

LOUISA ALCOTT, ANNA PRATT

COMIC TRAGEDIES

Louisa Alcott

Comic Tragedies

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Louisa M. Alcott

Comic Tragedies / Written by 'Jo' and 'Meg' and Acted by The 'Little Women'

"It was at this period of her life that she was violently attacked by a mania for the stage, and writing and enacting dramas. Her older sister, Anna, had the same taste, and assisted her in carrying out all her plans."

Mrs. Cheney's Life of Louisa M. Alcott.

A FOREWORD BY MEG

In the good old times, when "Little Women" worked and played together, the big garret was the scene of many dramatic revels. After a long day of teaching, sewing, and "helping mother," the greatest delight of the girls was to transform themselves into queens, knights, and cavaliers of high degree, and ascend into a world of fancy and romance. Cinderella's godmother waved her wand, and the dismal room became a fairy-land. Flowers bloomed, forests arose, music sounded, and lovers exchanged their vows by moonlight. Nothing was too ambitious to attempt; armor, gondolas, harps, towers, and palaces grew as if by magic, and wonderful scenes of valor and devotion were enacted before admiring audiences.

Jo, of course, played the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful queens; for her tragedy-loving soul delighted in the lurid parts, and no drama was perfect in her eyes without a touch of the demonic or supernatural. Meg loved the sentimental rôles, the tender maiden with the airy robes and flowing locks, who made impossible sacrifices for ideal lovers, or the cavalier, singing soft serenades and performing lofty acts of gallantry and prowess. Amy was the fairy sprite, while Beth enacted the page or messenger when the scene required their aid.

But the most surprising part of the performance was the length of the cast and the size of the company; for Jo and Meg usually acted the whole play, each often assuming five or six characters, and with rapid change of dress becoming, in one scene, a witch, a soldier, a beauteous lady, and a haughty noble. This peculiar arrangement accounts for many queer devices, and the somewhat singular fact that each scene offers but two actors, who vanish and reappear at most inopportune moments, and in a great variety of costume. Long speeches were introduced to allow a ruffian to become a priest, or a lovely damsel to disguise herself in the garb of a sorceress; while great skill was required to preserve the illusion, and astonish the audience by these wonderful transformations.

The young amateur of to-day, who can easily call to her aid all the arts of the costumer and scene-maker, will find it hard to understand the difficulties of this little company; for not only did they compose their plays, but they were also their own carpenters, scene-painters, property-men, dress-makers, and managers. In place of a well-appointed stage, with the brilliant lights and inspiring accessories of a mimic theatre, the "Little Women" had a gloomy garret or empty barn, and were obliged to exercise all their ingenuity to present the scenes of their ambitious dramas.

But it is surprising what fine effects can be produced with old sheets, bright draperies, and a judicious arrangement of lights, garlands, and picturesque properties; and Jo's dramatic taste made her an admirable stage-manager. Meg was especially handy with saw and hammer, and acted as stage-carpenter, – building balconies, thrones, boats, and towers after peculiar designs of her own. Bureaus, tables, and chairs, piled aloft and arched with dark shawls, made dungeon walls and witch's cave, or formed a background for haunted forest and lonely glen. Screens of white cloth furnished canvas on which little Amy's skilful hand depicted palace halls, or romantic scene for lovers' tryst; and Beth's deft fingers were most apt in constructing properties for stage adornment, and transforming the frailest material into dazzling raiment. For the costumes were a serious consideration. No money could be spared from the slender purse to supply the wardrobes of these aspiring actors, and many were the devices to clothe the little company.

Thus a robe in one scene became a cloak in the next, and the drapery of a couch in the third; while a bit of lace served as mantle, veil, or turban, as best suited the turn of the play. Hats covered with old velvet, and adorned with feathers plucked from the duster, made most effective headgear for gay cavalier or tragic villain. From colored cotton were manufactured fine Greek tunics and flowing trains; and remarkable court costumes were evolved from an old sofa-covering, which had seen better days, and boasted a little gold thread and embroidery.

Stars of tin, sewed upon dark cambric, made a suit of shining armor. Sandals were cut from old boots. Strips of wood and silver paper were fashioned into daggers, swords, and spears, while from cardboard were created helmets, harps, guitars, and antique lamps, that were considered masterpieces of stage art.

Everything available was pressed into service; colored paper, odds and ends of ribbon, even tin cans and their bright wrappings were treasures to the young actors, and all reappeared as splendid properties.

At first a store of red curtains, some faded brocades, and ancient shawls comprised the stage wardrobe; but as the fame of the performances spread abroad, contributions were made to the little stock, and the girls became the proud possessors of a velvet robe, a plumed hat adorned with silver, long yellow boots, and a quantity of mock pearls and tinsel ornaments.

Such wealth determined them to write a play which should surpass all former efforts, give Jo a chance to stalk haughtily upon the stage in the magnificent boots, and Meg to appear in gorgeous train and diadem of jewels.

"The Witch's Curse" was the result, and it was produced with astounding effect, quite paralyzing the audience by its splendid gloom. Jo called it the "lurid drama," and always considered it her masterpiece. But it cost hours of thought and labor; for to construct a dungeon, a haunted chamber, a cavern, and a lonely forest taxed to the uttermost the ingenuity of the actors. To introduce into one short scene a bandit, two cavaliers, a witch, and a fairy spirit – all enacted by two people – required some skill, and lightning change of costume. To call up the ghostly visions and mysterious voices which should appall the guilty Count Rodolpho, was a task of no small difficulty. But inspired by the desire to outshine themselves, the children accomplished a play full of revenge, jealousy, murder, and sorcery, of all which indeed they knew nothing but the name.

Hitherto their dramas had been of the most sentimental description, given to the portrayal of woman's devotion, filial affection, heroism, and self-sacrifice. Indeed, these "Comic Tragedies" with their highflown romance and fantastic ideas of love and honor, are most characteristic of the young girls whose lives were singularly free from the experiences of many maidens of their age.

Of the world they knew nothing; lovers were ideal beings, clothed with all the beauty of their innocent imaginations. Love was a blissful dream; constancy, truth, courage, and virtue quite every-day affairs of life. Their few novels furnished the romantic element; the favorite fairy-tales gave them material for the supernatural; and their strong dramatic taste enabled them to infuse both fire and pathos into their absurd situations.

Jo revelled in catastrophe, and the darker scenes were her delight; but she usually required Meg to "do the love-part," which she considered quite beneath her pen. Thus their productions were a queer mixture of sentiment and adventure, with entire disregard of such matters as grammar, history, and geography, – all of which were deemed of no importance by these aspiring dramatists.

From the little stage library, still extant, the following plays have been selected as fair examples of the work of these children of sixteen and seventeen. With some slight changes and omissions, they remain as written more than forty years ago by Meg and Jo, so dear to the hearts of many other "Little Women."

Concord, Mass., 1893.

"Those Concord days were the happiest of my life. Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement."

L. M. Alcott.

NORNA; OR, THE WITCH'S CURSE

CHARACTERS

Count Rodolpho *A Haughty Noble.*

Count Louis *Lover of Leonore.*

Adrian *The Black Mask.*

Hugo *A Bandit.*

Gaspard *Captain of the Guard.*

Angelo *A Page.*

Theresa *Wife to Rodolpho.*

Leonore *In love with Louis.*

Norna *A Witch.*

NORNA; OR, THE WITCH'S CURSE

SCENE FIRST

**[A room in the castle of Rodolpho.
Theresa discovered alone, and in tears.]**

Theresa. I cannot pray; my aching heart finds rest alone in tears. Ah, what a wretched fate is mine! Forced by a father's will to wed a stranger ere I learned to love, one short year hath taught me what a bitter thing it is to wear a chain that binds me unto one who hath proved himself both jealous and unkind. The fair hopes I once cherished are now gone, and here a captive in my splendid home I dwell forsaken, sorrowing and alone [*weeps*]. [*Three taps upon the wall are heard.*] Ha, my brother's signal! What can bring him hither at this hour? Louis, is it thou? Enter; "all's well."

**[Enter Count Louis through a secret panel in the
wall, hidden by a curtain. He embraces Theresa**

Theresa. Ah, Louis, what hath chanced? Why art thou here? Some danger must have brought thee; tell me, dear brother. Let me serve thee.

Louis. Sister dearest, thy kindly offered aid is useless now. Thou canst not help me; and I must add another sorrow to the many that are thine. I came to say farewell, Theresa.

Theresa. Farewell! Oh, brother, do not leave me! Thy love is all now left to cheer my lonely life. Wherefore must thou go? Tell me, I beseech thee!

Louis. Forgive me if I grieve thee. I will tell thee all. Thy husband hates me, for I charged him with neglect and cruelty to thee; and he hath vowed revenge for my bold words. He hath whispered false tales to the king, he hath blighted all my hopes of rank and honor. I am banished from the land, and must leave thee and Leonore, and wander forth an outcast and alone. But – let him beware! – I shall return to take a deep revenge for thy wrongs and my own. Nay, sister, grieve not thus. I have sworn to free thee from his power, and I will keep my vow. Hope on and bear a little longer, dear Theresa, and ere long I will bear thee to a happy home [*noise is heard without*]. Ha! what is that? Who comes?

Theresa. 'Tis my lord returning from the court. Fly, Louis, fly! Thou art lost if he discover thee. Heaven bless and watch above thee. Remember poor Theresa, and farewell.

Louis. One last word of Leonore. I have never told my love, yet she hath smiled on me, and I should have won her hand. Ah, tell her this, and bid her to be true to him who in his exile will hope on, and yet return to claim the heart he hath loved so faithfully. Farewell, my sister. Despair not, – I shall return.

[Exit Louis through the secret panel; drops his dagger.]

Theresa. Thank Heaven, he is safe! – but oh, my husband, this last deed of thine is hard to bear. Poor Louis, parted from Leonore, his fair hopes blighted, all by thy cruel hand. Ah, he comes! I must be calm.

[Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. What, weeping still? Hast thou no welcome for thy lord save tears and sighs? I'll send thee to a convent if thou art not more gay!

Theresa. I'll gladly go, my lord. I am weary of the world. Its gayeties but make my heart more sad.

Rod. Nay, then I will take thee to the court, and there thou *must* be gay. But I am weary; bring me wine, and smile upon me as thou used to do. Dost hear me? Weep no more. [*Sits himself. Theresa brings wine and stands beside him. Suddenly he sees the dagger dropped by Louis.*] Ha! what is that? 'Tis none of mine. How came it hither? Answer, I command thee!

Theresa. I cannot. I must not, dare not tell thee.

Rod. Darest thou refuse to answer? Speak! Who hath dared to venture hither? Is it thy brother? As thou lovest life, I bid thee speak.

Theresa. I am innocent, and will not betray the only one now left me on the earth to love. Oh, pardon me, my lord; I will obey in all but this.

Rod. Thou *shalt* obey. I'll take thy life but I will know. Thy brother must be near, – this dagger was not here an hour ago. Thy terror hath betrayed him. I leave thee now to bid them search the castle. But if I find him not, I shall return; and if thou wilt not then confess, I'll find a way to make thee. Remember, I have vowed, – thy secret or thy life!

[Exit Rodolpho.]

Theresa. My life I freely yield thee, but my secret – never. Oh, Louis, I will gladly die to save thee. Life hath no joy for me; and in the grave this poor heart may forget the bitter sorrows it is burdened with [*sinks down weeping*].

[Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. The search is vain. He hath escaped. Theresa, rise, and answer me. To whom belonged the dagger I have found? Thy tears avail not; I will be obeyed. Kneel not to me, I will not pardon. Answer, or I swear I'll make thee dumb forever.

Theresa. No, no! I will not betray. Oh, husband, spare me! Let not the hand that led me to the altar be stained with blood I would so gladly shed for thee. I cannot answer thee.

Rod. [*striking her*]. Then die: thy constancy is useless. I will find thy brother and take a fearful vengeance yet.

Theresa. I am faithful to the last. Husband, I forgive thee.

[Theresa dies.]

Rod. 'Tis done, and I am rid of her forever; but 'tis an ugly deed. Poor fool, there was a time when I could pity thee, but thou hast stood 'twixt me and Lady Leonore, and now I am free. I must conceal the form, and none shall ever know the crime.

[Exit Rodolpho.]

[The panel opens and Norna enters.]

Norna. Heaven shield us! What is this? His cruel hand hath done the deed, and I am powerless to save. Poor, murdered lady, I had hoped to spare thee this, and lead thee to a happier home. Perchance, 'tis better so. The dead find rest, and thy sad heart can ache no more. Rest to thy soul, sweet lady. But for *thee*, thou cruel villain, I have in store a deep revenge for all thy sinful deeds. If there be power in spell or charm, I'll conjure fearful dreams upon thy head. I'll follow thee wherever thou mayst go, and haunt thy sleep with evil visions. I'll whisper strange words that shall appall

thee; dark phantoms shall rise up before thee, and wild voices ringing in thine ear shall tell thee of thy sins. By all these will I make life like a hideous dream, and death more fearful still. Like a vengeful ghost I will haunt thee to thy grave, and so revenge thy wrongs, poor, murdered lady. Beware, Rodolpho! Old Norna's curse is on thee.

[She bears away Theresa's body through the secret door, and vanishes.]

CURTAIN

NOTE TO SCENE SECOND

The mysterious cave was formed of old furniture, covered with dark draperies, an opening being left at the back wherein the spirits called up by Norna might appear. A kitchen kettle filled with steaming water made an effective caldron over which the sorceress should murmur her incantations; flaming pine-knots cast a lurid glare over the scene; and large boughs, artfully arranged about the stage, gave it the appearance of a "gloomy wood."

When Louis "retires within," he at once arrays himself in the white robes of the vision, and awaits the witch's call to rise behind the aperture in true dramatic style. He vanishes, quickly resumes his own attire, while Norna continues to weave her spells, till she sees he is ready to appear once more as the disguised Count Louis.

SCENE SECOND

[A wood. Norna's cave among the rocks. Enter Louis masked.]

Louis. Yes; 'tis the spot. How dark and still! She is not here. Ho, Norna, mighty sorceress! I seek thy aid.

Norna *[rising from the cave]*. I am here.

Louis. I seek thee, Norna, to learn tidings of one most dear to me. Dost thou know aught of Count Rodolpho's wife? A strange tale hath reached me that not many nights ago she disappeared, and none know whither she hath gone. Oh, tell me, is this true?

Norna. It is most true.

Louis. And canst thou tell me whither she hath gone? I will reward thee well.

Norna. I can. She lies within her tomb, in the chapel of the castle.

Louis. Dead! – it cannot be! They told me she had fled away with some young lord who had won her love. Was it not true?

Norna. It is false as the villain's heart who framed the tale. *I bore the murdered lady to her tomb, and laid her there.*

Louis. Murdered? How? When? By whom? Oh, tell me I beseech thee!

Norna. Her husband's cruel hand took the life he had made a burden. I heard him swear it ere he dealt the blow.

Louis. Wherefore did he kill her? Oh, answer quickly or I shall go mad with grief and hate.

Norna. I can tell thee little. From my hiding-place I heard her vow never to confess whose dagger had been found in her apartment, and her jealous lord, in his wild anger, murdered her.

Louis. 'Twas mine. Would it had been sheathed in mine own breast ere it had caused so dark a deed! Ah, Theresa, why did I leave thee to a fate like this?

Norna. Young man, grieve not; it is too late to save, but there is left to thee a better thing than grief.

Louis. Oh, what?

Norna. Revenge!

Louis. Thou art right. I'll weep no more. Give me thine aid, O mighty wizard, and I will serve thee well.

Norna. Who art thou? The poor lady's lover?

Louis. Ah, no; far nearer and far deeper was the love I bore her, for I am her brother.

Norna. Ha, that's well! Thou wilt join me, for I have made a vow to rest not till that proud, sinful lord hath well atoned for this deep crime. Spirits shall haunt him, and the darkest phantoms that my art can raise shall scare his soul. Wilt thou join me in my work?

Louis. I will, – but stay! thou hast spoken of spirits. Dread sorceress, is it in thy power to call them up?

Norna. It is. Wilt see my skill. Stand back while I call up a phantom which thou canst not doubt.

[Louis *retires within the cave*. Norna *weaves a spell above her caldron*.

Norna. O spirit, from thy quiet tomb,
I bid thee hither through the gloom,
In winding-sheet, with bloody brow,
Rise up and hear our solemn vow.
I bid thee, with my magic power,
Tell the dark secret of that hour
When cruel hands, with blood and strife,
Closed the sad dream of thy young life.
Hither – appear before our eyes.
Pale spirit, I command thee *rise*.

[*Spirit of Theresa rises*.

Shadowy spirit, I charge thee well,
By my mystic art's most potent spell,
To haunt throughout his sinful life,
The mortal who once called thee wife.
At midnight hour glide round his bed,
And lay thy pale hand on his head.
Whisper wild words in his sleeping ear,
And chill his heart with a deadly fear.
Rise at his side in his gayest hour,
And his guilty soul shall feel thy power.
Stand thou before him in day and night,
And cast o'er his life a darksome blight;
For with all his power and sin and pride,
He shall ne'er forget his murdered bride.
Pale, shadowy form, wilt thou obey?

[*The spirit bows its head*.

To thy ghostly work away – away!

[The spirit vanishes.]

The spell is o'er, the vow is won,
And, sinful heart, *thy* curse begun.

[Re-enter Louis.]

Louis. 'Tis enough! I own thy power, and by the spirit of my murdered sister I have looked upon, I swear to aid thee in thy dark work.

Norna. 'Tis well; and I will use my power to guard thee from the danger that surrounds thee. And now, farewell. Remember, – thou hast sworn.

[Exit Louis.]

CURTAIN

SCENE THIRD

[Another part of the wood. Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. They told me that old Norna's cave was 'mong these rocks, and yet I find it not. By her I hope to learn where young Count Louis is concealed. Once in my power, he shall not escape to whisper tales of evil deeds against me. Stay! some one comes. I'll ask my way.

[Enter Louis masked.]

Ho, stand, good sir. Canst guide me to the cell of Norna, the old sorceress?

Louis. It were little use to tell thee; thou wouldst only win a deeper curse than that she hath already laid upon thee.

Rod. Hold! who art thou that dare to speak thus to Count Rodolpho?

Louis. That thou canst never know; but this I tell thee: I am thy deadliest foe, and, aided by the wizard Norna, seek to work thee evil, and bring down upon thy head the fearful doom thy sin deserves. Wouldst thou know more, – then seek the witch, and learn the hate she bears thee.

Rod. Fool! thinkst thou I fear thee or thy enchantments? Draw, and defend thyself! Thou shalt pay dearly for thine insolence to me! insolence to me!

[Draws his sword.]

Louis. I will not stain my weapon with a murderer's blood. I leave thee to the fate that gathers round thee.

[Exit Louis.]

Rod. "Murderer," said he. I am betrayed, – yet no one saw the deed. Yet, stay! perchance 'twas he who bore Theresa away. He has escaped me, and will spread the tale. Nay, why should I fear? Courage! One blow, and I am safe! *[Rushes forward. Spirit of Theresa rises.]* What's that? – her deathlike face, – the wound my hand hath made! Help! help! help!

[Rushes out. The spirit vanishes.]

CURTAIN

SCENE FOURTH

[Room in the castle of Rodolpho. Rodolpho alone.]

Rod. I see no way save that. Were young Count Louis dead she would forget the love that had just begun, and by sweet words and gifts I may yet win her. The young lord must die [*a groan behind the curtain*]. Ha! what is that? 'Tis nothing; fie upon my fear! I'll banish all remembrance of the fearful shape my fancy conjured up within the forest. I'll not do the deed myself, – I have had enough of blood. Hugo the bandit: he is just the man, – bold, sure of hand, and secret. I will bribe him well, and when the deed is done, find means to rid me of him lest he should play me false. I saw him in the courtyard as I entered. Perchance he is not yet gone. Ho, without there! Bid Hugo here if he be within the castle. – He is a rough knave, but gold will make all sure.

[Enter Hugo.]

Hugo. What would my lord with me?

Rod. I ask a favor of thee. Nay, never fear, I'll pay thee well. Wouldst earn a few gold pieces?

Hugo. Ay, my lord, most gladly would I.

Rod. Nay, sit, good Hugo. Here is wine; drink, and refresh thyself.

Hugo. Thanks, my lord. How can I serve you?

[Rodolpho gives wine, Hugo sits and drinks.]

Rod. Dost thou know Count Louis, whom the king lately banished?

Hugo. Nay, my lord; I never saw him.

Rod. [*aside*]. Ha! that is well. It matters not; 'tis not of him I speak. Take more wine, good

Hugo. Listen, there is a certain lord, – one whom I hate. I seek his life. Here is gold – thou hast a dagger, and can use it well. Dost understand me?

Hugo. Ay, my lord, most clearly. Name the place and hour; count out the gold, – I and my dagger then are thine.

Rod. 'Tis well. Now harken. In the forest, near old Norna's cave, there is a quiet spot. Do thou go there to-night at sunset. Watch well, and when thou seest a tall figure wrapped in a dark cloak, and masked, spring forth, and do the deed. Then fling the body down the rocks, or hide it in some secret place. Here is one half the gold; more shall be thine when thou shalt show some token that the deed is done.

Hugo. Thanks, Count; I'll do thy bidding. At sunset in the forest, – I'll be there, and see he leaves it not alive. Good-even, then, my lord.

Rod. Hugo, use well thy dagger, and gold awaits thee. Yet, stay! I'll meet thee in the wood, and pay thee there. They might suspect if they should see thee here again so soon. I'll meet thee there, and so farewell.

Hugo. Adieu, my lord.

[Exit Hugo.]

Rod. Yes; all goes well. My rival dead, and Leonore is mine. With her I may forget the pale face that now seems ever looking into mine. I can almost think the deep wound shows in her picture yonder. But this is folly! Shame on thee, Rodolpho. I'll think of it no more. [*Turns to drink. Theresa's face appears within the picture, the wound upon her brow.*] Ha! what is that? Am I going

mad? See the eyes move, – it is Theresa's face! Nay, I will not look again. Yes, yes; 'tis there! Will this sad face haunt me forever?

Theresa. Forever! Forever!

Rod. Fiends take me, – 'tis her voice! It is no dream. Ah, let me go away – away!

[Rodolpho rushes wildly out.]

CURTAIN

NOTE TO SCENE FIFTH

The apparently impossible transformations of this scene (when played by two actors only) may be thus explained: —

The costumes of Louis and Norna, being merely loose garments, afford opportunities for rapid change; and the indulgent audience overlooking such minor matters as boots and wigs, it became an easy matter for Jo to transform herself into either of the four characters which she assumed on this occasion.

Beneath the flowing robes of the sorceress Jo was fully dressed as Count Rodolpho. Laid conveniently near were the black cloak, hat, and mask of Louis, – also the white draperies required for the ghostly Theresa.

Thus, Norna appears in long, gray robe, to which are attached the hood and elf-locks of the witch. Seeing Hugo approach she conceals herself among the trees, thus gaining time to don the costume of Louis, and appear to Hugo who awaits him.

Hugo stabs and drags him from the stage. Louis then throws off his disguise and becomes Rodolpho, fully dressed for his entrance a moment later.

As Hugo does not again appear, it is an easy matter to assume the character of the spectre and produce the sights and sounds which terrify the guilty Count; then slipping on the witch's robe, be ready to glide forth and close the scene with dramatic effect.

SCENE FIFTH

[The wood near Norna's cave. Enter Norna.]

Norna. It is the hour I bid him come with the letter for Lady Leonore. Poor youth, his sister slain, his life in danger, and the lady of his love far from him, 'tis a bitter fate. But, if old Norna loses not her power, he shall yet win his liberty, his love, and his revenge. Ah, he comes, – nay, 'tis the ruffian Hugo. I will conceal myself, – some evil is afoot [*hides among the trees*].

[Enter Hugo.]

Hugo. This is the spot. Here will I hide, and bide my time [*conceals himself among the rocks*].

[Enter Louis.]

Louis. She is not here. I'll wait awhile and think of Leonore. How will she receive this letter? Ah, could she know how, 'mid all my grief and danger, her dear face shines in my heart, and cheers me on. [*Hugo steals out, and as he turns, stabs him.*] Ha, villain, thou hast killed me! I am dying! God bless thee, Leonore! Norna, remember, vengeance on Rodolpho! [*Falls*]

Hugo. Nay, nay, thou wilt take no revenge; thy days are ended, thanks to this good steel. Now, for the token [*takes letter from Louis's hand*]. Ah, this he cannot doubt. I will take this ring too; 'tis a costly one. I'll hide the body in the thicket yonder, ere my lord arrives [*drags out the body*].

[*Enter Rodolpho.*]

Rod. Not here? Can he have failed? Here is blood – it may be his. I'll call. Hugo, good Hugo, art thou here?

Hugo [*stealing from the trees*]. Ay, my lord, I am here. All is safely done: the love-sick boy lies yonder in the thicket, dead as steel can make him. And here is the token if you doubt me, and the ring I just took from his hand [*gives letter*].

Rod. Nay, nay, I do not doubt thee; keep thou the ring. I am content with this. Tell me, did he struggle with thee when thou dealt the blow?

Hugo. Nay, my lord; he fell without a groan, and murmuring something of revenge on thee, he died. Hast thou the gold?

Rod. Yes, yes, I have it. Take it, and remember I can take thy life as easily as thou hast his, if thou shouldst whisper what hath been this day done. Now go; I've done with thee.

Hugo. And I with thee. Adieu, my lord.

[*Exit Hugo.*]

Rod. Now am I safe, – no mortal knows of Theresa's death by my hand, and Leonore is mine. Voice [*within the wood*]. Never – never!

Rod. Curses on me! Am I bewitched? Surely, I heard a voice; perchance 'twas but an echo [*a wild laugh rings through the trees*]. Fiends take the wood! I'll stay no longer! [*Turns to fly. Theresa's spirit rises.*] 'Tis there, – help, help – [*Rushes wildly out.*]

[*Enter Norna.*]

Norna. Ha, ha! fiends shall haunt thee, thou murderer! Another sin upon thy soul, – another life to be avenged! Poor, murdered youth, now gone to join thy sister. I will lay thee by her side and then to my work. He hath raised another ghost to haunt him. Let him beware!

[*Exit Norna.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE SIXTH

[*Chamber in the castle of Lady Leonore. Enter Leonore.*]

Leonore. Ah, how wearily the days go by. No tidings of Count Louis, and Count Rodolpho urges on his suit so earnestly. I must accept his hand to-day, or refuse his love, and think no more of Louis. I know not how to choose. Rodolpho loves me: I am an orphan and alone, and in his lovely home I may be happy. I have heard it whispered that he is both stern and cruel, yet methinks it cannot be, – he is so tender when with me. Ah, would I could forget Count Louis! He hath never told his love, and doubtless thinks no more of her who treasures up his gentle words, and cannot banish them, even when another offers a heart and home few would refuse. How shall I answer Count Rodolpho when he comes? I do not love him as I should, and yet it were no hard task to learn with so fond a teacher. Shall I accept his love, or shall I reject?

[*Norna suddenly appears.*]

Norna. Reject.

Leonore. Who art thou? Leave me, or I call for aid.

Norna. Nay, lady, fear not. I come not here to harm thee, but to save thee from a fate far worse than death. I am old Norna of the forest, and though they call me witch and sorceress, I am a woman yet, and with a heart to pity and to love. I would save thy youth and beauty from the blight I fear will fall upon thee.

Leonore. Save me! from what? How knowest thou I am in danger; and from what wouldst thou save me, Norna?

Norna. From Lord Rodolpho, lady.

Leonore. Ah! and why from him? Tell on, I'll listen to thee now. He hath offered me his heart and hand. Why should I not accept them, Norna?

Norna. That heart is filled with dark and evil passions, and that hand is stained with blood. Ay, lady, well mayst thou start. I will tell thee more. The splendid home he would lead thee to is darkened by a fearful crime, and his fair palace haunted by the spirit of a murdered wife.

[Leonore starts up.]

Leonore. Wife, sayest thou? He told me he was never wed. Mysterious woman, tell me more! How dost thou know 'tis true, and wherefore was it done? I have a right to know. Oh, speak, and tell me all!

Norna. For that have I come hither. He hath been wed to a lady, young and lovely as thyself. He kept her prisoner in his splendid home, and by neglect and cruelty he broke as warm and true a heart as ever beat in woman's breast. Her brother stole unseen to cheer and comfort her, and this aroused her lord's suspicions, and he bid her to confess who was her unknown friend. She would not yield her brother to his hate, and he in his wild anger murdered her. I heard his cruel words, her prayers for mercy, and I stood beside the lifeless form and marked the blow his evil hand had given her. And there I vowed I would avenge the deed, and for this have I come hither to warn thee of thy danger. He loves thee only for thy wealth, and when thou art his, will wrong thee as he hath the meek Theresa.

Leonore. How shall I ever thank thee for this escape from sorrow and despair? I did not love him, but I am alone, and his kind words were sweet and tender. I thought with him I might be happy yet, but – Ah, how little did I dream of sin like this! Thank Heaven, 'tis not too late!

Norna. How wilt thou answer Lord Rodolpho now?

Leonore. I will answer him with all the scorn and loathing that I feel. I fear him not, and he shall learn how his false vows are despised, and his sins made known.

Norna. 'Tis well; but stay, – be thou not too proud. Speak fairly, and reject him courteously; for he will stop at nought in his revenge if thou but rouse his hatred. And now, farewell. I'll watch above thee, and in thy hour of danger old Norna will be nigh. Stay, give me some token, by which thou wilt know the messenger I may find cause to send thee. The fierce Count will seek to win thee, and repay thy scorn by all the evil his cruel heart can bring.

Leonore. Take this ring, and I will trust whoever thou mayst send with it. I owe thee much, and, believe me, I am grateful for thy care, and will repay thee by my confidence and truth. Farewell, old Norna; watch thou above the helpless, and thine old age shall be made happy by my care.

Norna. Heaven bless thee, gentle lady. Good angels guard thee. Norna will not forget.

[Exit Norna.]

Leonore. 'Tis like a dream, so strange, so terrible, – he whom I thought so gentle, and so true is stained with fearful crimes! Poor, murdered lady! Have I escaped a fate like thine? Ah, I hear his step! Now, heart, be firm and he shall enter here no more.

[Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. Sweet lady, I am here to learn my fate. I have told my love, and thou hast listened; I have asked thy hand, and thou hast not refused it. I have offered all that I possess, – my home, my heart. Again I lay them at thy feet, beloved Leonore. Oh, wilt thou but accept them, poor tho' they be, and in return let me but claim this fair hand as mine own?

[Takes her hand and kneels before her.]

Leonore *[withdrawing her hand]*. My lord, forgive me, but I cannot grant it. When last we met thou didst bid me ask my heart if it could love thee. It hath answered, "Nay." I grieve I cannot make a fit return for all you offer, but I have no love to give, and without it this poor hand were worthless. There are others far more fit to grace thy home than I. Go, win thyself a loving bride, and so forget Leonore.

Rod. What hath changed thee thus since last we met. Then wert thou kind, and listened gladly to my love. Now there is a scornful smile upon thy lips, and a proud light in thine eye. What means this? Why dost thou look so coldly on me, Leonore? Who has whispered false tales in thine ear? Believe them not. I am as true as Heaven to thee; then do not cast away the heart so truly thine. Smile on me, dearest; thou art my first, last, only love.

Leonore. 'Tis false, my lord! Hast thou so soon forgot *Theresa*?

Rod. What! Who told thee that accursed tale? What dost thou mean, Leonore?

Leonore. I mean thy sinful deeds are known. Thou hast asked me why I will not wed thee, and I answer, I will not give my hand unto a murderer.

Rod. Murderer! No more of this! Thy tale is false; forget it, and I will forgive the idle words. Now listen; I came hither to receive thy answer to my suit. Think ere thou decide. Thou art an orphan, unprotected and alone. I am powerful and great. Wilt thou take my love, and with it honor, wealth, happiness, and ease, or my hate, which will surely follow thee and bring down desolation on thee and all thou lovest? Now choose, my hatred, or my love.

Leonore. My lord, I scorn thy love, and I defy thy hate. Work thy will, I fear thee not. I am not so unprotected as thou thinkest. There are unseen friends around me who will save in every peril, and who are sworn to take revenge on thee for thy great sins. This is my answer; henceforth we are strangers; now leave me. I would be alone.

Rod. Not yet, proud lady. If thou wilt not love, I'll make thee learn to fear the heart thou hast so scornfully cast away. Let thy friends guard thee well; thou wilt need their care when I begin my work of vengeance. Thou mayst smile, but thou shalt rue the day when Count Rodolpho asked and was refused. But I will yet win thee, and then beware! And when thou dost pray for mercy on thy knees, remember the haughty words thou hast this day spoken.

Leonore. Do thy worst, murderer; spirits will watch above me, and thou canst not harm. Adieu, my lord.

[Exit Leonore.]

Rod. Foiled again! Some demon works against me. Who could have told her of *Theresa*? A little longer, and I should have won a rich young bride, and now this tale of murder mars it all. But I will win her yet, and wring her proud heart till she shall bend her haughty head and sue for mercy.

How shall it be done? Stay! Ha, I see a way! – the letter *Louis* would have sent her ere he died. She knows not of his death, and I will send this paper bidding her to meet her lover in the forest. She cannot doubt the lines his own hand traced. She will obey, – and I'll be there to lead her to my castle. I'll wed her, and she may scorn, weep, and pray in vain. Ha, ha! proud Leonore, spite of thy guardian spirits thou shalt be mine, and then for my revenge!

[Exit Rodolpho.]

CURTAIN

SCENE SEVENTH

[Leonore's room. Enter Leonore with a letter.]

Leonore. 'Tis strange; an unknown page thrust this into my hand while kneeling in the chapel. Ah, surely, I should know this hand! 'Tis Louis's, and at last he hath returned, and still remembers Leonore [*opens letter and reads*].

Dearest Lady, – I am banished from the land by Count Rodolpho's false tales to the king; and thus I dare not venture near thee. But by the love my lips have never told, I do conjure thee to bestow one last look, last word, on him whose cruel fate it is to leave all that he most fondly loves. If thou wilt grant this prayer, meet me at twilight in the glen beside old Norna's cave. She will be there to guard thee. Dearest Leonore, before we part, perchance forever, grant this last boon to one who in banishment, in grief and peril, is forever thy devoted
Louis.

He loves me, and mid danger still remembers. Ah, Louis, there is nothing thou canst ask I will not gladly grant. I'll go; the sun is well-nigh set, and I can steal away unseen to whisper hope and comfort ere we part forever. Now, Count Rodolpho, thou hast given me another cause for hate. Louis, I can love thee tho' thou art banished and afar.

Hark! 'tis the vesper-bell. Now, courage, heart, and thou shalt mourn no longer.

[Exit Leonore.]

CURTAIN

SCENE EIGHTH

[Glen near Norna's cave. Enter Leonore.]

Leonore. Norna is not here, nor Louis. Why comes he not? Surely 'tis the place. Norna! Louis! art thou here?

[Enter Rodolpho, masked.]

Rod. I am here, dear lady. Do not fear me; I may not unmask even to thee, for spies may still be near me. Wilt thou pardon, and still trust me tho' thou canst not see how fondly I am looking on thee. See! here is my ring, my dagger. Oh, Leonore, do not doubt me!

Leonore. I do trust thee; canst thou doubt it now? Oh, Louis! I feared thou wert dead. Why didst thou not tell me all before. And where wilt thou go, and how can I best serve thee? Nought thou canst ask my love shall leave undone.

Rod. Wilt thou let me guide thee to yonder tower? I fear to tell thee here, and old Norna is there waiting for thee. Come, love, for thy Louis's sake, dare yet a little more, and I will tell thee how thou canst serve me. Wilt thou not put thy faith in me, Leonore?

Leonore. I will. Forgive me, if I seem to fear thee; but thy voice sounds strangely hollow, and thine eyes look darkly on me from behind this mask. Thou wilt lay it by when we are safe, and then I shall forget this foolish fear that hangs upon me.

Rod. Thine own hands shall remove it, love. Come, it is not far. Would I might guide thee thus through life! Come, dearest!

[Exit.]

CURTAIN

SCENE NINTH

[Castle of Rodolpho. The haunted chamber. Enter Rodolpho leading Leonore.]

Leonore. Where art thou leading me, dear Louis? Thy hiding-place is a pleasant one, but where is Norna? I thought she waited for us.

Rod. She will soon be here. Ah, how can I thank thee for this joyful hour, Leonore. I can forget all danger and all sorrow now.

Leonore. Nay, let me cast away this mournful mask! I long to look upon thy face once more. Wilt thou let me, Louis?

Rod. Ay, look upon me if thou wilt; – dost like it, lady? *[Drops his disguise. Leonore shrieks, and rushes to the door, but finds it locked.]* 'Tis useless; there are none to answer to thy call. All here are my slaves, and none dare disobey. Where are thy proud words now? hast thou no scornful smile for those white lips, no anger in those beseeching eyes? Where are thy friends? Why come they not to aid thee? Said I not truly my revenge was sure?

Leonore. Oh, pardon me, and pity! See, I will kneel to thee, pray, weep, if thou wilt only let me go. Forgive my careless words! Oh, Count Rodolpho, take me home, and I will forget this cruel jest *[kneels]*.

Rod. Ha, ha! It is no jest, and thou hast no home but this. Didst thou not come willingly? I used no force; and all disguise is fair in love. Nay, kneel not to me. Did I not say thou wouldst bend thy proud head, and sue for mercy, and I would deny it? Where is thy defiance now?

Leonore *[rising]*. I'll kneel no more to thee. The first wild fear is past, and thou shalt find me at thy feet no more. As I told thee *then*, I tell thee *now*, – thine I will never be; and think not I will fail or falter at thy threats. Contempt of thee is too strong for fear.

Rod. Not conquered yet. Time will teach thee to speak more courteously to thy master. Ah, thou mayst well look upon these bawbles. They were thy lover's once. This ring was taken from his lifeless hand; this dagger from his bleeding breast, as he lay within the forest whence I led thee. This scroll I found next his heart when it had ceased to beat. I lured thee hither with it, and won my sweet revenge. *[Leonore sinks down weeping.]* Now rest thee; for when the castle clock strikes ten, I shall come to lead thee to the altar. The priest is there, – this ring shall wed thee. Farewell, fair bride; remember, – there is no escape, and thou art mine forever.

Leonore *[starting up]*. Never! I shall be free when thou mayst think help past forever. There is a friend to help me, and an arm to save, when earthly aid is lost. Thine I shall never be! Thou mayst seek me; I shall be gone.

Rod. Thou wilt need thy prayers. I shall return, – remember, when the clock strikes ten, I come to win my bride.

[Exit.]

Leonore. He has gone, and now a few short hours of life are left to me; for if no other help shall come, death can save me from a fate I loathe. Ah, Louis, Louis, thou art gone forever! Norna, where is thy promise now to guard me? Is there no help? Nor tears nor prayers can melt that cruel heart, and I am in his power. Ha! what is that? —*his dagger*, taken from his dying breast. How gladly would he have drawn it forth to save his poor Leonore! Alas, that hand is cold forever! But I must be calm. He shall see how a weak woman's heart can still defy him, and win liberty by death [*takes the dagger; clock strikes ten*]. It is the hour, — the knell of my young life. Hark! they come. Louis, thy Leonore ere long will join thee, never more to part.

[The secret panel opens. Adrian enters masked.]

Adrian. Stay, lady! stay thy hand! I come to save thee. Norna sends me, — see, thy token; doubt not, nor delay; another moment, we are lost. Oh, fly, I do beseech thee!

Leonore. Heaven bless thee; I will come. Kind friend, I put a helpless maiden's trust in thee.

Adrian. Stay not! away, away!

[Exit through the secret panel, which disappears. Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. Is my fair bride ready? Ha! Leonore, where art thou?

Voice. Gone, — gone forever!

Rod. Girl, mock me not; come forth, I say. Thou shalt not escape me. Leonore, answer! Where is my bride?

Voice [*behind the curtains*]. Here —

Rod. Why do I fear? She is there concealed [*lifts the curtain; spirit of Theresa rises*]. The fiends! what is that? The spirit haunts me still!

Voice. Forever, forever —

Rod. [*rushes to the door but finds it locked*]. What ho! without there! Beat down the door! Pedro! Carlos! let me come forth! They do not come! Nay, 'tis my fancy; I will forget it all. Still, the door is fast; Leonore is gone. *Who* groans so bitterly? Wild voices are sounding in the air, ghastly faces are looking on me as I turn, unseen hands bar the door, and dead men are groaning in mine ears. I'll not look, not listen; 'tis some spell set on me. Let it pass!

[Throws himself down and covers his face.]

Voice. The spell will not cease,
The curse will not fly,
And spirits shall haunt
Till the murderer shall die.

Rod. Again, spirit or demon, wherefore dost thou haunt me, and what art thou? [*Theresa's spirit rises.*] Ha! am I gone mad? Unbar the door! Help! help! [*Falls fainting to the floor.*]

[Enter Norna.]

Norna. Lie there, thou sinful wretch! Old Norna's curse ends but with thy life.

[Tableau.]

CURTAIN

SCENE TENTH

[A room in the castle of Rodolpho. Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. Dangers seem thickening round me. Some secret spy is watching me unseen, – I fear 'tis Hugo, spite the gold I gave him, and the vows he made. A higher bribe may win the secret from him, and then I am undone. Pedro hath told me that a stranger, cloaked and masked, was lurking near the castle on the night when Leonore so strangely vanished [*a laugh*]. Ha! – what's that? – methought I heard that mocking laugh again! I am grown fearful as a child since that most awful night. Well, well, let it pass! If Hugo comes to-night, obedient to the message I have sent, I'll see he goes not hence alive. This cup shalt be thy last, good Hugo! [*Puts poison in the wine-cup.*] He comes, – now for my revenge! [*Enter Hugo.*] Ah, Hugo, welcome! How hath it fared with thee since last we met? Thou lookest weary, – here is wine; sit and refresh thyself.

Hugo. I came not hither, Count Rodolpho, to seek wine, but gold. Hark ye! I am poor; thou art rich, but in my power, for proud and noble though thou art, the low-born Hugo can bring death and dishonor on thy head by whispering one word to the king. Ha! – now give me gold or I will betray thee.

Rod. Thou bold villain, what means this? I paid thee well, and thou didst vow to keep my secret. Threaten me not. Thou art in my power, and shall never leave this room alive. I fear thee not. My menials are at hand, – yield thyself; thou art fairly caught, and cannot now escape me.

Hugo. Nay, not so fast, my lord. One blast upon my horn, and my brave band, concealed below, will answer to my call. Ha! ha! thou art caught, my lord. Thy life is in my hands, and thou must purchase it by fifty good pistoles paid down to me; if not, I will charge thee with the crime thou didst bribe me to perform, and thus win a rich reward. Choose, – thy life is nought to me.

Rod. Do but listen, Hugo. I have no gold; smile if thou wilt, but I am poor. This castle only is mine own, and I am seeking now a rich young bride whose wealth will hide my poverty. Be just, good Hugo, and forgive the harsh words I have spoken. Wait till I am wed, and I will pay thee well.

Hugo. That will I not. I'll have no more of thee, false lord! The king will well reward me, and thou mayst keep thy gold. Farewell! Thou wilt see me once again.

Rod. Stay, Hugo, stay! Give me but time; I may obtain the gold. Wait a little, and it shall be thine. Wilt thou not drink? 'Tis the wine thou likest so well. See! I poured it ready for thee.

Hugo. Nay; I will serve myself. Wine of thy mixing would prove too strong for me [*sits down and drinks. Rodolpho paces up and down waiting a chance to stab him*]. Think quickly, my good lord; I must be gone [*turns his head. R. raises his dagger. Hugo rising*]. I'll wait no more; 'tis growing late, and I care not to meet the spirits which I hear now haunt thy castle. Well, hast thou the gold?

Rod. Not yet; but if thou wilt wait —

Hugo. I tell thee I will not. I'll be deceived no longer. Thou art mine, and I'll repay thy scornful words and sinful deeds by a prisoner's cell. And so, adieu, my lord. Escape is useless, for thou wilt be watched. Hugo is the master now!

[Exit Hugo.]

Rod. Thou cunning villain, I'll outwit thee yet. I will disguise myself, and watch thee well, and when least thou thinkest it, my dagger shall be at thy breast. And now one thing remains to me, and that is flight. I must leave all and go forth poor, dishonored, and alone; sin on my head, and fear within my heart. Will the sun never set? How slow the hours pass! In the first gloom of

night, concealed in yonder old monk's robe, I'll silently glide forth, and fly from Hugo and this haunted house. Courage, Rodolpho, thou shalt yet win a name and fortune for thyself. Now let me rest awhile; I shall need strength for the perils of the night [*lies down and sleeps*].

[Enter Norna.]

Norna. Poor fool! thy greatest foe is here, – her thou shalt not escape. Hugo shall be warned, and thou alone shalt fall.

[She makes signs from the window and vanishes.]

Rod. [*awakes and rises*]. Ah, what fearful dreams are mine! Theresa – Louis – still they haunt me! Whither shall I turn? Who comes? [*Enter Gaspard.*] Art thou another phantom sent to torture me?

Gasp. 'Tis I, leader of the king's brave guards, sent hither to arrest thee, my lord; for thou art charged with murder.

Rod. Who dares to cast so foul a stain on Count Rodolpho's name.

Gasp. My lord, yield thyself. The king may show thee mercy yet —

Rod. I will yield, and prove my innocence, and clear mine honor to the king. Reach me my cloak yonder, and I am ready.

[Gaspard turns to seek the cloak. Rodolpho leaps from the window and disappears.]

Gasp. Ha! he hath escaped, – curses on my carelessness! [*Rushes to the window.*] Ho, there! surround the castle, the prisoner hath fled! We'll have him yet, the blood-stained villain!

[Exit Gaspard. Shouts and clashing of swords heard.]

CURTAIN

SCENE ELEVENTH

[Norna's cave. Leonore and Adrian.]

Adrian. Dear lady, can I do nought to while away the lonely hours? Shall I go forth and bring thee flowers, or seek thy home and bear away thy bird, thy lute, or aught that may beguile thy solitude? It grieves me that I can do so little for thee.

Leonore. Nay, 'tis I should grieve that I can find no way to show my gratitude to thee, my brave deliverer. But wilt thou not tell me who thou art? I would fain know to whom I owe my life and liberty.

Adrian. Nay, that I may not tell thee. I have sworn a solemn vow, and till that is fulfilled I may not cast aside this sorrowful disguise. Meanwhile, thou mayst call me Adrian. Wilt thou pardon and trust me still?

Leonore. Canst thou doubt my faith in thee? Thou and old Norna are the only friends now left to poor Leonore. I put my whole heart's trust in thee. But if thou canst not tell me of thyself, wilt tell me why thou hast done so much for me, a friendless maiden?

Adrian. I fear it will cause thee sorrow, lady; and thou hast grief enough to bear.

Leonore. Do not fear. I would so gladly know —

Adrian. Forgive me if I make thee weep: I had a friend, – most dear to me. He loved a gentle lady, but ere he could tell her this, he died, and bid me vow to watch above her whom he loved, and guard her with my life. I took the vow: that lady was thyself, that friend Count Louis.

Leonore. Ah, Louis! Louis! that heart thou feared to ask is buried with thee.

Adrian. Thou didst love him, lady?

Leonore. Love him? Most gladly would I lie down within my grave tonight, could I but call him back to life again.

Adrian. Grieve not; thou hast one friend who cannot change, – one who through joy and sorrow will find his truest happiness in serving thee. Hist! I hear a step: I will see who comes.

[Exit Adrian.]

Leonore. Kind, watchful friend, how truly do I trust thee!

[Re-enter Adrian.]

Adrian. Conceal thyself, dear lady, with all speed. 'Tis Count Rodolpho. Let me lead thee to the inner cave, – there thou wilt be safe.

[They retire within; noise heard without. Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. At last I am safe. Old Norna will conceal me till I can find means to leave the land. Ha! – voices within there. Ho, there! old wizard, hither! I have need of thee!

[Enter Adrian.]

Adrian. What wouldst thou?

Rod. Nought. Get thee hence! I seek old Norna.

Adrian. Thou canst not see her; she is not here.

Rod. Not here? 'Tis false, – I heard a woman's voice within there. Let me pass!

Adrian. 'Tis not old Norna, and thou canst not pass.

Rod. Ah, then, who might it be, my most mysterious sir?

Adrian. The Lady Leonore.

Rod. Ha! – how came she hither? By my soul, thou liest! Stand back and let me go. She is mine!

Adrian. Thou canst only enter here above my lifeless body. Leonore is here, and I am her protector and thy deadliest foe. 'Tis for thee to yield and leave this cell.

Rod. No more of this, – thou hast escaped me once. Draw and defend thyself, if thou hast courage to meet a brave man's sword!

Adrian. But for Leonore I would not stoop so low, or stain my sword; but for her sake I'll dare all, and fight thee to the last.

[They fight their way out. Enter Rodolpho.]

Rod. At length fate smiles upon me. I am the victor, – and now for Leonore! All danger is forgotten in the joy of winning my revenge on this proud girl! Thou art mine at last, Leonore, and mine forever! *[Rushes towards the inner cave. Spirit of Theresa rises.]* There 'tis again! I will not fly, – I do defy it! *[Attempts to pass. Spirit touches him; he drops his sword and rushes wildly away.]* 'Tis vain: I cannot – dare not pass. It comes, it follows me. Whither shall I fly?

[Exit. Enter Adrian wounded.]

Adrian. I have saved her once again, – but oh, this deathlike faintness stealing o'er me robs me of my strength. Thou art safe, Leonore, and I am content. *[Falls fainting.]*

[Enter Leonore.]

Leonore. They are gone. Ah, what has chanced? I heard his voice, and now 'tis still as death. Where is my friend? God grant he be not hurt! I'll venture forth and seek him *[sees Adrian unconscious before her]*. Oh, what is this? Adrian, kind friend, dost thou not hear me? There is blood upon his hand! Can he be dead? No, no! he breathes, he moves; this mask, I will remove it, – surely he will forgive.

[Attempts to unmask him; he prevents her.]

Adrian [*reviving*]. Nay, nay; it must not be. I am better now. The blow but stunned me, – it will pass away. And thou art safe?

Leonore. I feared not for myself, but thee. Come, rest thee here, thy wound is bleeding; let me bind it with my kerchief, and bring thee wine. Let me serve thee who hath done so much for me. Art better now! Can I do aught else for thee?

Adrian. No more, dear lady. Think not of me, and listen while I tell thee of the dangers that surround thee. Count Rodolpho knows thou art here, and may return with men and arms to force thee hence. My single arm could then avail not, though I would gladly die for thee. Where then can I lead thee, – no place can be too distant, no task too hard for him whose joy it is to serve thee.

Leonore. Alas! I know not. I dare not seek my home while Count Rodolpho is my foe; my servants would be bribed, – they would betray me, and thou wouldst not be there to save. Adrian, I have no friend but thee. Oh, pity and protect me!

Adrian. Most gladly will I, dearest lady. Thou canst never know the joy thy confidence hath wakened in my heart. I will save and guard thee with my life. I will guide thee to a peaceful home where no danger can approach, and only friends surround thee. Thy Louis dwelt there once, and safely mayst thou rest till danger shall be past. Will this please thee?

Leonore. Oh, Adrian, thou kind, true friend, how can I tell my gratitude, and where find truer rest than in *his* home, where gentle memories of him will lighten grief. Then take me there, and I will prove my gratitude by woman's fondest friendship, and my life-long trust.

Adrian. Thanks, dear lady. I need no other recompense than the joy 'tis in my power to give thee. I will watch faithfully above thee, and when thou needest me no more, I'll leave thee to the happiness thy gentle heart so well deserves. Now rest, while I seek out old Norna, and prepare all for our flight. The way we have to tread is long and weary. Rest thee, dear lady.

Leonore. Adieu, dear friend. I will await thee ready for our pilgrimage, and think not I shall fail or falter, though the path be long, and dangers gather round us. I shall not fear, for thou wilt be there. God bless thee, Adrian.

[Tableau.

CURTAIN

SCENE TWELFTH

[Room in the castle of Louis. Leonore singing to her lute.]

The weary bird mid stormy skies,
Flies home to her quiet nest,
And 'mid the faithful ones she loves,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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