

**Miguel de Cervantes**



***The Generous  
Lover***

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# The Exemplary Novels of Cervantes — The Generous Lover

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"O lamentable ruins of the ill-fated Nicosia,<sup>[1]</sup> still moist with the blood of your valorous and unfortunate defenders! Were you capable of feeling, we might jointly bewail our disasters in this solitude, and perhaps find some relief for our sorrows in mutually declaring them. A hope may remain that your dismantled towers may rise again, though not for so just a defence as that in which they fell; but I, unfortunate! what good can I hope for in my wretched distress, even should I return to my former state? Such is my hard fate, that in freedom I was without happiness, and in captivity I have no hope of it."

These words were uttered by a captive Christian as he gazed from an eminence on the ruined walls of Nicosia; and thus he talked with them, comparing his miseries with theirs, as if they could understand him,—a common habit with the afflicted, who, carried away by their imaginations, say and do things inconsistent with all sense and reason. Meanwhile there issued from a pavilion or tent, of which there were four pitched in the plain, a young Turk, of good-humoured and graceful appearance, who approached the Christian, saying, "I will lay a wager, friend Ricardo, that the gloomy thoughts you are continually ruminating have led you to this place."

"It is true," replied Ricardo, for that was the captive's name; "but what avails it, since, go where I will, I find no

relief from them; on the contrary, the sight of yonder ruins have given them increased force."

"You mean the ruins of Nicosia?"

"Of course I do, since there are no others visible here."

"Such a sight as that might well move you to tears," said the Turk; "for any one who saw this famous and plenteous isle of Cyprus about two years ago, when its inhabitants enjoyed all the felicity that is granted to mortals, and who now sees them exiled from it, or captive and wretched, how would it be possible not to mourn over its calamity? But let us talk no more of these things, for which there is no remedy, and speak of your own, for which I would fain find one. Now I entreat you, by what you owe me for the goodwill I have shown you, and for the fact that we are of the same country, and were brought up together in boyhood, that you tell me what is the cause of your inordinate sadness. For even, admitting that captivity alone is enough to sadden the most cheerful heart in the world, yet I imagine that your sorrows have a deeper source; for generous spirits like yours do not yield to ordinary misfortunes so much as to betray extraordinary grief on account of them. Besides, I know that you are not so poor as to be unable to pay the sum demanded for your ransom; nor are you shut up in the castles of the Black Sea as a captive of consideration, who late or never obtains the liberty he sighs for. Since, then, you are not deprived of the hope of freedom, and yet manifest such deep despondency, I cannot help thinking that it proceeds from some other cause than the loss of your liberty. I entreat you to tell me what is that cause, and I offer you my help to the utmost of my means

and power. Who knows but that it was in order that I might serve you that fortune induced me to wear this dress which I abhor.

"You know, Ricardo, that my master is the *cadi* (which is the same thing as the bishop) of this city. You know, too, how great is his power, and my influence with him. Moreover, you are not ignorant of the ardent desire I feel not to die in this creed, which I nominally profess; but if it can be done in no other way, I propose to confess and publicly cry aloud my faith in Jesus Christ, from which I lapsed by reason of my youth and want of understanding. Such a confession I know will cost me my life, which I will give freely, that I may not lose my soul. From all this I would have you infer, and be assured, that my friendship may be of some use to you. But that I may know what remedies or palliations your case may admit of, it is necessary that you explain it to me, as the sick man does to the doctor, taking my word for it, that I will maintain the strictest secrecy concerning it."

Ricardo, who had listened in silence all this while, finding himself at last obliged to reply, did so as follows: "If, as you have guessed rightly, respecting my misfortune, friend Mahmoud," (that was the Turk's name,) "so also you could hit upon the remedy for it, I should think my liberty well lost, and would not exchange my mischance for the greatest imaginable good fortune. But I know that it is such, that though all the world should know the cause whence it proceeds, no one ever would make bold to find for it a remedy, or even an alleviation. That you may be satisfied of this truth, I will relate my story to you, as briefly as I can;