

"Your business was with Mr. Theophilus?"

"Impertinent boy," returned this extraordinary personage, "who taught you to catechise your elders?—Go and tell Mr. Robert Moncton that Dinah North must speak with him."

"Let me carry this message," whispered Harrison; "my happiness is deeply involved in yonder hag's commission."

I looked upon his countenance with surprise. His features were convulsed with agitation, his lips and cheeks had lost their brilliant tint of red, and the colour had settled in one burning fevered spot upon his brow.

I hesitated:

"Well, go," he continued: "I feel too deeply excited to speak, much less to look calmly, but read well Moncton's countenance and manners, and note down his words when you deliver the message; and report your observations faithfully to me."

I made no reply, for Harrison suddenly quitted the office.

The stranger sat down on Harrison's vacant seat, bowed her head upon her hands, and sank into a profound reverie. I regarded her for a moment with increasing curiosity, and with a flushed cheek and hurried step, proceeded to deliver her message to my uncle. I found him alone in his study, examining a long roll of parchments. At the sound of my voice, he hastily refolded them, and demanded in his usual stern manner the reason of my interruption.

"There is a strange person in the office, Sir, who insists on speaking with you."

"A woman?" he said, changing colour—I replied in the affirmative.

"Her name?"

"Dinah North!"

"Tell her," he replied, in a voice of thunder, and stamping upon the ground furiously as he spoke, "that I will not see her!"

On re-entering the office, I found the old woman huddled up in her wet clothes, in the same dejected attitude in which I had left her.

When I addressed her, she raised her head as if unconscious of the action, which revealed a countenance of the most revolting ugliness I ever beheld. Perhaps she mistook me for Mr. Moncton, for her hideous mouth stretched into a malignant grin, indicative of derision and contempt, as I informed her of my uncle's determination.

"Uncle!" she cried; "do you too belong to that accursed house? methinks there is already more than enough of such a breed."

I appeared like one in a dream, and every moment increased my astonishment. The old woman drew forth a slip of paper slightly folded together, and bade me carry that to my worthy uncle, and to ask him, if with all his land he could gainsay it—I took the billet, and once more proceeded to the study. As I went along the passage, an irresistible,

and I must own a criminal curiosity, induced me to unfold the unsealed paper. It only contained these brief words, traced in a hand of feminine delicacy: the characters which composed it were too beautifully formed to have been put together by the withered, palsied hand, of the hideous old hag from whom I received it—

"If you refuse to accede to my proposals, in spite of the shame and infamy which will devolve upon me, I will expose your son's villainy to the world."

A. M.

I paused for a minute in the passage, with the paper open in my hand, endeavouring to solve the riddle. But the mystery thickened around me, when my uncle's voice sounded in my ear more ominously than the sudden stroke of a death bell, when we are hourly expecting the dissolution of a friend,

"Geoffrey! is that woman gone?" He was too much agitated to notice my confusion. I hastily folded up the billet, and putting it into his hand with averted eyes, and knees bending under me from the mortifying consciousness of having been detected committing a base action, said, "no, she has sent you this."

He eagerly grasped the paper, and went back into the study. The door was open, and I had an opportunity of examining his countenance whilst perusing the paper. It was awful to witness the strife of passion, the fierce gestures of vehement indignation, remorse and despair, which agitated his features, which generally wore an expression of cold and unfeeling indifference. "Fool! madman! insane idiot!" he exclaimed! "how have you marred your own fortunes, destroyed your best hopes, and annihilated mine!"

After a pause of a few minutes, a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He calmed his agitated countenance, and came out of the room with his usual iron gravity. He regarded me with a stern and scrutinizing glance, but the passage was lighted by a dim and lofty window, and I stood so far back in the shade that my perturbation escaped his notice.

"Go, and tell that mad woman—but no, I will go myself." He advanced a few paces—seemed again irresolute, and finally bade me conduct her to the study.

"Dinah North rose with alacrity, and for a woman of her years seemed to possess great activity of mind and body. I felt a secret loathing for my companion, and almost pitied my uncle the unpleasant conference which I was certain awaited him. Mr. Moncton had resumed his seat in his spacious study chair, and rose with such calmness on our approach, that his late agitation appeared like a delusive dream, which had cheated my heated imagination with a semblance of reality.

Mr. Moncton motioned his unwelcome visitor to a chair, and coldly commanded me to leave the room,