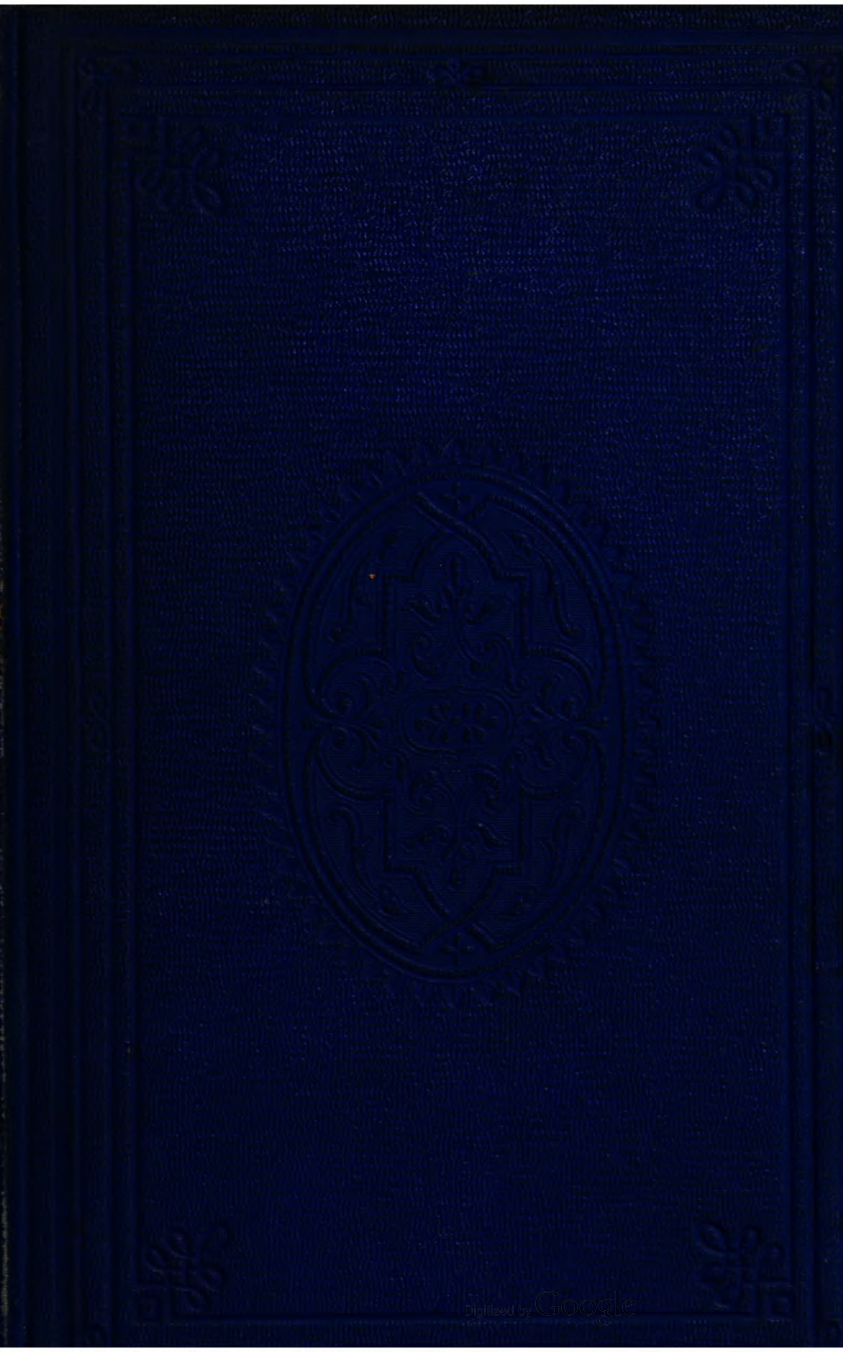

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THE WORLD'S OWN.



THE WORLD'S OWN.

BY

JULIA WARD HOWE, 

AUTHOR OF "PASSION FLOWERS" AND "WORDS FOR THE HOUR."

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
M DCCC LVII.



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1857, by
JULIA WARD HOWE,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

STEREOTYPED BY
HOBART & ROBBINS,
New England Type and Stereotype Foundry,
BOSTON.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

COUNT LOTHAIR.
EDWARD, an artist.
LORENZO, friend to Edward.
JACQUES, a villager.
BONIFACE, an inn-keeper.
THE PRINCE.
HUÖN, }
BERTO, } Nobles, friends of Lothair.
ORSETTI, }
JACOB, a Jew.
LEONORA, the Queen of the village.
KÄTCHEN, her friend and servant.
BERTHA, }
SUSANNE, } village girls.
LOULOU, }
A FLOWER GIRL.
COUNTESS HELEN, wife to Count Lothair.
ARTHUR, son of Lothair.
ZINGARA, a Gypsy.
PEASANTS, COURTIERS, MASKS, GUARDS.

The scene in the first two acts is laid in a village in the mountains of Piedmont, near the Italian frontier ; in the third act, in an Italian town. The last two acts are supposed to take place at the court of a small Italian principality.

The time is in the early part of the last century.

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THE WORLD'S OWN.

ACT FIRST.

SCENE I. — *A Village Green, with peasants dancing to the sound of rustic music. In the front stand EDWARD and JACQUES, looking on. The dance ceases; the villagers disperse.*

EDWARD.

COMES Leonora to the dance no more?
I thought to find her here.

JACQUES.

In other ways
She wanders, with the stranger from the inn,
That supercilious Signor Prettyman,
Whose pleasure-travel stopped, some three weeks
since,
For the repairing of a carriage-spring.

EDWARD.

Three weeks to set so small a matter right?
Your smiths are bunglers.

(7)

JACQUES (*significantly*).

There 'll be more to mend,
And worse, I fear.

EDWARD.

What mean you? Tell me straight.
You speak in riddles I am loth to read.
Dares he aspire to Leonora's love?

JACQUES.

Aspire? I tell you he 's a gentleman,
A man of courts — no rustic. He aspire?
He has won, and wears it most familiarly.

EDWARD (*aside*).

I've heard enough, — yet let me learn the worst.
Are they betrothed, then?

JACQUES.

Do you dream such men
Marry such maidens? They are matched in naught
On earth, save pride and beauty.

EDWARD.

Matched in beauty?
The matchless mated? Could her pride avail
To shield her better treasures, I'd forgive it;
But all your words imply is new to me,
Who went away two weary years ago,
With other thoughts of her. You can relate

Doubtless, how all befell. Where did they meet?
How grew this liking?

JACQUES.

I'll inform you straight.

At such an evening festival as this,
Just over, ere the dancing was at end,
The stranger passed, and saw what we have seen.
He had left his carriage at the smithy yonder,
For some repair, and, to beguile an hour,
With listless air was wandering hither, thither.
The music, haply, lured him to this spot,
But with a vacant and abstracted brow,
Scarce deigned he look upon the village-girls
In holiday attire; — nay, scarcely paused
Before the waterfall, our hamlet's pride,
That many a foreign artist comes to view.
The band, dividing, passed to either side,
And from the ranks moved Leonore alone,
To the majestic measure that she loves.
White were her garments, white her twisted scarf,
And white the flowers that garlanded her brow,
Proclaiming her the hamlet's maiden-queen.

EDWARD.

O, I have often seen her thus. And he?
Did this arrest him?

JACQUES.

Such a sudden spark
 Woke in his eye, it grew a flash, a flame,
 A thought, a purpose, and a destiny.
 I saw his breathing to her steps keep time.
 Unconscious she, — her movement mastered him.
 So gazed he, 'ware of naught on earth beside,
 Drunk with her beauty, till she stopped to rest,
 And turning, saw him. —

EDWARD.

Saw, but heeded not?

JACQUES.

Surprised to stillness, with a sudden shock,
 As seeing one foreshadowed in a dream,
 She stood, intense and tremulous ; a blush
 (The only element her beauty lacks),
 Reddened like sunset, from her fair white brow
 To the soft limits of her virgin vest.
 'T was but a moment, — pale and recomposed,
 She launched an ice-bolt from her scornful eyes,
 And swift, but stately, vanished from the scene.

EDWARD.

O, happy pride ! O, rescue sent of Heaven !
 She's safe ! Those eyes have deadly weaponry.

JACQUES.

Be not too sure. The peril is not past.

She wears the vizard of her maidenhood
 Haughtily close, I grant you ; but her heart
 May prove the traitor in the citadel.

EDWARD.

Proceed. How looked the stranger when she left ?
 In gloom or anger ?

JACQUES.

He was still, and smiled ;
 The languid features showed a new intent.
 Beckoning his servant with a lordly gest,
 He briefly said, " We go not hence to-night."

EDWARD.

And then ?

JACQUES.

O, then I know not what befell.
 Soon he was seen at Leonora's side,
 Close as her shadow ; — nay, we see her not
 Without him. In the shelter of her cottage
 They pass snug days, of which the world knows
 naught
 Save the perpetual hum of lovers' voices.
 And now and then two heads that come to view,
 Touching almost, within the vine-clad window.
 He has taught her foreign music, foreign ways,
 Unknown among our mountains : daintier work
 Has put to shame the wholesome spinning-wheel.

Books, too, they have, — plays, novels and such trash.

Her table feeds him, and when day is done, —

EDWARD.

She surely does not wander forth alone ?

JACQUES.

No, not alone — his escort never fails.

EDWARD.

O, strange imprudence ! O, ill-counselled girl !
How stands she scathless from the village gossips ?

JACQUES.

They 're nursing scandal that will soon take wing
And fly abroad, croaking its evil tale.
The time 's not come ; he has not left her yet.

EDWARD.

There 's an abyss of woe ! Yes, he must leave her !
Who shall stand up to be her savior then ?
I 've seen fair women tread those dangerous ways,
Snatching the flowers that hide the fatal pit ; —
But thou, my Leonora ?

JACQUES.

It grows late,
And supper waits.

EDWARD.

He thinks upon his meat !
Good Jacques, go before me to the inn,

I 'll seek you there anon, and make amends
 For present dulness, by some tales of travel,
 Enlivened by a friendly cup of wine ; —
 I would remain a moment here alone.

JACQUES (*going*).

Edward, they 're very like to come this way.

EDWARD.

Well — let them come — I 'm now beyond surprise.

(*Exit JACQUES.*)

SCENE II.

EDWARD.

He knew not that his words were murderous,
 Else, surely, he had not plunged back the steel
 To widen out the ghastly wound he made.

(*Looks around him.*)

Dark days of absence, comforted with hope
 Faithful and fervent, — waking, sleeping dreams,
 Enfolding one fair vision, — longing thoughts
 Intensified by distance, struggling ever
 Back to the charmed limits of her life,
 The rustic haunts that she made beautiful, —
 Was this the end ye led to? Even this.
 O, swift and sudden sorrow! Leonora
 Lost, — grant it Heaven! — not to herself, but me.
 The very heart of innocent delight

Plucked out and trampled by a love profane !
She was not mine, — true, true ; what was I then
To claim her ? An unmannered, blushing boy,
That durst not lift my looks or thoughts to her,
Till the voice said, “ Go forth and win renown !
Thou hast gifts to gather glory — use them well.
When all men praise thee, she may turn her eyes,
Those fairest eyes, upon thee, and discern,
Not angrily, thy merit in thy love.”
Fired with this thought I took the pilgrim's staff,
Following the lofty dream with breathless steps ;
I, who had been content in lowliness !
Nor have I stayed for pleasure or repose,
Such restless need has urged me to this hour, —
This hour, the goal of striving and success, —
This hour, that smites success with emptiness.
But I hear voices, — no, we must not meet ;
This rock shall spare them an unwelcome sight.

(Hides behind a rock.)

SCENE III. — *Enter* LOTHAIR *and* LEONORA.

LEONORA.

How soft the shadows gather in our train,
Holding the dead Day's pall, while we go forth,
Bearing heart-incense for her funeral !

This was a day on whose enamelled brow
 No marring break of separation came ;
 One golden web of happiness she wove ;
 Wherefore, God rest thee, gentle Day — sleep well !

LOTHAIR.

And this, the very charmed twilight hour,
 When pilgrim Love, his finger on his lips,
 Binds all to mystery.

LEONORA.

Shall we rest here ?

LOTHAIR.

A little further.

LEONORA.

You are still the guide,
 Leading, each day, to joys undreamed before.
 Into the sunset's fiery heart we fly,
 As in the rose the bee for ravishment.
 I know not places, when I walk with you ;
 I only know they are no earthly ways
 We tread together.

LOTHAIR.

Yet my Leonore
 At sudden fancies stays her pretty steps,
 Like to a tricksome steed that feigns alarm
 When he is froward.

LEONORA.

Nay, I do not feign ;

I love the light ; the very blaze of noon
 Frights not my courage ; on my hardy brow
 It lays a blessing and a kiss at once.
 So dear I prize it, I could walk abroad,
 Were you so minded, through the market-place,
 With dauntless presence, saying to the world,
 Behold Lothair, — behold my love for him,
 That seeks its sanction in the face of Heaven !

LOTHAIR.

Hush ! hush ! fair child ; that is no more to seek ;
 The heavens attest the love I bear you, list'ning
 To God's high name invoked ; th' attendant stars
 Give countenance to nuptials of the heart
 Where other priesthood were profanity.

(Giving a ring.)

This jewel shall record for thee my vows
 Beyond the power of distance or of doubt.
 Wearing it, thou becom'st my gentle thrall,
 Bounden to follow where thy master bids.

LEONORA.

Blest in obedience, when the word is, follow !
 Though through hell's tortures led the burning way ;
 The fear were, you might stay my eager steps
 With the cold ban of separation.

Ev'n then I would be dutiful till death,
 And keep my faith unbroken to the end.
 But we'll not think of that, Friend, Lover, Master !
 Why, Master seems the crowning name of all,
 As you pronounce it ; — so, command your slave,
 Only remembering that she yields to you,
 For faultless guidance, all she owes to God !
 (*Exeunt, he leading the way.*)

SCENE IV.

EDWARD (*coming from his concealment*).

I did not think t' have heard their stolen words,
 That stamp my sorrow beyond remedy !
 But now my course is plain ; an orphan she,
 Brotherless, friendless ; I must urge her right
 With this fine wooer ; she shall be his wife,
 Or he must try my weapon ere he sleeps,
 And this shall be Love's crowning sacrifice.
 Still, still, my heart ! this only can avail.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE V. — *Enter* BERTHA.

BERTHA.

I've heard enough ! If lost indeed be lost,
 Why need I follow further for their hurt ?

'T is no mean pleasure, certainly, to spin
A rival's ruin from her smiling lips,
Snatching Love's silver cord to strangle her.
Yet this delights me most, that I was there,
Breaking the charmed circle of their love,
When least they deemed this possible ; the veil
Was lifted from their hearts, and I, their foe,
Stood near, to profit by their confidence.
Whatever mischief I may bring to pass,
This shall sting deepest—this give deadliest wound ;
Thus from her very bosom I shall pluck,
Warm with her breath, the crimson flower of shame
That crowns my triumph with her infamy.

(*Exit* BERTHA.)

SCENE VI. — *A Room in the Inn. Various tables are about ;
at one of which are seated EDWARD and JACQUES, with wine,*

JACQUES.

You sit uneasily, and have not drunk
One manly measure since the wine was brought.
For shame ! fill up the beaker ; clear your brow ;
So much for mere good-fellowship ; — to drink
With an old comrade, ay, a friend of youth,
Looking as if the very hangman pledged you !

EDWARD.

Pardon, good Jacques !

JACQUES.

Pardon I'll accord

Only to better conduct. You forget
 You promised to beguile this evening hour
 With copious annals of these sumptuous years
 Passed in the gold-and-purple lap of Rome.

EDWARD (*rising and lifting his cap*).

You touch a theme most fervent in my thoughts.
 I must be worn and wasted out of life
 When I respond not to that sacred name.

(*Reseating himself.*)

Though not the gold and purple of the robe
 Enchant the eyes devout that worship Beauty.
 The splendors you would name were irksome to me,
 As guests that stay when you would be alone
 With one you love. (Still run my thoughts on that ?)
 For those that seek them, Rome has pomps and
 shows,

And men may play the villain or the child
 Before her, with majestic sufferance ;
 To them that love her, she unfolds her heart,
 Calm with the mighty sorrow, greatly borne.
 Yet oft, from Contemplation's higher ground,
 I've stooped to see the garish multitude ;

The pontiff, borne behind his triple crown,
 Ablaze with jewels, fanned with costly plumes
 Of Indian birds, — the coffin following
 Unseen, but close and certain, while a crowd,
 That loved him not, did heartless reverence ;
 And men whose hope of power must pass beyond
 His deathbed, gave the kiss of fealty,
 Caressing in the gray, decrepit man,
 The idol each has longing to become.
 Such devil's service do the lips of men
 When the heart deigns to falsehood.

On mine eyes

Flashed the rude torchlight of their pageantry,
 Leaving its dazzle only. The divine
 Mingles no whisper with these pæans loud ;
 Flies, startled, to congenial solitudes,
 Where marble heroes keep the pensive grace
 Of the old time, that stood for Deity ;
 And where, immortal, hang upon the walls
 Th' intenser glories of Jerusalem.
 There, in a labyrinth of high delights
 I wandered, winding Memory's golden thread,—
 There my weak faith, that bound and bleeding lay,
 Rose free, before the touch of Raphaél.

JACQUES.

Spoken with Southern fervor, on my word !

Your diction smacks not of the mountain phrase
Familiar to your childhood.

EDWARD.

'T is the theme
Lends finer meaning to the peasant's tongue ;
But while we talk at random, it grows late,
(*Aside.*)

(And Leonora's lattice shows no light.)

(*He rises, looks at the clock, goes to the window.*)

JACQUES.

Why do you look so wildly at the clock,
And at the silent cottage opposite ?
You have not come to your own story yet.
Talk further ; tell me of your first success.

EDWARD (*resuming his seat*).

You can remember when I drew a head
In charcoal, on a whitewashed village wall ?
A figure followed ; then, a straggling group ;
Then, all I could imagine, till men traced
My ramblings by my work.

JACQUES.

If I remember ?
Did you not spoil our kitchen in those days
Just newly plastered, with a chevalier
In armor, squinting every way at once,
For which you fled, my father at your back ?

EDWARD.

And you behind him, pleading loud for me? —
Well, to be brief, I grew a sturdy boy,
That would not tend the herds, or hunt the chamois ;
And so the pastor taught me as he could ;
But toil grew needful for my daily bread,
While my heart sickened to give up its dream,
And sink to sordid cares of vulgar life,
Untried, the airy footing of its hope.
So, things were dim before me, till one day
A stranger, visiting the parsonage,
Looked at my sketches, questioned my intent,
Then gave a purse, and, staying not for thanks,
Said, " Take this gold, and follow art in Rome.
If you are diligent, I shall be paid ;
If not, this ruins neither you nor me."
I have been diligent, — that 's all my merit ;
The love, the aptitude, were nature's gifts.
This year, my picture, at the Academy,
Drew the great prize, and when my name was called,
A voice behind me said, " I am repaid."
I turned and saw th' Unknown, whose generous gift
Unlocked for me the iron doors of Fate :
But now he wore th' insignia of his rank,
And when he offered me his princely hand,
From the pleased crowd approving murmurs came,

That rose, till plaudits blent his name with mine.

(*Aside.*)

She comes not yet, and I am idle here !

O, could I rush to save her !

Enter SERVANTS, bearing lights.

Who are these ?

JACQUES.

They wait upon the stranger, who returns

At easy leisure from his evening ramble ;

Love wanders late, they say, nor fears the dark.

(*Yawning.*)

I judge 't is nigh eleven of the clock.

EDWARD (*looking towards window*).

And Leonora lights her evening lamp.

O dim, uncertain light ! Comes he this way ?

JACQUES.

Ay ; that should be his step.

EDWARD.

This happens well.

SCENE VII. — *The above. Enter LOTHAIR, escorted by SERVANTS with lights.*

LOTHAIR (*to SERVANTS*).

Bid them bring supper to my room, and wine.

(*Exit SERVANTS.*)

EDWARD (*aside*).

What, — you 'll carouse ? I 'll bear you company.

(*Rising, and accosting* LOTHAIR.)

A word with you, sir !

LOTHAIR (*haughtily*).

I am not at leisure.

If you have business, seek my servant yonder.

He keeps my books.

EDWARD.

My business is with you.

Sir, you walk late.

LOTHAIR (*commanding himself*).

As I am wont to do !

EDWARD.

And in good company, I warrant me !

LOTHAIR.

I choose my own companions, and endure

None others. Stand aside, sir ! Let me pass !

EDWARD.

When I am satisfied I 'll give you way,

But, by my faith in God, no moment sooner.

You have mysterious habits, noble sir !

You come unquestioned, and depart unknown ;

You find your way to honest, humble roofs,

And palm yourself on inexperienced girls ;

And if the fairest should be fatherless,

And in unguarded beauty dwell alone,
 You'd violate her maiden sanctity,
 And bring dishonoring ruin on her head.
 That's what I think of you!

LOTHAIR.

What gives you right
 T' insult me thus? Detain me at your peril!

EDWARD.

A moment longer. You were best give ear;
 One reparation lies within your power, —
 The right to bear your name, whate'er it be, —
 Give it; — you have no choice but infamy.

LOTHAIR.

Upon my word, this passes sufferance!
 I'll hear no more. Your hand upon my cloak?
 Nay, have it then; there's for your insolence!
 Carlo! (Calls.)

EDWARD (*drawing his rapier*).

A blow! Draw, coward! for your life.
 We'll try the issue thus! Heaven help the right!

LOTHAIR.

I'll not cross weapons with a village brawler,
 Nor perish vilely by his hand.
(*Going to the window.*)

What, ho!

Help, friends! I am attacked. Here's treachery!

EDWARD.

None but your own, you villain ! Draw, I say !

LOTHAIR (*draws, but retreats*).

Where are my servants ?

JACQUES.

Edward, are you mad ?

EDWARD.

I'd have his life-blood, though my mother stood
Covering his caitiff body with her own !

(*EDWARD makes a deadly pass at LOTHAIR. LEONORA
leaps in at the window, in her night-dress, and
rushes between the combatants with a shriek.*)

LEONORA.

Ah, I have saved him !

(*Turning to EDWARD, and pointing to her breast.*)

Here, strike here, good friend !

He's safe ; I have no further need of life.

Lothair, they have not harmed you ?

EDWARD.

Leonore !

LEONORA.

What, Edward ? thou, my friend, my friend of youth,
Th' assassin, who would take my life in his ?
This is too much ! Put up your luckless sword.
I see, you knew not that I loved this man ;
Some sudden passion moved you, on some point

Of that strange lunacy that men call honor.
 I can forgive you. I will make your peace.
 You will not? O, be sure, then, you shall wound
 The saints in heaven, within God's crystal armor,
 Ere you attain him, shielded by my love!

EDWARD.

I have no heart to harm the meanest thing
 Your love could rest upon. 'T was for your sake, —
 Yours only.

LEONORA.

For my sake depart in peace!
 This is no time for further speech. To-morrow
 You shall explain this foolish fray; and I,
 Whom most it wrongs, will promise to forgive.

EDWARD.

I have an explanation to demand,
 Before I offer one.

LOTHAIR.

Make good your claim,
 And I will not be wanting.

LEONORA.

What! — no more.

Edward, there lies your way. I'll follow straight.

(JACQUES draws EDWARD away, at the same moment

LEONORA rests on the shoulder of LOTHAIR. A
 noise of people is heard, and lights appear be-
 hind the scenes.)

JACQUES.

Edward, the house is rising in alarm ;
Let us avert the scandal of this scene
Before your quarrel grow the village talk.

(To LEONORA.)

My pretty one, this is no place for you.
Come home with us.

LEONORA.

I stay but for a word.
Lothair, this evening might have been our last !
O, thought beyond all tears ! Look in these eyes,
These eyes to which thou art the universe,
And say we meet to-morrow !

LOTHAIR.

Do not doubt.

Surely, we meet.

LEONORA.

So sits my heart at rest,
Serenely anchored ; never storm can rise
To shake its peace, while thou dost harbor it.
We meet to-morrow. I shall dream till then,
Dream of thy voice, and sleep as on thy breast.
Good-night. Leonora's angel stays with thee !
To-morrow !

LOTHAIR (*looking suddenly in her eyes, and holding
her hand*).

Ay, to-morrow, fare thee well !

(EDWARD and JACQUES take LEONORA forcibly away.)

SCENE VIII. — BONIFACE, SERVANTS, LOTHAIR.

BONIFACE.

What is the matter?

SERVANT (*to* LOTHAIR).

Are you hurt, my lord?

LOTHAIR.

How durst you loiter when you heard me call?

SERVANT.

I was alone, and stayed to gather help.

LOTHAIR.

You come when need is passed, — a coward knave
That saves his own throat first. Nay, I'll not strike
you;

The hangman should do that. Go to my room!
See that you render better service there,
Or dread the reckoning. So, good Boniface,
These are your country manners, fair and simple.
A quiet traveller seeks his inn at night,
And is insulted, — what say I? — attacked
With ready weapons, — threatened for his life!

BONIFACE.

A gentleman assaulted in my house?

I've been an innkeeper these thirty years,
And never seen the like ! You are not hurt ?

LOTHAIR.

I thank you, — no.

BONIFACE.

What daring man was this
That set upon you ?

LOTHAIR.

I should ask *you* that.
Two brigands, with their faces half concealed.

BONIFACE.

Brigands, assassins, in our quiet village ?

LOTHAIR.

One finds them everywhere. You see, they leapt
In at the window.

BONIFACE.

On my life, 'tis true !
I must alarm the hamlet.

LOTHAIR.

Let them go.
They had the worst of it, I promise you.
'Tis ill to hunt such gentry in the dark ;
They have one at advantage.

BONIFACE.

Very true ;
But I'll report this matter to the judge.

LOTHAIR.

To-morrow ! No one loses time, you know,
By taking it. Be vigilant with bolt
And bar. I'll close this friendly window up
That lent such invitation to the rogues.

(Closes window.)

Take heed no further, honest Boniface.
D' ye know a youth called Edward ?

BONIFACE.

If I know him ?

One of our own ; a quiet youth enough,
Before he left us.

LOTHAIR.

Wherefore did he go ?

BONIFACE.

He thought himself above his father's lot.
An artist would he be, — a gentleman ;
And some rich man (a greater fool than he,
For all his money) gave him means thereto.
What of him ?

LOTHAIR.

Nothing. Did you tell me where
He learned his art ? I have forgot.

BONIFACE.

In Rome.

They say that he consorts with noblemen.
 Could he molest my lord ?

LOTHAIR.

No, no, — not he.
 Good host, it may be I shall send for you.

BONIFACE.

I'm always wakeful to your lordship's will ;
 Meantime I take my leave.

LOTHAIR.

Good-night, good friend !

SCENE IX.

LOTHAIR (*solus*).

This foolish tangle must be cut at once,
 Ere life and limb draw after. (*Goes to window.*)

Leonore !

There lies she, 'neath yon lattice, where so oft
 The summer wind has sped our mutual sighs,
 Freight for love's sweet commerce ;— from my eyes
 Thick walls conceal her ; but my daring thought
 O'erleaps the bounds of slumber's sacredness,
 To seize her as she lies. Her shadowy hair,
 Flinging its wild delights from brow to breast,
 While the fair arms are twin-enclasped above,
 In such repose as lends its thrill to marble.

Sleep holds the high-strung frame in mastery ;
 But I command him. Not of childish joys
 Thou dreamest, longing for thy mother's breast,
 Nor of thy beauty's virgin festivals.
 Lo ! the magician smites the crystal doors,
 Ceases the hymn, and in the mirror clear
 The mystic angels vanish. Innocence
 Dissolves, a pearl, in Passion's fervent cup.
 By Heaven, a costly draught for queenlike lips,
 That, peace contemning, offer life for love,
 And close on all thereafter ! Perish thus
 The cold to-morrow of a day like this !

*(He walks up and down in agitation ; then more
 calmly.)*

Hold fast the visioned sweetness, Leonore !
 Thou hast sipt the goblet at its brim. Not I,
 But Fate, conceals the poison in the dregs.
 Nay, never chide me, 't was thy will, thy will.
 Thy beauty spread its banner to the sun ;
 I passed, and it stood there to challenge me.
 Unequal combat followed, — not for thee
 The odds ; for thee nor rescue, nor repair.
 Yield thee ; the conquered from the conqueror's eyes
 Claims the unwonted tribute of a tear.

(Curtain falls.)

ACT SECOND.

SCENE I. — *A Bedroom in LEONORA'S Cottage. A bed with drawn curtains. Enter KÄTCHEN (on tiptoe).*

KÄTCHEN.

SHE slumbers late, poor child ! The morning meal
Grows cold with waiting ; here 's a letter, too,
That came an hour ago. She shall not see it
Till she has prayed, and dressed, and broken fast.

(Hides letter in her bosom.)

Ev'n lovers must be fed ; and I 've observed
That, has she but a billet from his hand,
She will not eat, nor speak, nor hear me speak ;
But wanders, like a creature in a dream,
And, looking at me with those great, fixed eyes,
Sees, Heaven knows what — not anything that is.
Ah, me ! those eyes — those eyes ! I 've seen of
late

A thousand signs that bode no good. Well, well,
Would she but take my counsel, — talk of that ! —
Would I take hers, could we but change in age

(34)

And circumstance? I cannot swear, forsooth!
 Edward's returned, — true-hearted, faithful Edward;
 I always praised him to my wayward girl.
 But she, — there is a fate in likings, too,
 An ill one, sometimes. All may yet be well.
 Meanwhile my slow affection waits to help,
 Should the far need I dare not think of, come.

LEONORA (*pushing back the curtains*).

Where am I? Is this waking? Did I sleep?
 O, not if slumber be forgetfulness.
 My dreams but shadowed out my daily thought,
 And that which makes my being, since its end
 Was given. Forbid it, God! that sleep should come
 So deep that I could let his image drop,
 And lose the sacred nearness he has sworn
 To make eternal. Death itself hath not
 This power; since death brings heaven, and heaven
 must give
 His presence, or be forfeit to my faith.

(*Looking at the ring.*)

What's this? The crystal prison of a smile?
 Love's fervor, looking from a thousand eyes
 In one? Nay, more, — the gem that makes me his,
 Bound, as a shining seal, upon my hand;
 Lothair has brought me many a precious flower,
 Whose dead delight is woven in my life,

But when he swore undying love, his pledge
Was this immortal emblem. (*Kisses it.*)

Kätchen here ?

Good-morrow. Do not plague me with thy break-
fast ;

I am full, and would not eat. But hast thou not
A morsel I could greedily devour ?
A letter — not a letter ? Give it me ?

KÄTCHEN (*shaking her head*).

I have new milk, with the fresh morning in it,
The cakes, and curds, and hill-side strawberries ;
If you ask more, you 're but a froward child,
And cannot be indulged. I 've spread it out
I' the garden-porch, where best you love to sit.

LEONORA.

Yes, we have held some merry banquets there,
Lothair and I, and thou didst serve us well.
Dost thou remember when he brought the wine,
The costly foreign wine, so full of fire,
And drank it to my praise ? So kind he shared
Our simple pleasures, and our humble fare, —
And he a creature of another world,
A thing to walk on sunbeams ! Do I speak
As if these things were past, when he shall come
To bring the benediction of the day
Before his wont, and shame his messenger ?

So, — help me dress ; give me the gown he chose ;
 Lace quick the bodice ; smooth this tangled hair,
 And I'll wear roses in it. O, my white ones !
 How did I crush them ?

KÄTCHEN.

Marry, in your sleep

You held them.

LEONORA.

Bring me others, — not like these ;
 The red shall blossom in my hair to-day,
 With warmer meaning. Haste, be quick, good
 Kätchen !

A day has but so many hours in all.
 What if he came at once, and I should lose
 Some precious moments of his company ? —
 It is no day till I have seen Lothair !

(*A loud knock below.*)

Who knocks ? Look out, dear Kätchen ! is it he ?

KÄTCHEN (*going to the window*).

'T is Bertha.

LEONORA.

An ungracious, envious girl !

And never more unwelcome than to-day.

KÄTCHEN.

She has her comrades with her.

LEONORA.

That is strange ;

They should be busy at their wheels ere this.
Tell her I will not see her.

KÄTCHEN.

Be advised,
Do her no slight. I'll say you're coming straight.

LEONORA.

If you will have it so, — I'll wait on them.

(*Exit* KÄTCHEN.)

And I must braid my hair without the flowers!
Well, they will be the fresher when he comes;
That's well, at least. —

KÄTCHEN (*without*).

Stay, she'll be down forthwith.

BERTHA (*without*).

She need not be so formal with her friends;
We're bound to save her ladyship these steps.
Nay, — stand aside, — we will come in.

LEONORA.

What means this?

SCENE II. — *The above. Enter BERTHA and companions.*

LEONORA.

Good-morrow, Bertha; would you aught with me?

BERTHA.

Our homage, gracious countess, we would pay,
And ask, how doth your precious health to-day?

LEONORA.

Why, I am well. What mean these words of yours —
 These mocking looks? Why do you call me
 countess?

BERTHA.

Such is your worthy title, we infer,
 After those sacred nuptials of the heart,
 At which the priest, indeed, did not attend,
 Having good cause for absence, — as I judge!
 The bridal ring, see, girls! upon her finger.
 That is a troth-ring for a village maid,
 A school prize for the first in modesty.
 Pardon, your virtuous, blushing excellence!
 We'll call you Countess, Duchess, Paragon,
 Whate'er your la'ship pleases; but henceforth
We please to keep no company with you.

LEONORA.

I stand amazed at these injurious words.
 Dare you insult me thus? And, if you dare,
 What moves your malice to break out on me
 Who never wronged you? These, my village mates,
 Are they come here to cast their jibes upon
 An unoffending comrade? Loulou, Blanche,
 Susanne, are you become my enemies?
 I thought you loved me.

GIRLS.

Bertha speaks for us.

LEONORA.

Nay, take your miserable pleasure then ;
 I leave it for the meanest. Yet, be sure,
 I have a friend whose watchful love and zeal
 Shield me from outrage. Vex me not too far,
 Or *he* may answer.

BERTHA.

He? How brave she talks! —

He's gone!

LEONORA.

Who's gone?

BERTHA.

Your spiritual spouse,
 Count, duke, or devil.

LEONORA (*to herself*).

Do I heed these words?

(*To BERTHA.*)

Bertha, your envious heart is strong in hate,
 Weak in invention — he is close at hand.

BERTHA.

He's gone, I say!

LEONORA.

They want to make me mad,
 For cruel laughter; so, I will not rave.

(*To them.*)

I do not doubt my being, person, place,

Nor that my usual senses help my thought ;
 Here are my old surroundings, — here myself ;
 Yonder 's the sun, that stands for God in heaven,
 And morning clouds that do him reverence ;
 The trees, the waters are unchanged ; 't is there,
 The glorious world I walked in, yesterday.
 Now, if there 's truth in aught that I discern,
 There is no need to question. He 's not gone !

SUSANNE.

My father 's master of the post, you know ;
 His horses left at daybreak.

LEONORA.

That may be.

What need I care what traveller ordered them ?

BERTHA.

Perhaps his empty chamber at the inn,
 The bed unruffled, would confirm your faith.

LEONORA (*suddenly*).

His chamber, — who has seen it ?

BERTHA, AND GIRLS.

All of us !

LEONORA.

There is no truth in this ; and yet, and yet, —
 I cannot live until it be disproved.

BERTHA.

She changes countenance.

LEONORA.

I 'll seek him there,
Or anywhere, to rid myself of you.

BERTHA.

Think you we 'll stay? We would not miss the scene
For the brave diamond in your wedding-ring!

LEONORA.

Beware, lest shame o'ertake the shameless tongue:—
Kätchen, I cannot tarry, — follow me! (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III. — *A Chamber at the Inn. A bed that has not
been slept in; various marks of confusion, — papers scattered
about, &c. BONIFACE, at a table with money, etc.*

BONIFACE.

I care not what the man may be, — I know
His gold is good, and he right free withal;
No haggling at the price of wine and wax,
Nor hint, nor question, — paid and pocketed.
Your half-way people now, Lord, how they save
Their candle-ends, and, better than yourself,
Can count you every morsel you have served!
(*Looking at the bill.*)

Come, come, old Boniface, if things go on
In this wise, we shall have our daughter portioned,
Our age kept warm with comfort, as is right.

God send me many gentlemen like him! —
 What noise is that without?

SCENE IV. — *The above. Enter LEONORA, followed by BERTHA and her comrades. LEONORA stands a moment and looks around her in surprise.*

BONIFACE.

Well, girls, what now?

LEONORA (*to BONIFACE*).

I do not see him. Where is Count Lothair?

BONIFACE.

What's that to you?

LEONORA.

Enough, enough, good friend!

Say where he is.

BONIFACE.

Why, gone where'er he likes,
 As you methinks may see. This was his room.

LEONORA.

Was? What an idle jest is this! (So, so,
 Let me not anger him.) So, Boniface,
 Bertha and you contrived this merry trick, —
 A harmless one, that cannot ruffle me.
 But now, if you and she have laughed enough,
 Be kind, and tell me, whither went the count.

BONIFACE.

A trick, indeed! I've told you all I know,
And so much more than I had need. He's gone;
Whither, and wherefore, you must ask elsewhere.

LEONORA.

Here's money for thee — tell me, pray thee, tell!

BONIFACE.

I want no money, and have naught to tell.
Where are your wits?

BERTHA.

They left her when he came;
Now that he's gone—who knows?—they may return.

LEONORA.

O! ye are all in league to torture me,
Like fiends, who know how falsehoods vex the soul!

Enter EDWARD.

BONIFACE.

Well, we shall hold a rural chapter here;
The syndic next. So, will you go in peace?
Or must I hunt this hubbub from my house?

LEONORA.

I will not stir until I know the truth,
So, Heaven be kind to me!

EDWARD.

Leonora here ?

I sought an interview with Count Lothair,
Or one who bears that name.

BONIFACE.

The count again ;
He left at daybreak.

EDWARD.

I am much surprised ;
He promised me a meeting.

BONIFACE.

Did he so ?
Well, you 'll not meet him here !

LEONORA.

Is this a dream,
Or truth, that breaks with lurid glare upon me ?
(*Going up to EDWARD with violence.*)
You had your weapon at his throat, last night ;
I rushed to part you ; with my naked breast
I shielded, rescued him whose life is mine ;
But what befell when I was there no more ?
Confess, explain, — his blood lies at your door.

EDWARD (*with astonishment*).

His blood ?

LEONORA.

Say how you did it ? Where ye met ?

Does he lie bleeding in the copsewood yonder?
 Or have you dug his grave with hasty hands?
 O where? O where?

BERTHA.

'T is better than a play!

LEONORA.

Say, if he's dead, I'll leave you all in peace;
 Why should I stay to plague you with my moan,
 Who never knew such sorrow? I'll depart;

(To EDWARD.)

But bid them lead me gently to the spot,
 Where, like a fallen sun, his beauty lies
 Veiled in the death-cloud. Ah, I see it now!
 I see him dead before me!

EDWARD.

Leonora!

Am I condemned to speak the sentence out
 That renders death itself a boon of peace?
 He lives — you are deserted and betrayed!

BERTHA.

Did we not tell you so an hour ago?
 But she is struck with blinding idiocy,
 And, having played the wanton, plays the fool.

BONIFACE.

What does she hold by? There's his money paid.

Trunks, boxes, servants, all are packed and gone ;
So, mistress, let us make an end of this.

KÄTCHEN (*suddenly*).

Ah, me, that letter ! Come with me, dear child !
Here 's something that may make all right.

LEONORA.

Give here !

(*She reads it.*)

BERTHA.

Look at her, will you ? See those eyes of hers,
That bloodless face, that swol'n vein in her forehead.
So, Leonora, you believe us now ?

LEONORA.

Believe you ? Never ! (*She falls.*)

EDWARD.

Stand back, all of you !

(*He raises her head. BERTHA makes a gesture of defiance. KÄTCHEN bends over her. Scene changes.*)

SCENE V. — *The Place in front of the Inn. Various youths and maidens in groups, as if conversing. Enter BERTHA.*

BERTHA.

All has befallen as I told you, boys ;
Leonora is deserted by her Count.

She slighted you and all of us for him ;
 So, let us raise a friendly voice or two
 To speed her homeward ; — rather, let 's unite
 To hunt her from our village.

FIRST YOUTH.

Where is she ?

BERTHA (*pointing to the inn*).

Yonder, — within. She fainted ; on my life
 She had need, I think. Let 's help her to her senses.

(*Sings.*)

“ Leonore, come to the door,
 Your true-love is *a*-waiting,
 With clerk and priest for nuptial feast,
 And we to see your mating.”

Join in the chorus, will you ?

FIRST YOUTH.

Willingly.

ALL SING.

“ With clerk and priest for nuptial feast,
 And we to see your mating.”

BERTHA.

Now that I call a tolerable song.
 I made it on the moment.

SECOND YOUTH.

Brava, Bertha !

Hurra, I say, for Bertha !

ALL.

One verse more !

Enter EDWARD.

FIRST YOUTH.

Here 's Edward !

EDWARD.

Let these ribald strophes cease ;
They outrage decency.

SECOND YOUTH.

Ho, sirrah, Edward !

We 'll sing as long as suits us, and as loud.
Why should our song disturb you ?

EDWARD.

Listen, friends !

Within those walls a suffering creature waits,
New-smit with sorrow ; let her pass in peace
To her own door. So much I ask of you.

BERTHA.

Think not that she shall pass without our greeting.
Let her come forth, and show her bridal-ring, —
The ring, — ho ! ho ! the glistening diamond ring !
Let 's form a ring, to view the bridal-ring !

(They shout.)

A ring ! a ring ! to view the bridal-ring !

EDWARD *(with forced calmness)*.

I know the goodness of your hearts believ

The roughness of your manners. So, good friends,
 Depart in peace ; it is not well to mock.
 The evil day may come to all of us.

BERTHA AND OTHERS.

There, Parson Edward, you have preached enough !
 The music 's better suited to our taste. (*Sings.*)

“ Whip, spur, and gallop, and the steed 's away,
 The steed that bore her lover.
 She may wait for him ever and a day ;
 It boots not, — courtship 's over ! ”

Now, chorus !

ALL SING.

“ Leonore, come to the door,
 And keep your true-love ever more.”

(*As they sing, the door opens, and LEONORA slowly emerges, veiled, and leaning upon KÄTCHEN. They form a ring around her.*)

BERTHA.

Take off that veil, — let 's see your pretty face.
 Don't hide your maiden blushes, Innocence !

(*They shout.*)

Off with the veil, or it shall hang in tatters !

EDWARD.

Leonora, fear not ! I 'll stand up for you
 Against the world ! Who dares impede her way,

Or follow her with one injurious word,
Accounts for it to me.

LEONORA (*lifting her veil*).

When I need help,
I have a knee to bend, a voice to call,
And God is not so far but he can hear.
I thank you, Edward!

(*She passes out. EDWARD follows.*)

FIRST YOUTH.

That's strange, by Jove!

SECOND YOUTH.

He was her lover once.

BERTHA

Pitiful soul! his suit may prosper now.
Good luck attend your wooing, Signor Edward!
(*They pair off, and depart in confusion.*)

SCENE VI.—*The same. Enter EDWARD.*

EDWARD.

She must not stay for further insult here.
Best she departs at once. Yet whither go,
Since disappointment lies along her way,
And the grim host, at ending, is Despair?
I'll follow at a distance, for defence
And counsel. She has need of me, although

Her heart is rebel to the thought. That need
 Makes me her follower. Why did they mock,
 Those cruel ones, because I shielded her
 From their rude pleasure? Was it strange that I,
 Who loved her, should stand up to plead her cause
 Against the brutal judgment of the crowd?
 Had I kept back, because she loved me not,
 Because she loved a wretch who sought her ruin,
 Because the evil left her for the good
 To help and cherish, what an empty name,
 A thing to scoff and spit upon, were love!

SCENE VII. — LEONORA ; KÄTCHEN.

KÄTCHEN.

So, they have fairly chased us from the village!
 I never thought to see this evil day. (Weeps.)

LEONORA.

Stay not for tears; or, if thou'rt loth to go,
 Return, and let me take my way alone.

KÄTCHEN.

Thou know'st I cannot choose but go with thee;
 Yet leaving on this wise is hard indeed.

LEONORA.

Now, Kätchen, I must hold you to a bond,

Or you shall try no further step with me.
 The way I seek is swift and terrible !
 Faith, with its fervent passion, hurries me,
 Ev'n as it blindly guides yon flock in air,
 Whose whitherward is known to God alone.
 Can you be strong and steadfast ?

KÄTCHEN.

Help of Heaven

Forsake me else ! yet, do not chide the thought, —
 I would that Edward bore us company !

LEONORA.

Edward !

KÄTCHEN.

The bravest, faithfulest of friends.

LEONORA.

I would not be his debtor.

KÄTCHEN.

Can you choose ?

Did he not raise you, fainting, in his arms ?
 Did he not silence Bertha and her crew,
 With such an earnest, valiant countenance ?

LEONORA.

Hush, Kätchen ! never speak of things like these.
 I do forbid your mention of this day
 In all our future converse. I must walk
 Without a weight would drag me down to hell.

(Looking towards the setting sun.)

My way lies where the morning-red is clear ;
 Where purple shadows stream towards golden light,
 When the Day gathers up his wide-blown robes
 For the cold plunge of darkness. I shall tread
 Where angels watch that spring-tide flowers may
 rise ;
 Rest where the vestal evening trims her lamp
 For prayer and offering ; all the loving helps
 Of nature will impel me towards the spot,
 The goal of fate, to which all ways must lead, —
 O, towards my love ! O, Kätchen, towards my love !

KÄTCHEN.

Doubt not that God shall guide us. Let us go !
(Exeunt slowly, LEONORA leading the way.)

SCENE VIII. — *A Room in an Inn.*

LOTHAIR.

I've travelled like the devil in a storm,
 Leaving this folly league on league behind.
 Gods, what a game I played ! Was this for me ?
 A man who sees the danger in the pleasure,
 And draws the fang before the serpent's head
 Rests on his bosom ? Fie, Lothair ! Confess

No school-boy could have done a wilder thing.
And yet, I swear, *I am* a cautious man !

(*Goes to window.*)

A tiresome journey, and a gloomy night ;
A night for dreams to bring those troubles back
Our will holds banished from our waking thought.
Beside my bed, last night, a Fury stood,
Whose stony eyelids nailed me where I lay,
While with an evil smile she drew a blade,
Red from her heart, and held it aimed at mine.
But, as I waited for the death-blow fain,
As that should end my agony, she flung
The weapon from her for a Lounce-like spring ;
And with wild hands about my neck, and shrieks
More wild, more dismal than the ghosts in hell,
She dragged me down a bottomless abyss,
Whose very vacancy seemed sharp with pangs.
I woke in torment. Bah ! I 'll dream no more !
Why should I, when there 's better to be done ?
Orsetti 's here, with Huön and Alberto,
And other nobles ; they have sent for me.
I am not merry, — but 't is time to break
This sombre web that suits not with my humor.
So, ye distasteful fantasies, depart !
Here 's for gay gossip, and a night at cards ;
And generous wine, the princely friend of man,

That helps him, like a father, out of straits,
 With such a twinkling, swaggering soberness.
 Back, — I can blow you backward with a breath,
 Ye owlet brood! Here's for the old Lothair!
(Goes.)

SCENE IX. — *An Apartment brilliantly lighted. In the further part of the room a table covered with wines and fruits. In front a smaller one, with cards and dice. At the latter are seated HUÖN and BERTO. ORSETTI, &c., stand near. LORENZO looks on.*

HUÖN.

Berto, your throw.

BERTO.

I can but lose again.

What shall we venture?

HUÖN.

Twenty ducats more.

BERTO.

Nay, I'd as lief risk forty.

HUÖN.

As you will;

The luck is mine to-night.

BERTO.

Try sixty, then,

For better fortune.

(They throw.)

There they go again,
 Here, Huön, take the purse, and pay yourself,
 To save me reck'ning.

HUÖN.

What a careless dog!
 'Fore Heaven! the men are few to whom I'd lend
 My purse, with gold uncounted.

BERTO.

I've a tree,
 You know, upon the old paternal lands,
 That bears such fruit for shaking.

HUÖN.

Have a care
 You strip it not, with wasteful husbandry!
 Good Berto, nay, I'm loth to cost you more;
 Let the dice rest, — they're not for you to-night.

BERTO.

The thought is pleasant, that a paltry sum
 Like this, could make a famine in my coffers.
 Here's for another rattle!

HUÖN.

Here's Lothair.

SCENE X. — *The above.* *LOTHAIR enters.*

ALL.

Welcome, fair Count!

LOTHAIR.

Welcome to all of you!

BERTO (*shaking hands*).

'T is long since we have seen you. Tell us, now,
Where have you lain perdu this blessed time?

LOTHAIR.

These thirty days of midsummer have passed
Ev'n as they might, with one whose health required
A country regimen and mountain air.

HUÖN.

Fie! fie! Lothair; don't lie to friends like these!

BERTO.

How 's your aunt's lap-dog?

ORSETTI.

And the good Arch-Priest,
Your venerable uncle, — how is he?

LOTHAIR.

All well, — I thank you kindly, — very well.

BERTO.

Speak like a man, and let your comrades know
What mischief you have wrought without their help.

HUÖN.

Give him some wine first. (*Pours.*)

LOTHAIR.

Yes, my throat is dry.

I drink, good Berto, to your better luck ;
For surely you 've been playing, — and as surely
The odds have gone against you.

BERTO.

On my life

You guess discreetly. What of that, my boy ?
Gold 's for the spending, be it lost or won ;
Though I could wish I had your star, Lothair,
In every venture.

LOTHAIR.

This is generous wine, —

A wine to sing about ; though 't is a point
How far the wine and singing go together.

BERTO.

What say you ?

LOTHAIR.

Why, your poets cannot drink

As we. They settle on the goblet's brim
Already half-intoxicate with song.
The fiery vapor is enough to turn
Their sublimated brains ; while you and I
Plunge to the muzzle, like a steed at water,
And keep the heavenly madness for ourselves,
Which they, not having, sing to all the world.

HUÖN.

True, true ; your men who linger in ideas
 Are not the men for pleasure. As with wine,
 So is 't with women. Your true worshipper
 Can never pass the outer circle dim
 Of their enchantments : he is lost, transfixed
 In admiration, while the vision fair,
 Dissolving, leaves him empty as before.
 So have I seen one introduced at court,
 Stand gaping at resplendent sovereignty,
 Until the favorable moment passed,
 And left him but his wonder for his pains.
 Another presses forward, gains the eye,
 The ear of power ; gets pension, title, place,
 While our poor clown has nothing asked or had.

LORENZO.

But could the prince or lady stand to choose,
 Would they not, think you, crown the modest heart
 With high deserving ?

HUÖN.

It concerns us not
 To force conclusions. Take things as they are.

ORSETTI.

Your woman-hunter tires down his prey
 With the true game-dog instinct ; 't is the love

Of conquest, not the feeble thing he hunts,
Incites him.

LOTHAIR (*indicating* LORENZO).

Berto, who is he that spoke
Just now ?

BERTO (*to* LOTHAIR).

A stranger chance threw in our way.
I have not heard his name, or else forgot it.
'T is a green, peevish youth ; let 's med'cine him
With something stronger than his mother's milk,
Scarce out of him, I judge.

LOTHAIR.

Indeed, poor babe !
He 's come into a proper nursery,
Eh, Berto ? I will look to him anon.

HUÖN.

'T is an impertinence to reason thus,
When one, of great authority in these
And other matters, sits at wine with us.
Lothair is here, the keenest, luckiest,
In these high sports ; the man who never missed
His game ; who has the pleasure, and escapes
The useless reckoning. Come, Don Juan mine,
Unfold for us thy catalogue, as long
And blooming as a florist's ; let us hear
What new adventures have beguiled this month.

They should be many, for Lothair lives not
 A week that brings not its intrigue to pass,
 As surely as its Sunday.

BERTO (*filling* LOTHAIR'S *glass*).

Drink again.

LOTHAIR (*after drinking*).

He should miscall, who named me woman-hunter :
 Hunted were nearer truth. The creatures know
 Too well the natural softness of my heart,
 Not to abuse it. Angels, shall we call them ?
 Women are angels ; but, like Lucifer,
 They have a natural tendency to fall,
 And drag us after.

BERTO.

O, you handsome dog !

Will you pretend to ignore the tempter's part ?
 You play the victim ?

LOTHAIR.

On my life, I may.

The pretty dears are deep in provocation.
 The very germ of womanhood 's a hook
 With a bait on it. How they angle for us !
 They madden us with prudence ; at the last
 They pass the palm of conquest to our sex,
 Through subtle instinct, when, in truth, we were
 The sought, the wooed, the conquered. Thus it goes.

Ah, they have led me many a weary dance !
 Would they but henceforth leave me to myself,
 'T were worth the thanking. Berto, give more wine.
(*Drinks.*)

HUÖN.

They 'll hang about you while your beauty stays,
 Your vigor, and your fortune. Let these go, —
 As, in a merry, swashing life, they may, —
 You need not shun the women.

LORENZO.

Gentlemen,

I am not forward, in such company,
 To speak of things most sacred : 't is the fault
 Of words of yours, if mine grow vehement.
 I think we call those Women, who uphold
 Faint hearts and strong, with angel countenance ;
 Who stand for all that 's high in Faith's resolve,
 Or great in Hope's first promise. Women they
 Whose shadows, passing, heal the fevered brow,
 And were a thing for grateful lips to press,
 Were 't not that men like you and Judas kiss !
 Remembrances like these, with all of us,
 Lie nearer to the heart than to the lips.
 But such let not an hour like this profane ;
 We name them not o'er goblets emptied oft,

But, pouring once to them the sacred wine,
Shatter the vase forever !

Weaker forms,

Where blood o'ermasters brain, and stops drawn out
Let the full rush of passion oversweep
Thought's modest labor at the finger-board,
Are near us in our daily lives. For these,
Justice has yet an earnest word to say ;
Ev'n the frail creature with a moment's bloom,
That pays your pleasure with her sacrifice,
And, having first a marketable price,
Grows thenceforth valueless, — e'en such an one,
Lifted a little from the mire, and purged
By hands severely kind, will give to view
The germ of all we honor, in the form
Of all that we abhor. You fling a jewel
Where wild feet tramp, and crushing wheels go by ;
You cannot tread the splendor from its dust ;
So, in the shattered relics, shimmers yet
Through tears and grime, the pride of womanhood.
A man, — I would show courtesy to all ; —

(*With emphasis.*)

Forbearance, even, to *some*. Were I a king,
To woman I would lift my coronet !

LOTHAIR (*to HUÖN*).

See how the crimson flashes to his brow !

This is some virgin-souled enthusiast.
 Huön, we were of his opinion once !
 Eheu ! that time seems further than it is.
 But you and I have seen the world, my boy !

BERTO.

Sir, you have spoken honestly and well ;
 But you 'll not hold to these illusions long.

LORENZO (*with solemnity*).

If it please God, may life depart from me
 Ere I lose faith in woman's nobleness !

LOTHAIR.

A madman's prayer !

HUÖN.

What need of prayer at all ?

I must confess my patience serves me not
 To stay a sermon, where we ask a toast.
 But, has our reverend father breathed his zeal,
 We 'll hear Lothair upon another theme, —
 The story of a month in mountain-land.

LOTHAIR (*to HUON*).

Why, yes. Gods ! I 'll astound the Puritan.
 Yet 't is a simple story, — briefly this :
 A traveller in an unknown neighborhood,
 Detained by breaking of a carriage-wheel,
 That proved a very wheel of Fortune to him,
 Through invitation of two glorious eyes,

Sealed by the sanction of two lovely lips,
 Became the captive of two swan-like arms,
 And stayed, content, in their captivity,
 Till — till — in fact, he thought it best to go.
 I trust I am decorous in my style ;
 Hints to the wise, you know! — my story 's done.

BERTO.

It runs as smoothly as a nursery-tale ;
 But 't is too vague in outline. Give some facts
 To mark the doubtful footprints of your friend.

HUÖN (*with irony*).

I hope he did not harm an innocent girl.

ORSETTI.

Few men have that good fortune, I 'm afraid.

LOTHAIR.

You shall not mar the conquest of my friend,
 Cynic — this was a bud whose virgin heart
 Found its first summer in the glow of his.
 Such summers are unthrifty, as you know ;
 All they have gathered falls in autumn's lap.
 Perhaps she mourns him. He desires it not, —
 Why should she? Life and love are left her still ;
 No funeral pyre awaits to end them both.
 I talk as though the thing were serious ;
 That you have leave to laugh at, if you will.

HUÖN.

Could you not shed some penitential tears ?
Methinks you grow pathetic.

ORSETTI (*with mock pathos*).

On my word,
It is a very touching history.

BERTO.

Why can't you tell us what the girl was like ?
As handsome as the last one ? No, not quite.

LOTHAIR.

Handsome ? You shall not find her counterpart
'T wixt this and the Circassian nurseries.
Gentles, that was a woman ! Such an eye,
Such lips, such shoulders, Passion's ecstasy,
Attempered by the snow-hue of her skin,
Like wine in ice, to madness exquisite.

HUÖN.

He always vapors of his women thus ;
She was some sunburnt dowdy, very like !

LOTHAIR (*taking out a portrait*).

See for yourself ; confess that beautiful,
Or let me call you night-owls, blind worms, moles.

HUÖN. (*considering the portrait*).

Humph ! let me see ! Upon my word, not bad !

ORSETTI.

Give me the shadowy pleasure of a look.
 'Fore Heaven, you've wronged the sovereign, sir!
 Such charms
 Are naturally rescript to royalty.

HUÖN.

That's true; you'll give me her address and name?
 (LORENZO takes the portrait.)

LOTHAIR.

You could not win her, Berto, with your gold;
 Nor Huön, with his devil's enterprise.
 No sordid bargain gave my suit success.
 She loved me.

HUÖN.

O, you're modest!—in that case
 Why did you leave her?

LOTHAIR.

That's the worst of it.
 I thought to spend another joyous month;
 But circumstances intervened. A broil,
 A jealous rival. Were it not for these
 I had not been with you, my friends, to-night.

HUÖN (*with meaning*).

Better employed your countship would have been.

LOTHAIR (*significantly*).

Perhaps.

LORENZO (*coming forward*).

Are you the hero of your tale ?

HUÖN.

It needs no prophet to declare us that.

LORENZO.

And is this portrait hers of whom you spake ?

(*LOTHAIR nods assent.*)

LORENZO.

You had the heart to leave your evil mark, —
The foulest, — on this glorious brow ; these eyes,
Tender and passionate ; these faultless lips,
Whose silence cries to God like victims' blood !
Say, was it yours, the deed that you aver,
Or is this empty boasting ? It is true !
Then, let me give your villainy its name,
And tell you that a blow from this right hand
Were just, — had *it* deserved so mean a service.

LOTHAIR (*starting*).

Hell's fury ! do you dare to tell me this ?

HUÖN.

Come on ! Draw swords ; we'll stand to see fair
play.

LORENZO.

I am no partner for a midnight brawl.

The morning sun may shame you to your senses ;

(*Throws down a card.*)

If not, I fling you here my honest name,
 And when we meet, may God protect the right.

(Exit.)

ORSETTI *(after a moment's silence)*.

Go, saucy cockerel ! we're well rid of thee.

HÜÖN.

Lothair, my man, you should have let him blood.

BERTO.

He was too quick with his impertinence.

HÜÖN.

I'll be the bearer of your line, to-morrow.

(LOTHAIR (suddenly).

The portrait, ha ! Up boys, and follow him !

(They all rush out.)

ACT THIRD.

SCENE I. — *A Room in an Inn.*

EDWARD (*solus*).

Thither and thither by her frenzy led.
O, the wild errand, with the frantic end !
O, piteous lavishing of holy gifts
On a remorseless idol, absent, dumb !
I chide, and I grow like her, wandering on,
Seeking new places, plunging into crowds,
With eyes intent to ravel out their web,
And seize the thread of Fate. On lonely heaths
Like her I see no spot so poor and bare
But it should yield him, like a spell of joy,
Could her foot touch the right stone. Swifter hope
Leads her, in towns where strangers congregate ;
Then, how she threads the narrow ways between
The booths ; heeds not the bestial and profane,
Hears not the music, murderous of tune !
Nor would she know, if angels stood and sang.
She listens only to the far-off pipe
That draws her, with its thin-worn melody,

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Through the flushed present to the far-off goal,—
 A dim, gray vista, with a sudden red
 That drops, death-quenched, ere you can win to it.

(After a pause.)

To-day her hope's in fuller heart than ever ;
 A market-town hangs simmering in our way ;
 "There will be many people there," she says,
 "Who knows ? who knows ?" Indeed, poor child !
 who knows ?

So, here we are. That step upon the stairs
 Is like Lorenzo's ; could I think it he ?

(The door opens.)

SCENE II. — *The above.* LORENZO enters.

EDWARD.

It is, indeed ! *(They embrace.)*

LORENZO.

Edward ! we meet at last.
 'Tis a kind chance that brings us face to face.

(Looking at him.)

Why ! you've much altered, man ! What mean
 these looks ?

You turn away ; your brow is worn and sad.

EDWARD.

I've been at work, you know, with over-zeal,

Sketching by midnight, working up by day.
 No one grew ever great in any art
 Who did not with this pallor paint himself.

LORENZO.

No — that's not it! Some sorrow weighs you down;
 Is it too great for words? You'll tell it me
 In time. I have no rest until I share it.

EDWARD (*with forced gaiety*).

Who talks of sorrow? — Give us bread and wine,
 And this shall be a feast. 'Tis nigh a year
 Since we have pledged each other. Boy, this way!
 A flask of Rhenish!

LORENZO.

I am not athirst.

(*Boy places wine, &c., on a small table. They sit.*

EDWARD *pours*).

Here's to our meeting! (*They drink.*)

LORENZO.

Tell of your return.

How was 't? Auspicious? Did the maiden smile?

EDWARD.

She smiles no more! The girl I loved is dead!
 That is, I think of her as if she were.
 Talk of your travels; you have much to tell!

LORENZO.

This is most strange!

EDWARD.

You're all the way from Rome ;
Have you no tidings ?

LORENZO.

Nothing worthy note.

EDWARD.

What of your journey ?

LORENZO.

Prosperous enough,
But bare of incident. Nay, on my word,
I had a story freshly in my thoughts,
When your pale face suggested other themes.

EDWARD.

Adventures wait for gallant knights like you.
Proceed, — I'm eager for your narrative.

LORENZO.

I chanced among some braggarts at their wine
One evening ; — wherefore, let's not fill too oft ; —
In the full flush of lustihood were they,
With rank and money to their mind, I think !
And one of them the man for women's eyes ; —
You know the sort. Had one a sister, now,
God rest her in her grave ere wooed of him !

EDWARD.

Ay, say you so ? You would not pray amiss.
Proceed.

LORENZO.

His presence was profane to me
 Before his lips unlocked their evil treasures.
 The talk soon turned on amorous enterprise ;
 All turned to him as one supremely versed ;
 And he, with some new-glowing conquest crowned,
 Told its loose tale ; resigned its heroine
 To hints, and shrugs, and jeers, which, on my word,
 If women feel as we, should burn like hell,
 And bring shame's scarlet to a wanton's cheek.

EDWARD (*aside*).

This might be he, or any one. (*Aloud.*)

Say on !

LORENZO.

He had a portrait ; it was hers, he said ;
 His boon companions (such men have no friends)
 Drove on their jesting till he showed it them.

EDWARD.

It was — ?

LORENZO.

God's pity ! what a face it was !
 Like something, too, that I have seen in dreams,
 Or in a picture ; but more beautiful.
 It seemed to plead for rescue at my hands,
 And so — I snatched it.

EDWARD.

Have you brought it here ?

LORENZO.

Behold !

EDWARD.

'T is she ! I knew it from the first !

LORENZO.

Edward, you falter ! — tell me, why is this ?

EDWARD.

Had I his heart's blood ! had I that, Lorenzo !

LORENZO.

You 've known her, then — the victim of this man ?

EDWARD.

Ask this grief-hardened bosom, these parched eyes,
Whose tears have left their burning bed a-dry,
If I have known her !

LORENZO.

All grows clear to me, —

'T was in a sketch of yours I saw the face ;
This was your Leonora !

EDWARD.

Name her not !

LORENZO.

Poor maid ! poor Edward ! Help is idle here.

EDWARD.

Justice remains. We 'll talk of that anon.
Say, did you leave his baseness unchastised ?

LORENZO.

I had it in my heart to strike him down ;

But what, — 't is pitiful to harm a coward ;
 I smote him only with a shameful word,
 And, spurning, left him to his fellows' scorn.

EDWARD.

O worthy friend ! 't was well, 't was nobly done ;
 But it seems little to my angry heart.
 I could become a fiend, to plot his ruin.

LORENZO.

God needs not men like you, nor me, for that.
 Such wretches twine the slip-noose for themselves.
 What we can do for her were first to seek.
 Where is she ?

EDWARD.

Searching the wide world for him,
 With me to help her.

LORENZO.

Then she 's nigh at hand,
 And hanging still upon a treacherous hope.
 Can you unmask him to her ?

EDWARD.

Such a task
 Affection's utmost should require of me.

(After a pause.)

Give me that portrait. You should follow me ;
 Your statement only can establish mine.

Support me, Heaven! beneath the weight of woe
I bear to her.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III. — *A Street.* LEONORA, KÄTCHEN.

LEONORA.

I know not why I am so light to-day.
I seem to breathe the sunshine, taste the flowers,
Weave rainbow clothing from this golden air,
The morning's gift, that scatters heaven abroad.
He is not distant, Kätchen. Do not smile!
To-day, be sure, he lives in happiness,
And from his heart the first glad overflow
Sends its wide circlings of delight to mine.
'T is such a day shall bring us face to face;
Nay, never shake thy head. I will not bear
Doubt in my presence; — better walk alone; —
For, Kätchen, I'm as sure of meeting him,
As next year's spring-tide, if I live so long.
And I shall see what has become a vision, —
So long, so far I follow it, — and sink,
To die, perhaps, — what matter? — on his breast.
(She clasps her hands, and pauses.)
I fear I've been undutiful, of late;
For though I have miraculous support

To pierce the devious ways, as some pale moon
 Threads the dim vapors, striving towards her heaven,
 Yet, when the wavering columns of the day
 Give way, and swift the weight of darkness falls,
 Crushing my hope and me, I sink so low
 The grave itself seems near me ; but at morn
 The little prisoner finds its wing again.

KÄTCHEN.

Alas, my child ! who knows what nights and mor-
 rows,

What days and years, this search shall link together ?
 You 'll drop me, somewhere, in a wayside grave,
 But you may perish on some lonely moor,
 Where ev'n poor Kätchen's comfort were not scorned,
 Where unblest brutes and wicked ghosts may strive
 To cheat your bones of Christian burial.

LEONORA.

I do not love you when your speech runs thus ;
 'T were best would you and Edward go your ways,
 And leave me to myself.

KÄTCHEN.

Not while I live.

Enter FLOWER-GIRL.

LEONORA.

Forgive me, Kätchen ; I was harsh, indeed.
 See, the fresh roses ! Hither, little maid !

You need not bear them further ; we are poor,
 But Kätchen will not grudge this shining coin
 That buys a priceless joy of memory.

FLOWER-GIRL.

Keep it, I pray ! you 're welcome to the flowers.
 I 'd rather give to you than sell to some.

LEONORA.

Not so, dear child ; you have your bread to earn,
 And must keep thrifty commerce with your wares.

KÄTCHEN.

Thank God if they can give you honest life.

FLOWER-GIRL.

What else ? I earn the little that I need,
 And keep my friends and favorite customers ;
 Lovers are generous with their gold, you know,
 And love needs flowers to help its blushing tale.
 One buys my freshest violets every day,
 And, flinging thrice their value, looks not back,
 Hurrying to the street beyond the square,
 Where, from a window, leans his lady-love.

LEONORA.

God keep them happy ! I have chosen these.

(Taking flowers.)

FLOWER-GIRL.

And some buy rosemary, to strew on graves,
 And some, rich garlands for a wedding-feast,

Or lilies, for the altar of their saint.
 You see, it is my fortune that they fade.
 God, when he made them so, remembered us.

(*Exit.*)

LEONORA.

'T is wild to flaunt with posies in the street, —
 But, could I meet him, I'd be thus arrayed ;
 The white and red, for Love and Truth, just here,
 Where the thin folds are gathered on my breast.
 This was the toilet of my happiest days,
 And still it seems familiar. Harken, Kätchen !
 Should God recall my spirit ere we meet,
 And heaven, not earth, unfold that blissful hour,
 'T is thus thou shalt adorn me for my bier ;
 Thus will I make my progress to the tomb, —
 For he might pass me, fading in my shroud,
 And smile to see me still attired for him.

(*Suddenly turning her head.*)

There comes a sound of horses' hoofs this way —
 O, ever, when I hear it, leaps my heart !

Enter **LOTHAIR** and **HELEN** *at the further end of the stage; they walk along as in the street. LEONORE and KÄTCHEN have retired a little in the background.*

LOTHAIR (*to HELEN*).

'T will rest you, love, to walk this quaint old street,
 And hunt its treasures, while the horses stand.

The tedious chariot wearies us and them ;
Grand, like our state, but slow and irksome too.

HELEN.

I thank you. I was eager to descend,
Cramped with long sitting. Will our boy be safe,
Think you ?

LOTHAIR.

Why, what should harm him where he sits ?
You mothers travel wide to find a fear.

LEONORA.

Lothair !

(She tries to advance, but falls senseless.)

HELEN.

What girl is this ?

LOTHAIR.

Some sickly fool !
Let us walk further ; there 's the market-place ;
The palace with the pictures is beyond.

HELEN.

She knows your name.

LOTHAIR.

Only by miracle.

I should be tasked, indeed, to tell you hers.
Come, we lose time.

KÄTCHEN *(springing before him)*.

Stay, Count Lothair ! for shame,
If not for pity.

LOTHAIR (*angrily*).

Shame is lost, I think,
When things like you patrol the streets by day!
Release my arm, or take this! 't is your fault.

(*Striking her.*)

HELEN (*screams*).

Ah! do not strike her!

(*KÄTCHEN drops her hold, with a cry of pain.*)

LOTHAIR (*dragging HELEN along*).

Madam, come away!

HELEN.

Let me go back to help her! See! she lies
Upon the flinty bosom of the street.

LOTHAIR.

Go at your peril, madam! It beseems
My rank that you should parley with a wench!
Come on, I say!

HELEN.

Heaven help thee, wretched one!

(*Exeunt.*)

KÄTCHEN (*bending over LEONORA*).

Shall I recall her to this heartless world?
The dead will move her envy, when she wakes.

Reënter FLOWER-GIRL.

But she must wake. Help, child! your friend lies here.

GIRL.

Alas! what shall I do?

KÄTCHEN.

Bring water straight;

The fountain yonder.

GIRL (*runs and returns*).

Yes, I have it here.

KÄTCHEN.

Pour on her temples; see, she breathes, she stirs!
Be not in haste, sad eyes, to open here!
Keep still a while, poor heart! you're happier so.

LEONORA (*opens her eyes*).

Lothair! not here? I saw him in a dream;
No, no! he's gone, alas! he knew me not;
I must be altered!

(*Springs to her feet, seizes the FLOWER-GIRL by the
shoulder.*)

Which way did he go?

Speak! speak! you cheat me of this precious time.

GIRL.

I met a noble as I came this way,
And on his arm a lady.

LEONORA.

Do not prattle, —

Where saw'st thou him?

GIRL.

Beyond the market-place ;

But they walked rapidly.

LEONORA.

That way ?

GIRL.

That way.

(LEONORA goes.)

KÄTCHEN.

Leonora ! Leonora ! my own child,
Stay, if you love me !

LEONORA (*looking back*).

Not for God in heaven !

SCENE IV.—*A Room in an Inn. Enter LOTHAIR and HELEN.*

LOTHAIR (*aside*).

All safe, thank Heaven !

(*Aloud.*)

Dear Helen, rest you here ;
I bade them bring the choicest grapes and wine.
You must take some refreshment, for we leave
Within the hour. I go to seek our grooms.

HELEN.

You need not send the fruit. I never felt
Further from hunger than I do to-day.

LOTHAIR.

Why are you grown so sudden cold and strange ?
Your very voice seems altered. Do not say
It was that silly business in the street, —
A scene well-acted ; poh ! the merest jest.

HELEN.

I will say nothing.

LOTHAIR.

Helen, change that tone ;
Look like yourself, or I shall think you jealous,
Of what ? — a thing I would not stoop to pick
From off the pavement.

HELEN.

Do not slander her ;
My woman's heart will take no pleasure in it.
I saw her face ; it was no wicked one,
But very young and beautiful.

LOTHAIR.

My child,
You do not know the world. These shameless women
Can simulate all virtues for their ends.
Even the blushing gift of modesty
They trade with, when occasion calls for it.
But that I could not keep my angel wife
In such vile presence, I had shamed the creatures
Back to the noisome sewers where they live.

HELEN.

What sound without ?

LEONORA (*without*).

I know that he is here !

Enter LEONORA. LOTHAIR'S hand seeks his dagger. He starts forward ; HELEN intervenes.

HELEN.

Now, by God's life ! this woman shall have speech !

(*LOTHAIR stands transfixed. LEONORA advancing, holds him at arm's length, gazing fixedly at him. After some moments she turns abruptly from him, and sinks upon a seat.*)

LEONORA.

'T is he ! I did not dream, nor was I mad,
 In all the 'wilder'd ruin of my heart.
 'T is he, unchanged in form and countenance ;
 No death-like pang has left its rigid mark
 Along his features. Is it not for this,
 Because he is unchanged, that, here in sight,
 I do not know him, — cannot speak to him ?
 There is a gulf of agony between us,
 Silent and deep, which I have crossed alone, —
 And he stands there, and we are parted still.
 Lothair, — if it be thou indeed, — dissolve
 This icy spell with one familiar word.
 O, smile ! O, speak ! Give me the old, dear name,

And loose those arms that keep me from thy heart!

(*Going nearer to him, she stops suddenly.*)

He dares not smile, nor speak; a sullen glow

And leaden pallor alternate upon

The cheek that used to shame mine, prest to it.

(*With a cry.*)

It is not he! no time could change him so!

(*She perceives HELEN.*)

We're not alone! What lady pale and still

Looks like a ghost upon us? Pray you, madam,

Know you this gentleman as Count Lothair?

(*HELEN bows assent.*)

And you, — his sister, or his friend?

HELEN.

His wife.

LEONORA.

You're merry, madam! Whosoe'er you be

Your jesting is ill-chosen and worse-timed.

HELEN (*with dignity*).

I do not jest.

LEONORA.

Lothair, — what may this mean?

HELEN.

Speak, sir, the truth.

LOTHAIR (*with effort*).

This lady is my wife.

LEONORA.

What strength shall hold me up to suffer this?
Let me hear all, — is this your wedded wife?

LOTHAIR.

Surely she is.

LEONORA.

And I, O God, betrayed!

Do you remember me? These eyes, these lips,
This bosom, — was it you who ravished all
The poor girl's dower? This very lock of hair
Has lost its fellow, — do you know its fate?
Upon your heart you swore that it should lie
Till death, — upon the heart that swelled with pleasure
To ecstasy, you said, when I drew nigh.
Sweet words, — sweet breath, — a madness of delight
In which my soul passed from me! Could I die,
And think him not a villain, I would bless
The hand that stabbed me! Say it is not true;
Say that you love me still!

LOTHAIR.

Mere raving this, —
You know not what you say. Your words offend
One who has rights.

LEONORA.

She'll waive those rights a moment, —
Let your heart speak this once before we part
Forever, — do you love me?

LOTHAIR.

No!

LEONORA.

O, fiend!

But 't is not true! Your lips belie your heart.
Your policy deems fit to cast me off,
But you will keep my image in your thoughts
Sacred and dear.

LOTHAIR.

Upon my word, not I!

LEONORA.

Then am I wronged as never woman was,
And such a sin cries out to Heaven for vengeance.

LOTHAIR.

Let me advise you to depart in peace;
You need not stay to criminate yourself.
Our journey presses, — we must go from hence.

LEONORA.

Not yet, — I have a word or two to say
In quietness, — and you must wait so long.
When were you wed, — before those days, or since?

LOTHAIR.

In early youth.

LEONORA (*pressing her hands to her head*).

Fail me not now, my thoughts!
Did you not give your hand as worldlings do,

A bargain for a bargain, loving not?
 Your friends persuaded you, your fortunes urged,
 You took her coldly, — wanting but her dower,
 And when you met me, love sprang rashly up
 In your despite, to avenge the hollow vow?

LOTHAIR (*aside*).

I wonder that my patience holds to this, —
(*Aloud.*)

I loved this lady, and I love her now,
 As I can love none other. Can you think
 That you might waken passion's fervency,
 Where she, the pure, the peerless, passed in vain?
 Regard the perfect outline of her face,
 That takes its mould from princely ancestry;
 Think, too, — this angel is so merciful
 That even you have leave to speak before her;
 Consider this, — ay, ponder what it means,
 Then dare to ask me if I love my wife!

LEONORA.

And what was I?

LOTHAIR.

A love-lorn village girl;
 The ready partner of a vain amour,
 Which grief of mine must purge for fault of both.
 With shame in this dear presence I confess
 You did beguile me of some tenderness,

For which I crave the pardon of this saint,
And you were best implore it, and begone!

LEONORA.

I hear it all as voices in a dream,
But as for feeling, I've no feeling left.
Thus was it best, — why, this was merciful! —
All's over so, — I was about to go.
Distraction waits upon the threshold yonder,
To mock me as I pass. The stones i' the street,
That bore my hasty hitherward steps, will stand
And laugh as I go hence. The bridal flowers, —
Why should I keep them at my bosom more? —
Lie there forever, — ye, the sweet of earth!
But, O! this ring, — in whose solemnity
My life's whole thought lay centred, — how shall this
Stand in remembrance as a thing profane?
Madam, I lay it, sobbing, at your feet,
Happier than I, who have no refuge there.

HELEN.

If pity can alleviate thy pain, —

LEONORA.

Nay, madam, — I came hither in my right;
Respect my ruin, — fling no alms, I pray!

LOTHAIR.

You'd weary Heaven's compassion with your pride.
Let all this end, — you've cost us time enough.

Enter ARTHUR.

HELEN (*going towards him*).

My child !

LEONORA.

I see, — his features, with her hair.
Come hither.

LOTHAIR.

Helen, take the child away !

(*In an undertone to LEONORA, showing his dagger.*)

If e'er you venture in my path again
This shall decide between us !

LEONORA (*catching up the child*).

Little one,

I have thee ; thou art fair and innocent.

Hist ! Shall I tell thee what thy father is ?

He is — what thou wert better die than hear.

(*Putting the child down.*)

Go from me ! God has justice, Count Lothair ;
When it draws nigh your door, remember me !

(*Exit.*)

LOTHAIR.

She's gone at last ! Thank Heaven !

HELEN (*looking after her*).

Unhappy one,

Let not thy vengeful prayer send judgment back
Where thou wert let depart uncomforted !

(*He kneels at her feet. Scene changes.*)

SCENE V. — *Enter HUÖN and BERTO.*

BERTO.

What kept Lothair so long ? He went at last
 In moody haste, his wife upon his arm ;
 I stopped him, and essayed a friendly jest.
 " I 'm in no mood for your frivolity ! "
 He gruffly said. Frivolity, indeed !

HUÖN.

I fancy he has met an unloved ghost,
 For, through the arras (I was lodged next door),
 I heard hot speech and angry argument ;
 And, looking out thereafter, I espied
 A woman dashing headlong from his door.
 With wild, quick step she spurned the crabbed stair,
 But, turning at its base, her countenance
 Flashed full upon me, like a certain one, —
 Well, well, I 'll keep this matter to myself.

BERTO.

What was she like ?

HUÖN.

O, like a dream of youth !
 Go back, good Berto ; bid my carriage stand
 Yonder, behind the church. Command my men
 To be in readiness, lest I should call.

BERTO.

What 's in your fancy, now ?

HUÖN.

A merry plan ;

Do but my errand — we shall meet ere long.

BERTO.

(Am I his pack-horse ?) I will see it done.

HUÖN.

Farewell. A prosperous journey to us both.

(*Exit* BERTO.)

HUÖN.

It was that glorious cast-off of Lothair's.

I knew her from the portrait ; following,

I saw her rush, dishevelled, down the street,

Like a wild thing affrighted at itself ;

And I determined that she should be mine,

If wit of man can compass woman's soul.

A woman's beauty is a power on earth,

A woman's passion is a power in hell !

This one, I see, is eminent in both ;

And now 's the time to catch her at rebound,

And beat my lord with his own tennis-ball.

Look where she comes ! A sight to scare the fiend !

Marble and lightning ! she is terrible !

SCENE VI.— *The same.* Enter LEONORA.

LEONORA.

Let no one say I've wept. From these seared eyes
 Poisons may drop, but never human tears.
 Some deadly power is in me. Were he here,
 My breath should wither him. One sudden look
 Should bid the life-blood curdle at his heart,
 Never to leave it more. Let me not think!
 Avenging God! I was a woman once, —
 A thing to nourish children at my breast,
 And hear their angels whisper through my dreams,
 As she does nightly, pillowed on his breast.
 With sorer travail now shall deeds of wrath
 And ghastly horror claim their birth from me.

HUON (*taking her by the arm*).

I am your friend. So, give me leave to speak,
 Nor pluck your sleeve away as if you feared.
 What if I knew your story, — knew your wrong,
 And him who wronged you, handsome Count Lothair?

LEONORA (*shrieks*).

HUON.

Do not shriek! The precious moments crowd
 Close on each other. Will you come with me?
 I'll help you to revenge.

LEONORA (*drops upon her knees*).

On my knees

To that dear purpose I devote my life. (*Rises.*)

But you,— why should I trust your faith, your
power?

HÜÖN (*showing a badge*).

Stay not to question. For my power, behold
A sign that makes men tremble. For my faith,
I can but swear fidelity to you.

LEONORA (*scornfully*).

Is there an oath can bind a gentleman?
Promise revenge, and you shall use my life,
Beyond it, as you will; but that shall be
The earnest of my service — not its wage!

HÜÖN (*holding up a dagger*).

I swear!

LEONORA.

By him who is at home in hell,
And in our hearts.

HÜÖN.

The oath is singular.

LEONORE.

Take it!

HÜÖN.

By him I swear.

LEONORA.

Then I am yours.

She gives him her hand; as they go, enter from the same side

EDWARD and LORENZO.

EDWARD.

'T is she! 't is Leonora!

LORENZO.

In what hands!

This was his vile companion.

EDWARD.

Leonora!

Come with us where your faithful Kätchen waits,
Grieved at your long delay.

LEONORA.

I will not come!

My path is chosen; it is wide of yours.

EDWARD.

Your brain is crazed; you know not what you say.
While love and sorrow waste themselves on you,
You cling for succor to an arm like this,
Weak with the falsehood of the heart beneath.
Come with your true friends.HUON (*drawing his sword*).You will find it ill
To meddle in my matters.

EDWARD.

Help, Lorenzo!

HÜÖN (*calls*).

What, ho ! my people !

LORENZO (*drawing*).

You remember me ?

Release that lady !

(HÜÖN fights with LORENZO. *His servants rush in.*)

EDWARD.

For your own soul's sake,

I pray you, Leonora !

LEONORA.

Spare your words ;

My will is turned and set like adamant.

Me shall you ne'er see more !

(HÜÖN wounds LORENZO. *His servants and he carry off LEONORA.*)

EDWARD.

Have after them !

LORENZO.

I cannot, — I am wounded ; hasten you !

EDWARD (*rushing after them ; stops*).

Too late ! the carriage passes, swift as hell !

O, those black steeds ! With one defiant smile,

She disappears — the last of Leonora !

(LORENZO totters and falls.)

My friend, you're pale and bleeding. What is this ?

LORENZO.

'T is only death, that comes to all men once, —
 To me less welcome, from so base a hand.
 But what, — the action hath a solemn strain,
 That calms men's passions for the scene beyond.
 How hot and rash was I, an hour agone, —
 Ten minutes, — and how tamely I lie down
 Never to rise again !

EDWARD.

You shall not die !

Help is at hand. I'll bear you in my arms
 To where the surgeon's knowledge shall avail.
 Soft, — let me raise you.

LORENZO.

Think of her, of her !

My need is ended ; hers is just begun.
 Remember, though my blood be vilely shed,
 It is in Mercy's holy cause I die !

EDWARD (*assisting him*).

Heaven send us help ! I cannot lose you thus !

LORENZO.

How the day darkens ! Ev'n the sun grows cold !
 Lay me down gently ! kiss me, my own Edward !

(*Dies.*)

EDWARD.

Ah, God ! he dies ! My love is changed to hate !

The noblest heart of men I ever knew,
Slain for her wanton pleasure ! Go, I curse thee !
Thou cankered blossom ! — ay, thou poison-sweet !
'T were better die than love thee ! My Lorenzo !
This was the only brother of my heart,
And Leonora is his murderer !

ACT FOURTH.

SCENE I. — *A Street. Enter two COURTIERs.*

FIRST COURTIER.

Strange things have happened since you left our
court.

Huön is banished ; Berto sent away
On some wild errand to an Indian prince
One never heard of, never hopes to see.

SECOND COURTIER.

You 've gained in losing reprobates like these.

FIRST COURTIER.

Yes, truly ; but the question, Who goes next ?
Leaves anxious silence at the hearts of all,
And they whose wisdom never is at fault
Fill up the gap with stories of their own.

SECOND COURTIER.

What do they say ?

FIRST COURTIER.

One thing in various shapes ;
But you shall hear it as 't is most believed.

(102)

There is a woman near the prince's heart
 Who guides him, as a pilot guides the helm.
 They say her chamber's floored with amethyst,
 And hung with beaten gold; while jewels take
 The counterfeit of flowers; the lily's cup
 Presented stands in pearl and emerald,
 While clustered rubies emulate the rose.
 And she in whom these splendors concentrate
 Outvies them in her youth's magnificence.

SECOND COURTIER.

Have any seen her?

FIRST COURTIER.

Would she walk abroad,
 Think you, for common men to look upon?
 She's veiled, and does not pass her chamber-door;
 Yet her malignant eyes are everywhere.
 So runs the common talk.

SECOND COURTIER.

Poh! poh! a myth.

'T is thus the vulgar mind impersonates
 Its idle dreaming of the things that rule.

FIRST COURTIER.

They say she has a wicked loveliness,
 A seraph's beauty, with a demon's heart;
 So, all that goes amiss is laid to her.
 There creeps a shadow 'twixt the people's love

And the good prince, so frank and debonair ; —
'T is hers, the Lady of the evil eye.

SECOND COURTIER.

What says Lothair ?

FIRST COURTIER.

I know not what he says, —
But he is changed, of late. *How* he is changed !
He wears the scars of trouble on his brow,
And his fair eyes look otherwise than when
They glanced about for conquests.

SECOND COURTIER.

Poor Lothair !

He was a trifler, for a man of parts,
And very handsome. Is the Countess well ?

FIRST COURTIER.

I scarcely know. They're much retired from court.
'T is said, the money-lenders press him hard.
Those vultures circle in the van of ruin,
And fan it onward with their eager wings.
But, talking of our gossip, here he comes,
And at his side, a noted usurer.

Enter LOTHAIR, — JACOB *following*.

LOTHAIR.

You shall not bend me to your purposes
To-night. Go hence, and let me see the world
Without your shadow ! (JACOB *retires*.)

SECOND COURTIER.

Shall we speak to him ?

FIRST COURTIER.

What, ho, — Lothair !

LOTHAIR (*starting*).

I greet you, gentlemen !

Pardon the rudeness of an absent man,
Who lives much in his own ill-company.

FIRST COURTIER.

I would but ask you where your wits are flown,
That I might volunteer to bring them back.
What, man ! are you bewitched ? or does the Jew
Feed on your heart's blood ?

LOTHAIR.

He's a mine of shrewdness,
A serviceable imp.

FIRST COURTIER.

I know him well.

Trust me, you'll find him mine and countermine.
D'ye go to court ? The prince receives, to-night.

LOTHAIR.

I have forsaken gayeties, of late.

SECOND COURTIER.

And gayety hath, in turn, forsaken you.

FIRST COURTIER.

Break from these moody, melancholy ways ;
Let the world see your handsome face again.

LOTHAIR.

The world is changed ; it pleases me no more.

FIRST COURTIER.

Man ! man ! you grow distempered in your mind.
What 's changed — the music ? for the better, then, —
The wine, the women, or our gracious prince ?
Your whims have spider-webbed your pane of glass,
So to your eye the face of earth is dark.

LOTHAIR.

It may be so.

FIRST COURTIER.

Then fling this humor off,
And smile abroad upon your favorites ;
Or, if you seek distraction, try the cards.

LOTHAIR.

Have with you, gentlemen ! Your friendly cheer
Should be the earnest of auspicious fortunes.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE II. — ZINGARA, JACOB.

ZINGARA.

The hospitable night hath spread her tent,
Lighting the torches that the gypsy loves,
For the dark feast of Eblis. Stolen things
Have sweetest savor thus, and thou and I,

Whose torment is the Christian's holiday,
May plot their ruin, and defy their wrath.

JACOB.

You 're wild of speech. I bear a sober mind,
Entirely giv'n to the affair in hand.

ZINGARA.

Fit instrument of her who hires us
To spy upon each other.

JACOB.

She is right ;
Albeit, the thing is needless in our case,
Since love of money and of mischief vie
To speed us on our errand.

ZINGARA.

Has yours sped ?

JACOB.

Not ill, indeed ; the fish is in the net,
And though he flounders in his element,
Trust me, I 'll bring him heedfully to shore.

ZINGARA.

It is a joy to bait these Christian hounds,
And set them on to tear each other's bones.
I know no pleasure like it.

JACOB.

What 's your task ?

ZINGARA.

The thing I can do better than another, —
To steal a creature with fair silken locks,
And bring it to my mistress.

JACOB.

So ! a dog ?

ZINGARA.

Why, Jacob, you are quick to guess, — a dog,
A certain favorite spaniel of the count's ;
Or, if you will, a lamb, a lady-bird,
A thing whose loss shall make them howl again,
I promise you !

JACOB.

You 'll need my help for that.

ZINGARA.

Your help, indeed ! I 'll ask it when I do.
I own I 'd rather keep the little wretch ;
I 'd crop its curls and sell them ; it should drudge,
Curse, steal, lie for me, when 't were big enough.

JACOB.

Could you not bring another in its place ?

ZINGARA.

That were to caper in the jaws of hell.
I tell you, Jacob, I 'm afraid of her,
She is so sweetly, coldly terrible.
Besides, she knows it by the father's eyes.

JACOB.

Hist, then ! a hasty footstep comes this way.

(LOTHAIR *rushes in.*)

LOTHAIR (*wildly*).

Hence ! I am mad to think on what I 've seen !

(JACOB *approaches.*)

Who 's this that dares to stop a desperate man ?

JACOB.

'T is Jacob.

LOTHAIR.

Ill confound thee ! give me way !

JACOB.

I 'll call to-morrow.

LOTHAIR.

In the devil's time !

(*Exit.*)

JACOB.

Whose fault is 't, if you lose at cards, Sir Count ?

We are a little hot and rash to-night,

And must have leave a while to vent our spleen.

'T is but a flare-up in a wasted socket ;

To-morrow he 'll be black and still enough.

But see the signal in the turret yonder, —

It calls for both of us — away !

ZINGARA.

Away !

SCENE III. — *A Room in LOTHAIR'S Palace.* LOTHAIR,
HELEN.

LOTHAIR.

Helen, see at your feet a ruined man,
Give him quick shelter from the fiend abroad.
I know I stabbed you to the heart, poor wife !
But that great heart must shield and save me now.

HELEN.

You come so wildly, with these staring eyes,
That bloodless face ; — compose yourself a while,
Then tell me what befell ?

LOTHAIR.

The list is long
Of your misfortunes, purchased by my crimes ;
But, pray you, draw the bolt, ere I begin.

(HELEN bolts the door, and returns to him.)

First, then, your fortune's wasted to the winds ;
Your dowry, ay, your boy's inheritance,
Your very diamonds, forfeit to the Jew.

HELEN.

I have expected this. I know not why.
What further ?

LOTHAIR.

Are you greedy of despair,
That thus you drain it down, and ask for more ?

HELEN.

Who stops to taste a poison, drop by drop?
 I could have begged your bread from door to door,
 Once, and not thought it scorn. So, let that pass.
 Give me the last, the worst calamity.

LOTHAIR (*looking about him*).

Come nearer, then. I have an enemy,
 Whether in flesh and blood it walks the earth,
 Or whether 't is a wild, avenging ghost,
 I know not. You believe in miracles,
 Give credence to the tears of pictured eyes, —
(*With meaning.*)

Think you a portrait could have speech? It can.

HELEN.

Your madness almost lends itself to me,
 So swift these sudden horrors shock the brain;
 But I must calm you with good countenance.
 Call back your senses; tell me what you saw.

LOTHAIR.

You know I have not crossed the palace gate
 Since what you wot of. I was there, to-night;
 A friend persuaded me; and I, heart-worn
 With cares and losses, flung myself his way.
 The Prince — well, well, no matter how he seemed;
 I passed beyond, to seat myself at cards;
 Duke Cesarini was my adversary.

Our play was high, and mine most fortunate,
Winning a sum to ransom my estates.
"Enough," cried I. "Not so," the duke rejoined,
"Are you not bound to give me my revenge?"
Just as I spoke, methought, a sudden gleam
Flashed on me from a portrait opposite;
I looked, I saw the unmistakable face,
I heard these words, "Revenge is slow, but sure!"

HELEN.

Who was't you saw?

LOTHAIR.

One whom I cannot name.

Ah, God! she was not as she used to be,
Tender, and fresh, and passionate in love;
She seemed a ghost escaped from hopeless hell,
All her fair features gathered up to give
A fiend's expression of malignity.
"It is your work!" she whispered, as I gazed;
Then she was gone, and all around grew dim.

HELEN.

And then?

LOTHAIR.

I heard one call, "Play on, Lothair!"
I flung a card down blindly, in the mist;
The winner laughed aloud, and all was lost!

HELEN.

How did this end ?

LOTHAIR.

I raised my eyes, at length,
 And saw a well-known picture on the wall,
 A Fornarina that was always there.
 I staggered from the room, and hurried here.

HELEN.

What have you suffered ere you came to this !
 Unhappy man ! your brain is over-wrought,
 You see its phantoms as realities.
 Go in, — persuade your weary eyes to rest ;
 I'll calm your throbbing temples on my couch.
 Why should we waste our grief on fortunes lost ?
 Far from the dang'rous splendors of the court,
 We'll lead a happier, wiser life ; and I
 Will be your own fond Helen, as of old.
 You see I have forgiv'n, forgotten all,
 Save that you need the love I promise you.

LOTHAIR.

O faultless-tempered, O true woman's heart !
 Thy love re-conquered, let all treasures go !
*(He sinks into her arms. A knock is heard
 without. They start in alarm. The knock is
 repeated.)*

HELEN *(going to the door)*.

Who knocks ?

VOICE (*without*).

A friend.

HELEN.

What seek you at this hour?

VOICE.

I must have instant speech with Count Lothair.

'T is at his peril if you bar the door.

HELEN (*to* LOTHAIR).

Go in, — leave me to deal with him alone.

LOTHAIR.

So far my manhood hath not left me yet.

(*Going to the door.*)

You say you are a friend to Count Lothair;

How shall I trust you?

VOICE.

By three angles bound,

Three arcs, one circle, and the mystic word

We only speak in presence.

LOTHAIR.

He must enter.

Whate'er your errand, welcome, in God's name!

Enter MESSENGER, hooded and cloaked.

LOTHAIR.

I know you not.

MESSENGER (*showing a blazon*).

You know the badge I wear.

One of the ancient Brotherhood am I,
Fellow of yours and Huön's.

LOTHAIR.

Whoso bears
That mark, is in my house as light and air.
Ev'n on my death-bed I attend his need.
How can I serve you ?

MESSENGER.

Nowise in the world ;
'T is I must serve you. We should speak alone.

LOTHAIR.

Leave us, dear Helen !

HELEN.

Do not bid me go ;
Let the new danger, falling, crush us both,
Nor single one to bear the other's torture.

LOTHAIR.

Fear not, — 't is one of a Fraternity
Whom fearful oaths have bound for mutual help ;
And, though 't is like we never met before,
We are, till death, beholden to each other.

HELEN.

I 'm loth to leave you. Heav'n protect us all !

(Exit.)

LOTHAIR, MESSENGER.

LOTHAIR.

Well, friend ?

MESSENGER.

My errand is best quickest done ;
Great needs must crowd the wheels of strategy.
Who, single-handed, keeps the pass of Fate,
Should have a far eye, and a fearless hand.
I can but warn you of the danger nigh,
And trust your high resolve to save yourself.

LOTHAIR.

Speak plainly.

MESSENGER.

You are ruined with the Prince ;
Your fellows met the doom of banishment ;
Your turn is next, — not banishment, but death.

LOTHAIR.

I cannot find a sin against my Prince
In my most deep remembrance. He and I
Are of one age, — were play-fellows in youth,
And friends thereafter. Should he do me harm,
When naught could move him to it ?

MESSENGER.

Let me ask,
How did you vex the demon of the palace ?

LOTHAIR.

Your words strike deadly terror through my veins.
What mean you ?

MESSENGER.

Why — the Prince's Favorite ;

'T is she doth lead him to these cruelties,
 So new, so strange. She draws him with a hair ;
 She binds him in a chain of perfumed breath,
 Padlocked with kisses. What she wills, he does ;
 Our lives are in her hand.

LOTHAIR.

O, hideous dream !—

Who is she ?

MESSENGER.

God and Satan only know.

No man has seen her ; but her evil power
 Shows its malignant presence everywhere.

LOTHAIR.

Is this a nightmare ?

MESSENGER.

Do not think it such.

Your time is short ;— the morrow is your own ;
 Beyond that, nothing but eternity.

LOTHAIR.

Can I not fly ?

MESSENGER.

Your every step is watched—
 Spies are about you in your very bed.

LOTHAIR.

Great Heaven ! What help remains ?

MESSENGER.

One sole resource,
 The deed of Brutus, swift and terrible !

Cleave the false heart, and let the murderous arm
Drop powerless, ere the fatal bolt be hurled.

(Shows a dagger.)

LOTHAIR *(turning away his head)*.

No, no ! not bloodshed !

MESSENGER.

Whose blood ? His, or yours ?

What if I had your sentence in my bosom,

(Takes out a paper.)

Caught on its way ? — Read this.

LOTHAIR.

It is not signed.

MESSENGER.

It wants a signature that will not fail.

Why, man, we would not leave the task to you ;

A dozen stouter hearts and surer hands

Direct the swift-descending tool of death.

We only want your name and countenance ;

Record them here. *(Showing a parchment.)*

LOTHAIR.

I must have time to think.

Leave me this night ; come back at early dawn.

I shall be ready.

MESSENGER.

It will be too late.

Necessity is not a merchant's clerk,

To be put off from payment for a day !
 Give me your name, or keep your tardy courage
 For the confessor and the headsman's axe.

LOTHAIR.

Give here ! (Signs.)

MESSENGER.

So, so ! — the thing is bravely done ;
 I give you rendezvous to-morrow night
 At the Redoubt. You 'll meet a domino
 In black and yellow. Touch your vizard thus,
 And he shall bring you to our company. —
 Now go to rest, and think your life is safe. (*Exit.*)

LOTHAIR.

He 's gone, as if the earth had swallowed him.
 I do not rightly know what I have done,
 Such horrors hedge my footsteps everywhere.
 Shall I lie down ? For me is no repose.
 Sleep shall o'ercome me with her awful shapes,
 And pin me helpless in my agony.
 There is one refuge. Death shall find me there !
 Helen ! to thy protecting arms I come ! (*Exit.*)

SCENE IV. — *A Room in the Palace.*

LEONORA.

I had not thought t' have found mankind so vile !
 I looked for shame, at least, where villains trade

In blood and falsehood. I discern it not.
 Where'er I need an instrument of ill
 To speed my dreadful work, straightway appears,
 As from an ambush, some vile human tool
 That begs my using. Royalty itself
 Takes service with its sceptre and its sword,
 Staining its dainty fingers in my quarrel.
 Thus, all things favor me save yonder Heaven,
 Whose stern compression keeps my forehead bent,
 Lest evil eyes, aspiring to its sunshine,
 Should dare to claim its promise. What of that?
 Avenging God! it is thy work I do,
 Though Thou disown it. Smile where Thou likest
 best,

I do not seek thy favor. Downward lies
 My way; but, ere I plunge, the shrieks of one
 Dragged struggling from the bosom of delight,
 And hurled before, make hideous sacrifice,
 And spread my fall, as soft as feathery night.

(A pause. She hears a step.)

The Prince?

Enter the PRINCE.

PRINCE.

You sent for me, my Beautiful?

LEONORA.

Forgive me, gentle sovereign, if I erred.

PRINCE.

You know how dear these precincts are to me !
How sacred, — how my leaping heart awaits
Your messenger, — too seldom and too slow
For my desires ! The Prince can summon all
But Leonora ; she must summon him.

LEONORA.

I am too much beholden to your goodness
To find a ready answer. Gratitude
Weighs down my utterance ; let me rather break
At once th' unwelcome business of this hour,
Set for me by my duty.

PRINCE.

Do not fear !

Ill tidings should be sweet, love, told by you.

LEONORA.

O, how my woman's nature hates this work !
I must unmask a traitor to your eyes. '
Suspecting long, I hold the proofs at last ;
But guilt so black, my heart had ne'er alleged.
I pause and tremble with the dreadful work ;—
The Count Lothair conspires to take your life !

PRINCE.

Lothair ! My fairest, you are misinformed.
He's an offender in another sense.
Lothair's worst treasons are to womankind.

LEONORA.

A man that can betray a woman's love
Avoids no crime for its enormity.

PRINCE.

You must not be too stern, my Puritan!
Our courtiers keep not the chivalrous faith
Of their grim grandsires.

LEONORA.

Pardon! I forgot
The times we live in. I have surely heard
That loyalty to Sovereigns and to Women
Went out of date together.

PRINCE.

You are keen!
I pity him who is your enemy.

LEONORA.

But Count Lothair, —

PRINCE.

Call him a reprobate,
A man capricious, thriftless, passionate.
Do you not see he has too little weight
For good or evil? Like this sword of mine,
With jewelled hilt and gold-encrusted blade,
'Tis a rare bauble for a holiday —
For service, now, what fool would borrow it?

LEONORA.

Read but this document. (*Giving paper.*)

PRINCE (*reading*).

I am amazed!

His name upon the villanous enrolment?

Why, this is unimagined infamy!

What could have brought him to it?

LEONORA.

Urgent need,

With hope and promise of high dignity.

How often is a daring public deed

Hatched vilely from the occasion of the hour,

As from an egg a viper!

PRINCE.

'T is most true.

I know that he hath been in straits of late,

And thought to help him for his father's sake,

And for a careless friendship that I bear him;

While his false eyes took measure of my throat!

Such faith doth follow princes. Are you sure

He signed this devil's patent knowingly,

Having possessed the tenor of the bond?

LEONORA.

My royal master, look into this face;

A sad one, — you are pleased to say, a fair.

You would not think it were a marble mask
Of falsehood, that should put his crime to shame ?

PRINCE.

The very words are impious !

LEONORA.

Hear me, then !

By every feature that you love, I swear
Lothair's a perjured, faithless, ruthless villain !

PRINCE.

Your oath is awful ; it commands my faith
As 't were a word from God.

LEONORA.

I thank your Grace.

PRINCE.

O, I am sad to think upon this man,
Whose thankless graces made him dear to me !
I thought him gentle, spite of grievous faults.

(*With emotion.*)

I loved him !

LEONORA.

How this tenderness of heart
Exalts the hate I bear him !

PRINCE.

We must act.

When should the deed be done ?

LEONORA.

This very night.

I've a device shall bring him in our toils ;
Sign but this warrant — leave the rest to me.

PRINCE.

Must he then die ?

LEONORA.

Justice should turn on us
Her awful anger did we falter here.
Think, 't is my life he plots against, sweet prince !
And for the love you bear me, waver not !

PRINCE.

Those lips can never miss the thing they ask.
Ev'n this sad boon I grant them.

(Signs.)

ACT FIFTH.

SCENE I. — *A Dark Room in the Palace. Several figures in masks stand in the background. In front, LEONORA and the PRINCE, also masked. On the left, wearing no mask, the MESSENGER.*

LEONORA.

Well met. The hour and the man approach.

PRINCE.

I hear a step along the corridor.

LEONORA.

My trusty messenger has brought him safe,
Through winding paths, to meet his fellows here.

PRINCE.

Who is that yonder ?

LEONORA.

He to whose keen scent
We owe the tracing of this shameful plot.
He shall be spokesman.

Enter LOTHAIR, *blindfold, led also by a mask.*

MESSENGER.

Take the bandage off.

(126)

LOTHAIR (*looks around him*).

Where am I?

MESSENGER.

In the presence of your friends.

LOTHAIR.

Why are they masked?

MESSENGER.

In risks so desperate,
Men must be cautious of their fellowship.
These wait to be assured of your good faith.

LOTHAIR.

Whatever other treason I intend,
I mean none here.

MESSENGER.

Turn, then, and tell them so.

LOTHAIR.

Methinks my coming hither was enough,
Without more words.

MESSENGER.

You waver in your mind;
Men name you as a man of no resolve.

LOTHAIR.

Wait till I give you cause for this reproach.

(*Turning towards the others.*)

Friends, I'll not praise th' intent that calls us here;
Not choice doth make it, but necessity.

Where sudden danger leaves no chance of good,
It is the lesser evil we embrace.

MESSENGER.

We are agreed ; like must be met by like.
A tyrant must be tyrannously quelled.
He has his troops, his hangman ; — what have we ?
Only the resolute heart and daring hand.

LOTHAIR.

What else, indeed ? The need is imminent ;
The remedy the only one in sight,
However we deplore its urgency.

MESSENGER.

This paper bears your lawful signature ?

LOTHAIR.

It is my name.

MESSENGER.

Signed freely ?

LOTHAIR.

As you know.

MESSENGER.

Unmask, then, brothers in a noble cause !
First by an oath devote yourselves to death,
Or to success ; the tyrant's death, or ours !
Your swords, quick ! let them clang the harsh refrain ?

(They all draw their swords.)

Now, then, the watchword ! give it, Count Lothair !

LOTHAIR (*with effort*).

Death to the tyrant ! Infamy and death !

LEONORA (*unmasking*).

Death to the traitor first !

LOTHAIR.

What do I see ?

Vengeance of God !

LEONORA.

Do you remember me ?

LOTHAIR.

O fool ! I am betrayed ! I see it all !

Here was the tool, and there the cunning hand !

PRINCE (*unmasking*).

And here the breast at which your steel was aimed !

LOTHAIR.

My Prince, although in this aspect I stand,
I do implore your sovereign leave to speak,
And show a thousand damning proofs of crime
In those who urged me to this enterprise.

PRINCE.

What boots it, man, who tempted you ? The devil
Tempts every cutpurse, stabbing on the road.
The gallows does not heed his argument.
Can you deny your guilt ?

LEONORA.

Deny it ? Yes,

He would deny the mother's face that bore him,
 Could it but serve his purpose.

LOTHAIR.

I am dumb.

PRINCE.

Chief of my guards, arrest this gentleman !
 Strike off the spurs from his unknighly heels.
 To the state dungeon lead him. Give the priest
 And headsman leave to do their ghostly work
 At the cock's crow. His hours on earth are num-
 bered.

LOTHAIR.

Grant but one mercy to a fallen man,
 For all your former favors, gracious Prince !
 One parting moment with my wife and child, —
 The gift of tears, my only legacy !

LEONORA (*to the PRINCE*).

The countess is arrested. It is clear
 She lent her aid in this.

LOTHAIR.

No ! on my word !

LEONORA.

Traitor, that thing you lack ; you have no word !

HELEN (*without*).

Lothair ! Lothair !

She enters, escorted by two GUARDS, breaking furiously from them.

Let me have room, I say !
Our child ! our Arthur ! —

LOTHAIR.

What of him ?

HELEN.

He 's lost !

They say a gypsy lured him from the house.
I only know he 's gone ! O God, he 's gone !

(She comes close to LOTHAIR.)

I went to kiss my darling in his bed, —
You know I always do, — he was not there !
He 's hiding now, I thought, and paused a while,
To let the little creature have his play ; .
Then called, then shrieked, then searched the whole
house over
In vain ; then fled distracted through the streets,
Crying my child ! my child ! till these men came
And brought me hither.

LOTHAIR.

God ! must I bear this ?

HELEN.

Why do you stand there ? we must search the town.
He may be dead or dying while I speak,
Or hidden where we ne'er shall see him more !

Come with me, come ! I have strength for everything.
 I'll drag the sewers, dig the dung-heaps through,
 Search wizard houses as the lightning leaps ;
 I'll cope with witches, in their murderous dens,
 But I will bring him back ! Nay, more ; methinks
 I'd tear the earth's hard bosom with these hands,
 If it could hide him. Who are these that stare ?
 If they have children, they will lend us aid,
 And we will serve them all our mortal lives !

LOTHAIR.

Helen, I am a prisoner to the state ;
 My head is forfeit. This o'erwhelming hour
 Takes life and all its blessings at one blow.

HELEN.

My sight grows dizzy. No, I'll not sink down
 Until I know the worst ! (*Perceiving the PRINCE.*)
 Our Sovereign, too !

What does he here ?

PRINCE.

Your husband is a traitor,
 And so condemned to meet a traitor's doom !

HELEN.

'T is false, I say ! 'T is slanderous as hell !
 Who says Lothair is faithless to his prince ?

(*She sees LEONORA, who comes forward.*)

'T is she, the woman with the wicked smile !

She called the curse down ; it has come at last !
 How the room darkens ! Help me, dear Lothair !
 O, to have kissed my boy before I die !

(She sinks, — LOTHAIR bends over her.)

Part softly, Helen !

LEONORA.

She shall never kiss him !

PRINCE.

Convey her hence, and bid the leech attend.

(They bear HELEN away.)

LOTHAIR *(coming close to LEONORA)*.

Fiend ! are you satisfied ? Is this enough ?
 Could not my ruin glut your greed of blood,
 But my pure wife, my guiltless child, must perish,
 To heap the measure of your fell revenge ?
 'T was little that a nobleman should die,
 Vilest of spiders, strangled in your web !

PRINCE.

Silence !

LEONORA.

I pray your highness, let him speak.

LOTHAIR.

Come to my dungeon, — I invite you there, —
 Come with your butchering myrmidons, and hold
 Your midnight feast of blood. The torture waits
 For her whose malice is its only term.

In life or death you shall not make me moan.
 I have not lived as I was born to live,
 Nor kept the faith and courage of my youth ;
 But here, my steps find footing on the grave.
 With this brief breath, whose latest gasp shall curse
 The day we met, I give you back your hate ;
 I scorn you, spit upon you, and defy you !

(*The guards lead away LOTHAIR. Scene changes.*)

SCENE II. — LEONORA'S *Bedchamber.* *On the bed a child
 asleep.*

LEONORA.

'T was great, — 't was godlike ! I have drunk to the
 full

The costly wine of vengeance ; and I feel
 Its mighty madness coursing through my veins !
 What pang was left forgotten ? What disgrace ?
 O, man, so gallant and so reckless once,
 Crushing the poor girl's heart in your white hands !
 Where are you now ? Your glozing tongue is dumb ;
 The flashing falsehoods of your eyes are spent ;
 And Death and you, of all disguises stript,
 Glare grimly on each other.

Here 's his boy ; —

I shall be mad, — no ! I must see his face.

(She goes to the bed, and draws the curtain.)

These are the features of my girlhood's dream ;
 Thus looked my idol, ere it fell, — to seam
 The upturned forehead with the gash of shame.
 O, what a god he seemed ! He stood on clouds ;
 Stars shot their glances through his azure eyes
 That were my Sun, my Heaven, my Universe !
 It is the folly of my heart, to think

(A masked figure appears behind her.)

That something bears his form in yonder skies ;
 Some heavenly delight must look as he did.
 For things divine have twin-antipodes,
 And Lucifer hath left his shining peer
 Where he hath no hereafter.

Night wears on,
 And brings no pause. The hours drop off like pearls
 Into the silver silence.

(Taking a phial from her bosom.)

Here 's a draught
 Shall help me to a moment of repose,
 With this concluding thought, — I am revenged !

MASK.

You shall not close your brilliant eyes to-night,
 My countess. I have work for them to do.
 The midnight summons up strange visitors,
 And here 's a friend that knows you through your
 paint,

And all your wicked bravery.

LEONORA.

What's this ?

I am betrayed.

MASK.

'T were justice if you were, —
The only justice you are knowing to.

LEONORA.

I'll call my guards, — what, ho !

MASK.

All doors are closed ;
Your sentinel is absent by my leave.
What if I stood, Heaven's righteous messenger,
To deal with you a little in your sort ?
You have o'erthrown your mortal enemy, —
Who's he that doth avenge mankind of you ?

LEONORA.

Your speech is haughty as your voice is rude.
Talk as you will, — one thing alone dare not, —
To think I fear you. **I NO G!**

MASK.

I could show you that
Should make you tremble.

LEONORA.

Show it then, — your face ?

MASK.

That has no office in this interview.
 If I could show you what you were and are,
 You'd feel a keener anguish than your foe
 Who cannot cry to Heaven for cursing you.
 I had your portrait of a man who wore
 That blushing slander of all womanhood

(Shows picture.)

For very mockery. See, how fresh, how pure!
 How dewy sweet a morsel for the fiend
 In whose wide jaws she leaped with open eyes!

LEONORA.

'Tis my young face, — my fair and innocent face.
 What wretch art thou, to torture me with this?

MASK.

She was as wild and arrogant in her love
 As in the hate to which the scorched bud ripened.
 Too proud to bear the fortune of her sex;
 Wronged ever more than wronging, save this one,
 She grew a fiend in malice. Help was near
 In faithful hearts, and in the priceless power
 To shame misfortune with true nobleness.
 From loving hands held out she turned away,
 And plunged from passion into infamy;
 Not for the weakness of a second love,
 Or sordid need, or lust of leprous splendor,

But for the ruin of one wretched soul,
 She gave, what God till then held innocent,
 The glories of her youth. The prince's mistress,
 There is her portrait ; you behold her now !

LEONORA.

Is this enough ?

MASK.

Her measure is not full ; —
 The prince's love she might have ruled for good,
 As thieves are generous with unrighteous gold.
 The patient angel kept his record back ;
 Hope sent her leaping scouts along the road ;
 Here she may pause, and tremble, and turn back ;
 Here, when she meets the infant's pleading eyes,
 She may forgive the father. Further still,
 When all his heart-strings quiver in her hand,
 The thought may dawn, " Why should I crush thee,
 worm ? "

And she may dash her deadly purpose down,
 A costly offering, broken in God's face.
 This, too, she did not. What remains for her
 But the Ghoul's feast, corruption, horror, blood ?

LEONORA.

This man seems risen from the depths of hell,
 With all its torment burning in his speech.
 Speak ; what remains ?

MASK.

The fate of ruined souls, —
 To prosper and grow fat in wickedness.
 I've seen your prototype a thousand times :
 Lucretia, — not the Heav'n-avenging one, —
 The poisoning Borgia, fiend-like, — false, and cruel ;
 Or Messalina, with the cold sly look,
 Or other dames, whose pictures give us fright
 Lest they should claim our human fellowship.
 Rather than you should grow a thing so vile,
(*Shows a dagger.*)

Methinks 't were merciful to slay you here ;
 A brother's deed, — if ev'n a brother's love
 Could follow you so far.

LEONORA (*snatches the dagger*).

Give here the steel.

Wrest not from me my right of sacrifice.
 To one who loved me as a brother should,
 I give the latest struggle of my heart.

(*Stabs herself.*)

EDWARD (*unmasking*).

Leonora !

LEONORA.

Edward, we are haply met !

EDWARD.

O, rash, heroic deed !

LEONORA.

Why should you grieve ?

See how this life-blood lets the madness out,
That pressed, so closely-packed, upon my heart ;
And I grow calm at last ; and, as in dreams,
Behold the peaceful visions of my youth.
Deep in the mountain's heart the chalêt lies,
And, in the sun, the rustling waterfall
Leaps gladly evermore. A maiden band
Dance rustic measures to its cool refrain ;
And one in white moves, taller than the rest.
D' ye see it, Edward ?

EDWARD.

I am there with you.

LEONORA.

Who 's he that passes with the haughty eyes ?
The tall girl stopped her dancing when he came,
That he might speak, and cheat her of her soul.
Then, there was vengeance ! what became of it ?
'T is gone. I see you, — know myself again, —
And what I come from. We must save Lothair,
Whose treason was the fruit of my deceit.
Tell him I spoke forgiveness ere I died.
Help ! — I grow faint ! — So, let me lie at rest !

(Dies.)

EDWARD.

See ! she is dying ! my beloved is dying !
Ah, God ! the parting struggle is at end.
Let the white shadow lie upon my heart,
The wreck of all that's fair and excellent ;
A thing of tears and tenderness forever !

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