I was born and raised in Geneva, where my father was a distinguished citizen. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and unfailing attention to public business. He was so busy with his duties that he did not become a husband and father until late in life.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain from relating them. One of his closest friends was a merchant who fell, through numerous unfortunate events into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition. He could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. He retreated, therefore, with his daughter, to Lucerne. There he lived, unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort. He was deeply saddened by his friend’s situation. He went to seek him out, in hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his assistance.

**refrain:** keep myself
**unbending:** stiff, unwilling to change his mind
**oblivion:** the condition of being forgotten
Ten months passed before my father discovered where he lived. He found his old friend sunk in his grief, lying in bed, incapable of any activity.

Beaufort’s daughter attended him with great tenderness, but she saw that their funds were rapidly decreasing. They had no other prospect of support, but Caroline Beaufort was brave, and her courage rose to support them in their adversity. She took menial jobs and managed to earn enough to keep the two of them alive.

Unfortunately, her father grew worse. In a matter of months he died in his daughter’s arms. Caroline was left an orphan. My father came to the poor girl like a guardian angel. He determined to take care of her. He brought her to Geneva and placed her under the protection of a relative. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

There was a considerable difference between the ages of my parents, but this circumstance seemed only to unite them. My father was very attached to my mother. He tried to shelter her, as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener from the

**menial jobs**: servant’s jobs

**fair exotic**: a beautiful, foreign plant
rougher winds. He sought to surround her with all that could excite pleasurable emotion in her soft and benevolent mind. Her health, and even the tranquility of her spirit, had been shaken by what she had gone through. During the two years before their marriage my father had gradually given up all of his public functions. Immediately after their marriage, the two of them sought the pleasant climate of Italy. My father hoped that the climate there would restore my mother’s health.

From Italy they visited Germany and France. I, their eldest child, was born in Naples, and as an infant accompanied them in their travels. They were affectionate parents to me. My mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me are my first recollections.

For a long time I was their only care. However, this changed when I was five years old. My parents were passing a week on the shores of Lake Como. Their benevolent disposition often made them enter the cottages of the poor. This, to my mother, was more than a duty; it was a necessity, a passion. She

*__benevolent:__* kind, generous
*__tranquility:__* calmness
remembered what she had suffered—and how she had been relieved. She wanted to assist others who were struggling in life.

One day my mother and I visited the cottage of a peasant and his wife. These poor people were bent down by care and labor. They could scarcely feed their five hungry babes. Among these there was one which attracted my mother far above all the rest. She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants. This child was thin and very fair. Her hair was the brightest gold. Her blue eyes were cloudless. She seemed a being heaven-sent, with a celestial stamp on all her features.

The peasant woman, seeing my mother looking with wonder and admiration on this lovely girl, eagerly communicated her history. She was not her own child. She was the daughter of a nobleman from Milan. Her mother was a German, and she had died giving birth. The infant had been placed with these good people to nurse. She had bloomed in their rude dwelling, fairer than a garden rose among dark-leaved brambles.

**celestial**: heavenly
**brambles**: prickly shrubs
When my father returned from his trip, he found me playing in the hall of our country home with this child. My mother got his permission and convinced the girl’s guardians to let the girl come and live with us. They were fond of the sweet orphan. Her presence had seemed a blessing to them, but they could scarcely feed their other children. They consulted their village priest, and the result was that Elizabeth Lavenza joined our family. She became my sister—my more than sister. She became the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and pleasures.

Everyone loved Elizabeth. I not only loved her but also looked up to her. On the evening previous to her being brought to my home, my mother had said playfully, “I have a present for you, Victor. Tomorrow you shall have it.” On the next day, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift. I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth as mine—mine to protect, love, and cherish. We called each other “cousin,” but she was my beloved sister.