

“Alas! in my young childhood he dwelt with me as a brother. My father loved him not; but, for my mother’s sake, who cherished him even as her own, was he dear to me; and heavy, heavy is the burden, which his sins cast upon my soul.”

“Perchance, he loved thee, lady, and thy disdain urged him to commit the deed which sunk him to perdition,” I said, with strange cruelty, seeking to torture still more the heart I adored. “Alas! then, if this be so—alas, for thee! Ere thy soul shall be purified from this stain, long and grievous must be its penance, bitter the tears that shall avail to cleanse it, earnest the prayers, that shall win from heaven its pardon!”

“And prayers and penance, vigil and tears, are mine,” she said, in broken tones; “and could they cancel the sin, and with it, the memory of that deed—that hour, I would endure them gladly, ay, with joy!”

“She leaned her pale cheek upon her hand, and tears, which glittered in the bright moon-beams fell fast from her eyes. Willing to probe her yet more deeply:

“This is the sorrow of love, lady, and not of remorse,” I said. “Thou mournest for the poor outcast, and could’st thou recall him, would’st bind thy heart with his, if by so doing thou could’st win him back to virtue.”

“Never shall I forget the shudder that convulsed her frame, as shrinking from me, she vehemently exclaimed:

“What then, dost thou take me for, if thou think’st I would clasp that hand, reeking with the blood of innocence, or link my fate with one, whose soul crouches in slavery to the blind dominion of the darkest and most fearful passions!”

“It was with difficulty I could command myself, and my voice was hoarse with passion, as I said:

“Then thou did’st love his rival, lady—speak! was it not so? For his loss thou art in heaviness; not for the misery, in this world, and another, of one, whom thy disdain has destroyed.”

“No, no, she said, recoiling from my fierce and searching scrutiny. “He was my father’s choice, yet I know not if I ever could have loved him. But there was kindness and gentleness in his bearing, and it was terrible, with the smile upon his lip, and sun-bright hopes glittering in his path, to see him smitten from the earth. He, too, the heir of all that it bestows of gladness, the hope of fond hearts, the possessor of a proud and princely name.”

“I trembled with jealous rage as she spoke—I could not bear that she should lavish tender compassion and regret upon the victim of my revengeful hate. It was like casting oil upon a burning pyre, and with my love, mingled a yet deeper desire to avenge upon her all she had made me suffer.

“The time may come,” I said, in a tone tremu-

lous with excessive passion; “the time may come, lady, when less of harshness shall blend with thy thoughts of the outcast, who, for thy love, hath forfeited the hopes that brightened his manhood. He is of thy race, as thou knowest, and I warn thee, with a voice of prophecy, that even yet, despite thy coldness and thy scorn, thou and he, the sole descendants of the proud Du Contis, may and ought, to link your destinies in one; and so it shall be, widely as at this moment fate casts them asunder.”

“God forbid it!” she gasped; and startled into fearful suspicion by my words and manner, she trembled in every limb, yet stood, gazing with eyes of terror on my face. I shrunk not from her scrutiny, but stretching forth my arms, “Viola!” I passionately ejaculated, and would have clasped her in a fond embrace; but she bounded wildly from me; I felt her in my power, and pursued. She heard my steps, and overcome with terror, fainted and fell prostrate. It was a moment of triumph. There were steps leading from the end of the balcony, to the garden below, from whence escape would be easy to me, who knew all its labyrinths and secret points of egress. The breathless silence of night’s deep and starry noon, reigned around me; no eye saw me, and why should I let go the golden opportunity to gratify my vengeance and my love, by bearing away the prize which with such scorn, had been denied me. The thought conceived, I flew to execute it, and bending down, was in the act of raising her in her arms, when, from behind a projecting buttress, a figure sprang towards me, and—but thou knowest what befell at that encounter, and what guerdon, yet unpaid, I owe thee for thy words of menace and of scorn, and for the threatened blow, which, though it fell not, save upon my spirit, will be long remembered, and with the gratitude it merits.

“Nor even then, would I have left my purpose unfulfilled, for my hand is too well trained, to enforce eternal silence, if need be, to have shrunk at that moment from inflicting on thee, the penalty of thy officiousness. But I saw a light glancing in a distant wing of the palace, and I feared, before I could effect my object and bear away my prize, there would come other intruders, to constrain the freedom of my will, as well as of my person. So, for that time, I left thee to thy poor triumph; imposing on thy weak credulity, with a tale of the lady’s false alarm, when carried away by holy zeal, I chid a trivial fault of which she had spoken, with harsh severity; and I even prayed thee, for the sake of Christian love and charity, to suffer my departure unmolested.

“Intoxicated by the bliss of cradling that dainty form upon thy breast, thou wert gulled by the seeming truth and meekness of my words, and bade me depart. I left thee, with humble words upon my lips, but bitter imprecations in my heart, and passed