

"Alas! but too well! but tell me is there no hope? can I not devise some means to wrest her from them?"

"Come with me to the cavern, for much you need rest, and we will see what can be done for thee!"

Gustavus arose, and followed Rodolphe toward the cavern, nor was it long ere they reached the rude home of the bandit chief. The day was far spent, and several of the robbers were assembled there when they entered, listening to a merry song to which our minstrels were treating them, for Francis had learned the propriety of affecting cheerful submission to his fate, and now he shared with Malcolm the love of the ruffian band. "We are in good time!" cried Rodolphe, addressing his guest, "I forgot to mention to you, that since we met, I have added to my household two jolly minstrels, who enliven many a gloomy hour!"

The eye of Gustavus turned toward the minstrels, who had both started to their feet on beholding him, and the three stood gazing on each other, Gustavus and Francis pale with emotion, while Malcolm looked upon him for a moment with calm indifference, and then exclaimed, "By our holy lady, but it is our good master, the young lord of Lindendorf!"

"Yes!" cried Gustavus in a voice of triumph, for his two most deadly foes were now within his power, "yes it is Gustavus of Lindendorf, guided by the hand of heaven to detect you, for know you not Rodolphe!" he exclaimed turning to the bandit chief, "that those whom you are thus kindly entertaining, are beneath the minstrel's peaceful garb, spies sent out to discover, if possible, the passes to your mountain abode, that they may guide your enemies hither! I learned all this, and because I sought with my faithful servant to intercept one of them, while in the neighborhood of Lindendorf, I received from him the blow that had nearly proved fatal to my life!"

"Liar, base liar!" cried Francis, springing toward him, "thou shalt unsay thy words!" but the powerful arm of Rodolphe held him back, while at a word from him, Malcolm was also seized, by the incensed robbers. It was in vain that they attempted to be heard, to tell their story; to the jealous mind of Rodolphe, the falsehood of Gustavus seemed but too probable, and the unhappy prisoners read their fate in his dark frown and flashing eye, while the features of Gustavus glowed with fierce triumph.

"Now shalt thou die a death which would bring shame to a dog, nor is there hope of mercy!" cried the captain, as he threw the luckless Francis to

the earth, and placed his foot upon his breast, "aye and thy fellow, shall share thy fate! said I not that as living men, you should not leave us? aye and die thou shalt, and by the most dreadful death, the lingering death of starvation! Away with them to the cavern of death! know ye why 'tis so called? because none that enter it, have ever left it! there you will find the decaying forms of others who have incurred my anger, and then wilt thou have time to arrange thy plans of bringing my foes to my retreat, for some few days will pass by, ere want can do its work!"

Francis, and Malcolm were dragged forth by the strong arms of the ruffian band, followed by Rodolphe and Gustavus, to see that the order was punctually obeyed. Francis spoke not; horror seemed to chill his every faculty, but Malcolm by a strong effort subdued his emotion, and while his heart beat painfully, he was apparently as calmly indifferent as if a dreadful doom awaited him not; for he resolved that Gustavus should not triumph in his distress. They led them onward for some distance from the cavern, and then commenced to ascend a rugged steep, on the side of which stood a thicket almost impenetrable. Into this thicket they plunged, and after proceeding a short distance paused, while several of the men by united efforts at length succeeded in moving a large stone, when a small aperture, before which was a strong door, grated with iron, appeared. The strong stench as of animal bodies in a state of putrefaction, caused the men to recoil as they opened this door, but Rodolphe, addressing his captives bade them enter the dark and horrid place.

"Nay good robber!" cried Malcolm, "but that is what we will not do in peace, unless thou wilt send the worse than robber by thy side to bear us company!"

"Do my bidding!" cried the bandit in a voice of thunder, "Or this good sword shall send thy coward soul to the realms of eternal darkness!"

"Well even then will I triumph, for I will have withstood thy command, nor stooped like a coward wretch, who would barter for a few hours of life, to yield obedience to a murderous robber!"

"Sayest thou this of me?" cried Rodolphe, pale with rage, for murder was a word that grated harshly on his ear, "I could smite thee to the earth, had I not resolved that a more dreadful fate should be thine! Yes thou shalt enter that loathsome place, there wilt thou find the mouldering forms of others who have dared to brave my anger, there shalt thou linger a prey to pining want, until nature sinks beneath thy load of misery, and thou shalt die, and now my merry men, do your duty!"