increased, and then suddenly stopped before Don Andrea's door. There had been another nephew expected from the country, whither the tidings of his uncle's imminent danger might perhaps have reached. Recollecting the orders of the dying man, with respect to his other relatives, I betook myself in guise of prayer to beseech Don Andrea's permission to introduce the stranger, who had not yet seen him. At this request, the muscles of his countenance became horribly contracted, as if he had been stung by a scorpion—and then gradually recovered, he answered by signs, No. Heaven only knows what ideas at that moment filled him with such ungovernable rage! He refused to admit the nephew whom he had once loved, because richer, and more crafty than his cousins—either through the hate of youth instinctive to age, or because he feared that his unscrupulous favourite, wearied of waiting for his long deferred inheritance, had come to accelerate his death—perhaps to suffocate him under the mask of love, by a prolonged kiss. If mentioning his name alone, said I to myself, has so shaken the exhausted frame of this poor wretch, his