

Almost their last arrow was expended, and they were repelling their assailants from the inner wall with their spears, when *Went*, the most formidable enemy of the besieged, began to assail them from within.

It was now that the gentle Madeline, when Sir William endeavoured to inspire her with hope, replied—"I fear not to die—to die with you!—but tell me not of hope—it is not to be found in the courage of the brave garrison whom famine is depriving of their strength. There is one hope for us—only one; but it is a desperate hope, and I would rather die than the life of another."

"Nay, name it, dearest," said Sir William, eagerly; "and if the heart or hand of man can accomplish it, it shall be attempted."

Madeline hesitated.

"Speak, silly one," said the Countess, who had overheard them—"where lies your hope? Could true knight die in nobler cause? Name it; for I wot ye have a wiser head than a bold heart."

"Name it, do, dear Madeline," entreated Sir William.

"King Edward is now in Yorkshire," she replied; "could a messenger be dispatched to him, the castle might hold out until he hastened to our assistance."

"St. George! and 'tis a happy thought," replied the Countess. "I have not seen my cousin Edward since we were children together; but how know ye that he is in Yorkshire? I expected that ere now, he was conquering the hearts of the dark-eyed dames of Brittany, while his arms conquered the country."

"In dressing the wounds of the aged Scottish nobleman," answered Madeline, "who was yesterday brought into the castle, he informed me."

"What think ye of your fair lady's plan for our deliverance, good brother" inquired the Countess, addressing the governor.

"Madeline said it would be a desperate attempt," replied he, thoughtfully—"and it would, indeed, be desperate—it is impossible."

"But can thy knighthood, man!" rejoined the Countess—"is this the far-famed chivalry of Sir William Montague? why, it is the proposition of your own fair ladye, whom, verily, ye cannot believe chivalrous to a fault. But is it to Joan Plagenet that ye talk of impossibilities? I will stake thee my dowry against fair Madeline's, I find a hundred men in this poor garrison ready to dare what you declare impossible."

"You find not *two*, fair sister," said Sir William, proudly.

"Oh, say not *one*!" whispered Madeline earnestly.

Upon every man in the castle did the Countess urge the dangerous mission—she entreated, she threatened, she offered the most liberal, the most tempting rewards; but the bold east rejected them with dismay.

The Scottish army lay encompassing the around—their sentinels were upon the wall almost at every step, and to venture beyond the gate of the castle seemed but to meet death and seek it.

"At midnight have my fleetest horse in readiness," said Sir William, addressing his attendant—"what no man dare, I will!"

"My brother!—thanks!—thanks!" exclaimed the Countess, in a tone of joy.

Madeline clasped, her hands together—her cheeks became pale—her voice faltered—she burst into tears.

"Weep not loved one," said Sir William, "the heavens favour the enterprise which my Madeline conceived. Should the storm increase, there is hope—it is possible—it will be accomplished." And, while he yet spoke, the lightning glared along the walls of the castle, and the loud thunder pealed over the battlements. Yet Madeline wept, and repented that she had spoken of the possibility of deliverance.

As it drew towards midnight, the terror of the storm increased, and the fierce hail poured down in sheets and rattled upon the earth; the thunder almost incessantly roared louder and more loud; or, when it ceased, the angry wind moaned through the woods like a chained giant in the grasp of an enemy, and the impenetrable darkness was rendered more dismal by the blue glare of the lightning flashing to and fro.

Silently the castle gate was unbarred, and Sir William, throwing himself into the saddle, dashed his spurs into the sides of his courser, which bounded off at its utmost speed, followed by the adieus of his countrymen and the prayers and the tears of Madeline. The gate was scarce barred behind him ere he was dashing through the midst of the Scottish host. But the noise of the warlike elements drowned the trampling of a horse's feet, or, where they were indistinctly heard for a few moments, the sound had ceased, and the horse and its rider were invisible, ere the sentinels, who had sought refuge from the fury of the storm in the tents, could perceive them.