

but not even these possessed any power to soften him, for stern and cold were the glances which he gave them in return. After a while he moved away to a more distant spot, where a temporary alcove had been erected, and threw himself on a couch, over which was suspended a gilded canopy, with falling drapery of rich crimson damask. Here he remained unseen, and smiling in scorn at the soft whisperings that occasionally met his ear, from the gay maskers and their fair partners, as they passed. Presently he beheld the Baroness enter the alcove, and, to his astonishment, accompanied by one of the strangers who he had seen in the boat. He knew him again from the singularity of his costume, which he noticed when his cloak fell aside as he stepped on shore. Albert was so screened by the curtain, that they knew not he was near.

"Are you quite sure she has taken it?" were the first words uttered by the stranger, whose voice Albert recognized as that of Count Ravensberg.

"Yes, I am assured of it," replied the Baroness. "I sent it in some wine, requesting her to drink to the health of my young Baroness."

Albert trembled, while an exclamation had nearly escaped him.

"But you are certain," she continued, "that it was innocuous. I felt a strong repugnance to using such means."

"Do not alarm yourself; it was merely of sufficient strength to produce sleep, which must long ere this have overtaken her," returned the Count.

Albert breathed more freely, as he continued to listen with deeper interest; but with feelings of rage which he found it so difficult to repress that he bit his lip until the blood sprang.

"And have you all things in readiness to carry her away?" enquired the Baroness.

"I have—my servant awaits me with the boat. From this she will be conveyed to a carriage, when we shall instantly proceed to my friend Count Woolstein's, where the priest is in attendance to tie the fatal knot whenever she awakes;" and he smiled.

"It is well," said the Baroness; "and remember Count, that I implicitly trust in your word, in your honour. Follow me, and I will lead you by the private way to her apartment; but for Heaven's sake let us avoid my son, for the dark spirit seems to overshadow him tonight."

They retreated from the alcove as she spoke, when Albert sprang to his feet. He gazed with a haggard, wild stare about him, as he clutched his dagger in his grasp. He waited until they had left the ball room, and then he followed warily, and at a distance, managing as they turned each corner in the passages to evade them, until they reached the one in which was the sliding panel, when he darted forward, exclaiming—"Hold, villain, turn and defend yourself."

The Baroness screamed, and sank on her knees, while Count Ravensberg starting round, beheld the furious young man rushing upon him. He had just time to draw and parry the thrust of his antagonist, who, however, proved too skilful for him, for in raising his arm to strike he received the point of Albert's weapon in his side, and fell weltering in his blood to the ground.

Marguerite hearing the fearful noise from within, fled aghast from the side of her now sleeping charge, and drawing aside the panel, viewed with horror the scene before her. She approached the Baroness, who had fainted, and raised her in her arms, while Albert glared on his fallen foe, like a young tiger over his first prey.

"Spirit of my brother, gaze not on me so fixedly," feebly murmured the Count, whose mind appeared wandering, as he looked fearfully upon him. "Yet, what do I say—you are young Waldberg—if you have any mercy or compassion remove me hence."

Albert was too young not to feel touched by remorse on beholding the agony of his unhappy victim. He immediately summoned assistance, and had him conveyed by the astonished and terror stricken domestics to an adjoining chamber, where they placed him on a bed, his own servant and the Baron's medical man quickly following. After a strict examination of his wound, it was pronounced mortal, and that he could not possibly survive through the night. Rumours of this dire catastrophe were soon circulated, when the affrighted guests dispersed, and the scene of gaiety became reversed for one of sorrow, lamentation, and of death. The Baron, in a state of extreme agitation, hastened to the bed side of the sufferer, who continued to exclaim, in tones which thrilled on the hearts of all:—"I cannot die—I dare not die. Will no one save me from the fiends who are ready to seize my soul?" and his eye balls seemed starting from their sockets while he spoke.

The Baron knelt down by his side, and taking his hand, endeavoured to soothe him, by leading his thoughts to that God before whose tribunal he was so soon to appear. "Be calm, my friend," he said; "you have no heavy sins, I trust, to answer for, or at least unrepented of. Cast all your care upon that Saviour who died for you."

"Talk not to me of repentance—it is all too late," replied the Count, grinding his teeth in the extremity of pain.

"It is never too late, if in sincerity of heart you have faith to believe in the atonement of Christ—remember the thief upon the Cross."

"Oh, you know not what I am—bend your ear down, and let me whisper it."

The Baron obeyed him; but in the next instant started back in horror, as he clasped his hands, exclaiming—"Merciful God, is it possible?"