

The Bride of Lindorf

By Letitia E. Landon

Midnight is a wonderful thing in a vast city—and midnight was upon Vienna. The shops were closed, the windows darkened, and the streets deserted—strange that where so much of life was gathered together there could be such deep repose; yet nothing equals the stillness of a great town at night. Perhaps it is the contrast afforded by memory that makes this appear yet more profound. In the lone valley, and in the green forest, there is quiet even at noon—quiet, at least, broken by sounds belonging alike to day and night. The singing of the bee and the bird, or the voice of the herdsman carolling some old song of the hills—these may be hushed; but there is still the rustle of the leaves, the wind murmuring in the long grass, and the low perpetual whisper of the pine. But in the town—the brick and mortar have no voices of their own. Nature is silent—her soft, sweet harmonies are hushed in the great human tumult—man, and man only, is heard. Through many hours of the twenty-four, the ocean of existence rolls on with a sound like thunder—a thousand voices speak at once. The wheels pass and re-pass over the stones—music, laughter, anger, the words of courtesy and of business, mingle together—the history of a day is the history of all time. The annals of life but repeat themselves. Vain hopes, vainer fears, feverish pleasure, passionate sorrow, crime, despair, and death—these make up the eternal records of Time's dark chronicle. But this hurried life has its pauses—once in the twenty-four come a few hours of rest and silence.

Vienna was now still as the grave, whose darkness hung over a few lamps swung dimly to and fro, and a few dark shadows—which the crimes of men make needful. The weary watchers of the night paced with slow and noiseless steps the gloomy streets. God knows that many of those hushed and darkened houses might have many a scene of waking care within—many a pillow might be but a place of unrest for the aching head—still the outward seeming of all was repose.

One house, and one only, obeyed not the general law. It was a magnificent hotel in the largest square, and was obviously the scene of a splendid fête. Light and music streamed from the windows, the courtyard was filled with equipages, and a noisy crowd—part servants, part spectators—thronged the gates. Within, all was pomp and gaiety. The Countess von Hermanstadt was unrivalled in her fetes. She knew how to give them—a knowledge very few possess. The generality labour under the delusion, that when they have lighted and filled their rooms, they have done their all. They never were more in error. Lighting is much—crowding is much also—but there lacks 'something more exquisite still.' This something the countess possessed in its perfection. Any can assemble a crowd, but few can make it mingle. But Madame von Hermanstadt had a skill which a diplomatist might have studied. She saw—she heard everything; she knew who would and who would not understand each other; she caught at a glance the best position for one lady's velvets, and for the diamonds of another; she never interrupted those who were engaged—she never neglected those who were not; she took care that great people should be amused, and little people astonished. Moreover, she had an object in whatever she did—hence the incentive of interest was added to the pride of art.

The ball of to-night was given in honour of Pauline von Lindorf, her niece, who had just left the convent of St Therese;—her education, as it is called, completed—that education which is but begun. How many cares—how much sorrow will it take to give the stern and bitter education of actual life! Pauline had just finished a waltz, having pleaded fatigue sooner than might have

been expected from a foot so light—a form so fairy-like. She wore a robe of white satin, trimmed with swansdown; large pearls looped back the folds, and a band of diamonds scarcely restrained the bright hair that fell over her neck and shoulders in a thousand natural ringlets. It was of that rare rich golden so seldom seen—almost transparent, like rain with the sunbeams shining through it. At the first glance, that slight and graceful girl—with the rose on her cheek a little flushed by exercise, her glittering curls falling round her, golden as those of Hope—might have seemed the very ideal of youth and pleasure;—so much for the first glance, and how few go beyond! But whoso had looked closer would have seen that the soft red on the cheek was feverish; and there was that tremulous motion of the lip which bespeaks a heart ill at ease. At first she was looking down, and the long shadow of the curled eyelash rested on the rounded cheek; but there was something in the expression of the eyes, when raised, that caught even the most careless passer-by. They were large—unusually large—and of that violet blue which so rarely outlasts the age of childhood, while they wore that wild and melancholy look whose shadows have a character of fate;— they are omens of the heart.

It was growing late, and a furtive gaze of the young baroness wandered more and more frequent round the rooms, and each time sought the ground with a deeper shade of disappointment. The Countess von Hermanstadt observed the look, and her own haughty brow curved with a scarcely perceptible frown. It was smoothed away instantly; and passing with a bland smile through the assembled groups, she left the ball-room.

The upper part of the magnificent house was in darkness, but in one window burned a still and lonely lamp. It lighted a small chamber sufficiently removed from the scene of the festival to be quite undisturbed by its tumult, though a distant sound of music floated in, ever and anon, at the open window. The chamber was panelled with old carved oak, and the arches thus formed were filled with books. Books, too, of all sizes, were piled on the ground, and papers and writing materials covered a table in the middle. There were also some pictures: a sombre landscape of Salvator Rosa—just a desolate rock, grey and barren, standing out amid old dark trees, where many a branch was bare with the lightning's fiery visitings. Beneath them stood a single figure—pale, bareheaded, with long black hair that had not yet lost the motion of the wind. He looked what he was—an outlaw; the blood which he had shed, yet warm upon his hand, and his foot yet quivering with its flight for life or death. Near this was a dark, grave portrait by Velasquez: one of those faces whereon time has written the lesson of the prophet king—'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Others were scattered round, but all more or less of a sombre character, and marking the taste of their possessor. He was a young man of some twenty-two years of age. The richness of part of his costume ill suited the apparently studious recluse; but the task of dressing had been hastily suspended. He had flung a loose robe of sables around him, and leaned back in a large arm-chair, thinking of anything but the festival for which he had begun to prepare. His eye sometimes dwelt on an old history of chivalry, whose silver clasps lay open before him—sometimes on the last sparks of the fire that was dying away on the hearth, but oftener on a copy of a well known Italian picture, the portrait of Beatrice Cenci.

'Yes,' said he, half aloud, 'a few links bring all life before us: here is adventure—excitement—the toil and the triumph of the body. I wish I had been born in those stirring times— life spent half on horseback, half at the banquet board—when you had but to look round the tournament, fix on the brightest smile, and then win your lady with your sword. Action— action in the sunshine—passion—but little feeling, and less thought: such was meant to be our existence. But we refine—we sadden and we subdue—we call up the hidden and evil spirits of the inner world—we wake from their dark repose those who will madden us. The heart is like the wood on yonder

flickering hearth: green and fresh, haunted by a thousand sweet odours, bathed in the warm air, and gladdened by the summer sunshine—so grew it at first upon its native soil. But nature submitteeth to art, and man has appointed for it another destiny; it is gathered, and cast into the fire. It seems, then, as if its life had but just begun. A new spirit has crept into the kindled veins—a brilliant light dances around it—it is bright—it is beautiful—and it is consumed! What remains?—A warmth on the atmosphere soon passing away, and a heap of blackened ashes! What more will remain of the heart?’

At this moment a burst of sudden flame sprung up from the mouldering embers, and fell with singular effect on the wan and lovely likeness of Beatrice Cenci. ‘Why does that face haunt me?’ exclaimed the youth. ‘Why, when others younger and brighter are near, does it glide between them and me like a shadow? I remember finding it as a child in the old deserted gallery. I loved it then, I know not why—save that it brought to my memory a face I fancy watched my sleep when I was a little child. I recollect a large, dark room—a bed whose gloomy curtains were drawn aside—and some one bent over me and kissed me. I put my arms around her neck, and went to sleep, for I had been afraid. She came every night then; but my memory is faint and confused—I can recall nothing more. How beautiful is that picture, with its clear, colourless cheek—with the imperial brow, and the large black eyes filled with melancholy tenderness! Holy Madonna, what a destiny was hers!—A childhood whose sweetest affections were crushed! I can fancy the little pale trembler crouching beneath her angry father’s fierce eyes; and at last, as if those soft eyes grew desperate gazing on their slain, who shall say what madness of despair led to the fearful crime—avenging one yet more fearful? Why do I keep it here? It makes me sad—too sad!’ And he turned aside, and leant his head upon his hand.

Ernest, for such was the young student’s name, was singularly handsome; but it was the heart and the mind that gave their own nameless charm. The heart sent the flushed crimson to the cheek—the mind lighted up the clear white forehead, around which darkened the blackest hair: that deep black hair whose comparisons are all so gloomy, the poet likens it to midnight—to the shadow of the grave—to the tempest—to the raven’s wing. Brought from the south, our cold climes just serve to dash the passionate temperament which it indicates with the despondency and the reverie of our sad and misty skies. All women would have called him interesting—the woman who loved him would have called him beautiful. Had the word fascinating never been used before, it would have been invented for him. Like all of his susceptible organization, Ernest was very variable: sometimes the life of society, with every second word an epigram; at others, grave and absorbed—no stimulus, no flattery, could rouse him to animation. His intimate, his very few intimate friends, said that nothing could exceed his eloquence in graver converse: carried away by his feelings, how could he help being eloquent? He was made of all nature’s most dangerous ingredients: he thought deeply—he felt acutely; and for such this world has neither resting-place nor contentment.

The door of Ernest’s chamber suddenly opened, and its threshold was crossed by a step that certainly had never crossed it before. Stately and slow, as usual, the Countess von Hermanstadt just raised her robe with an air of utter disdain, as she swept by the heavy folios that lay scattered on the ground.

‘What! not dressed yet, Ernest?—Certainly the Count von Hermanstadt is well employed, sitting there like a moonstruck dreamer. Pray, am I to have the distinguished honour of a poet or a painter, or,’—added she, pointing sneeringly to a volume of planetary signs that lay open at her feet—‘or even an astrologer, as my son?’

Ernest coloured, and rose hastily from his seat. 'I do so hate,' said he, 'those crowds where no one cares for the other; where'— 'No one,' interrupted the Countess, 'can be so great a simpleton as yourself. Who, in a crowd or elsewhere, will care about one whom they never see? What friends will you ever make in this little, miserable room? The Archduke Charles has twice inquired after you. I managed as well as I could; but I really have something else to do to-night than just to make excuses for you.'

'Ah! my mother, you cannot think how unfitted I am for the mock gaiety of to-night. Let me stay where I am.'

'Nonsense!—Why, there has been your pretty cousin waiting, till I forbade it, to dance with you. I left her waltzing with Prince Louis.'

'The less need of me.'

'Nay, my dear child!' said his mother, in those caressing tones she well knew how to assume, 'think what a slight it will be to our guests if you do not appear; and so many old friends of our house among them. I want assistance. Come, Ernest, would you be the only son in Vienna who would refuse his mother the slight favour of appearing at a ball which is given to introduce him to old friends, whom she at least loves and values?'

Ernest rose hastily and silently from his seat. 'I will be there almost as soon as yourself,' exclaimed he; and indeed the Countess had scarcely resumed her place at the upper end of the room, before she saw her son enter, and noted with delight, hidden under an air of proud humility, his graceful and high-born bearing. 'He is odd, reserved, and studious,' thought she; 'but I shall make something of him yet.'

But one eye, and one ear, was yet quicker than her own. Pauline was the first to see her cousin enter. She hastily turned aside, and began to be very much interested in some Bengal roses that stood beside; but her sigh was as soft, and almost as low, as their own, and her blush was still richer and deeper. Ernest came up and asked her to dance. Her eyes were downcast, and he thought she took his arm coldly; but more than one bystander remarked how different was the animation with which the young Baroness von Lindorf waltzed with her cousin, to that with which she had danced with the handsome Prince Louis.

At length the ball ended, as all balls do—having given some delight, more discontent, and also several colds; but it had answered the Countess's purpose. All Vienna talked of the approaching marriage of the beautiful heiress with Count von Hermanstadt. Many of her young friends ventured on a little gentle raillery. Pauline blushed, smiled, sighed, and denied the charge, but was believed by none. The time soon came for her return to the Castle of Lindorf; but little of her life had been passed there. She had left it, when quite a child, for the convent, and of late she had spent much time with her aunt. Her father, a silent and reserved man, but doatingly fond of his child, came often to see her; and though Pauline could recollect nothing of the affectionate confidence which so often exists between father and daughter when left alone in the world, yet she was full of gratitude and tenderness. With the quick instinct of a loving heart, she saw that she was the Baron's first and only object—that her happiness, and even her girlish pleasures, were his constant care. There was something in his unbroken sadness, his habits of seclusion, and his gloomy deportment, that excited her youthful imagination, and gave a depth of anxious devotion to her filial attachment.

The paramount desire of the Baron appeared to be, that she should not find her home dull on returning to it. At his request the Countess von Hermanstadt had collected together a gay young party, and the old castle was for some weeks to be a scene of perpetual festival. Pauline went thither accompanied by her aunt and cousin. She at least found the journey delightful. Ernest,

taken away from his books, animated by the fresh air and the rapid travelling, undisturbed by the presence of strangers, and anxious to please, now that he had no fear of either ridicule or coldness, was in high spirits. He drew their attention to every spot haunted by an association, and told its history as those tell who are steeped to the lip in poetry—rich in imagery, abounding in anecdote, he flung around all of which he spoke his own warm and fanciful feeling. Pauline fixed upon him her large blue eyes, where tenderness struggled with delight; while in the interest excited by his various details, she forgot the sweet and inward consciousness that would have fixed her eyes on the ground, or anywhere rather than on her cousin's face. The Countess was delighted to see everything going on so prosperously, and already began to plan wedding fetes.

Night had fallen ere they approached the castle, the first view of which was singularly striking. The party had gradually sunk into silence, the road for miles had wound through a dense forest, with no other light than that flung over the road by the lamps of the carriage, and the torches which the out-riders carried before them, forming strange and fantastic outlines. The red light played over the drooping boughs of the forest trees; the flickering rays only illumined the outside, and all beyond was impenetrable obscurity: from the depths of that thick darkness came forth wild sighs and sounds; the mournful murmur of the pine leaves, the creaking of the branches as they swayed heavily in the wind; these, mingled with the hoarse cry of the night-birds. Sometimes disturbed from his gloomy perch, the dusk wings of the owl flapped across the road, and his hooting disturbed the sad low music of the night; it was neither time nor place for gay converse: the whole party felt the subduing influence, and leant back in deep thought. Suddenly they cleared the wood, and the carriage paused for a moment that they might catch the first view of the castle of Lindorf; visible for miles around,—there it stood in the centre of a vast plain, on the summit of a high hill, with not a single rise to intercept, or a single object to distract the view. It rose in bold relief against the deep blue sky, with the large round moon shining directly behind it;—even at that distance you could mark the square towers and the indented battlements, while the mass of the building itself seemed immense. The sky, of that intense purple which marks a slight frost, was covered with floating clouds, and on the further edge, sheltered in their shadow, were scattered a few pale stars; but the Broadway of heaven was flooded by moonlight; no longer shut out by the thick forest,—her rays silvered whatever they touched, and the long grass of the plain looked like undulating water, so thickly did the crisped dew lie upon it, and so clearly did the moonshine glitter through the frosted moisture. Ernest gazed upon the dark and distant castle with an emotion for which he could not himself have accounted; he remembered it not—and yet it seemed strangely familiar. The moonlight clothed it like a garment, and the old towers shone like silver; but even while they gazed, the brightness was departing.—One mass of vapour flowed in after another like the dark tide coming in upon the shore; a black ridge rose above the castle; it darkened—it widened—its edges grew luminous as they approached the moon: gradually half her disk was hidden by them. 'Is it an omen?' asked Ernest of his own thoughts. Even as he asked the question, the black clouds swept over the moon, and entire darkness covered the whole scene. 'Drive on,' cried Ernest, impatiently; and the horses set off at full gallop, but even the exhilaration of rapid motion failed to drive away the weight that had fallen upon his heart. He could not divest himself of the idea that the castle was in some way connected with his destiny,—and that such destiny was ill-fated. When at length they arrived, and drove slowly up the steep ascent as the old gate creaked on its hinges to receive them, and they alighted in the hail of black carved oak, he felt a cold shudder come over him. Again he asked himself—'Is it an omen?' and the voice of his inward spirit answered 'Yes!'

A fortnight passed away, and one fête succeeded to another. At first Pauline clung to her cousin's side,—she wandered with him in the antique gardens, and would leave the dancers to gaze with him from the terrace which overlooked the vast plain below. Gradually she gave more and more into the pleasures around her; and the mornings were devoted to her young companions, and the evening saw her the gayest, as well as the loveliest of the assembled circle. This was a relief to Ernest—it left him more at liberty to indulge his own solitary pursuits, and to feed on the visionary melancholy, which was half thought—and half feeling. He was wrong, however, in the conclusion that he drew from the change in his cousin; he merely supposed that she was attracted by the amusements so natural to her age; he knew not that even that fair young brow had already learnt the bitter task of dissembling. He knew not that often did that bright young head lay down in weariness and sorrow on a pillow wet with frequent tears. Love only rightly interprets love. Pauline saw that her cousin had only for her the calm and gentle tenderness of a brother;—they had been brought up together, and there was nothing in the pretty and playful child, that had grown up beside him, to excite his imagination. But she—she loved him with all that poetry which is only to be found in a woman's first affection; it is the early colour that the rose-bud opens to the south wind,—the warmth that morning breathes upon a cloud whose blush reddens, but returns not. Pure, shy, sensitive, tender, and unreal; it is the most ethereal, yet most lasting feeling life can know. The influence of a woman's first love is felt on her whole after-existence: never can she dream such dream again. For a woman there is no second-love—youth, hope, belief, are all given to her first attachment; if unrequited, the heart becomes its own Prometheus, creative, ideal, but with the vulture preying upon it for ever.—If deceived, the whole poetry of life is gone; the very essence of poetry is belief, and how can she, whose sweet eager credulity has once learnt the bitter truth—that its reliance was in vain, how can she ever believe again?

Pauline learnt to know Ernest's heart by her own, and she felt the difference. Night after night she left the ball-room in all the false flutter of that excitement whose fever destroys the heart which it animates. But once in her own room, the colour left her cheek, and the light, her eye; she flung herself down, with a burst of tears, long and painfully repressed, while she thought that Ernest had not entered the hall throughout the evening. He, in the meanwhile, saw her seemingly happy and amused—and gave more and more into his pursuits; he would spend days in the old forest adjoining, till the midnight stars shone through the darkling branches like the eyes of a spirit, awakening all that was most ethereal in his nature. Hours too were past on the winding and lovely river—lost in those vague but impassioned reveries which fade, and for ever, amid the sterner realities of life. The dreaming boyhood prepares for adventurous man; we first fancy, then feel, and, at last, act and think. He delighted too in rambling through the ancient castle-filled with the memory of other days: not a face in the picture gallery but he conjured up its history, and he loved to assign to each some one of the spacious chambers for the site of their adventures. Many of the rooms in the left wing were all but deserted,—and one afternoon, while wandering carelessly along, he found his way into a chamber that had apparently not been opened for years; he was struck with the beauty of some richly wrought oak panels. While leaning against one of them he chanced to touch a hidden spring; the panel flew open—and discovered a narrow flight of winding stairs. To kindle a phosphorous match, to light a small wax taper, was the work of a moment; and he began to descend the staircase:—childishly eager to discover something—he did not much care what, so long as it was a discovery. It wound to a much greater distance than he had supposed, and, at last, ended at a sort of low arch—the door of which was heavily barred inside. With great difficulty he succeeded in unfastening it; at last it yielded to his efforts, and he

opened it. It opened inwards—and even then, though he perceived the open air, he could scarcely make his way through the matted ivy, and the thickly grown shrubs that extended beyond. The moment he arrived beyond their shade he found himself in a portion of the castle grounds which he had never seen before; it was a lovely little garden of small extent, girdled in by lofty walls and tall trees—but a fairy land in miniature as far as it extended. The hues of autumn were now upon the boughs—but the evergreens shone with untiring verdure; and various late flowers appeared in that gorgeous colouring which belongs to the last season of earth's fertility. He wound through a narrow path of green and purple,—for the carefully trained grapes hung in arches overhead, with fruit as rich as those of the eastern garden discovered by Aladdin. Ernest was enchanted with his discovery, and hurried on, when his attention was caught by the sound of singing; it was a female voice of the most touching sweetness. The words were inarticulate, but the air, an old German melody, was exquisitely marked. Ernest followed whither the voice led—he paused amid some laurel trees, and a scene like a picture presented itself to his astonished gaze; it was a bright open grass plot—a very rendezvous for every stray sunbeam,—and in the middle glittered and danced a little fountain which threw up its silvery jets in the air, and then fell over large shells, stones, and rugged pieces of granite, which formed a sort of basin; a number of creeping plants were around it, and one or two lilies grew as if carved in ivory. Seated on one of the huge stones scattered around—singing a low sweet air, or rather humming it, for the words were inaudible, was a female figure. Ernest could see only a very pretty back—an exquisitely shaped head bending forward, and a profusion of black hair hanging down in plaits—the ends somewhat fancifully fastened with a scarlet flower.

Ernest felt that he was an intruder, but he did—as all other young men would have done—remain rooted to the spot. He knew the melody that she was singing to the music of the plashing fountain; he had not heard it for years, but now it came freshly back to his memory haunted with a thousand vague fancies: suddenly the low sweet singing ceased; the maiden rose hastily from her seat, and, turning round, showed the exact likeness of his favourite picture—the Beatrice Cenci. There was not the peculiar head-gear,—for the hair was simply parted back; but everything else was exact in resemblance. There was the same low white forehead, the same black arched eyebrow, the same Grecian outline of face, the same small and scornful lip. She looked towards him, and there were the same large, dark, and melancholy eyes. Surprise made Ernest both speechless and motionless—not so the lovely stranger; she bounded towards him with something between the spring of the startled fawn, and the confidence of an eager child.

‘I knew some one would come at last to free me from my weary captivity,’ exclaimed she, in one of those thrilling voices which have a magic beyond even their music; ‘you are not a prisoner too?’ asked she, seeing the bewildered expression of Ernest's countenance.

‘A prisoner! No,’ said he, too much astonished to know what he was saying, and taking one of the small and delicate hands which were extended so imploringly towards him.

‘You will save me—help me, will you not?’ asked the girl; ‘they have kept me here many years, and I long to go into the beautiful world that lies beyond these high walls. I sometimes wish I were a bird, and then I would spread my wings on the free air, and fly away, and be so happy. But you will take me with you, will you not?’ whispered she, looking up in his face with the sweet and impatient look of a pleading child. ‘You look very kind—I may trust you, may I not?’

‘With my life I will answer to that trust,’ cried young Hermanstadt; ‘but who are you,—who keeps you here?’

‘My uncle, the Baron von Lindorf,’ muttered she, in a low frightened voice. ‘They tell me that there is a castle, and vassals, and gold, that should be mine, and that is why he keeps me here. He is very cruel!’

‘Good God!’ cried Ernest, ‘come this moment with me—and in his usurped place—before his own guests—I will force him to do you right.’

‘No, no,’ replied the captive, her lip whitening, and the pupils of her large eyes dilating with sudden terror. ‘No, let us fly,—you do not know how cruel he is, and how strong. Let us only get beyond these high walls. How did you get in?’

‘I found by chance a long, concealed passage.’

‘And you can come again? Ah! now I shall not mind being a prisoner. You will come and talk to me—and not tell me to be quiet, like old Clotilde, or frown upon me like Heinrich?’

‘You shall not stay here—come with me this moment. I will protect you from them all!’

‘No,’ replied the captive, ‘not now; you do not know my uncle’s power—he would kill us both; we must escape without his knowing it. Do you think you can manage it in a few days?’

‘Certainly! but the sooner the better.’

‘What is your name?’ interrupted the prisoner.

‘Ernest von Hermanstadt.’

‘They call me Minna. I used to have another name, but it is so long ago that I have forgotten it; I have grown so much since I was here. I could not reach those flowers when I came here first;—my pretty flowers, and my singing fountain—I shall be sorry to leave you! You never scold Minna; but it is a brave world yonder—you will take me into it, Ernest?’ asked she; and again those sweet eyes were raised beseechingly to his.

‘Come with me now—I will pledge my life for your safety!’

‘No, come to-morrow—can you—without being seen? To-morrow morning, when those clouds are reddening, and the waters of the fountain are rosy with their shadows? I always come here then, I love the fresh air of the morning.’

At this moment a shrill voice in the distance was heard calling—‘Minna, Minna.’ Ernest would have pressed forward, when the maiden caught his arm, trembling from head to foot. ‘Go, go,’ whispered she, then, clasping her little hands with an air of passionate entreaty, she added:—‘I expect you to-morrow at sunrise’; and before he could answer, she had darted away. Once she looked back, but it was to wave her hand in token that he should depart. Ernest lingered for a moment, and then hurried back to the hidden passage; he carefully effaced all traces of his progress—and drew the ivy after him when he entered the arched door, that he barred; and then hurriedly sought his own chamber, which he left no more that night. This was an act of too frequent occurrence, on his part, to excite the least surprise; and the supposed student was left undisturbed,—for, for him there was as little study as rest. That sweet face floated before his eyes, that low melodious voice haunted his ear—and the name of Minna lingered upon his lip. ‘Now,’ thought he, ‘I understand the cause of my uncle’s gloom and abstraction; no marvel that he has no heart for gaiety with such a crime pressing upon it. I faintly remember hearing that his brother had fallen in some campaign that they fought together;—doubtless, with his last breath he commended his orphan girl to one bound by blood to protect her. How has that dying trust been violated; how has that child been oppressed! Made a prisoner—debarred all the social enjoyments of her age—deprived of rank and birthright, immured in solitude and ignorance. Great God! can such cruelty exist among the creatures thou hast made? but retribution, sooner or later, overtakes the guilty. Poor Pauline! how will her gentle and affectionate nature be grieved to hear this thing of the father she idolises; it must be kept from her. Wealth, what a subtle

tempter thou art! Even my uncle—the man I deemed so noble, so generous, so full of high feeling, and knightly qualities; even he has for thy sake played traitor to the dead, and broken every sacred tie of duty and of affection! I will think no more of it.’ This resolve was easily executed; for the image of Minna excluded every other thought. Her beauty, her grace, her childishness had captivated Ernest’s imagination; fate, too, had set her stamp upon the fiery passion to which he utterly abandoned himself. ‘How strangely,’ murmured he to himself, as, thrown in the deep window-seat, he gazed out upon the silent night—’are the links knitted together, which time unravels! The picture my boyhood discovered, and which so haunted my youth, has it not now fulfilled its mission? The chance likeness has led to the predestined result. I feel it,—Minna has been predestined to be my bride. Fate, in filling my heart with her face, from the earliest years kept it free from all those passing fancies which would have detracted from the intense devotion of my present love. How wonderfully have we met! Minna—sweet Minna, life owes you much happiness; will it not be my delicious task to pay the debt?’

The night passed in one long, but happy reverie; and the light sleep into which Ernest fell at last was soon broken by the anxiety, which visited even his dreams, to catch the first crimson break of morning. He started from his bed—and the dark clouds in the east were beginning to redden; he hurried to the deserted suite of rooms—down the winding staircase, and in a few moments found himself again in the little garden. Cautiously he entered the vine-covered alley, and paused for a moment amid the thick shelter of the laurels; with a glance he drank in the beauty of the scene; the feeling of the painter and the poet—and Ernest had the imagination of both—overpowered, during an instant, the feeling of the lover. Huge bodies of vapour—a storm in each—were hurrying over a sky, dashed alike with the hues of the tempest and the morning; some of the vapours were of inky blackness, others spread like a scroll of royal purple; some undulated with the light struggling through, others were of transparent whiteness; but those upon the east were of a deep crimson—and the round, red sun had just mounted above an enormous old cedar. Red hues were cast upon everything; even the lilies blushed, and the waters of the little fountain were like melted rubies: on the same stone which she had occupied the previous day sat Minna, but her head was now turned towards the spot where she had last seen Ernest. A movement amid the boughs caught her quick ear; she started from her seat upon the granite, and Ernest was at her feet. Shy, silent, with her long eyelashes drooping upon her flushed cheek; there was a sweet consciousness about her—even more fascinating than her yesterday’s childish confidence. Ernest led her to her place, and knelt beside her; he had no words but those of love; he had a thousand plans for the future ready on his tongue; he could only speak of the present. ‘Yes, Minna; may I not call you so, though I am jealous of the very air bearing away the music of that name? I have loved you for years: not a feature in that beautiful face but has been long graven in my soul. I will show you your picture, sweet one, when you come home with me. Will you come to my home?’

And the maiden smiled and said, ‘I shall be so happy.’

But the words of lovers are a language apart; their melody is a fairy song departing with the one haunted hour; to repeat it is to make it commonplace—cold, yet we can all remember it. Enough, that everything was planned for flight. The following morning they were to meet again; and Minna was only to return to the castle of Lindorf as the bride of Ernest von Hermanstadt. None there could question his right to protect her. The clouds gathered overhead; a vast vapour like a shroud, but black as night, came sweeping over the sky; a fierce wind shook the branches of the mighty cedar, and the slighter shrubs were bowed to the very earth; a hollow sound came

from among the boughs, and a few large drops of rain disturbed the fountain, whose waters were dark as if the sunshine had never rested there.

‘You must go, sweet one; this is no weather for that slight form. To-morrow, at sunset—’

‘Why cannot I give you this?’ exclaimed Minna, holding up one of the tresses with its scarlet flower.

‘You must,’ cried Ernest, kissing the plait of the black hair, which was soft and glossy as the neck of the raven.

‘I have nothing,’ said she, sadly, ‘that I can cut it with.’

Ernest took from his pocket a little Turkish dagger—and with that Minna severed the glossy tress.

‘I must go now,’ said she, ‘they will seek me if I stay out in the rain.’

Ernest pressed her tenderly to his heart, and they parted. He caught the last wave of the flowers in her hair—the last sound of her fairy foot, and turned mournfully away. All that day he was occupied in preparations for his departure; he rode over to the castle of Krainberg which belonged to a fellow student, whom he found on the point of departure. The young Baron, delighted with the romance, of which however he understood little more than that his grave and quiet friend was actually engaged in an elopement—agreed to remain to witness the marriage. He was also to have his chapel prepared, a priest in readiness, and then to leave his castle as a temporary residence for the bride and bridegroom. His mother had left Lindorf—or he would have trusted his secret with her, and intreated her countenance. In his own mind, Ernest was not sorry that her absence rendered this impossible; he liked the excitement, the strangeness, the adventure of his present plan, and his mother’s calm and worldly temper would have interposed a thousand delays, and have arranged everything in the most proper and commonplace manner.

He was early at their rendezvous, the fountain, but early as he was, Minna was there before him; she approached him in a hurried and agitated manner, her slight frame trembling with emotion, her large eyes glancing from side to side like those of the frightened deer—and he could feel every pulse beating in the little feverish hand, which he kissed.

‘Let us go at once,’ whispered she, ‘they will soon come to seek me.’ Ernest needed no urging to speed; he led, or almost carried her, down the vine alley, and they reached the dark portal without molestation. Minna drew back, terrified at the gloomy passage—but Ernest’s caresses reassured her, and she ran up the winding stairs; in a short time they reached the little chamber, which was his study, and that gained, they were in comparative safety. Here they waited a short time, partly to give the lovely fugitive time to compose herself—partly, that it might be dusk before they attempted to leave the castle: that, however, was matter of no difficulty. A staircase led direct from Ernest’s chamber to the garden—and he had the key of a small wicket which led to the woods around; once there, and escape was certain. Minna sat down in the old oak chair, which was Ernest’s usual place. With what delight did he contemplate her charming figure bending over the table, and examining his favourite volumes with a curiosity which even fear and timidity could not quite dispel! what a delicious augury did the enthusiastic young student draw from her apparent interest! How many happy hours would they pass together over those very volumes! but there was little time even for the most delightful anticipations of the future. The dinner hour of the castle had now arrived—and every creature in it was busily engaged. Now then was the time to leave it. Carefully wrapping up his precious charge in his cloak, he led her to the little gate, where his servant was in waiting. Placing her before him, he sprung up on his horse, a strong and stately black steed, and a few moments more saw them galloping rapidly along the road that led to Arnheim castle. They needed to make all possible haste, for the storm,

which had been gathering all day, now threatened to burst over their heads:—their way lay through a thick wood—and the elements had already commenced their strife. The creaking of the huge pine branches, mixed with the hurried sweeping of the leaves, of which a dry shower every now and then whirled from the earth—from the gathered heaps of autumn, or came down in hundreds from overhead. The birds, disturbed from their usual rest, flew around, beating the air with their troubled wings, and uttering shrill cries; the thunder rolled along in the distance, and a few large drops of rain fell heavily upon the ground; there was an unnatural heat in the air, and gleams of phosphoric light streamed along the burthened sky. But Ernest heeded not the storm; he only feared for the sweet burthen that rested so trustingly in his arms—he only drank the perfumed breath of the warm lips so near his own; he only felt the beating of the heart, now and henceforth to be pillowed on his own; he only heard the low murmur of a voice which now and then whispered his name—as if that name were to her all of love and safety. He spurred his horse to its utmost speed; the sparks flew from its hoof. He cut his way through the fresh wind, and felt as if the excitement of the impassioned moment were cheaply purchased, though his life were its ransom. They reached the castle of Krainberg before the storm burst forth in all its fury. The master was in waiting to receive them, and Ernest felt all a lover's pride as he marked the astonishment and admiration with which Von Krainberg gazed on the beautiful stranger. They led her at once to the chapel; Ernest grudged himself the pleasure of even seeing her till he had a right to gaze upon her—till every look was at once homage and protection; he was impatient, in her strange and isolated situation, to call her his own—his wife. A close, damp air struck upon them as they entered the chapel; it had long been out of use, and the hastily lighted tapers burnt dim in the sepulchral atmosphere. The mouldering banners were stirred by the high wind, and the breathing was oppressed by the dust; many tombs were around, and the white effigies seemed like reluctant witnesses glaring upon the hopes of humanity, with cold and stony eyes. A monk, bowed with extreme age, pale, emaciated, and his white head tremulous with palsy, stood beside the altar—and his long, thin fingers trembled beneath the weight of the sacred volume. He began the ceremony, and his low, tremulous voice could scarcely be heard through the moaning of the wind amid the tombs. The ground beneath their feet was hollow, and sent forth a hollow echo;—the graves below had once been filled with the dead, and now only a little dust remained in their vacant places: they had perished as it were a second time. There was a mournful contrast between the place of the bridal and the bride; there she stood in that radiant loveliness, which is heaven's rarest gift to earth. Her dress was of the simplest white, gathered at the waist by a belt of her own embroidery—ornament she had none. The daughter of the noble house of Von Lindorf wedded the heir of the as noble house of Von Hermanstadt, dressed as simply as a peasant. Her black hair hung down in its long plaits, like serpents—the scarlet flower at each end; a bright colour flushed her cheek, and her eyes seemed filled with light.

The aged priest closed the holy book, and Ernest turned to salute his bride; but even he started back at the sudden clap of thunder that pealed through the chapel. The building shook beneath the crash, and a flood of lightning poured in at the windows, casting a death-like light on the stony faces of the white figures on the monuments:—it was but for a moment— and Ernest caught his trembling bride to his heart. She was pale with terror, for now the storm rushed forth in all its fury, and a sudden gust of wind and rain dashed against the painted window at the end of the chapel. The repeated flashes threw a strange radiance around, and strange noises mingled together.

'It is an awful night,' said the young baron of Krainberg, as he led the way to the hall, which, as they entered, was lit up with one livid blaze. Ernest supported the almost insensible form of

his bride; he murmured a few caressing words— but even love, in all its strength, felt powerless before the war of the immortal elements.

The next morning but few traces of the tempest remained; the river that wound through the valley was somewhat swollen, and a few giant pines dashed down to earth would never again cast their long shadows before them on a summer morning; but the sky was soft, clear, and blue, and a few white clouds wandered past, light as down. The leaves glittered with the lingering rain-drops, and a fresh, sweet smell came from the herbage of the valley. Ernest was seated in a little breakfast parlour, looking to a terrace that commanded the country; he was seated at the feet of his bride, whose small fingers were entwined in his black hair. What a world of poetry seemed in the depths of her large, shining eyes, which looked upon him so tenderly—so timidly; their dream, for it was a dreamlike happiness, was broken in upon by the entrance of Ernest's servant, who asked to speak to his master. There was something in the man's manner which commanded instant attention, and Von Hermanstadt followed him out of the room.

'Sir,' exclaimed the man, 'here is your letter to the Baron— he died suddenly last night. The lady Pauline is in a dreadful state, and the steward intreated that you would go up there at once.'

Ernest felt that this was a case which admitted of no delay. Saying a few hasty words about important business to Minna, reserving the death till he could have time to tell it soothingly, he flung himself upon his horse, and galloped to Lindorf. Though grave and solitary, both in manners and habits, the Baron had been much beloved by his domestics, and the voice of weeping was heard on every side. Ernest hurried to his uncle's chamber; there the daylight was excluded, and the ray of the yellow tapers fell dimly upon the green velvet bed where lay the last Baron of Lindorf. In him ended that noble house; with his arms folded, so as to press the ebon crucifix to his bosom—his head supported by a damask cushion, lay the Baron. Ernest paused for a moment, awe-struck by the calm beauty which reigned in the face of the dead; the features were stately and calm, the brow had lost the care-worn look it wore in life, and peace breathed from every lineament of the sweet and hushed countenance. 'Can the dead,' thought Ernest, 'struck down with an unrepented crime—can the oppressor of the orphan look thus?'

He had not time for further reflection, for a convulsive motion on the other side of the bed showed him Pauline crouched in a heap at the feet of the corpse—her face buried in the silken counterpane. Her bright hair was knit up with pearls, and she still wore the robe of the previous evening; how terrible seemed its gay colours now!

'We have not been able,' whispered an old grey-headed servant, 'to get her to speak or to move.'

Ernest's heart melted with the tenderest pity. He took the passive hand, and covered it with tears and kisses. 'Pauline, dearest, look up,' said he, passing his arm round her, so as to raise her head. What his words could not effect, the movement did; she was roused from her stupor, and, giving one wild glance at the corpse, she leant her head on her cousin's shoulder, and burst into a passion of tears. Soothing her with the tenderest words, he carried her to her chamber. 'At least,' said he to himself, as he left her, 'the memory of her father shall be sacred.'

The old steward met him, and said—'There is a letter for you which my master was writing at the time of his death. I know many circumstances which it is now of the last importance that you should know too. For God's sake, Sir, go and read the letter, and I will be within call.'

The old man led the way to his master's room. He looked round it piteously for a moment, and then hurried away, hiding his face in his hands. Ernest had never been in the room before; and yet how full it seemed of the living presence of him who was no more! There was his cloak flung on a chair;—there lay open books of which he and Ernest had recently been talking. There, too,

was a flask of medicine—alas! how unavailing!—and a goblet of water, half drunk. But one object more than all riveted Ernest's attention;—there was the picture of Beatrice Cenci. It was a portrait as large as life: his own seemed to have been a copy of it. How well he knew that striking and lovely face! He knew not why, but he gazed upon it with a sudden terror; the large black eyes seemed to fix so mournfully upon his own. He turned away, and saw the letter on the table, addressed to himself. He seated himself, and began to read the contents; though the tears swam in his eyes as he saw the handwriting of an uncle who, whatever his faults, had always been kind, very kind, to himself. It ran thus:— 'My beloved Ernest,—For dear to me as a child of my own is the boy who has grown up at my side. I have long been desirous of communicating to you the contents of the following pages, but I have found it too painful to speak—I find that I must write. My confidence will not be misplaced, for I have noted in you a judgment beyond your years, and a delicacy which will estimate the trust reposed in you. My health is declining rapidly, and I would fain secure protection for my darling Pauline, and another as dear and more unfortunate. I have rejoiced to see that my sister's plan for a marriage between you and my daughter is not likely to take place. You do not love your cousin—you prefer the solitary study and the lonely ramble—so would not a lover. She, too, is amused in your absence. I hear her step and song among her companions, and you are not with them. It is for the best—you will be a safe and affectionate friend. I hope she will never marry.

'Alas!—On me and mine has rested a fearful curse! I married one whose beauty let the picture now opposite to me attest, and her heart was even lovelier than her face. An Italian artist painted her as Beatrice Cenci: he said that the costume suited her so well. I have since thought it an omen that we should have chosen the semblance of one so ill-fated. For years we were most happy, but at last an unaccountable depression seized upon my wife. She became wayward and irritable. This led to the quarrel between your mother and ourselves. She knew not the fatal cause. After the birth of her third and last child, her malady took a darker turn. Ernest, it was melancholy madness, and incurable! In a paroxysm of despondency, she murdered the infant in her arms, and died a few hours afterwards in a state of raving insanity!

'I will not dwell on my after-years of misery. I was roused by fear of the headstrong and violent temper of my eldest girl, Minna—I saw in it the seeds of her mother's malady. My terror was too well founded. She was found one evening attempting to strangle her little sleeping sister, who was then six years old—Minna being just fourteen. A brain fever followed, and a report was spread of her death. Why should our family calamity be made the topic of idle curiosity? But, in reality, she has resided in this castle—her state requiring constant and often strict restraint. I have been scarcely ever absent from the castle; but, alas! my tenderness has answered but in part. With a caprice incidental to persons in her dreadful situation, she has taken an extreme dislike to me, and fancies that I am her uncle, and imprison her to detain the vast possessions of which she fancies herself the heiress.'

The fatal paper dropped from Ernest's hand. He remained pale, breathless, the dew starting, and the veins swelled of his forehead. 'God of heaven, have mercy on me!—What have I done?' Again he caught up the letter, and, with a desperate effort, read to the close.

'My faithful Heinrich and his sister Clotilde are the only depositories of this secret. While I live, I shall devote myself to the care of my ill-starred Minna, who is the very image of her mother. When I die—and the shadow of death even now rests upon my way—I commend her to her God and to you. You will be to her and to Pauline as a brother. I know I can rely upon you.

'Married to a maniac—a hopeless maniac!—What will my mother say?'—exclaimed Ernest, as he paced the room. The image of his beautiful bride rose before him; he felt as if his tenderness

and his devotion must avail; he would watch her every look—anticipate her very thoughts. He started—it was the steward who came into the room.

‘I see,’ said the old man, ‘that you have read my master’s letter. Alas! I have dreadful news to tell. The Baroness Minna has evaded all our precautions. She has escaped, I know not whither. I only trust it is alone.’

‘Heinrich,’ said Ernest, solemnly, ‘I speak to you as the trusted and valued friend of my beloved uncle. Minna is with me. I married her last night—deceived, alas! by a narrative which I ought never to have credited. I at least ought to have known my uncle too well to believe that he could be guilty of fraud or oppression. The rest of my life will be too little to atone for that moment’s doubt. Old man, hear me swear to devote myself to his children!’

‘God bless you!’ sobbed the old man, as he clasped the hand which Ernest extended towards him.

Months passed away in unceasing watchfulness on the part of Ernest. With trembling hope he began to rely on Minna’s complete recovery. Wild she was at times, and her fondness for him had a strange character of fierceness; but his influence over her was unbounded, and her passion for music was a constant resource. By Heinrich’s advice they left the castle, that no painful train of thought might be awakened; and they resided in a light, cheerful villa, amid the suburbs of Vienna. Her husband found all the plans of mutual study in which the young student lover had so delighted, were in vain. It was impossible to fix her attention long on anything. Companionship there was none between them, and the call on his attention was unceasing; but his affection became even deeper for its very fear, and it was hallowed by the feeling of how sacred it was as a duty. Gradually as he became more and more satisfied about Minna, he grew more anxious for Pauline. He saw her drooping day by day; her spirits became unequal, and her eyes were rarely without tears. Too late he discovered how she loved him. Her bodily weakness seemed to render her less capable of repressing her feelings. Her eye followed him, go where he would; she hung upon his least word, and she shrunk away from her sister. The proposed visit to his mother brought on such a passion of tears, that he had not the heart to insist upon it—especially when he looked upon her pale, sunken cheek, and watched her slow, dispirited step. Once or twice he saw Minna watching her with a wild, strange glance in her large, black eyes, as if there was an intensive feeling of jealousy.

It was now the first week in June, and the weather was unusually hot; and there was thunder in the air, which added to the oppression. The moon, too, was at its full; and Minna, always restless at that time, was now unusually so. At last, towards evening, she sank on the window-seat in a deep slumber. Pauline was walking on the terrace below; and Ernest, who saw that she was scarcely equal to the fatigue, went down to give her his assistance. She took his arm, and they walked up and down together. At last she leant over the balustrade, and her eyes filled with tears as she watched the moonlight turning the flowers to silver.

‘I wish,’ said she, ‘I were a flower—happy in the sunshine—happy in the soft night air. No beating heart within, to make me wretched.’ And she dropped her head on his arm, and wept.

Before Ernest had time to utter even a few soothing words, a bright blade glittered in the moonlight, and Pauline sunk with a faint scream on the pavement.—Minna had stabbed her sister to the heart! There she stood: her cheek flushed with the deepest crimson, and her eyes flashing the wild light of insanity—waving the weapon she had so fatally used. It was the little Indian dagger Ernest had lent her to sever the long tress of hair. She had concealed it till this moment.

‘Yes,’ cried she, ‘I have killed her at last. They thought I did not know her, but I did. She took away my father’s heart from me, and would have taken away my husband’s; but I have killed her at last.’

By this time the servants came rushing from all parts. At their approach, Minna seemed seized with some vague fear, and attempted to fly. Ernest had just time to pass his arms around her, though she struggled violently. They raised Pauline, but the last spark of life had fled—the pale and lovely features were set in death!

Minna lived on for years—her insanity taking, every succeeding year, a darker colour. Ernest never left her side. Fierce or sullen, violent or desponding, he watched her through every mood. She wore herself away to a shadow, till it was a marvel how that frail form endured. For months before her death, she was almost ungovernable, and did not know him the least. She scarcely ever slept, but one night slumber overpowered her. The sun was shining brightly into the chamber, and its light fell upon the whitened hair and careworn features of her husband, who had been watching by her for hours. A sweet and meek expression was in her eyes when she awoke.

‘Ernest, dearest Ernest,’ said she, in a soft, low whisper. She raised her head from the pillow, and, like a child, put up her mouth to kiss him. She sank back: her last breath had passed in that kiss!

He laid her in the same tomb with her father and sister; and the next day, the noble, the wealthy, and still handsome Count von Hermanstadt entered the order of St Francis.