

and desertion of Sir Eustace and his family. For counsel and guidance she referred me to a friar attached to the neighbouring monastery of Santa Maria della Vita, and with great impressiveness she implores me to be wary and circumspect."

"Well," said Mr. Wilmer, taking advantage of the pause that ensued, "for my part, my dear friend, I would advise you, instead of having recourse to the aid of a meddling priest, to adopt the more straight forward and manly course, of seeking an explanation from the Count, and, if he refuses it, forcing him at the sword's point to avow his designs."

"Such were my first intentions," said Captain Beaufort; "but the conversation I held with the friar fully convinced me of the futility of such a proceeding. You must remember, Wilmer, we are not in England, where public opinion sometimes forces bad men to act well, against their natures. If I challenge this dastard, it is quite probable the assassin's steel would reach my heart whilst reading his acceptance of my cartel."

"True,—true," responded Mr. Wilmer; "you are right."

"The old man, I believe," continued Captain Beaufort, "was prepared for the interview, as he entered at once and frankly on the subject of my visit. I learned from him many particulars of Isabella's present mode of life, but he either is or affects to be ignorant of the Count's ulterior views. The Countess he represents as a most exemplary lady, who would never participate in any criminal design, involving the happiness of her niece. She has for many years led a life so secluded that she is almost forgotten in the world, and Miss Herbert has been a companion in her prison house. My worst impressions of the Count were indirectly confirmed by the friar. He appeared to dread so much my being discovered by him, and repeated so often the necessity of circumspection, that I am forced to believe no scruples would deter him in adopting means to free himself from a troublesome adversary. Whilst we were deliberating, a knock at the entrance of the small apartment caused the friar to rise; he left the cell, and I saw by the light of the dim taper he carried, that it was a pretty young woman, who interrupted our conference. This circumstance combined with all that preceded it, increased my uneasiness for Miss Herbert. It is such a strange and unheard of occurrence, for an Englishwoman of rank, to be placed at the mercy of an unprincipled libertine, relying only for protection on an intriguing priest. My uncle, honourable and high minded as he is, little knows the character to whom he has resigned a guardianship, held as sacred and as dear as the unsullied honour of his name. It will grieve the old man to learn the result of his too generous confidence. He merits censure, but his own will be the most severe."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Wilmer, "that Sir Eustace has acted injudiciously; but forgive me, if I say that you have acted equally ill."

"You do not mean towards Miss Herbert?" said Captain Beaufort, indignantly.

"Yes, towards Miss Herbert," replied Mr. Wilmer; "and I have no objection to include yourself as a party aggrieved by an idle punctilio. You have risked the loss of a lovely and amiable girl, because your fortune was likely to be diminished by a few thousand pounds, whilst she possessed an ample share of fortune's goodly gifts, and only sighed to bestow it on you. Verily, pride bringeth its own punishment,—you must not, Beaufort, arraign Providence, if the prize is snatched from you,—I do not mean in the present dastardly way; but if an honourable rival woos and wins your lady-love, it would be a just retribution for slighting the gifts thus cast at your feet."

"Nay, nay, Wilmer, you may freely censure me for imprudence,—I can forgive that; but had I taken advantage of an open and generous disposition, would you as readily acquit me of all sordid motives. Had Miss Herbert been a portionless girl, her beauty and her goodness her only dower, I should have stood between her and this and every other peril, where a manly arm might avail; but to be regarded as depending on a woman's love for my station in society is more than my spirit has learned to brook; dear as she is to me, I would sooner relinquish the hope that brightens the future, the long—long cherished hope of calling her mine, than to stand in so humiliating a position before the world. So let all this pass, and return to objects that press more immediately upon our attention. The friar returned after an absence that could only be excused by the courtesy due to the sex of his visitor; he did not offer even an apology, but resumed the subject of our conversation with an impressment that led me to think he had received some light on the matter during his absence. Instead of the hesitating and apprehensive manner in which he spoke at the opening of our interview, he now took a tone of decision. 'You must,' said he, 'be seen no more in these environs; return to your ship without further delay, and for the better security of the plan I have devised, remain there till the second night from this, between the hours of nine and ten o'clock. Do not fail to be at the entrance of the *Hospital de la France*, accompanied by a few friends on whose prudence and resolution you can rely. Much will depend upon your circumspection, young man. If the Count d'Altino only surmises that there breathes a being in Naples desirous of the young lady's release, she would be spirited away before the morning dawns, far beyond your reach and mine. A single premature step,' he continued, 'on your part disconcerts the plan, by which, I hope, under the guidance of her—'