

Excerpt from *The Castle of Otranto*
Widely considered the first Gothic Novel
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5 As it was now evening, the servant who conducted Isabella bore a torch before her. When they came to Manfred, who was walking impatiently about the gallery, he started and said hastily, "Take away that light, and begone." Then shutting the door impetuously, he flung himself upon a bench against the wall, and bade Isabella sit by him. She obeyed trembling. "I sent for you, lady," said he, — and then stopped under great appearance of confusion. "My lord!" — "Yes, I sent for you on a matter of great moment," resumed
10 he, — "Dry your tears, young lady — you have lost your bridegroom. — Yes, cruel fate! and I have lost the hopes of my race! — but Conrad was not worthy of your beauty." — "How! my lord," said Isabella; "sure you do not suspect me of not feeling the concern I ought. My duty and affection would have always —"
"Think no more of him," interrupted Manfred; "he was a sickly puny child, and heaven has perhaps taken him away that I might not trust the honours of my house on so frail a foundation. The line of Manfred
15 calls for numerous supports. My foolish fondness for that boy blinded the eyes of my prudence — but it is better as it is. I hope in a few years to have reason to rejoice at the death of Conrad."

Words cannot paint the astonishment of Isabella. At first she apprehended that grief had disordered Manfred's understanding. Her next thought suggested that this strange discourse was designed to ensnare her: she feared that Manfred had perceived her indifference for his son: and in consequence of that idea
20 she replied, "Good my lord, do not doubt my tenderness: my heart would have accompanied my hand. Conrad would have engrossed all my care; and wherever fate shall dispose of me, I shall always cherish his memory, and regard your highness and the virtuous Hippolita as my parents." "Curse on Hippolita!" cried Manfred: "forget her from this moment as I do. In short, lady, you have missed a husband undeserving of your charms: they shall now be better disposed of. Instead of a sickly boy, you shall have a
25 husband in the prime of his age, who will know how to value your beauties, and who may expect a numerous offspring." "Alas! my lord," said Isabella, "my mind is too sadly engrossed by the recent catastrophe in your family to think of another marriage. If ever my father returns, and it shall be his pleasure, I shall obey, as I did when I consented to give my hand to your son: but until his return, permit me to remain under your hospitable roof, and employ the melancholy hours in assuaging yours,
30 Hippolita's, and the fair Matilda's affliction."

"I desired you once before," said Manfred angrily, "not to name that woman: from this hour she must be a stranger to you, as she must be to me; — in short, Isabella, since I cannot give you my son, I offer you myself." — "Heavens!" cried Isabella, waking from her delusion, "what do I hear! You! My lord! You! My father-in-law! the father of Conrad! the husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!" — "I tell you," said
35 Manfred imperiously, "Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons, — and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes." At those words he seized the cold hand of Isabella, who was half-dead with fright and horror. She shrieked and started from him. Manfred rose to pursue her, when the moon, which was now up and gleamed in at the opposite casement, presented to his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet, which
40 rose to the height of the windows, waving backwards and forwards in a tempestuous manner, and accompanied with a hollow and rustling sound. Isabella, who gathered courage from her situation, and who dreaded nothing so much as Manfred's pursuit of his declaration, cried, "Look! my lord; see, heaven itself declares against your impious intentions!" — "Heaven nor hell shall impede my designs," said Manfred, advancing again to seize the princess. At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung

45 over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast. Isabella, whose
back was turned to the picture, saw not the motion, nor knew whence the sound came, but started, and
said, "Hark, my lord! What sound was that?" and at the same time made towards the door. Manfred,
distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and yet unable to keep his eyes
50 backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and
melancholy air. "Do I dream?" cried Manfred returning, "or are the devils themselves in league against
me? Speak, infernal spectre! or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched
descendant, who too dearly pays for — " Ere he could finish the sentence the vision sighed again, and
made a sign to Manfred to follow him. "Lead on!" cried Manfred; "I will follow thee to the gulph of
55 perdition." The spectre marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery, and turned into a
chamber on the right hand. Manfred accompanied him at a little distance, full of anxiety and horror, but
resolved. As he would have entered the chamber, the door was clapped to with violence by an invisible
hand. The prince, collecting courage from this delay, would have forcibly burst open the door with his
foot, but found that it resisted his utmost efforts. "Since hell will not satisfy my curiosity," said Manfred, "I
60 will use the human means in my power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me."

That lady, whose resolution had given way to terror the moment she had quitted Manfred, continued her
flight to the bottom of the principal staircase. There she stopped, not knowing whither to direct her steps,
nor how to escape from the impetuosity of the prince. The gates of the castle she knew were locked, and
guards placed in the court. Should she, as her heart prompted her, go and prepare Hippolita for the
65 cruel destiny that awaited her, she did not doubt but Manfred would seek her there, and that his violence
would incite him to double the injury he meditated, without leaving room for them to avoid the
impetuosity of his passions. Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had
conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could for that night at least avoid his
odious purpose. — Yet where conceal herself? how avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout
70 the castle? As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage
which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she
was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place;
and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up for ever among the holy
virgins, whose convent was contiguous to the cathedral. In this resolution, she seized a lamp that burned
75 at the foot of the staircase, and hurried towards the secret passage. The lower part of the castle was
hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the
door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions,
except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the
rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new
80 terror; — yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her.
She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave, — yet frequently stopped and listened to hear if she
was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few
paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it
was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash
85 flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw anybody
to her assistance. — Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind, — if Manfred knew where she was,
he must have followed her: she was still in one of the cloisters, and the steps she had heard were too
distinct to proceed from the way she had come. Cheered with this reflection, and hoping to find a friend
in whoever was not the prince, she was going to advance, when a door that stood ajar, at some distance to
90 the left, was opened gently: but ere her lamp, which she held up, could discover who opened it, the
person retreated precipitately on seeing the light.

Isabella, whom every incident was sufficient to dismay, hesitated whether she should proceed. Her dread of Manfred soon outweighed every other terror. The very circumstance of the person avoiding her gave her a sort of courage. It could only be, she thought, some domestic belonging to the castle. Her
95 gentleness had never raised her an enemy, and conscious innocence bade her hope that, unless sent by the prince's order to seek her, his servants would rather assist than prevent her flight. Fortifying herself with these reflections, and believing, by what she could observe, that she was near the mouth of the subterraneous cavern, she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness.

100 Words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation. Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred, and far from tranquil on knowing she was within reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts, — all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions. She addressed herself to every saint in heaven, and
105 inwardly implored their assistance. For a considerable time she remained in an agony of despair. At last, as softly as was possible, she felt for the door, and, having found it, entered trembling into the vault from whence she had heard the sigh and steps. It gave her a kind of momentary joy to perceive an imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleam from the roof of the vault, which seemed to be fallen in, and from whence hung a fragment of earth or building, she could not distinguish which, that appeared to have been
110 crushed inwards. She advanced eagerly towards this chasm, when she discerned a human form standing close against the wall.

She shrieked, believing it the ghost of her betrothed Conrad.