

"She observed my confusion, without recognizing in the tall, strong featured, athletic man, the person of the pale, melancholy, injured boy whom she had loved for his misfortunes.

"Laying aside the book which she was reading, she motioned for me to come forward. With a strong effort I mastered my feelings, and placed my box of jewellery upon a stand near her. She glanced carelessly over the beautiful gems. 'I want none of these; I have more rings and brooches than I can wear. But what is this?' she cried, her small fingers clutching convulsively a white cornelian heart, with one large deep red spot in the centre, as if stained by newly shed blood. 'Where! where! Oh! where did you obtain this?'

"Six years before she had placed that heart, with her own hands, around my neck, and there it had reposed ever since, until purposely removed that morning, to see what effect the sight of it would have upon her mind. 'Ah! my lady,' I said, 'that stone is of little value when compared with these.'

"'It is not of its intrinsic value, but the value that I attach to it, I speak,' she replied. 'Name your own price, merchant. I must have this jewel.'

"'Forgive me, madam—I fear, I must disappoint you. This heart belongs to another.'

"'Who is the possessor?'

"'Ah! madam,' I exclaimed, looking sadly and tenderly in her face. 'This little heart was once my own. It is all that remains to me of her I adored; and worlds should not buy it from me.'

"Her face grew leadily pale; she continued to gaze upon me, until large tears burst from her eyes, and the name of 'Fredwald' escaped her lips. The next moment she lay fainting in my arms. The agony, the remorse, the crimes of years, were forgotten, and steeped in a blessed Lethe for the brief space that I held that divine creature to my aching heart. At length her eyes unclosed, and she sprang from my embrace with a cry of horror. 'Oh! that you were dead! Dead, as I believed you to be. You live—and I see before me the murderer of my brother! Away, monster! I thought you innocent. For years have wept over your untimely end, have prayed night and day to God for the salvation of your soul. But I see you now stand in life before me, and I know that you are guilty.'

"'Pity and forgive me, Christiana,' I cried, sinking on my knees before her, while tears streamed down my face. 'I was sorely tempted.'

"'Forgive you. How can I forgive you? God condemns you. The laws of nature, that you violated, condemn you. Your own conscience

condemns you; and think not that I can acquit you!'

"'Think of my wrongs, Christiana. Of my love for you!'

"'Love for me! Ifad you loved me, you never could have murdered the brother who was so dear to me. Did you imagine that I could accept a hand red with his blood? Infatuated man! Did you think that I was an unnatural monster like yourself?'

"I was stung to madness by her reproaches, and sprang indignantly to my feet. 'If I am a murderer, Countess P——, what are those who drove me, by their injustice and treachery, to commit this act? Are their characters stainless?—they who sowed the seed which produced this bitter fruit, whose ambition and avarice made me what I am! When you condemn me, you record a more awful sentence against them.'

"'Count Fredwald,' she said sternly, 'I know that you were injured; I wept for you, prayed for you, pitied and loved you. Yes, I would have become your wife, and set at naught all the sneers of the world, in uniting my destiny to one who was looked upon as a maniac. Interested Count P—— in your favour. Through him, God would have avenged your wrongs, without guilt, without bloodshed. At the very moment when you consented to this crime, your ease was before the king, and he had determined to search it to the bottom! Ah, short sighted man! Hurried on by your own thirst for revenge, you committed an act of murder against one as innocent as yourself—an act of deliberate, cold-blooded, cruel murder—and the victim, so unsuspecting, so unprepared! He was the son of those who had injured you. Is this an excuse? Was not I their daughter? Might you not as well, and with as much shew of justice, plunge a knife into my heart? Go! I will not betray you. Live to repent of your crime, but never let me see your face again.'

"I was awed by the solemn majesty of her manner. Never had I left the full extent of my guilt until then—then, when I heard lips that once loved me so tenderly, condemn me. But I hated her for not yielding one inch of her lofty integrity, and I answered tauntingly:

"'I perceive that I am not pleading to the beloved Christiana, the worshipped idol of my boyhood, but to the Countess P——, who, though she considered me innocent, forgot her vows of everlasting fidelity, and within the space of two short years from the time of my supposed death, gave her hand to another. Brief widowhood, I think, for one who loved so well!'

"'I learned to love him,' said the Countess, with modest dignity; 'because he loved and be-