

"Are you safe, sweetheart?" he asked.

"Safe, and waiting for you."

"One moment, Dehra," said the King. Then he bent his eyes upon Lotzen. "Monsieur le Duc, I will give you one more chance for mercy—will you yield yourself prisoner?"

"And if I refuse?" said Lotzen carelessly.

"You die," was the answer.

"You will grant no terms?"

"There are no terms for such as you."

"No?" the Duke asked indifferently. "Well! so be it—you likely know your own mind, cousin. Nevertheless, I am disposed not to yield without a fight. I have long been anxious for a fitting occasion to measure swords with you again—as, you may remember, we did at the Vierle Masque. And I think the occasion is here. You used to be brave. Are you brave still, or have the joys of conjugal blessedness sapped your spirit? Will you fight me *à outrance*, or are you afraid, cousin?"

"I forbid it, Armand, I forbid it!" the Queen exclaimed.

The Duke laughed tauntingly.

"She forbids it! Pardon me, sire, I forgot that now you are ruled by a woman."

The King smiled grimly.

"Not because of your slurring words to me," he answered, "but because of your insult to her Majesty, and to relieve the House of Dalberg—