

Wilfred stamped his foot and ground his teeth, muttering imprecations, at which Wolfstein smiled contemptuously.

"These are impotent attempts at revenge, truly," he said; "you had far better return to your brother, entreat his pardon, and promise amendment, when perhaps in pity he may receive you into favour again."

"Wolfstein, do not madden me," cried the enraged Wilfred; "is this the conduct you would pursue under similar circumstances?"

"No, I take the fiends to witness it is not," replied Wolfstein resolutely—and with a countenance of stern determination. The two men glared on each other for a few brief moments in silence. Wilfred then drew near his friend, while in a hoarse, low tone, he demanded:

"Tell me what would you do." Wolfstein whispered his reply.

"Oh, no, no, I dare not, I could not," returned the alarmed Wilfred, starting back from him and covering his face with his hand.

"I know that," said Wolfstein, coolly; "it would require one of another metal than yourself, but what say you to garnering the harvest of another man's labour, hey?"

"What mean those words?" cried Wilfred gazing fixedly and eagerly upon him.

"I mean that for gold I would place you on the pinnacle where now your brother stands—now do you comprehend me?" returned Wolfstein firmly, and confronting him with all a villain's audacity, when he is certain of his compliance. Wilfred trembled in every limb. "Wolfstein," he faltered, while his cheek blanched, "I can have nothing to do with this—you must act alone, if indeed, you are determined to—to—"

"I ask not your aid—but your gold," interrupted Wolfstein, fiercely grasping his arm. Have I your promise for this?" The only reply given by Wilfred, was placing his hand in that of Wolfstein, who, wringing it until the other writhed in agony, he released him with a grim smile, and after a few more words they parted.

Wilfred then returned to his brother, expressing deep contrition for his past misconduct, and even with tears acknowledging his grateful sense of his kindness, bidding him at the same time farewell. The Count was much affected by his words, and manner; he reflected on himself for having been too harsh, and falling on his neck said, "that he should never so depart from the home of his fathers. His reformation was all that he desired, and if he would only give up the society of those who were leading him blindfold to the brink of a precipice, he would never withdraw from him his fraternal regard or protection. Wilfred made the fairest promise—and the Count left him with the delightful feeling of a Christian, who hopes that under Providence he has t

length touched the sinner's heart; and that he will now turn from the crooked ways of sin unto holiness.

That night a dark tempest raged around the castle of Ravensberg the vivid lightning played on its devoted battlements, the thunder rolled awfully above it while the howling blast, and the crash of falling trees, added to the terror of the scene, which in the memory of the oldest inhabitant had never been surpassed or even equalled. The affrighted peasant closed his door in trembling haste—the wild beasts of the forest sought for shelter in their dens from its violence, but a band more ruthless, more savage than they, braved its fury, and for gold bartered their eternal weal to assist in a plot contrived by fiends.

The young Countess was drawing near to the period of her confinement, and her lord, fearful that she might experience alarm from the wild raging storm, was sitting by her side, as she reposed on a couch, reading aloud some amusing tale, to beguile her attention, when suddenly Wilfred entered the room, pale and trembling, to announce that the castle was attacked by banditti who had gained an entrance none knew how—and that they had fired it in several places. On hearing this dreadful intelligence, the Countess uttered a piercing scream, and instantly swooned away, while the Count, summoning her women to her aid, rushed forth, calling on his domestics, in a state of fearful agitation. Wilfred remained behind as he said to protect the Countess. Count Ravensberg and his people, armed themselves to seek their enemies, who they encountered in one of the galleries; they were twelve in number, and all masked. The foremost of them rushed upon the Count who nobly defended himself. Amidst the horrible din, and clash of arms, and the roar of the devouring flames which were now seen bursting from various points, the voice of Wilfred vociferated from above.

"Forbear, I command you forbear! Hoffman save your lord from that villain's stroke; but his words were unheeded. In the same instant that he uttered them a dagger was plunged into the Count's back, who fell with deep groans to the ground, while the ruffians, fighting their way through the paralyzed domestics, escaped from the spot.

Wilfred looked wildly on the terrific sight, and then flew back to the apartment of the Countess. "Ravensberg is slain," he cried, "let us fly ere the flames cut off our retreat." The Countess clasped her hands, and gazing on him with an expression of agony, united to execration, exclaimed:

"Never with you—death is all that I have now to desire."

Deserted by her women, who had fled aghast from the surrounding horrors, the unfortunate Countess remained the very image of despair—her tearless eyes fixed on vacancy. This distressing immobility was succeeded by a violent paroxysm of madness, in