

distant hint, by one of my messengers to him, of what we were about here."

"Well! his reply?"

"*Maledetta!* the poor man thought he would have eaten him alive; and his next letter warned me to remember the respect which I owed both to him and Ottorino. Methinks his Principality of Lucca hath cured him of his love."

"So much the better for us! He will be the better able to attend to his interests, which, thou knowest well, are ours also. But tell me, how standest thou now with our fair prisoner—thy correspondent?"

"She expects me within a couple of days. I had to afford her this hope, to withdraw her from the alarm and anxiety she suffered for some time past, as the time fixed for her mother's visit passed without her appearance. She seemed at first quite consoled by my letter; but yesterday she was as down-hearted as ever; she never utters a word, never tastes a mouthful, and does nought but weep from morning to night."

"We must bring matters to an issue soon," said Lodrisio, "as the tidings I have for thee will convince thee—Lupo has escaped."

"Lupo escaped!" repeated Pelagrua in accents of surprise and alarm.

"Yes—escaped. I saw him myself as I wended hither. But I have consigned him into good hands, and ere tomorrow's sun rise—. But enough! we will speak of this and other matters after I have written to Lucca."

A letter was accordingly written and dispatched to Marco. This finished, and after some further conference, the castellan led his companion through secret staircases and narrow corridors to a dark closet, where several concealed crevices gave them a full view of the apartment in which Bentrice, attended by the faithful Lauretta, was accustomed to pass the day.

The young wife of Ottorino was reclining on a richly embroidered couch, her drooping head supported by an arm as white and transparent as alabaster. Grief and despondency had left their fell traces on her pale and dejected countenance; her hair hung loose and dishevelled o'er her white robe; her eyes—those eyes of heavenly blue, where the light of her gay and lively spirit was wont to shine, softened by the sweet and innocent expression that accompanied it—those eyes, once so lustrous in their serene majesty—now languid, dim and sunken, expressed nought but fear and anguish. Lauretta, seated at a small table by her side, had taken up and continued a piece of embroidery which her mistress had just laid down, the latter seeming to watch her motions intently, although closer examination would show that no intelligence shone in her eyes, and that

her mind was wholly occupied by some secret terror.

After some minutes had thus passed, she rose from her couch, and moved with languid steps towards the balcony, to which a side door opened, and, leaning on the parapet, stood gazing abroad in silence. The setting sun, half hid among the high tops of a distant forest, spread a livid light over the vast plain beneath, only broken here and there by the dark shadows of the few willows that sprung from the sterile soil. The air was filled with the harsh croaking of the frogs that tenanted the waste and marshy ground; from the swamps and fens and stagnant pools a thick grey mist began to rise, gradually veiling the objects close at hand, and completely concealing those at a greater distance. A scene so different from those splendid and gorgeous sunsets which the poor girl had so often contemplated amidst her native mountains struck an additional chill to her heart. Leaving the balcony, she returned towards the table, on which Lauretta had just placed a lighted lamp, and throwing herself dejectedly on the couch, exclaimed, in plaintive and despairing accents:

"When shall this life of torment have an end?"

The sympathising attendant hazarded no reply, but a few minutes after stepped gently to the door that opened on the terrace, for the purpose of shutting out the night air; but ere she had completed her errand, the notes of a lute were heard at some little distance, and she stood motionless, with her hand on the latch. The sounds, too, had caught her lady's ear, and, springing to her feet with more energy than she had displayed since they arrived at the castle, she stood listening in an attitude of eager attention. The sweet and melancholy symphony had struck her as something familiar, and when a rich manly voice was heard mingling with the melody of the chords, she at once recognised the song which she had heard at Bellano, under the title of

"THE PRISONER TO THE NIGHTINGALE."

Cease, wandering warbler, cease thy strain;
Forbear these melting tones of grief;
Let soothing silence round me reign,
To give my aching heart relief—
Ah, hush! sweet minstrel of the air;
Thou fill'st my heart with sad despair.

And yet, sweet nightingale! sing on;
I fain would learn thine artless lay,
And teach my voice to catch the tone
Of thy sweet strain, as best I may:
For well thy plaintive notes express
The sorrows that my soul oppress.

Perchance the self-same feelings move
Thy thrilling song—my falling tear.
Darest, like me, of those we love,