

up in solitude as I had been, who had never seen a young female of higher rank than the peasant girls in the neighbourhood, this vision of beauty awoke the first intoxicating sensations of passion in my breast. My own sorrows, and the selfish beings who had been the cause of them, passed away from my mind, which was wholly occupied in contemplating the young enchantress before me. My uncle remarked my abstraction and the cause of it, and calling the young lady to him, said, 'Fredwald, this is your cousin, the lady Christiana; I hope to see you friends. Such near relatives should love one another.' I sprang from my seat, and received, in a kind of transport, the small white hand he placed in mine, and I almost forgave him the cruel treachery which had robbed me of my birthright. Nothing could have reconciled me to my dreary lot but the love and sympathy of that blessed girl. She had been brought up by my grandmother, and had never visited Norway before: and when the ice was once broken between us, I found the greatest pleasure in describing to her all the beauties which surrounded my wild domain; to which she listened with the same quiet smile, and dovelike expression of eye, which first stole my heart, and for years riveted my affections."

CHAPTER XIV.

They call me mad—Oh, would to God! I were—
The fiery demon, with his hot fierce breath
Would sweep out memory, and restore me peace.

"STRANGE as it may appear to you, Burwood," continued the Captain, "this was the happiest period of my unhappy life. As long as I continued to submit passively to my degraded position, I was treated civilly by my uncle, while my imperious aunt and grandmother confined their dislike and hostility to taunting speeches, or contemptuous neglect. My cousin Adolphus, who upon the whole, was not a bad-hearted fellow, although he never expressed himself in friendly terms towards me; yet often accompanied me, during his brief sojourns at the castle, in expeditions of hunting and shooting among the hills. He was a beautiful creature, if the term beautiful can appropriately be given to man. His features were a model for the sculptor; and his rich yellow hair hung clustering around his snow white temples in luxuriant curls. His figure was light and active; and it was impossible to regard his noble air and manner with indifference. I could have loved him had he showed the least commiseration for my situation, but I viewed him in the light of a supplanter, and the popularity he had gained among my people, made me hate him with an intensity which was in itself murder.

"He was the idol of his proud mother's heart; and though the lady Christiana was the feminine of her brother, and in my eyes, yet more fair, she never bestowed on her those marks of overflowing love which she constantly lavished upon her son. For a long time I marvelled that any intercourse was allowed between me and my lady cousin. We were constantly together. We read and rode and walked together, without any restraint, and the mutual attachment which was growing up between us must have been apparent to the elder members of the family. A conversation I once overheard between my aunt and grandmother opened my eyes to the policy of this step.

"It was a lovely moonlight evening. They were walking in the garden, and I was seated unobserved by them in the deep shadow of a dark mountain fir tree.

"My grandmother commenced. 'That unfortunate lad, Matilda, loves Christiana.'

"'I know it,' was the reply.

"And she, if I mistake not, is not indifferent to him.'

"'You are right again, my lady mother.'

"Well, is not this the height of folly for you to know that such is the case and suffer it?"

"Quite the reverse. My husband, you know, entertains a regard for the lad. He would never consent to his death; now his love for Christiana reconciles him to his situation; besides, I have a more urgent reason for allowing this intimacy, and I wonder that you, with all your sagacity, have never discovered it before. The titles and estates of Christenstien cannot be enjoyed through a female. Should anything happen to Adolphus, the property must pass into a distant branch of the family. Ah! I see you comprehend me now. Should Christiana marry her cousin, she ensures its continuance in our line.'

"But the stain that you have thrown upon the boy, in order to enjoy his rights?"

"Might as easily be wiped out, if occasion required. Might overcomes right. In this case, might and right would go together.'

"I sat trembling with ill suppressed passion, and dearly as I loved, yea idolized Christiana, I determined that I would not be a tool in their hands any longer,—that she should never be my wife. You smile, Burwood, but you know not the iron stuff of which I am made. My whole soul was panting for revenge. My aunt, and that she-devil, my grandmother! returned to the castle while I sat ruminating on my wrongs beneath the tree. A light touch upon my shoulder made me raise my head, and the cherub face of Christiana smiled down upon me.