

COUNTESS, (*Trembling, and clinging closely to the arm of Beatrice,*)

Ah, should the count be here!

My heart grows sick e'en at the very thought—  
I could not live to hear him spurn me hence,  
As sure he would! shall we go on? Ah me,  
I faint—one moment let me rest,—here,—here  
Beside this stream that murmurs in its course,  
Just as in by-gone days.

(*She sinks upon the bank, while Beatrice loosens her veil, and sprinkles her face with water, speaking at the same time in a low tone,*)

BEATRICE.

Comfort, my lady,

None are stirring here, at this still hour;  
The baron, as thou know'st, ne'er walks abroad,  
After the dews have fall'n,—for my lord,  
He's with the Duke de Bourbon, safe ensconced  
In the old walls of Chantelle.

COUNTESS, (*rising,*)

I'm strong once more,—

It was a sudden pang came o'er my heart,  
But it has gone again. Lend me thine arm—  
And now, (*pausing,*) hush, hush! I hear a footfall,—  
no—

'Twas but the wind stirring some withered leaf—  
Can'st thou uncloset the gate? but softly girl,  
Lest e'en a bird should wake from its sweet sleep,  
Scared by the guilty thing that trembling steals  
Where once she gaily passed,—her handmaid innocence,

And radiant love attendant on her steps,

(*They pass cautiously through the gate and advance slowly up a shaded alley.*)

COUNTESS.

Ah, these old walks,—how sad they look,  
As though they mourned my shame,—and see this  
vine,

Its tender branches, spread o'er the damp ground,  
Uncheck'd, untrain'd—no hand to guide its shoots,  
No voice to carol neath its clust'ring shade  
In evening's purple light.

(*As they pass onward, a part of the castle becomes visible through an opening in the trees, a light glances from one of the windows, and as the countess observes it she exclaims in a low and agitated voice,*)

Look! look!

From my own chamber streams that ray;—  
Can he be there? oh, speak! dost think he can?

BEATRICE.

Impossible, my lady,—

Calm thyself, see, see, the light has gone,  
Some glancing ray, shed from a menial's lamp,  
As he passed to seek his midnight couch.

COUNTESS.

Have patience with me, guilt has many fears,  
Else every sound and sight, stirred me not so.

How many thoughts come thronging at the view  
Of that dear home, that pleasant chamber,  
Where I used to sit, watching my doves,  
And feeding on sweet thoughts, that coloured life  
With hues might shame the dazzling brow of heaven.  
And then, and then—but no; I am forbid  
To breathe that name. Hush, hush, my heart! lie  
still;

It should have been a spell to keep thee pure,  
That cherish'd name, I dare not utter now.

BEATRICE.

Madame, the moon sinks low;  
If thou would'st rest, let's gain the alcove quick:  
Tarry not long, I pray! we must begone  
E'er all is darkness to perplex our path.

COUNTESS.

Ah loved, and lovely bower,  
Hallow'd to memory—dear and sacred spot!  
I'll enter thee alone, no eye shall see  
My heart's last struggle e'er it bid adieu  
To earth's fond ties: there were they cherish'd—  
There shall they be dissolved. Wait thou awhile,  
I will not keep thee long.

(*Beatrice sits down upon a garden bench, and the Countess turning into a side alley, proceeds towards the alcove. When she reaches its entrance she pauses irresolute, clasps her hands, and bows her head upon her bosom, then overcome by her emotions, and with tears streaming from her eyes, she enters and casts herself prostrate upon the mossy floor. Silence for a few moments succeeds, when in low and broken tones she gives utterance to her feelings.*)

COUNTESS.

Impure! Impure!

Yet He that pardon'd her, whose sins were great,  
May cleanse my soul: He can alone forgive.  
To Him I look—Him ask for strength, for aid,  
In this dark hour, when all earth's props have fail'd,  
And I am cast, a wretched, sinful thing,  
Low grovelling in the dust; yet hear, oh God,  
My heart's deep vow, at this still midnight hour;  
The calm moon looking, with her cold, bright eye,  
Down on my altered state; hear me renounce  
All human hopes, all earth-born happiness,  
And henceforth dedicate to thee alone,  
My life, my soul.

(*She rises, and stands for a few moments looking around her.*)

Bright phantoms of the past,  
Why will ye flit across my startled sight?  
And now ye come—again, again. I cannot  
Banish ye! It is my punishment—  
Still, still to gaze back o'er the fearful gulf  
My feet have passed, to the bright days of bliss  
And innocence, left far behind.

(*A deep groan is heard, and the Countess starting round, sees the figure of a man standing at the entrance of the alcove, earnestly regarding her. Unable to speak, she stands with outstretch-*