

At the terrible sound of my voice, Viola uttered a faint shriek, and springing from her lover's side, fell senseless to the earth.

"See what thou hast done!" he said, reproachfully. "Begone, madman—begone! or thou wilt tempt me to slay thee!"

As he spoke, he drew his sword, and parried the fierce thrust which I made at him, but I pressed madly on, and, furious that he acted only on the defensive, I plunged my weapon deep into his breast, and with a groan he fell bleeding at my feet. Leaping across his prostrate body, I raised the lifeless Viola in my arms, and fled with her from the spot. But the sound of the mêlée, remote and secluded as was the place of its occurrence, had reached the ears of a solitary gardener, who lost no time in giving the alarm; and before I had sped far with my dearly won prize, voices were ringing wildly in pursuit—steps were close upon mine, and impeded as was my progress by the weight of her I sustained, by the rough paths and the tangled shrubbery, I began to feel that escape was hopeless.

"Yet still I faltered not; more than human strength and power seemed mine, and I was in the act of passing the last barrier of the Duke's estate, when my arms were suddenly seized by two of the foremost of my pursuers, who came noiselessly behind me, and wresting from my embrace the fair form I carried on my breast, they cast fetters around my limbs, and stripping me of every offensive weapon which I bore about my person, they forced me back with them to the palace, and cast me into one of its deepest and most loathsome dungeons.

"There I lay, cursing my fate, and pondering on my future doom, while days, ay, weeks crept on, and no ray of heaven's light, no sound of human speech, save the harsh brief tones of my surly keeper, ever gladdened or relieved my frightful solitude. I will not pause to tell thee the fearful workings of my soul, while I lay buried in that infernal prison-house—its desperate resolves, should freedom ever more be mine—the dark schemes of vengeance I matured, the hate, the rage, the bitterness, that in my lone and powerless captivity, awoke a living hell within my tortured breast.

"Often I scanned, by the feeble ray of my lamp, the dark walls that enclosed me, guiding my hand over their rough surfaces, in the vain hope of discovering some secret outlet from my horrid tomb. Not a crevice, not a loop-hole, was discernible, and one day, after my fruitless scrutiny, I sank down in the sullenness of utter despair on the damp floor, longing for some instrument with which to cut the thread of my existence, when the grating of the rusty key in the lock of my door, roused me to look up, in expectation of beholding the rugged and harsh features of my keeper. In his stead, however, a boy, a very imp of Satan, as he looked, entered with the coarse fare that was granted to

prolong, in wretchedness, the burden of my existence. Illness had seized my usual attendant, and to his son had been deputed for the present, the task of ministering to my necessities.

He wore the seal of early wickedness upon his brow, but he had youth; and if its lovely attributes of pity and of kindness were departed, I still hoped he might not be impregnable to bribery, and drawing from my finger, a costly ring, I offered to make it his, if he would aid me to escape. He hesitated, more from fear than probity, however; for the sparkle of the diamond proved decisive, and at midnight I was free. Dreading to meet the consequences of his treachery, by remaining, the boy fled with me, following my guidance, as I threaded the mazes of a subterranean passage, which I revealed to him, and which, in early youth, it had been my delight to explore.

"In the midst of these wild mountains, which have ever since been my home, we separated—he, with his treasure, to seek some distant mart, where he could advantageously dispose of it; and I, to find safety, as I best might, till pursuit was over, in the silent dens, and dark defiles, whose echoes, the foot of man never awakened with its tread. The boy afterwards came back, conveying me tidings that the Prince di Urbino after long suffering, had died, of the wound I gave him, and he is now one of the firmest, and most trusty of my band.

"It matters not to dwell upon this period of my history—lonely and outcast as I was, I grew enamoured of my forest life. Its wild freedom charmed me; I was unshackled by the conventional forms of society, and amenable to no tribunal for deed or thought. Strange projects fitted through my brain, which I longed for opportunity to carry into action. Circumstances soon favoured my wish. In my mountain wanderings I fell in with a broken band of freebooters, who, having lost their chief, were divided and dispersed, unable to unite in the choice of a leader, and at enmity among themselves. I collected, and made them friends, and gained for myself their confidence, at the same time that, by the mastery of a higher mind, I awed them into submission and obedience. They both feared and loved me, for I surpassed them in skill, in judgment, in generosity, and possessed a courage that quailed not, in the most desperate enterprises.

"In short, I became their chief. I found a fierce joy in the many perils, and wild excitements of my new life; and now I stand girt with a power as arbitrary as that of the most despotic monarch, a power at which monarchs tremble—for we awe them by our deeds, carrying our depredations to the very gates of their capitals; levying contributions on the treasures of nobles, that drain them of their riches, and blanching many a proud cheek with menaces, which fail not, through secret