

Carmen and Joachim regarded her with profound attention; for both had heard of Margaret the *Seigneuresse*; a name well known among the Brethren of the Coast. As if continual physical exertion were necessary to rescue her from the companionship of her own thoughts, she was constantly traversing the swamps and forests to bear assistance to those of the adventurers who stood in need of it. She bound up the hurts of the wounded, watched and comforted the sick, prayed beside the pallets of the dying; refusing no task however hard, undeterred by danger or fatigue, a noble Sister of Charity, she seemed constrained to this constant sacrifice by some mighty grief hidden in the secret of her heart. No one had ever observed her to laugh or smile; she was never seen at any of the wild orgies of the buccaneers, amidst their rejoicings for victory, or the partitions of the spoil. But she was always found where cries of pain or distress were heard from any of the tents; or on the forsaken battle-field where the wounded were left to perish, otherwise unheeded, amid the dead.

Every thing about her betokened that she had at one time occupied a much higher station in society. She disdained all vulgar intimacy, and when any new recruit ventured to address her too familiarly, indignation would redder her pale and withered cheeks, and fire flash from her usually dull eyes. An imposing dignity was revealed in the haughty carriage of her head and the contemptuous curve of her lips, and she stood before the adventurer who had hitherto looked on her as a madwoman, like some excited Pythoness. It was this that had earned for her the surname of the *Seigneuresse*.

The Brethren of the Coast, fierce as they were and inaccessible to all human fear, loved the proud Margaret, and with their affection was mingled something of superstitious terror. They regarded her as of unsentled mind, for they often saw her, after remaining for whole days absorbed in silent reflection, suddenly burst into a bitter and mocking laugh.

"Have you seen my son?" she would then demand, in an imperious tone; "tell me have you seen him?"

To this madness of the *Seigneuresse* many of them attributed privileges almost divine, and, far from despising her weakness of intellect, they venerated it as a gift from heaven, consulting her, with entire faith, upon the future. Of these superstitious partisans of Margaret, Michel le Basque was one of the firmest.

The *Seigneuresse* advanced towards Joachim, gazing upon him with a melancholy tenderness.

"Of just such an age would he have been!" she murmured, kissing the golden locket; "tall and

well-formed, doubtless, as this young man. But alas! he would not recognise me, for he was scarcely cradled on the knees of his mother, never returned an answering smile to hers, nor stammered her name as his first word."

She seemed sunk for a few minutes in a reverie which none dared to interrupt. At last, placing her meagre hand on Joachim's shoulder, she said, gently,

"Be doleful, my child! and Margaret will watch over thee. Take heed never to resist thy master."

Joachim was involuntarily awed by the tone of authority assumed by the *Seigneuresse*, and felt himself cheered by her next words, although she seemed very unlikely to have the power to withdraw him from his present situation.

"Be wise and prudent," she said, in the tone and manner of an inspired prophetess; "the future is vast and uncertain, but it is chequered by many a broad tract of sunshine. As for thee, Michel le Basque!" she continued, pointing at the same time towards Donna Carmen; "if you desire there should be peace between us, respect this girl as if she wore blood of my blood; you know at what rate to value the wrath of Margaret."

"That voice is surely not altogether unknown to me," thought Carmen, who had been narrowly observing the features of the *Seigneuresse*.

Michel, who had twice owed his life to the services of Margaret, hastened to reply to her injunction.

"Fear not, good mother! young Ebony-skin shall be treated with all gentleness; and this stripling, too, shall go scatheless, if he but perform his tasks with readiness and docility. But how is it, Margaret! that you take such interest in the youth?"

"How is it?" she repeated, pressing her forehead with her hands, while her sparkling eyes seemed to follow through the air a form, visible but to herself. "It is because he recalls to me my child, who, if yet alive, I feel persuaded, must resemble him."

"There she goes," muttered Michel, "with that everlasting son of hers; her madness has got the better of her!"

"Madness!" echoed she, passionately and impetuously. "Who spoke that word? Madness? Do I not see every night my child appear and touch with his rosy cheeks my withered visage? Madness! Did I not hear him last night cry thus—'My mother! why hast thou abandoned me? What doest thou, whilst thy son weeps and suffers under a hard task-master, his only food black bread steeped in tears?' And is it madness to think of one who is ever thus present with