

A wave of anguish swept over Margaret's plain, proud face, her voice grew beautiful with the soul's voiceless eloquence, her soft eyes pleaded wistfully, her shy lips quivered beseechingly. The old dowager's glaring eyes dwelt on her with gloating admiration.

"You will make a noble lady," muttered Mrs. Brand, with a fond smile. "Come, tell me you are satisfied with my arrangements for you?"

"No, no, I cannot meet St. Udo Brand—and I will not stand between him and his own property. I cannot, indeed!" cried Margaret, with a heart-rending sob.

The words rang out sharply in the hushed death-chamber, and the little doctor shifted uneasily in his chair, and stopped stirring the stimulant he was preparing, to gaze from one to the other—the lady and her companion. Twice Mrs. Brand essayed to speak, but her trembling lips refused to articulate a word, and her faint eyes sought Margaret's in dumb appeal.

"Say but one word before Dr. Gav and Mr. Davenport," pleaded Margaret, wildly. "Say that you wish the will to be canceled, and your grandson to come into his inheritance without incumbrance. For the sake of the love we have borne each other, grant my request."

"Unsay those words, my darling," wailed Mrs. Brand. "You give me a parting stab I never thought to receive from you. Oh, my darling, can't you save St. Udo from ruin for my sake?—do you grudge to do something for my sake?"

"No, dear madam, I would be glad to die for your sake," cried Margaret, lifting up a brave, love illumined face; "but not this—oh, Heaven! not this."

Mrs. Brand closed her eyes with a pang of mortal anguish.

"Have I been mistaken in my Margaret?" she uttered, brokenly. "Is she not the high, heroic soul I deemed her?"

Tears rose from the heart that thought never to feel another earthly pang, and rushed from the eyes which she thought to have closed in peace; and Margaret's tender heart accused her sternly for her own self-care in this most pitiful hour.

"Do not fear for your grandson," said she, eagerly. "I shall not suffer him to be defrauded."

"Mrs. Brand turned a piercing gaze upon her.

"You must do your best to win St. Udo's love," she whispered, earnestly, "else you will defraud him of his rights, and his ruin will be at your door."

Poor Margaret's head sank on her breast, her heart grew heavy as lead. Her last supplications had been made, and vainly.

Death was stealing closer to his feeble victim.

Where, where was St. Udo Brand that he came not in time to save her and himself from this fatal chain which his grandmother's death was to rivet round them both?

The trampling off horses' hoofs reached her ear. She started to her feet and listened breathlessly. Yes, through the still April eve stole those welcome sounds, nearer and clearer. An arrival at Castle Brand.

Margaret took her dying friend in her arms and tenderly kissed her cold, trembling mouth, and laid her on her pillow again.

"Captain Brand has arrived," said she, softly. "I shall bring him in at once."

She stepped to the doctor's side—he was still stirring the stimulant with a nervous hand.

"Give it to her quickly," she whispered; "the heir has come."

She left the chamber, her pulses throbbed with a vague sense of evil, her limbs seemed heavy as lead; and as she crept down the great vaulted staircase, lit by pale, flickering tapers, she thought that her own tall shadow writhed and shuddered before her like the panthom of a deadly fear.

The great hall-door stood open, the servants were waiting decorously, in the hall to greet the heir, and Purcell, the old steward, stood out on the threshold bare-headed, his silvery locks glistening in the broad moon's light.

Margaret Walsingham stepped beside him and eagerly looked for St. Udo Brand.

Two horsemen were cantering across the Waaste; the night wind bore the fragment of a gay *chanson* to the doors of Castle Brand. Under the Norman oaks they rode softly over the velvet turf, now snatched from view by the dense hazel coppice, anon seen plainly on the brow of this gentle curve.

Nearer, nearer—home at last to Seven-Oak Waaste. They slackened their pace as they approached, and gazed admiringly at the ancient castle, then observing a lady in the doorway, curved into the court and dismounted.

"Is this St. Udo Brand?" whispered Margaret to the steward.

A tall man had approached to the foot of the granite steps, leaving his companion standing between the pawing horses, holding a bridle of each, and serenely smoking a cigar—a tall man wrapped in a Spanish riding-cloak, who gazed about him with a dark, lowering eye.

"Can't say, Miss Margaret," muttered the steward; "if it is, he's a sight the worse for wear; but I haven't seen him for well nigh onto six years."