

I see what you are now, while I am here, a dying man perhaps. and in your power; but I ask no favour."

The man spoke not, as he stood without moving and in silence, at the feet of Alberti, who turned away and closed his eyes. Ernest looked round again, and the man was still standing before him.

"Will you answer one question?" inquired the deserter.

"Speak then."

"Did you come hither in search of me?"

"In search of you?" replied Alberti, in a tone of evident surprise. "No, alas! I thought not of you till this night."

The man did not raise his head, but said slowly, "I was sorry when I saw that I had stabbed my commander. I don't forget that I have met with much kindness from you, Signor; but now, I know that you came not here to take me, I would do anything to save you."

Alberti was proud, but he felt ashamed in the presence of the man whose hand had been raised against his life, who was a deserter, and a common robber.

"I am justly punished," he said; "I am more guilty than yourself. I have lifted my arm against my commander. I left him dying; perhaps he is now dead. I too am a deserter: at this moment I am pursued; and if I should be taken, my life will be forfeited for my crime. If you are inexcusable, what am I?"

The man took up the lamp, and walked hastily from the cavern. He returned in a short time, and with him came a young woman, whose countenance displayed a strange mixture of boldness and feminine beauty. She brought with her a basket of provisions, and with the assistance of the deserter, they dressed the wound in Alberti's shoulder, which had been before bound only with handkerchiefs.

For days and weeks, Alberti was kindly and constantly attended by the banditti. They heard his history from Michael; and his manners and martial appearance, all they observed about him, commanded respect, and even confidence. His wound was healed, and his strength was gradually returning, when the cavern was entered one night by a party of the banditti, among whom was the leader of the band. Ernest had been treated before with attention; but the request which the band then made, astonished him. They told him, that they knew he could not return to his rank, and to his former associates. They told him that they admired, respected, and could trust him. They were still speaking, when Alberti raised his eyes, and fixed them on the man who ad-

dressed him, with a look of calm, and almost stern surprise. The fellow looked down and hesitated; he had begun to speak in a tone which seemed to declare, that he was *conferring* a favour; as he continued, he felt that he was *asking* a favour. He proposed to Alberti, that he should take the command of their band.

"Never," replied Ernest, in a tone of resolute decision. A murmur of angry disapprobation passed through the band. He observed it, and walked into the midst of them. "Hear me," he said, "I am speaking to men, and I expect to be heard as a man. You have been kind to me, and I thank you heartily. I am still weak in body, but I have not learned to fear any of you. I wish not to offend you; but I will tell you the plain truth. I will never countenance your mode of life. It is perfectly true, that I am a disgraced man and an outlaw. I feel it. But I feel that, bad as I am, I might be worse. I pretend to no superior virtue. In my opinion I am the most sinful man among you; surely then I have gone far enough in guilt. I will not go farther. You have me in your power, kill me if you please; life cannot be very joyful to me in future. I have nothing more to say. I would not have you forget, that I am grateful to you; but remember, at the same time, that I know as little of fear as any man among you."

The men had listened to him in silence; and after a pause, the leader asked, rather impatiently:

"What do you expect from us, count?"

"Nothing," replied Ernest coolly.

"What would you do, were you permitted to follow your own will?"

"Leave this place and betray us," said one of them, "instantly."

"I could have answered that question more warmly," replied Ernest, with a look of calm disdain, (turning to the captain of the band): "had no suspicions been uttered by that man, I might have told you that the same principles which forbid my becoming your companion, would prevent my becoming your betrayer. I ask my freedom as a man, entitled, equally with yourselves, to the common right of air and liberty. I do not insult you or myself by entreaties. You may best judge if you can believe and trust me."

It is a fact, that Alberti was released a few days after the above interview; the captain of the band came to the cavern where Alberti had been kept, and told him that his freedom was granted to him. Ernest thanked him even with tears, and before he followed him out, he said:

"I was brought to this place senseless; I have never quitted it since that time. Bind your