

The Convent Horror

The Story Of Barbara Ubryk

Twenty-One Years in a Convent Dungeon
Eight Feet Long, Six Feet Wide
From Official Records

(Excerpted from the enlarged 1957 edition)



INTRODUCTION

It is a most significant evidence of the moral obtuseness of the American people, that while all progressive foreign countries which are called Roman Catholic, have either suppressed or opened for public inspection, convents and monasteries, this great professedly-Protestant nation not only permits them to continue their nefarious course unmolested, but encourages them by indirect public aid, in exempting them from taxation.

Convents are increasing at an enormous rate in this country, and while used as prisons of life-servitude for American-born girls, are officered and controlled in nine cases out of ten by foreign-born unnaturalized women and priests.

The following items are taken from recent American dailies:

London, May 23, 1892. — Two huge petitions were wheeled into the House of Commons this afternoon. They bore the signatures of 13,305 members of the Protestant Alliance and 101,408 members of the Loyal Protestant League and others, praying for the appointment of a commission to inquire into the conditions of the convents and monasteries in the United Kingdom.

City of Mexico, Dec. 26, 1891. — It is probably difficult for people in the United States, where church and State are quite distinct in their spheres of action, to understand the recent forcible closing of convents in Puebla and Cholula by an armed force, and amid a popular tumult which resulted in the killing of soldiers and rioters.

But here everybody understands the difficulty to be the result of the clandestine establishment of convents, in defiance of the laws governing religious establishments.

All convents, or other associations of persons under religious vows, are forbidden by law, and a convent of high church Episcopalian nuns or monks would be as promptly closed by the authorities as similar associations of Catholics.

Naples, Oct. 21, 1890. — The judicial authorities have instituted proceedings against the superior of the monastery popularly known as the "Convent of the Buried Alive," where the dreadful discoveries of the existence of starving and demented nuns within its walls was recently made. Another domiciliary visit has been made by the police to a conventional refuge of a similar character at Tencuraboli, where no opposition was made to their entrance. From information obtained at this establishment, it was found that institutions, for the "Sepolta Vive," or "Buried Alive," under the rule of St. Orsola, are not uncommon. In vatican circles it is asserted that at the next consistory the Pope will enter a protest against the violation of the monasteries here. In the meantime the priests of this city are sending in their adhesions to the remonstrance by Cardinal San Felice, Archbishop of Naples, against the recent visitations.

Another account says: "Sixteen nuns were found within a state bordering on insanity. They were covered with rags, and their surroundings were of the most filthy description. Many had forgotten how to speak, and the demeanor of all of them was more like that of animals than human beings. Those who were induced to talk expressed themselves perfectly resigned to their fate.

"The cause of the raid upon the nunnery was the desire of the parents of a young girl who had entered the convent to recover her. She had been banished to a nunnery on account of a love affair objectionable to her family. The latter, being unable to communicate with her, had complained to the police, and an order from the Minister of Justice for her removal was obtained. She was found to be a mere skeleton, and her parents became half-

crazed at the condition in which she was discovered. The nunnery has been closed and a strict investigation ordered by the Governor of Naples.

“Later intelligence states that ten more nuns have been released from the subterranean dungeons of the nunnery of ‘The Buried Alive’ at Naples which has just been opened by order of the Minister of Justice. Among them were eight young women who had been incarcerated against their will by order of their parents. The police have been ordered to visit all nunneries in Southern Italy which are closed to the public. Cardinal Sanfelice left Naples for Rome to obtain further instructions from the Pope on the subject. Immense excitement has been created by the disclosures.”

And so reports come in from all countries, of vigorous acts of suppression or confiscation, while Americans are giving their money to begging nuns and priests—thus supporting these shameful institutions.

The story of Barbara Ubryk was first brought to our attention by cable dispatches in the daily papers (see Boston Transcript, May 15, 1891, and other dailies of about the same date.)

It should be remembered that the story of Barbara here given is written from a Roman Catholic standpoint.

HER OWN NARRATIVE

After the death of my father in 1843, at which time I was sixteen years old, my mother moved from the city of Vienna, to the residence of her sister, my aunt, Pauline Bertholenski, a short distance from Cracow. For a year previous to this I had been receiving the attentions of a young gentleman from Vienna, and, in fact, we were betrothed, for I loved him very dearly, and he had asked me for wife. He did not love me, however, as I did him, for when, on my father’s death, it was found that I could not inherit much wealth, my suitor became suddenly cold, and finally asked to be released from his engagement to me. Though my poor heart was broken, I bade him farewell, resolving never to have another suitor. People used to say I was beautiful; and many times after this event my mother chided me for refusing the attentions of several young gentlemen who desired to court me.

My natural disposition was one of much gaiety; but I now became the victim of melancholy, which made my mother extremely angry with me, so much so that she sometimes struck me, and forced me to see gentlemen calling at our house. Once she reproached me with the remark that, if I did not soon get married, I would always be a burden on her. This drove me crazy; and, in a moment of grief, I resolved to enter the Carmelite Convent.

“Mother, dear mother.” said I one day after determining what I intended to do, “I love you, and would like to obey you, but I cannot marry. I could give no man my love, and would therefore’ bring him only misery. Yet I will not be a burden on you. I will bid adieu to the world, with its frivolities, and go and live

as a Carmelite in the Cracow Convent. There, in pious converse and happy contentment, I will pass the remainder of my days in prayer and meditation.”

My proposition pleased my mother, and, in a short time afterward, I began my novitiate, that ended in my assuming the veil and vows of a Carmelite nun in 1846.

During the time that I was passing my novitiate, the Lady Superior, Josepha, was exceedingly kind to me; never speaking to me except with a gracious and sweet smile upon her face; and often doing me many little, kindly favors, that were really against the rules of the Convent. Fr. Calenski, during this time, also, was kind to me, but maintained a distance toward me that he did not exhibit toward the other inmates of the institution; though, from the glances that I accidentally discovered him sometimes casting at me, I felt that he took a particular interest in me.

I thought now that my life was the most delightful one in the world; that I would never grow tired of it, and I yearned daily for the hastening of the time when I should complete the course of duty that would entitle me to become a nun of the order. At last this long-wished-for day arrived; and, amidst the most solemn ceremonies, I took the required vows and received upon my forehead the sisterly kiss from the Carmelite nuns that sealed me as one of themselves for life. I was now a nun; a member of the order in full, cut off forever from the outside, wicked world. Oh, how intense was my joy, and how sweetly did I slumber that night on my humble pallet! Could I have only died during that sweet sleep, from what an eternity of sorrow would I have been saved!

Nothing of any note occurred for a month or two subsequent to my assumption of the vows, though it did not miss my observation that there was somewhat of a change in the deportment toward me, of both the Lady Superior and Fr. Calenski. Whereas the former had heretofore been so extraordinary kind and familiar, she was now much more cold, distant and even haughty. The change in Fr. Calenski was not so marked; yet still, it was very perceptible, instead of treating me with more reserve than my companions, as he had formerly done, he was now more familiar and more pleasant with me than with any of them. I did not then perceive his wicked object; but afterwards, when I was languishing in my living tomb, the whole plot stood revealed before me in all its horror.

I well remember the first occasion on which he commenced his advances to me. For some trifling offence in the supper room—striking my knife thoughtlessly against my plate while one of the Sisters was reading to us—Mother Josepha, as was called the Lady Superior, ordered me to remain all the next day fasting in my cell. Punishments were so often ordered to us by the mothers of the Convent—the four oldest nuns were called mothers—that we did not think hard of them, and I was enduring mine in all humility and resignation.

About half the afternoon had passed away, and I was engaged in reading the

"Lives of the Saints," when suddenly, and of course unexpectedly, the door opened, and Fr. Calenski came in, shutting the door after him. I was surprised and nonplused by this, and rose quickly to my feet.

Daughter, said he, "I see you are alarmed."

"Not alarmed, father," replied I, "but startled."

"Yes, yes" was his reply, "that is the proper word, 'startled,' for of course you could not be alarmed by me."

He laughed, and gave me a meaning look as he made this answer.

I brought him the cell stool to sit upon, and when he had sat down, I kneeled before him in accordance with my duty, and awaited what he had to say; supposing, of court, it would be instruction and pious conversation.

For a short time he did so converse with me, respecting my duties, devotions, and so forth. Then suddenly he changed his manner and tone entirely, and said:

"Barbara, does not Mother Josepha often order you to fast now?"

"Yes, father," I replied. — "Ah, that is right! And she commands you also, rather frequently, the penance of flagellation with the thongs, does she not?"

"She does, father," I replied. — "I must stop all that, or she will ruin your loveliness of face and admirable contour of figure. Barbara, do you know you are beautiful?"

"Thanks to heaven, father," said I. "I think no more of it now. Before I took upon me the vows of a holy profession—ere I left the vain, foolish world—I was called beautiful; but whenever I look upon yonder skull I think to what an end mere beauty must come."

"That is exceedingly correct and proper on your part, Barbara; but you must not fix your thoughts so entirely on the future as to lose sight altogether of pleasure, within your grasp for the present."

As he said this he placed his arm upon my shoulder and drew himself, still sitting on the stool, closer to me. So complete was my confidence in the holiness of Fr. Calenski, that even his strange language and still stranger movements did not awaken any suspicion, within me, and I therefore did not change my position.

But when a moment later he bent down and kissed me full on the lips, a frightened chill flashed through my whole frame, and I started back and looked up at him in wonder.

"Why, daughter, are you frightened? Is the kiss of a father, who loves you as a child, so dreadful?" and he again drew himself close to me.

I knew not what I was about, nor what to do, and in my bewilderment I made reply, half stammeringly:

"No, father, but it is so strange, so unusual, so-I scarcely know what to tell you."

"There, there Barbara," he laughed, "I know it is a little unusual now, but in the future you will get used to that, and more too, from me. It is my love for you. But I must go now. Rise, daughter."

I obeyed mechanically, and stood waiting for what else the Confessor had to say. He also rose and said:

"Before I go, Barbara, I will interpose my superior authority and relieve you from punishment. Here, I leave you some seed-cakes, and some dried fruit, and tomorrow I will bring you something better. And remember, when Mother Josepha orders you any penance, I relieve you from it."

"But, holy father—" remonstrated I, trembling at the idea of such a thing.

"Never you mind, daughter!" interrupted he, smiling and placing his hand playfully over my mouth. "You must obey me; I am superior above Mother Josepha, and she, I think, has a little too much zeal in punishing you, because I have spoken sometimes to her of my liking for you. In the outside world she would be called jealous. But I must go now; you will mind what I tell you."

After saying this, Fr. Calenski went out of the cell, leaving me a prey to most conflicting and harassing thoughts. What should I do? I endeavored to interpret his singular conduct favorably against my own intuitive judgment that it was at least wrong if not wicked. The cakes and fruit that he brought me were exceedingly tempting, and as I had been punished much by fasting that week, I ate all of the refreshments. The cakes tasted not only delicious, but, as I thought, somewhat peculiar. So likewise did the fruit, each piece of which I noticed had been cut upon on the ends.

After the repast I sat down upon my pallet and commenced reading the "Lives of the Saints." After a while I began to feel drowsy. To shake this off I arose and walked about my cell briskly; but I became so sleepy in spite of all my efforts to keep awake that at last I sank down in a heavy slumber upon the pallet.

How long I slept thus I could not tell, but when I at last aroused it was dark. Terrified at my negligence, I tried to spring up; but such an apparent languor had possession of my limbs that I could only rise to a sitting posture. At this instant I also became aware that I was not alone, for some one moved about in my cell, and in a moment or two a small wax taper was lit by my companion,

who was none other than Fr. Calenski.

"You have had a long sleep, Barbara" said he, reaching the taper upon a small shelf on which were my books, and coming and sitting down beside me.

So heavy had been my slumber, or rather torpor, that I now felt half listless, like a person in a dream, and though I looked at Fr. Calenski I made no reply, as both my will and power seemed completely overcome or torpid. After a few moments silence he said in a bantering tone and giving me a little shake:

"Come, Barbara, rouse up a little, and let me talk with you."

Then placing one arm around my waist he pressed me to him so strongly as to nearly drag me off my pallet and hurt me very much. At the same time taking from his vestments a phial of pungent vaporous extract, he held it beneath my nostrils, causing me to inhale it. So sharp was the vapor that it strangled me and made the tears spring into my eyes, and caused me to utter a cry of agony. Dashing down the phial as though in anger and alarm, he exclaimed:

"Ah! little fool, don't make any noise! There now, be quiet."

At this moment he laced both arms around me and drew me to him.

Whether it was this act or the effect of the pungent liquid in the bottle which broke the languor that had enthralled me, I do not know; but instantly recovering my strength, I sprang away from my companion, striking him in the face, and screaming out:

"Go away out of my cell, Fr. Calenski! Why do you behave so wickedly."

I shall never forget the horrible expression that came over his features when I screamed. In an instant he bounded up, put out the taper, and seized me roughly, gave me a heavy, blow with his open hand on the side of my head, saying, in a low hissing tone:

"Silence, if you utter another scream, "I'll kill you! You'll disturb all the Sisters, and have Mother Josepha here!"

My spirit was up now, however, that the Confessor had thus uncloaked his villainous intentions, and I replied instantly, as I recovered from the blow he had dealt me:

"Shame, Fr. Calenski! shame on you! Though you are our Confessor I fear you not; and if you do not instantly leave my cell I shall scream for help! Now then, go; or I will rouse the whole Convent! I do not care if you kill me for it!"

"Hush! Barbara, hush!" replied Mr. Calenski, "I am going out. Be quiet, and I will not lay hands on you again. Remember, however," he continued, in a low, bitter tone, "that I will punish you for this behavior, so that you will pray for

death ten times a day. You have repulsed me, and now you shall see what my power is. I will torture you well; believe me, but I will!"

There was something in his manner that sent a chill of apprehension through me. Yet feeling strong in the right I banished the momentary fear, and was in the act of making a reply, when suddenly the door was opened and there stood Mother Josepha with a lamp and bunch of keys in her hand.

"What is the stupid fool bawling about?" asked she of Fr. Calenski, after stepping in and closing the door tight: "Sister Agatha and Lucie, next above, told me they heard her scream out your name, and also something else that they could not make out. There will be a pretty fuss if this comes to the bishop's ears. I really do wish that you would be more careful."

These last words were directed to the Confessor, and, from the looks that he and Mother Josepha exchanged between them, the new and horrible revelation was made clear to me that she was as bad as he was and that both instead of being the holy persons they seemed were only whited sepulchres full of loathsomeness. My brain reeled as this conviction flashed upon me, and, losing my judgment and discretion, I boldly accused them of what I thought them guilty. When I had finished, they looked at each other, and next at me. Then both stepped to the farthest corner of the cell, and whispered for several minutes together, talking in French, which I did not sufficiently understand to know exactly what they said; though I knew enough to make out that it was what they should do with me. At the conclusion of the conversation, both left my cell, Mother Josepha last. As she was going out, she said to me in a tone I never forget:

"Girl, your own silly lips have sealed your doom!"

A moment more, and I was alone. Oh, what terrible thoughts and dread filled my mind! What had I done? What would be done with me? I know the Confessor and Lady Superior to be wicked; and yet alas! I knew also that here in the Convent they had the supreme power. In their hands I was helpless. I was aware that they intended to do something dreadful to me, not only out of personal enmity to me, but also to prevent me from making any damaging disclosures. I at once concluded that they would take my life; and I composed my mind-to meet my fate.

DOWN IN THE DUNGEON

For a week I remained in my cell, not being allowed to come out, except when I was accompanied by Mother Josepha and Mother Cecilia, who was next in authority to the Lady Superior. Mother Cecilia, I noticed, seldom spoke to me; and her manner was that of a person who is in charge of a lunatic. She would watch every motion of mine, no matter how trivial, and she seemed to be afraid of me.

At the end of the week, one Friday evening after Vespers, and when all the

Sisters had gone to their cells for the night, my door was opened by Mother Josepha who ordered me to come out, as she wanted me to do some menial labor in the kitchen for punishment. I knew it would be useless to resist, so I arose and followed her.

She led me downstairs to the foundation floor of the Convent, then along a cold, damp corridor, near the end of which was a heavy oaken door, padlocked on the outside. Putting down her lamp, Mother Josepha proceeded to unlock the door. Instinct told me what was coming; and that, instead of taking me from my cell to do kitchen work, the Lady Superior intended to imprison me in that cellar cell.

The idea of escape rushed upon my mind, and I turned my head to look along the corridor, a dim hope rising within me that I might run and escape out of the building. But, as I turned thus, there I beheld, standing close behind me, with a vengeful, wicked smile upon his face, Fr. Calenski, who must have come noiselessly out of the passage-way.

The plan had been well laid. In case, as was supposed by my persecutors, I might make an attempt at escaping, the Confessor had thus quietly followed our footsteps in order that he might be ready to render all the brute force which might be necessary to overcome my resistance.

By this time the door was opened, and Mother Josepha told me to go into the dungeon.

"Yes, Barbara, go in!" added Fr. Calenski, with a demon-like satisfaction in his manner, as he waved his hand toward the cell.

For a moment I was undecided, and then, bethinking me how little resistance would avail me, I crossed the dreadful threshold. When inside, I asked:

"Mother Josepha, how long must I stay here?"

"Till you die, Barbara!" — These words were uttered by Fr. Calenski, and in a tone that chilled my heart with despair. An instant more, and the thick oaken door was closed, the padlock secured, and I was alone in my living tomb.

After I had been left thus solitary for some minutes, I began to think of the size of my dungeon, of its accommodations, and so forth, stoutly resolved to bear up bravely under my afflictions and oppression. Knowing that it would be many hours yet before daylight came, I began to grope around the room to ascertain what was in it. I began at the door and moved toward the right, feeling the wall and floor as high as I was able to reach up, and as far as I could reach out my arms. The wall was of stone, cemented, and the floor of heavy oaken planks, so mortised and fitted together as to make it like a solid oak block.

When I state that this underground vault was only eight feet long, six feet

wide, and an inch or two over six feet high, in the middle of the ceiling, which was arched, it may easily be supposed that my groping search did not occupy more than a few moments, and resulted in discovering, first, that the walls were perfectly bare, and second, that the floor was the same, with the exception of two small hutches of straw in one corner — the two together weighed about nine pounds — and a sort of privy seat, such as are to be found in prisons. This seat was fixed, and evidently let down into the general cesspool or sink of the Convent. I was convinced of this from the frightful smell that came up out of it.

By leaping up with all my strength, I could sometimes touch the ceiling with my fingers. My object in thus jumping up was to ascertain where the window was. I thought there must be a window in the ceiling, as in the end wall the only aperture I had felt was like a narrow slit, in the bottom of which I could just insert my four fingers flat across. How long it was I could only tell by jumping up and running my fingers up to the top of the slit. That it opened into the air I knew from the rush of cold wind which would once in a while come in.

This was all that I could discover, and the violent exertion of leaping so wearied me that I undid the two hutches of straw, and, spreading it out smoothly, I threw myself down on it, and soon fell into a profound slumber.

When I awoke, I felt very stiff in my limbs, and had a dreadful pain in my back and loins. I thought I must have been asleep for a very long time, yet I saw not the expected daylight; so, not feeling sleepy any more. I sat up and awaited the coming of the dawn.

Hour after hour passed away, yet still my dungeon was as dark as when I first entered it. I got up and walked about, and jumped, laid down and sat up, got up and went through the same exercises as before, over and over again, looking always looking, for the appearance of the precious sunshine.

By the time I had been thus awake for twelve or fourteen hours, I knew that I was doomed never to see the light again while I remain in this grave. Then I fell to crying, and wept myself asleep. Again I woke up and was still in utter darkness. Hunger, too, and thirst, added their pangs and began to make me feel weak. Again, therefore, I searched, with my hands every inch of the floor, in the dim hope that, while I had slept, my persecutors had perhaps come and left me a little food and drink. But no! there was nothing but the bare floor.

Once more I began a weary, listless watching for something, I knew not what. After many more hours of silent horror I heard some one at the door, which caused me to scream out with very joy that the dreadful monotony was about to be broken. The door was opened and there stood Fr. Calenski with a lamp in one hand. a pitcher of water in the other, and a portion of a stale loaf of bread under his arm. He came in, and, shutting the door after him, gave me the bread and water, which I eagerly devoured, as I was literally famished. While I was eating, he stood watching me, as though I were a wild beast; and

when I asked him to please tell me how long I was to stay there; how long I had been there, and what time it was now, he said that I had been there two days, or about forty-eight hours, that I would be fed every forty-eight hours for the rest of my life, and that never again would I see the light of day, so it made no difference to me what time it was now. He then continued:

“You have almost exposed both me and Mother Josepha. The rest of the Sisters are suspecting things, and all because you were foolish enough to resist me. Now I have arranged everything. It is given out that you attempted to kill us; that you have become raving mad, and so dangerous as to force us to confine you in this cell. You are now in my power and I can do as I please with you here, and the more you cry for help, the less likely will it be that you get any, even if your cries are heard at all!”

I was utterly helpless in that bad man’s power, as he had truly said, and when he had left my dungeon I indeed felt like a wretch; a blighted outcast, indeed! My woman’s strength and resolution were no match against overpowering force. For a long, long time I lay half insensible upon my heap of straw, and then, when I grew stronger and collected my sense, I became a prey to the most, harrowing thoughts. I asked myself a hundred times, why was it that I was permitted by Heaven to be so dreadfully used? I, who had never harbored even an ill-will to any living creature. During what I calculated to be the next two weeks, Fr. Calenski came to my dungeon eight or ten times. On the occasion of his last visit, he said:

“I am tired of you now, why don’t you die or go really crazy?”

I begged him in every way I knew how to set me free, or at least take me out of the dungeon. I promised solemnly never to speak one word about the past. But he only laughed at me, and remarked that, that was a risk neither he nor Mother Josepha could incur. Then I implored him for something to employ myself with.

“I will go mad if I am kept here!” I cried wildly.

“Well, go mad!” With these words, spoken with the most intensely cruel expression, the Confessor left me and locked the door, after which it must have been two years before I saw him again.

HOW SHE PASSED HER TIME

After this last visit the strange impression fixed itself indelibly upon my mind that I would live many long years in this awful dungeon; but that after that I would be rescued and taken out. In my childhood days I had read with much avidity the narratives and histories of the victims who had lived in dungeons in the Bastille and other prisons from youth till exceedingly old age, enduring all the sufferings of cold and hunger, and torture; and I felt that I was to become just such a victim. Strange as it may seem, yet it is true, that after this conviction took possession of me I resigned myself to my fate, and laid out

many plans and methods for occupying my mind so as to pass the time away.

One of these was to count the hairs on my head. My hair had begun to grow long. This generally kept me employed for three or four hours of what I used to call days. Every hundred hairs that I counted I would tie with cotton, a spool of which, with a needle and a paper of small pins, was everything I had about me, when first placed in the dungeon. In the course of time my cotton wore completely out, and then I used a strand of hair in place of it.

Another source of employment my hair afforded me was to take six, eight, or twelve single strands, and plait them so all over my head, and then do all up into some supposed fancy style, and wonder how I looked, and what people would say if they could see me.

Still another means of employment I made for myself was to construct fancy articles out of the straw that served me for a bed. Besides these, I wove out of it with my fingers and teeth a rug or carpet that covered nearly half the floor. The outside edges of this I trimmed with a fancy fringe made out of the beards, or heads, that had contained the grains of wheat. The latter I carefully picked out and ate; and well I recollect how delicious these gray grains used to taste to me, because I was always so hungry.

In the course of time my eyes became so accustomed to the darkness that I could distinctly see all the little articles I had made, and from the difference in the amount of what light did get in at the slit in the wall, I got to be able to tell night from day quite easily; though to any one else all this would have been perfect darkness continually.

All I longed for to complete my happiness was a yet of some description; a cat, a rat, a spider, a beetle, an ant, or anything to which I could talk, and which I could make love me, and stay with me. And I recollect how nearly crazy I was with delight, when, one day a little mouse, that had run into the slit of a window, fell down upon the floor of my dungeon. I bounded to it, picked up tenderly, kissed it, and cried bitterly over it because it seemed badly stunned by the fall. After a while, however, the little animal recovered and in a short time became quite sociable. He and I soon got to be attached to each other, and would play together for hours. Even this pleasure was taken from me; for in a few months the mouse sickened and died. No one can imagine how intense was the agony of my grief when my little pet was dead. I mourned for it several years, as though it had been a darling child.

Sometimes I found employment and amusement in the same way I once read what the prisoners of the Bastille had done, which was this: Taking all my pins in my hand, I would shut my eyes, and then throw them singly behind me; and when I had cast all away, I would go down on my hands and knees to hunt them up again. But I became so expert at the finding of them that it afforded me but little employment.

One greatest trouble to me, and one which at times drove me nearly mad, was

that I had no water which to keep myself clean, and I became covered with vermin.

At times, when Mother Josepha, accompanied by one of the other mothers — or, as was occasionally the case, by a sister — I would beg in the name of God for a little water to wash myself. It was always refused me, and I would then rave about my dungeon screaming, and beating the doors with my fists till they bled again.

By the time ten years had gone by my clothes were so rotten and worn away that they would no longer stay on me. Often, during the latter part of this time, I had sewed them together with strands of my hair that I pulled out of my head for that purpose. But nothing would hold them; and I therefore was obliged to go about my dungeon completely naked.

To add to the horror of my situation, the privy pipe sometimes became filled up, or the Convent cesspool overflowed. Which it was I do not know.

The result, however, was that my dungeon would become filthy in the extreme. Oh, how often have I gone down on my poor bleeding knees and prayer Mother Josepha to have some little mercy upon me or kill me dead. Yet all my entreaties seemed only to render that woman's heart more stony. Nay, more, she actually delighted in the torture she thus inflicted upon me.

SHE BECOMES INSANE

One day in the midst of my desolation something seemed to break inside my brain; and for hours afterwards I experienced the strangest sensations. I became wild with some dreadful, undefined fear. I needed something, I knew not what. I leaped and jumped and laughed and cried and beat myself against the wall and screamed with all my might. Then I knew I was mad at last — insane!

Just after I experienced this terrible feeling, Mother Josepha, in company with Fr. Calenski, opened the door, the latter having in his hand a long strap like a knout. I could not stop screaming, though he ordered me to be quiet. Then he beat me till I fell down, after which he and Mother Josepha went away.

How many years I remained in this condition I do not know, but the only recollection I have of it is being often so very cold and hungry and dirty, and being often beaten with the knout or a heavy walking-cane.

While this spell was on me I knew I used to rave a great deal, and I always remember how often Mother Josepha, with some of the Sisters, would come to the door hold up their hands in horror and say:

“What an awful, wild lunatic poor Barbara has become!”

And I remember, too, how terribly angry these remarks used to make me, and

how much worse I used to be afterwards. I cannot tell how long my insanity continued; but it left me just as suddenly as it had come on.

One night I lay down in my filthy, rotten straw, and went to sleep, and when I awoke I was in my right mind. The strangest part of my recollection is that from the moment I was placed in this dungeon up to the day I recovered from my insanity, I never had had one dream. Sometimes I used to think to myself, if I could only dream about my young days, about my mother and father and sisters and brothers; about the green fields and the rivers, the flowers and trees, how happy I could be, at least in my sleep. But after I became sane again, I began to dream not only in my sleep but even when awake.

No one can imagine what a delight this was to me. And while I dreamed I used to think, I hope I will not wake up now till my dream is done. Then, when I was awake, I would sit hour by hour conjuring up scenes of pleasure in my past life; every place, time and occurrence passing in review before being exactly like a panorama in the most vivid reality. At such times, though, if any one came to the door I would not allow the interruption to break the pleasing trance.

It may seem a strange assertion for me to make, but so habituated had I become to the filth and suffering of my situation that I now looked on it all with the calmness of despair. Yet I did not despair. Oh, no! had I done so I should have died long ago. I never ceased praying except, perhaps, during the years that I was insane. But, before, and since that, I have never failed to pray morning, noon and night, not only for myself but also for my enemies, who were thus torturing and persecuting me so frightfully. Like a star in the great, dark distance, was that precious, precious comfort of God's Holy Word:

"Not a sparrow falls to the ground without He knows it."

I kept my eyes fixed on that star through all my twenty-one years of agony. Nothing could blot it out; no cloud could hide its cheering rays from my poor eyes. All for the best. It is my lot to suffer here, and in His own good time God will reach out his omnipotent arm and pluck me forth out of this dreary dungeon. This was always my thought, and when I revert to my happy deliverance, it seems as though that unfailing star came nearer and nearer till it burst into my dungeon, drove out all the gloom, and filled it with pure light. Thank God for his mercy and goodness to me, the most unworthy of his creatures.

HOW SHE WAS FINALLY RELEASED

A few weeks before I was released from my dreadful dungeon I was one night startled by the appearance at my door of Sister Mary, one of the oldest nuns to the mothers in the Convent. It was not so much the mere fact of her coming, for no one had been near me for nearly three days, and I was very weak from hunger. But what surprised me was that she was alone.

"Where is Mother Josepha?" I asked. — "Hush, Sister Barbara. She is asleep. All the sisters are asleep. I am your friend. Trust me. I have brought you some food and drink. I have not been able to sleep for several nights by reason of thinking of you. From all that I have observed and heard I am assured that you are the victim of a horrible conspiracy on the part of Father Calenski and Mother Josepha. But you are not the only one who has suffered. All is not well in the Convent. What I come alone here for is to ascertain to a certainty, whether you are mad as they say you are. It is given out that you are raving mad, frightfully dangerous, and that it is necessary to keep you securely confined in this dreadful place.

I was trembling violently with the sensation of struggling hope and dread within me! but I controlled myself as powerfully as possible and replied:

"God and the saints bless you dear Sister Mary, for your bravery and kindness! Let me tell you my story and you will say it is strange that I was not crazy long ago or dead; and when I have done you shall demand of me any proof you like of my sanity and I will give it to you. Oh, if you could only get word to our holy bishop, he will interpose his authority and save me. I know he will!"

I then told Sister Mary my whole story, simply, truly.

"Oh, horrible! horrible!" she exclaimed when I had finished. "Poor Barbara! Poor Barbara. But live in hope! From this night forth I shall labor to have you freed. Do not be too sanguine. Father Calenski and Mother Josepha are all powerful here, and without I use caution and judgment I may not only bring myself under some awful punishment, but may also make your own condition still worse than it is now."

"That cannot be, dear Sister Mary; but I will be patient, indeed I will. You are so kind! so kind!"

She was about to go away. I had not heard one word of kindness for twenty-one dreadful years; and her affection impressed me so that I asked her to let me touch my lips to her hand. She did not answer a word; but, as the tears filled her eyes, she stepped back again and kissed me on the forehead.

A moment more and she was gone, leaving me alone. I put my hand up to my forehead where Sister Mary had kissed me, and I thought of the day, many a year gone by, when she, and Mother Josepha, and the rest of the sisters, had given me the sisterly kiss and I became one of their number. Oh, how I cried at the thought! Then I saw the star in the distance coming nearer and growing lighter, and I felt that deliverance would soon come to me now.

And the rest of that night I sat awake in the midst of the filthy remnants of my straw, pondering over this unlooked-for promise of succor and deliverance. Yet it did not surprise me as it might be supposed to have done; for, from the second day after I had been thrust into this loathsome hole, I had a childlike

faith in the goodness and mercy of God. I felt then the conviction had never died out of my mind even in the midst of the darkest and direst of my afflictions and oppressions — that someday He would by some means in His kind providence set me free.

It was at least ten days before I again saw Sister Mary, and during these days and nights I suffered all the torments of suspense. At one time I thought that perhaps she had been watched by Fr. Calenski or Mother Josepha, and been herself imprisoned in some dismal dungeon like my own, at which I wept for hours. Then I would imagine that perhaps she had been forced to give up her attempts to free me on account of the vigilance of my persecutors. Yet again the terrible idea would flit across my mind, like the shadow of an illumined bird, that Sister Mary perhaps in some way in league with my oppressors. But I banished this the moment it presented itself as unworthy.

No! no! I could not suspect that good and noble sister of treachery! She, who, of all those in the Convent, had made her way down to my dreary dungeon in the dead hours of the night, bringing me delicious food and most precious of all, words of kindness and hope and cheer. Yes, yes, I would trust her.

On the tenth night of her absence, just after one o'clock, I was roused from the dreamy, semi-unconsciousness I used to call sleep, by the noise of somebody unfastening the padlock of my dungeon door. I started up, fearing that the visitor might be Fr. Calenski or Mother Josepha, and yet hoping it might be Sister Mary. It was Sister Mary, and I could hardly suppress a scream of exquisite delight as I heard her friendly voice, in low tones, say:

“Are you awake, Sister Barbara?” — “Yes, I am awake. Oh, dearest Sister Mary, how sweet it is to hear your voice!”

Without answering, she came in, and closing the door after her, opened a small lantern, though dim enough in reality, seemed excessively bright to my eyes as to make them ache. Setting this down, Sister Mary next produced two slices of soft, white bread, between which were two or three very small bits of bacon. She gave me this — to me — tremendous quantity of food, and said:

“Sister Barbara, until to-night I have been unable to come to you, neither have I been able to do anything for your release. But do not think I am cold or neglectful. Depend on me, and have patience. Either Fr. Calenski or Mother Josepha would not hesitate to kill me outright, or else bring me here and shut me up for life with you in this dreadful den, if they ever suspected me of my design. Even now I am running a great risk in coming to you. But I could not help it. I felt that I must speak to you again. I may not be able to see you any more before I make known your case outside the Convent. I will try every method, and if I see no other way within a week, then I will watch my opportunity; escape out of the building into the street, go to the Court of Correction and state your case before the judge, who will certainly give ear to the statement and investigate it immediately.”

"Why not speak directly to the bishop when he next comes here?" asked I.

"Ah, poor Barbara, you little know how impossible that would be. Not that our bishop is not a holy man; but that I would have no opportunity to do as you suggest. And even were I to do so, the Confessor and Mother Josepha would tell the bishop I was crazy or something of that sort, and not bring him to your dungeon."

"Well, dearest Sister Mary," replied I, "do as seems best to you on my behalf, and I will ever pray for blessing upon you for your kindness and love."

"Be of good cheer, Barbara," said Sister Mary, taking up her lantern preparatory to leaving me, "be of good cheer, you shall soon be free now, or I will perish in my attempt to make you so. Farewell."

"Farewell. and God and the Saints be with you and keep you. Whether you may succeed or not, I shall always feel deeply grateful to you for your kindness."

Sister Mary darkened her lantern, and passing out from my dungeon, shut me in again. I ate what she had brought to me with great relish. The slices of soft, white bread, I remembered, seemed to me the most delicious food I had ever tasted. Strange as it may seem, yet it is true, that now, when fresh hope of being delivered from horrible captivity was awakened in me, I began to fret and worry about the question of how soon I would be released for as I have already said, I had all along had the impression that I would be released in some mysterious manner in spite of the precautions of Fr. Calenski and Mother Josepha to the contrary.

I spent at least half my time now in praying that I might speedily be rescued. I was praying thus the day after Sister Mary's visit, when Fr. Calenski, accompanied by Mother Josepha, came to my dungeon. I did not cease when they came in; but I was quickly interrupted by Fr. Calenski, exclaiming:

"Here! get up, you miserable wretch! What is that you are praying for? To be released, eh? I will release you!"

With these words he struck me on the back of the neck with his cane so violently as to prostrate me on the floor. He made another blow at me; but by a great effort I shrank away into corner and begged him not to beat me; that I would mind all he said.

"I wish she was dead!" said Mother Josepha.

"Yes!" added the Confessor, "and if she doesn't die pretty soon I will kill her myself! She has more lives than ten thousand cats. But I will fix her very shortly. A dose of arsenic will help her wonderfully!"

"Barbara," asked Mother Josepha, "have any of the Sisters been here at any

time to see you?"

A cold chill of horror wrapped itself around my heart at this ominous question, asked as it was in a peculiar tone. A thousand suspicions, a thousand dreads, trooped through my brain in an instant of time. Had the Lady Superior or the Confessor seen Sister Mary either going to, or leaving my dungeon? Had some one of the Sisters seen her and given information thereof to my persecutors? Or was the question of Mother Josepha propounded on a mere suspicion of her own, aroused by some trifling circumstance, or accident; such as the padlock having been meddled with since she herself secured it? Or was there any crumbs of my bread on the filthy floor that had attracted her eye? This though was dismissed immediately, for I knew I had been too careful in eating the bread to allow a single precious atom to fall. Possibly there might be mingling with the stench of my dungeon a faint odor of rose leaves. Sister Mary was fond of keeping dried rose leaves about her, which she gathered in the garden of the Convent.

All these thoughts, as I have said, rushed through my brain in one instant of time, and in an equally short space I had weighed each of them and decided on my line of action. I pretended to be greatly excited as I replied that she would never allow any of the Sisters to come to see me.

"That was not what I asked you," she said; "I asked you if any of the Sister had been here to see you?"

"No; you know they have not!" I promptly and savagely answered, feeling that the circumstances in which I was placed justified me telling an untruth..

"What do you mean by answering that way, eh?" exclaimed Fr. Calenski, raising his cane and giving me several dreadful blows with it, and causing me such agony that I became nearly crazy, and could not help screaming out. He then looked down at the broken dish on which there were three small mouldy potatoes, and laughing at Mother Josepha, said:

"Well, mother, I think there is no need of leaving our wild pig anything more to eat, for she has enough to last her a day or two, and it will never do to feed her too high, you know."

"I will put these that I have brought with those she has and that will do for several days."

Thus speaking, Mother Josepha emptied four or five potatoes out of a little bag on the plate: and then, in company with the Confessor, left the dungeon.

For several days after this I felt a numbness in my neck and back where I had been struck by Fr. Calenski, and this gradually gave way to a mental dullness and stupidity that I could not possibly resist, though I made the most strenuous effort to do so. I now feared that I was becoming idiotic, which gave me a frightful anxiety. On several occasions after this, Fr. Calenski and

Mother Josepha beat me, and I became so filled with despair — for I had not as yet received another visit from Sister Mary — that, for the first time since I had been immured in my dreadful dungeon, did I pray for death to relieve me from my torments.

But thank God for His mercy, He at last remembered me, His unworthy creature. After languishing over twenty-one years in my living grave, and almost giving up all hope, I was startled one day by a strange visitor; clad in the uniform of an officer of police. I could see him very distinctly, though he did not see me.

Dear reader, it is not in my power to tell you what my sensations were at this occurrence. You may, perhaps, partially imagine what your own feelings would be, had you been like me, locked up for more than twenty-one years in a damp, loathsome vault in the ground, without one ray of blessed sunshine all that dreary life-time; and then suddenly, an officer of the law standing at your dungeon to bid you come forth to liberty.

I was obliged to hold my hands tight upon my heart to still its wild pulsations; and I screamed out my joy. Had I not been able to do this, I am certain I should have sunk down dead with excessive happiness.

My first thought, after I collected my sense sufficiently to think at all, was about good, noble-hearted Sister Mary. I did so long to see her, for I felt certain that to her I was indebted for my rescue.

Very soon after this, however, I began to lose all control of myself, and I know that by the time the bishop and the rest came and stood in my cell, I seemed actually demented. Yet I could not have helped it, had I been threatened with a thousand deaths.

I need not here repeat the details of my liberation, and the discomfiture of my persecutors, Fr. Calenski and Mother Josepha. It would not behoove me as a Christian, an humble follower of God to desire revenge. Christ has taught my lips and my heart to forgive my enemies, and I do so fully and freely.

Another duty I must perform ere closing my narrative, and that is to entirely exonerate all the Sisters in the Convent from any complicity in my long imprisonment and dreadful persecution in the dreary dungeon. Fr. Calenski and Mother Josepha were the sole and only ones to blame in the matter. They induced all the Sisters in the building to believe that I had become a raving maniac, and that it was necessary to confine me in the dungeon. And had it not been for Sister Mary I should have been either still a prisoner there in that living tomb, or mouldering in my grave.

I wish to be particular in regard to this correction, as it had been stated in all the public newspaper accounts that the Sisters were cruel and heartless to me. What gave this color, I have no doubt, was the fact that when they came into my dungeon at the time the bishop and officers were there, the former

reproached them in great anger as though they had been equally guilty with Fr. Calenski and Mother Josepha. It is true that he did thus reproach them at that time, but as soon as he learned the true account of it he fully withdrew all he had then said to them.

It is all over now, and I am free to spend the few remaining days of my life in serving God and praising Him for His goodness and mercy.

(Signed) _____ BARBARA UBRYK

The foregoing statement has been duly and legally made to affirmation by the nun, Barbara Ubryk, of the Carmelite Convent, as being in every whit true. Done before me officially this sixteenth day of August, eighteen hundred and sixty-nine, A.D. — Kironski, presiding judge of the Court of Correction, Austria.

[Barbara's convent was in the city of Cracow, Poland. After Barbara's release, Fr. Calenski committed suicide and Mother Josepha was found guilty by the Commissioners of Examination — Wilhelm Franski, J. Trelings, Louis Breverrich, and J.P. Heiliginski]

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