

SUSANNE.

Ah, good Florine! sure thou wilt comfort find  
Even in her joy, though none direct to thee,  
Flow from thy generous act. Yet well, methinks,  
Doth Gaston love thee, and he hath a heart  
Generous and good, and such an open hand,  
As scatters freely unto all who need,  
Even as the winds in their kind industry  
Shake from the bearded wheat the ripening grain  
For the wild songsters of the fields and groves,  
And from the loaded sheaves, the loosened ear,  
For the poor gleaner, who with patient toil  
Follows the groaning wain.

FLOLINE.

Ay, rumour saith  
He hath a liberal hand, but what of this?  
In our low cottage I am most content,  
And eat the bread which hardly I have earned,  
With grateful heart. Content at least, I am,  
As one may be, who sees the goodly pearl  
That made her wealth, snatched from her sight, for aye.  
Nought ever can atone for this sore loss,  
And only to bring peace to my fond mother,  
And an ample store of worldly comfort  
To her sinking age, do I consent  
To bear the name of wife, without the lopes  
And the affections sweet, which cluster round,  
And hallow that dear name.

SUSANNE.

Though wanting now,  
They may, perchance, awake, when thou dost fill  
A sphere of duty in thy husband's home.  
Ned must it be the chosen of one's youth,  
With tears to mourn; yet as through busy years  
We onward pass, the tried and faithful love  
Of one true heart, is 'mid life's desert waste,  
A fount perpetual, gushing to refresh  
The weary soul.

FLOLINE.

I know not what of truth  
Thy words contain; heaven grant they prove not false;  
But I must dare the trial, for my word  
Is passed, and cannot be recalled.

SUSANNE.

'Tis well.  
So will I hope; and three days hence thou'lt plight  
Thy marriage vows?

FLOLINE, (haughtily.)

Nay, not so soon! ah, no!  
He asks it, but in vain; for ere a week,  
Didst thou not say the baron would return,  
After long absence, from the distant wars,  
To seek his home again?

SUSANNE.

Such, from her lord  
The tidings were, received but yestereve,  
By the good baroness, and great the joy  
Throughout the castle and the whole domain,  
At the glad news.

FLOLINE.

I may not share this joy,  
For Leon comes not with the warlike train,  
And welcome tones, embracing arms, fond eyes,

Greeting each loved one with affection sweet,  
Will to my heart in sad and tender signs,  
Speak of the absent, who went gaily forth,  
Ne'er to re-tread his native vale again.

SUSANNE.

Dwell not on this; it is to cloud thy life  
With ceaseless grief. New duties and new hopes  
Will comfort bring, and in a peaceful home.  
Affection learn to dwell. Nay, look not sad!  
Thou art o'er wearied, and the noontide sun  
Shines with a scorching heat; but cool the shade  
Of yon bright branching oak, and soft the turf  
Beneath its verdant boughs; there let us sit  
And rest awhile, ere we our toil resume.

*They walk away, arm in arm, and as they cross the field towards the oak, Susanne espies Gaston and Lewis, another way, sitting in earnest discourse under a hedge. Making a signal for Florine to proceed alone, she starts forward to surprise them, but when on the point of discovering herself, she hears Gaston say,*

I must prevail, must wed her ere this week  
He past and gone, or all will be betrayed;  
When startled by the import of the words, she conceals herself behind a stack of sheaves to listen further.

LEWIS, (speaks in reply.)

She's hard to please, for thou hast woo'd her long;  
Methinks the prize will scarce repay thy pains  
When it is won.

GASTON.

I've vowed to triumph,  
For I long have loved, and borne her coldness  
With a patient heart. Yet when another  
She preferred to me, my pride was touched,  
And with most earnest will, I constant strove  
To blight my rival's hopes—but all in vain,  
Till his departure for the distant wars  
Left me to work my purpose. Thou hast learned,  
Or else I now were mute; how I have sped;  
Spreading a rumour of young Leon's death,  
Which all believe; for 'mong the slain he lay,  
Left by his comrades on the battle field,  
Where they with conquering swords the foe pursued  
To Saragossa's gate. But still he lived,  
Though gashed with fearful wounds, a corpse he  
seemed,  
And with returning sense he slowly crept  
To a low cottage near, and found the aid  
From friendly hands he earnestly implored.  
There, months he dwelt, by those kind peasants nursed,  
Feeble and maimed, yet gaining day by day,  
Both strength and health, which with a lover's haste  
He quickly used, to write his dear Florine  
The tidings of his fate. Letters came oft,  
Which I as oft suppressed, at first with fear,  
But having dared the deed, I bolder grew,  
And on the ruin of my rival's hopes  
Upraised mine own.

LEWIS.

But now thou fear'st their fall,  
And well thou may'st, since with the baron  
Leon homeward comes.

GASTON.

So hath he writ,  
And I must make my own ere he appear,  
His pillared bride, else all my labour