

St. Udo was talking kindly to this youth, who lay quite still in a corner listening to the whispered words of cheer with a faint and hopeless smile, when a shadow fell across the sweet, dying face, and a woman's gasp of terror fell upon St. Udo's ear. He turned to look upon her, and started involuntarily.

There she drooped, with wild, grief-darkened eyes fastened on the boy, her fair cheeks white with horror, her shapely hands clasped in anguish; her snaky tresses lying low upon her sloping shoulders—a vision of surpassing grace and dumb sorrow—Madam Estvan.

How came she there? Where came she from, who had lain entombed in a holocaust of flame?

A spirit, was she? Ay, truly, a spirit of pity and grief, weeping over a brave boy-soldier's end.

"God bless you, madam!" burst from St. Udo's lips.

She turned her tranced eye from its shocked scrutiny of the boy, and lifted it in mute anguish to the colonel's. She did not recognize him in that supreme moment of her woe.

"Is he dying, do you think?" whispered she, pressing close.

The sweet face turned with a smile of anguish at her voice, the dark eyes opened on her lovely countenance with a far away look already in their depths.

"Yes, yes, madam, I am dying," murmured the boy.

"Oh, Edgar! Edgar!" moaned the woman, in harrowing tones, "must you go? I loved you so dearly, too—my last, my only hope on earth or in Heaven—my son!"

"Ah, madam, you did not treat me as your son."

"Hush!" whispered she, in anguish. "I was not to blame for that. Your father was to blame when he deserted us both, my poor boy. How could I fight against fate? In self-defence I parted from you, but I have loved you truly, Edgar."

"May God, to whom I go, forgive my cold rejection of me many times when I have besought you on my knees to let me call you mother. From place to place you have led me, keeping me at a distance all the while, and now my sad, lonely life must end here. Oh, madam, you have been cruel!"

She wept wildly, she raised him in her arms and kissed him many times, but her lips framed no excuse.

"To think that I should find you here, my boy," moaned she, "when I sent you North expressly for safety's sake. Why—why did you enter the army, Edgar?"

"To find death," said the calm, dying voice.

She laid him down upon the straw, and raised her streaming eyes to St. Udo Brand. They recognized him now, and grew hard and fierce. She rose, and clutched him by the arm.

"Where is that fiend in human shape who calls himself Colonel Calembours?" cried she, vehemently.

"I cannot tell," replied St. Udo. "He has played the traitor to the North; he must be with Lee's army."

"He has played the traitor to me, and to that boy, his son!" she exclaimed, vengefully. "He has deserted us for eighteen years, and now my boy is dying. He threw me back among the flames three months ago in Colonel Estvan's house as soon as he recognized in me his wife. Oh! can such a monster escape justice?"

"Did you come here to-day expecting to find Colonel Calembours?" inquired St. Udo, compassionately.

"I did. I have just come from a sick-room, which my terror drove me to after my servants had rescued me from being consumed in the flames which destroyed my only home. I hear that Monsieur Estvan was killed, and I searched in every hospital in Richmond, and every jail, for some tidings of the monster in case he might have been captured. Now, alas! I find my son in the agonies of death."

She knelt again by the boy and kissed his cold lips, smiling so stilly.

St. Udo left the hapless pair together, and strode to the doorway of the shed for a breath of Heaven's pure air; the despair, the misery behind him were wringing his heart, adamant as he was wont to call it.

St. Udo suddenly heard the beat of hoofs, and in a moment a Confederate officer dashed in front of the tent and reined up.

"*Eh bien! Monsieur, mon ami,*" chirped a familiar voice. "Well met, my colonel. *Par ma foi.* I like this extravagantly—yes."

And the Chevalier de Calembours, dismounting from a magnificent war-horse, performed a profound obeisance.

"You unhangd villain!" shouted St. Udo, scornfully.

A white face peered out from behind Colonel Brand. Madam Estvan glided out, and put a nervous hand upon the chevalier's arm.

"Come here," whispered the wan lips, sadly.

He went with her into the tent, and looked at the sweet young face, sealed with the smile of death, of a noble soldier lad.

"Colonel Calembours, look at your son," whispered madam.

The chevalier grew ghastly white. Truly this fair, smiling dead bore his own sin.