

CURTAIN.

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SCENE SECOND.

[*A room in the palace of The Queen. The Queen alone.*]

Queen. Why comes he not? They told me that our ambassador to the Princess Irene had returned, and bore a gift for me. Would that it were a picture of herself! They say she is wondrous fair; and could my wayward son but gaze upon her, his heart might yet be won. [*Enter Irene, disguised as the slave, lone.*] Ah, a stranger! Who art thou?

[*lone kneels and presents a letter.*]

Queen [*reads the letter*]. Ah, welcome! Thy mistress tells me she hath chosen from among her train the fairest and most faithful of her slaves, as a gift for me. With thanks do I accept thee. Lift thy veil, child, that I may see how our maidens do compare with thee. [*lone lifts her veil. The Queen gazes in surprise at her beauty.*][Pg 155] Thou art too beautiful to be a slave. What is thy name?

lone. lone; may it please thee, lady.

Queen. 'Tis a fit name for one so fair; and thy country, maiden?

lone. With the princess, my kind mistress, have I dwelt for many happy years; and honored by her choice now offer my poor services to thee.

Queen. What canst thou do, lone? Thou art too fair and delicate to bear the heavy water-urn or gather fruit.

lone. I can weave garlands, lady; touch the harp, and sing sweet songs; can bear thee wine, and tend thy flowers. I can be true and faithful, and no task will be too hard for thy grateful slave, lone.

Queen. Thou shalt find a happy home with me, and never grieve for thy kind mistress. And now, listen while I tell thee what thy hardest task shall be. I will confide in thee, lone, for thou art no common slave, but a true and gentle woman whom I can trust and love. Thou[Pg 156] hath heard thy lady is betrothed to my most noble son; and yet, I grieve to say, he loves her not. Nay, in the struggle 'gainst his heart, hath lost all gayety and strength, and even the name Irene will chase the smile away. He loves no other, yet will not offer her his hand when the heart that should go with it feels no love for her who is to be his wife. I honor this most noble feeling; yet could he know the

beauty and the worth of thy fair lady, he yet might love. Thou shalt tell him this: all the kind deeds she hath done, the gentle words she hath spoken; all her loveliness and truth thou shalt repeat; sing thou the songs she loved; weave round his cups the flowers she wears; and strive most steadfastly to gain a place within his heart for love and Lady Irene. Canst thou, wilt thou do this, lone?

lone. Dear lady, all that my poor skill can do shall yet be tried. I will not rest till he shall love my mistress as she longs to be beloved.

[Pg 157]Queen. If thou canst win my son to health and happiness again, thou shalt be forever my most loved, most trusted friend. The gods bless thee, child, and give thy work success! Now rest thee here. I will come ere long to lead thee to the prince.

[Exit The Queen.]

lone. All goes well; and what an easy task is mine! To minister to him whom I already love; to sing to him, weave garlands for his brow, and tell him of the thoughts stirring within my heart. Yes, I most truly long to see him whom all love and honor. The gods be with me, and my task will soon be done.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 158]

SCENE THIRD.

[Another room in the palace. Constantine, *sad and alone*.]

Con. Another day is well-nigh passed, and nearer draws the fate I dread. Why must I give up all the bright dreams of my youth, and wed a woman whom I cannot love?

They tell me she is young and fair, but I seek more than that in her who is to pass her life beside me. Youth and beauty fade, but a noble woman's love can never die. Oh, Irene, if thou couldst know how hard a thing it is to take thee, princess though thou art! [Enter lone.] Ah, lady, thou hast mistaken thy way! Let me lead thee to the queen's apartments.

lone. Nay, my lord; I have come from her. She bid me say it was her will that I, her slave, should strive with my [Pg 159] poor skill to while away the time till she could join thee.

Con. Thou, a slave? By the gods! methought it was some highborn lady,—nay, even the Princess Irene herself, seeking the queen, my mother.

lone. She was my mistress, and bestowed me as a gift upon the queen. This scroll is from her hand. May it please thee, read it [*kneels and presents letter*].

Con. Rise, fair maiden! I would rather listen to thy voice. May I ask thee to touch yon harp? I am weary, and a gentle strain will sooth my troubled spirit. Stay! let me place it for thee.

[*Prince moves the harp and gazes upon lone as she sings and plays.*]

The wild birds sing in the orange groves,
And brightly bloom the flowers;
The fair earth smiles 'neath a summer sky
Through the joyous fleeting hours.
But oh! in the slave girl's lonely heart,
Sad thoughts and memories dwell,
[Pg 160]And tears fall fast as she mournfully sings,
Home, dear home, farewell!

Though the chains they bind be all of flowers,
Where no hidden thorn may be,
Still the free heart sighs 'neath its fragrant bonds,
And pines for its liberty.
And sweet, sad thoughts of the joy now gone,
In the slave girl's heart shall dwell,
As she mournfully sings to her sighing harp,
Native land, native land, farewell!

Con. 'Tis a plaintive song. Is it thine own lot thou art mourning? If so, thou art a slave no longer.

lone. Nay, my lord. It was one my Lady Irene loved, and thus I thought would please thee.

Con. Then never sing it more,—speak not her name! Nay, forgive me if I pain thee. She was thy mistress, and thou didst love her. Was she kind to thee? By what name shall I call thee?

lone. lone, your Highness. Ah, yes; she was too kind. She never spake a cruel word, nor chid me for my many faults.[Pg 161] Never can I love another as I loved my gentle mistress.

Con. And is she very fair? Has she no pride, no passion or disdain to mar her loveliness? She is a princess; is she a true and tender woman too?

lone. Though a princess, 'neath her royal robes there beats a warm, true heart, faithful and fond, longing to be beloved and seeking to be worthy such great joy when it shall come. Thou ask'st me of her beauty. Painters place her face among their fairest works, and sculptors carve her form in marble. Yes, she is beautiful; but 'tis not that thou wouldst most care for. Couldst thou only know her!—pardon, but I think thou couldst not bear so cold a heart within thy breast as now.

Con. Ah, do not cease! say on! There is that in the music of thy voice that soothes and comforts me. Come, sit beside me, fair lone, and I will tell thee why I do not love thy princess.

[Pg 162]lone. You do forget, my lord, I am a slave; I will kneel here.

[Prince reclines upon a couch. lone kneels beside him.]

Con. Listen! From a boy I have been alone; no loving sister had I, no gentle friend,—only cold councillors or humble slaves. My mother was a queen, and 'mid the cares of State, tho' fondly loving me, her only son, could find no time to win me from my lonely life.

Thus, tho' dwelling 'neath a palace roof with every wish supplied, I longed most fondly for a friend. And now, ere long, a crown will rest upon my head, a nation bend before me as their king. And now more earnestly than ever do I seek one who can share with me the joys and cares of my high lot,—a woman true and noble, to bless me with her love.

lone. And could not the Princess Irene be to thee all thou hast dreamed?

Con. I fear I cannot love her. They told me she was beautiful and highborn;[Pg 163] and when I sought to learn yet more, 'twas but to find she was a cold, proud woman, fit to be a queen, but not a loving wife. Thus I learned to dread the hour when I must wed. Yet 'tis my mother's will; my country's welfare calls for the sacrifice, and I must yield myself.

lone. They who told thee she was proud and cold do all speak falsely. Proud she is to those who bow before her but to gain some honor for themselves, and cold to such as love her for her royalty alone. But if a fond and faithful heart, and a soul that finds its happiness in noble deeds can make a queen, Irene is worthy of the crown she will wear. And now, if it please thee, I will seek the garden; for thy mother bid me gather flowers for the feast. Adieu, my lord! *[She bows, her veil falls; Constantine hands it to her.]* Nay, kings should not bend to serve a slave, my lord.

Con. I do forget myself most strangely. There, take thy veil, and leave me
[turns [Pg 164] aside]. Nay, forgive me if I seem unkind, but I cannot treat thee as a
slave. Come, I will go with thee to the garden; thou art too fair to wander unprotected
and alone. Come, lone [leads her out].

CURTAIN.

[Pg 165]

SCENE FOURTH.

[The gardens of the palace. lone weaving a garland.]

lone. The rose is Love's own flower, and I will place it in the wreath I weave for thee, O
Constantine! Would I could bring it to thy heart as easily! And yet, methinks, if all goes
on as now, the slave lone will ere long win a prince's love. He smiles when I approach,
and sighs when I would leave him; listens to my songs, and saves the withered flowers
I gave him days ago. How gentle and how kind! Ah, noble Constantine, thou little
thinkest the slave thou art smiling on is the "proud, cold" Princess Irene, who will one
day show thee what a fond, true wife she will be to thee [sings].

[Enter Helon; kneels to lone.

lone. Helon, my father's friend! thou here! Ah, hush! Betray me not! I am
no [Pg 166] princess now. Rise, I do beseech thee! Kneel not to me.

Helon. Dear lady, why this secrecy? What dost thou here, disguised, in the palace
where thou art soon to reign a queen?

lone. Hark! is all still? Yes; none are nigh! Speak low. I'll tell thee all. Thou knowest the
young prince loves me not,—nay, do not sigh; I mean the princess, not the slave lone,
as I now call myself. Well, I learned this, and vowed to win the heart he could not give;
and so in this slave's dress I journeyed hither with Rienzi, the ambassador, as a gift
unto the queen.

Thus, as a poor and nameless slave, I seek to win the noble Constantine to life and
love. Dost understand my plot, and wilt thou aid me, Father Helon?

Helon. 'Tis a strange thought! None but a woman would have planned it. Yes, my child,
I will aid thee, and thou yet shall gain the happiness thy true heart [Pg 167] well
deserves. We will talk of this yet more anon. I came hither to see the prince. They told
me he was pale and ill, in sorrow for his hated lot. Say, is this so?

lone. Ah, yes, most true; and I am cause of all this sorrow. Father, tell me, cannot I by some great deed give back his health, and never have the grief of knowing that he suffered because I was his bride? How can I avert this fate? I will do all, bear all, if he may be saved.

Helon. Grieve not, my child; he will live, and learn to love thee fondly. The cares of a kingdom are too much for one so young; but he would have happiness throughout his native land, and toiling for the good of others he hath hidden his sorrow in his own heart, and pined for tenderness and love. Thou hast asked if thou couldst save him. There is one hope, if thou canst find a brave friend that fears no danger when a good work leads him on. Listen, my daughter! In a deep and lonely glen, far beyond the[Pg 168] palace gates, there grows an herb whose magic power 'tis said brings new life and strength to those who wreath it round their head in slumber. Yet none dare seek the spot, for spirits are said to haunt the glen, and not a slave in all the palace but grows pale at mention of the place. I am old and feeble, or I had been there long ere this. And now, my child, who canst thou send?

lone. I will send one who fears not spirit or demon; one who will gladly risk e'en life itself for the brave young prince.

Helon. Blessed be the hand that gathers, thrice blessed be he who dares the dangers of the way. Bring hither him thou speakest of. I would see him.

lone. She stands before thee. Nay, start not, Father. / will seek the dreaded glen and gather there the magic flowers that may bring health to Constantine and happiness to me. I will away; bless, and let me go.

Helon. Thou, a woman delicate and[Pg 169] fair! Nay, nay, it must not be, my child! Better he should die than thou shouldst come to harm. I cannot let thee go.

lone. Thou canst not keep me now. Thou hast forgot I am a slave, and none may guess beneath this veil a princess is concealed. I will take my water-urn, and with the other slaves pass to the spring beyond the city gates; then glide unseen into the haunted glen. Now, tell me how looks the herb, that I may know it.

Helon. 'Tis a small, green plant that blossoms only by the broad, dark stream, dashing among the rocks that fill the glen. But let me once again implore thee not to go. Ah, fatal hour when first I told thee! 'Tis sending thee to thy death! Stay, stay, my child, or let me go with thee.

lone. It cannot be; do thou remain, and if I come not back ere set of sun, do thou come forth to seek me. Tell Constantine I loved him, and so farewell. I return successful, or I return no more.

[lone *rushes out*.

[Pg 170]Helon. Thou brave and noble one to dare so much for one who loves thee not! I'll go and pray the gods to watch above thee, and bring thee safely back.

[*Exit Helon*.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 171]

SCENE FIFTH.

[*A terrace beside the palace. Enter Constantine.*]

Con. Why comes she not? I watched her slender form when with the other slaves she went forth to the fountain yonder. I knew her by the rosy veil and snow-white arm that bore the water-urn. The morning sun shone brightly on the golden hair, and seemed more beautiful for resting there; and now 'tis nearly set, and yet she comes not. Why should I grieve because my mother's slave forgets me? Shame on thee, Constantine! How weak and childish have I grown! This fever gives no rest when lone is not here to sing sweet songs, and cheer the weary hours. Ah, she comes! [*Enter lone with basket of flowers.*] Where hast thou been, lone? The long day passed so slowly, and I [Pg 172] missed thee sadly from my side. But thou art pale; thy locks are damp! What has chanced to thee? Speak, I beseech thee!

lone. 'Tis nothing; calm thyself, my lord. I am well, and bring thee from the haunted glen the magic flowers whose power I trust will win thee health and happiness. May it please thee to accept them [*kneels, and gives the flowers*].

Con. Thou, thou, lone? Hast thou been to that fearful spot, where mortal foot hath feared to tread? The gods be blessed, thou art safe again! How can I thank thee? Ah, why didst thou risk so much for my poor life? It were not worth the saving if thine were lost.

lone. My lord, a loving nation looks to thee for safety and protection. I am but a feeble woman, and none would grieve if I were gone; none weep for the friendless slave, lone.

Con. Oh, say not thus! Tears would[Pg 173] be shed for thee, and one heart would grieve for her who risked so much for him. Speak not of death or separation, for I cannot let thee go.

lone. I will not leave thee yet, till I have won thy lost health back. The old priest, Helon, bid me seek the herbs, and bind them in a garland for thy brow. If thou wilt place it there, and rest awhile, I am repaid.

Con. If thy hand gave it, were it deadly poison I would place it there. Now sing, lone; thy low sweet voice will bring me pleasant dreams, and the healing sleep will be the deeper with thy music sounding in mine ears.

[The prince reclines upon the terrace. lone weaves a garland and sings.]

Flowers, sweet flowers, I charge thee well,
O'er the brow where ye bloom cast a healing spell;
From the shadowy glen where spirits dwell,
I have borne thee here, thy power to tell.
[Pg 174]Flowers, pale flowers, o'er the brow where ye lie,
Cast thy sweetest breath ere ye fade and die.

[lone places the garland on the head of the prince, who falls asleep. She sits beside him softly singing.]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 175]

SCENE SIXTH.

[The Queen's apartment. The Queen alone.]

Queen. 'Tis strange what power this slave hath gained o'er Constantine. She hath won him back to health again, and never have I seen so gay a smile upon his lips as when she stood beside him in the moonlight singing to her harp. And yet, tho' well and strong again, he takes no interest in his native land. He comes no more to council hall or feast, but wanders 'mong his flowers with lone. How can I rouse him to the danger that is near! The Turkish sultan and his troops are on their way to conquer Greece, and he, my Constantine, who should be arming for the fight, sits weaving garlands with the lovely slave girl! Ah, a thought hath seized me! Why cannot she who hath such power o'er him rouse up with noble words the brave[Pg 176] heart slumbering in his breast? I hear her light step in the hall. lone, lone,—come hither! I would speak with thee.

[Enter lone.

lone. Your pleasure, dearest lady.

Queen. lone, thou knowest how I love thee for the brave deeds thou hast done. Thou hast given health unto my son, hath won him back to happiness. Thou hast conquered his aversion to the princess, and he will gladly wed her when the hour shall come. Is it not so?

lone. Dear lady, that I cannot tell thee. He never breathes her name, and if I speak of her as thou hast bid me, he but sighs, and grows more sad; and yet I trust, nay, I well know that when he sees her he will gladly give his hand to one who loves him as the princess will. Then do not grieve, but tell thy slave how she may serve thee.

Queen. Oh, lone, if thou couldst wake him from the quiet dream that seems to lie upon his heart. His country is in[Pg 177] danger, and he should be here to counsel and command. Go, tell him this in thine own gentle words; rouse him to his duty, and thou shalt see how brave a heart is there. Thou hast a wondrous power to sadden or to cheer. Oh, use it well, and win me back my noble Constantine! Canst thou do this, lone?

lone. I will; and strive most earnestly to do thy bidding. But of what danger didst thou speak? No harm to him, I trust?

Queen. The Turkish troops are now on their way to carry woe and desolation into Greece, and he, the prince, hath taken no part in the councils. His nobles mourn at his strange indifference, and yet he heeds them not.

I know not why, but some new happiness hath come to him, and all else is forgot. But time is passing. I will leave thee to thy work, and if thou art successful, thou wilt have won a queen's most fervent gratitude. Adieu, my child!

[Exit The Queen.

[Pg 178]lone. Yes, Constantine, thy brave heart shall awake; and when thy country is once safe again, I'll come to claim the love that now I feel is mine.

[Exit lone.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 179]

SCENE SEVENTH.

[*Apartment in the palace. Enter lone with sword and banner.*]

lone. Now may the gods bless and watch above thee, Constantine; give strength to thine arm, courage to thy heart, and victory to the cause for which thou wilt venture all. Ah, could I but go with thee, thy shield would then be useless, for with mine own breast would I shelter thee, and welcome there the arrows meant for thee.

He comes; now let me rouse him from this dream, and try my power o'er his heart.

[*Enter Constantine.*]

Con. What high thoughts stirring in thy heart hath brought the clear light to thine eye, lone, the bright glow to thy cheek? What mean these arms? Wouldst thou go forth to meet the Turks? Thy[Pg 180] beauty would subdue them sooner than the sword thou art gazing on so earnestly.

lone. Thou hast bade me speak, my lord, and I obey; but pardon thy slave if in her wish to serve she seem too bold. Thy mother and thy subjects wonder at thy seeming indifference when enemies are nigh. Thine army waits for thee to lead them forth; thy councillors sit silent, for their prince is gone. While grief and terror reign around, he is wandering 'mong his flowers, or listening to the music of his harp. Ah, why is this? What hath befallen thee? Thou art no longer pale and feeble, yet there seems a spell set on thee. Ah, cast it off, and show them that thou hast no fear.

Con. I am no coward, lone; but there is a spell upon me. 'Tis a holy one, and the chain that holds me here I cannot break,—for it is *love*. I have lost the joy I once took in my subjects and my native land, and am content to sit beside thee, and listen to the music of thy voice.[Pg 181]

lone. Then let that voice arouse thee. Oh, fling away the chain that keeps thee from thy duty, and be again the noble prince who thought but of his people. Oh, let me plead for those who sorrow for thy care, and here let me implore thee to awaken from thy dream and be thyself again [*she kneels*].

Con. Oh, not to me! Rise, I beseech thee, rise! Thou hast led me to my duty; I will obey thee.

lone. I would have thee gird on thy sword, and with shield upon thine arm, and banner in thy hand, go forth and conquer like a king. Show those who doubt thee that their fears are false,—that thou art worthy of their love. Lead forth thy troops, and save thy

country from the woe that now draws nigh. Victory surely will be theirs when thou shalt lead them on.

Con. Give me my sword, unfurl my banner, and say farewell. I will return victorious, or no more. Thy voice hath [Pg 182] roused me from my idle but most lovely dream, and thy brave words shall cheer me on till I have won the honor of my people back. Pity and forgive my fault; and ah, remember in thy prayers one who so passionately loves thee. Farewell! farewell!

[Kisses her robe and rushes out. Ione sinks down.]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 183]

SCENE EIGHTH.

[On the battlements. Ione, watching the battle.]

Ione. The battle rages fiercely at the city gates, and the messengers are fearful of defeat. I cannot rest while Constantine is in such peril. Let me watch here and pray for him. Ah, I can see his white plume waving in the thickest of the fight, where the blows fall heaviest and the danger is most great. The gods guard him in this fearful hour! See how small the brave band grows; they falter and retreat. One blow now bravely struck may turn the tide of battle. It shall be done! I will arm the slaves now in the palace, and lead them on to victory or death. We may win—and if *not*, I shall die in saving thee, Constantine!

[Ione rushes out.]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 184]

SCENE NINTH.

[The castle terrace. Enter Constantine.]

Con. The victory is ours, and Greece again is free, thanks to the gods, and to the brave unknown who led on my slaves, and saved us when all hope seemed gone. Who could have been the fearless stranger? Like an avenging spirit came the mysterious leader, carrying terror and destruction to the Turkish ranks. My brave troops rallied and we

won the day. Yet when I sought him, he was gone, and none could tell me where. He hath won my deepest gratitude, and the honor of all Greece for this brave deed.

But where is lone? Why comes she not to bid me welcome home? Ah, could she know that thoughts of her gave courage to my heart, and strength to my weak[Pg 185] arm, and led me on that I might be more worthy her! Ah, yonder comes the stranger; he may not think to see me here. I will step aside.

[Constantine *retires*. Enter lone in armor, bearing sword.

lone. The gods be thanked! the brave young prince hath conquered. From the flying Turk I won his banner back, and now my task is done. I must fling by this strange disguise and be myself again. I must bind up my wound and seek to rest, for I am faint and weary. Ah, what means this sudden dimness of mine eyes, this faintness—can it be death? 'T is welcome,—Constantine, it is for thee!

[lone *faints*; Constantine *rushes in*.

Con. lone, lone, look up and listen to the blessings of my grateful heart for all thou hast dared and done for me. So pale, so still! Ah, must she die now I have learned to love so fervently and well? lone, awake!

[lone *rouses*.

[Pg 186]lone. Pardon this weakness; I will retire, my lord.

Con. Ah, do not leave me till I have poured out my gratitude. My country owes its liberty to thee: then let me here before thee offer up my country's thanks, and tell thee what my heart hath striven to hide. Dear lone, listen, I do beseech thee! [*Kneels*.]

lone. My lord, remember Lady Irene.

Con. [*starting up*]. Why comes she thus between my happiness and me? Why did she send thee hither? Thou hast made the chain that binds her to me heavier to be borne; the sorrow of my heart more bitter still. Nay, do not weep. I will be calm. Thou art pale and faint, lone,—lean thus on me.

lone. Nay, leave me; I cannot listen to thee. Go, I pray thee, go!

Con. Not till thou hast pardoned me. I have made thee weep, and every tear that falls reproaches me for my rash words. Forget them, and forgive me.

[Pg 187]lone. Ask not forgiveness of thy slave, my lord. 'Tis I who have offended. And think not thus of Lady Irene, who in her distant home hath cherished tender thoughts of one whom all so honored. Think of her grief when she shall find thee cold and

careless, and shall learn that he who should most love and cherish, deems her but a burden, and hates the wife whom he hath vowed to wed. Ah, think of this, and smile no more upon the slave who may not listen to her lord.

Con. Thou art right, lone. I will obey thee, and seek to hide my sorrow within my lonely breast. Teach me to love thy mistress as I ought, and I will sacrifice each selfish wish, and be more worthy thy forgiveness, and a little place within thy heart. Trust me, I will speak no more of my unhappy love, and will seek thee only when thine own voice bids me come.

The sunlight of thy presence is my truest joy, and banishment from thee the[Pg 188] punishment my wilful heart deserves. Rest here, lone, and weep for me no more. I am happy if thou wilt but smile again. Farewell, and may the gods forever bless thee! [*Kisses her robe, and rushes out.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 189]

SCENE TENTH.

[*A gallery in the palace. Enter lone with flowers.*]

lone. How desolate and dreary all hath grown! The garden once so bright hath lost its beauty now, for Constantine no longer walks beside me. The palace rooms seem sad and lonely, for his voice no longer echoes there, and the music of his harp is never heard. His pale face haunts me through all my waking hours, and his mournful eyes look on me in my dreams. But soon his sorrow all shall cease, for nearer draws the day when Princess Irene comes to claim the heart so hardly won, and will by constancy and love so faithfully reward. Hark! I hear a step. It is Rienzi. How shall I escape,—my veil is in the garden! He knows me and[Pg 190] will discover all. Stay! this curtain shall conceal me [*hides within the drapery*].

[*Enter Rienzi stealthily.*]

Rienzi. How! not here? I told the messenger to meet me in the gallery that leads from the garden. Curses on him! he hath delayed, and were I discovered in this part of the palace, all might be betrayed. I'll wait, and if he comes not, I'll bear the message to the friends myself, and tell the bold conspirators we meet to-night near the haunted glen, to lay yet farther plans. We must rid the kingdom of the prince, who will be made ere long our king, for his bridal with the Princess Irene draws more near. But ere the royal

crown shall rest upon his brow, that head shall be laid low. The queen will soon follow her young son, and then we'll seize the kingdom and rule it as we will. Hark! methought I heard a sound. I may be watched. I'll stay no longer, but seek the place myself [*steals out and disappears in the garden*].

[Pg 191][*lone comes from her hiding-place.*

lone. Surely the gods have sent me to watch above thee, Constantine, and save thee from the danger that surrounds thee. I will haste to tell him all I have discovered. Yet, no! Rienzi may escape, and I can charge none other with the crime. They meet near the haunted glen, and not a slave would follow even his brave prince to that dark spot. How can I aid him to discover those who seek to do him harm? Stay! I will go alone. Once have I dared the dangers of the way to save thy life, Constantine; again I'll tread the fearful path, and watch the traitors at their evil work. It shall be done! I will dare all, and fail not, falter not, till thou who art dearer to me than life itself art safe again.

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 192]

SCENE ELEVENTH.

[*A wood near the haunted glen. lone shrouded in white glides in and conceals herself among the trees. Enter Rienzi.*]

Rienzi [*looking fearfully about*]. 'Tis a wild and lonely spot, and 'tis said strange spirits have been seen to wander here. Why come they not? 'Tis past the hour, and I who stand undaunted when the fiercest battle rages round me, now tremble with strange fear in this dim spot. Shame on thee, Rienzi, there is nought to fear [*opens a scroll and reads*]. Here are their names, all pledged to see the deed accomplished. 'Tis a goodly list and Constantine must fall when foes like these are round him. [*lone appears within the glen.*

Ha! methought I heard a sound! Nay, 'twas my foolish fancy. Spirits, I defy thee!

[Pg 193]lone. Beware! Beware!

Rienzi. Ye gods, what's that? It was a voice. [*Rushes wildly towards the glen, sees lone, drops scroll and dagger.*] 'Tis a spirit! The gods preserve me, I will not stay! [*Exit in terror.*]

[Enter lone.

lone. Saved! saved! Here are the traitors' names, and here Rienzi's dagger to prove my story true. Now hence with all my speed, no time is to be lost! These to thee, Constantine, and joy unfailing to my own fond heart.

[Exit lone.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 194]

SCENE TWELFTH.

[Apartment in the palace. Enter Constantine.]

Con. This little garland of pale, withered flowers is all now left me of lone, faded like my own bright hopes, broken like my own sad heart. Yet still I cherish it, for her dear hand wove the wreath, and her soft eyes smiled above the flowers as she twined them for my brow. Those happy days are passed; she comes no more, but leaves me sorrowing and alone. And yet 'tis better so. The princess comes to claim my hand, and then 'twill be a sin to watch lone, to follow her unseen, and listen to her voice when least she thinks me near. The gods give me strength to bear my trial worthily, and suffer silently the greatest sorrow life can give,—that of losing her [*leans sadly upon the harp*].

[Pg 195][Enter lone.

lone. My lord—He does not hear me, how bitter and how deep must be his grief, when the voice that most he loves falls thus unheeded on his ear. My lord—

Con. [*starting*]. And thou art really here? Ah, lone, I have longed for thee most earnestly. Ah, forgive me! In my joy I have disobeyed, and told the happiness thy presence brings. What wouldst thou with me?

lone. My lord, I have strange tidings for thine ear.

Con. Oh, tell me not the Princess Irene hath arrived!

lone. Nay, 'tis not that. I have learned the secret of a fearful plot against thy life. Rienzi, and a band of other traitors, seek to win thy throne and take the life of their kind prince.

Con. It cannot be, lone! They could not raise their hands 'gainst one who hath striven for their good. They cannot wish the life I would so gladly have lain down[Pg 196] to save them. Who told thee this, lone? I cannot—no, I will not think they could prove so ungrateful unto their prince.

lone. I cannot doubt the truth of this, my lord, for one whose word I trust learned it, and followed to the haunted glen, there saw Rienzi, whose guilty conscience drove him from the place, leaving behind this scroll whereon are all the traitors' names. And this dagger,—'tis his own, as thou mayst see [*shows dagger and scroll*].

Con. I can no longer doubt; but I had rather have felt the dagger in my heart than such a wound as this. The names are few; I fear them not, and will ere long show them a king may pardon all save treachery like this. But tell the name of thy brave friend who hath discovered this deep treason, and let me offer some reward to one who hath watched above me with such faithful care.

lone. Nay, my lord, no gift, no thanks are needed. 'Tis a true and loving subject, who is well rewarded if his king be safe.

[Pg 197]Con. Thou canst not thus deceive me. It was thine own true heart that dared so much to save my life. Oh, lone, why wilt thou make me love thee more by deeds like these,—why make the sorrow heavier to bear, the parting sadder still?

lone. Thou dost forget, my lord, I have but done my duty. May it please thee, listen to a message I bear thee from the queen.

Con. Say on. I will gladly listen to thy voice while yet I may.

lone. She bid me tell thee that to-morrow, ere the sun shall set, the Princess Irene will be here. [*Constantine starts and turns aside.*] Forgive me that I pain thee, but I must obey. Yet, farther: thy bride hath sent her statue as a gift to thee, and thou wilt find it in the queen's pavilion. She bid me say she prayed thee to go look upon it, and remember there thy solemn vow.

Con. Oh, lone, could she send none but thee to tell me this? To hear it from[Pg 198] thy lips but makes the tidings heavier to bear. Canst thou bid me go, and vow to love one whom I have learned to hate? Canst thou bid me leave thee for a fate like this?

lone. My lord, thou art soon to be a king; then for thy country's sake, remember thy hand is plighted to the princess, and let no kindly thoughts of a humble slave keep thy heart from its solemn duty.

Con. I am no king,—'tis I who am the slave, and thou, lone, are more to me than country, home, or friends. Nay, do not turn away,—think only of the love I bear thee, and listen to my prayer.

lone. I must not listen. Hast thou so soon forgot the vow thou made that no word of love should pass thy lips? Remember, 'tis a slave who stands before thee.

Con. Once more thou shalt listen to me, lone, and then I will be still forever. Thou shalt be my judge, thy lips *shall*[Pg 199] speak my fate. I cannot love the princess. Wouldst thou bid me vow to cherish her while my heart is wholly thine? Wouldst thou ask me to pass through life beside her with a false vow on my lips, and, with words of love I do not feel, conceal from her the grief of my divided heart? Must I give up all the bright dreams of a happier lot, and feel that life is but a bitter struggle, a ceaseless longing but for thee? Rather bid me to forget the princess and bind with Love's sweet chains the slave unto my side,—my bride forever.

lone. The *slave* lone can never be thy bride, and thou art bound by solemn vows to wed the Princess Irene. My duty and thine honor are more precious than a poor slave's love. Banish all thoughts of her, and prove thyself a faithful lord unto the wife who comes now trustingly to thee. Ask thine own heart if life could be a bitter pilgrimage, when a sacrifice like this had been so nobly made. A tender wife[Pg 200] beside thee, a mother's blessing on thy head,—oh, were not this a happier fate than to enjoy a short, bright dream of love, but to awake and find thy heart's peace gone, thy happiness forever fled; to see the eyes that once looked reverently upon thee now turned aside, and lips that spoke but tender words now whisper scornfully of broken vows thou wert not brave enough to keep. Forgive me, but I cannot see the prince so false to his own noble heart. Cast off this spell; forget me, and Irene shall win thee back to happiness.

Con. Never! All her loveliness can never banish the pure, undying love I bear to thee. Oh, lone, canst thou doubt its truth, when I obey thee now and prove how great thy power o'er my heart hath grown? Oh, let the sacrifice win from *thee* one gentle thought, one kind remembrance of him whose life thou hast made so beautiful for a short hour. And in my loneliness, sweet memories of thee shall[Pg 201] cheer and gladden, and I will bear all for thy dear sake. And now farewell. Forgive if I have grieved thee, and at parting grant me one token to the silent love that henceforth must lie unseen within my heart. Farewell, lone! [*He kisses her.*]

lone [*falling at his feet*]. Ah, forgive me,—here let me seek thy pardon for the grief I have brought thee. May all the happiness that earth can bring be ever thine. But, if all others should forsake thee, in thine hour of sorrow remember there is one true heart

that cannot change. Oh, may the gods bless thee! 'Tis my last wish, last prayer
[weeps]. Farewell!

Con. Stay! I would claim from thee one little word which hath the power to brighten
e'en my sorrow. I have never asked thee, for I thought my heart had read it in thine eyes
that looked so kindly on me; in the lips that spoke such gentle words of hope. But ah!
tell me now at parting dost thou *love* me, dear lone?

lone. I do, most fondly, truly love thee.

[Pg 202]Con. lone, thy voice hath been a holy spell to win me to my duty. Thy love shall
keep me pure and faithful, till we meet above. Farewell!

lone. Farewell!—and oh, remember how I have loved thee; and may the memory of all
I have borne for thee win thy pardon for any wrong I may have done thee. The princess
will repay the grief the slave hath caused thy noble heart. Remember lone, and be
true.

[Exit.

Con. Gone, gone, now lost to me forever! Remember thee! Ah, how can I ever banish
thy dear image from this heart that now hath grown so desolate? I will be true. None
shall ever know how hard a struggle hath been mine, that I might still be worthy thee.
Yes, Irene, I will strive to love thee, and may the gods give me strength; but lone, lone,
how can I give thee up! [*Picks up a flower lone has dropped, and puts it in his bosom
and goes sadly out.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 203]

SCENE THIRTEENTH.

[The Queen's *pavilion*. A dark curtain hangs before an alcove. Enter Constantine.]

Con. The hour hath come when I shall gaze upon the form of her who hath cast so
dark a shadow o'er my life. Beautiful and young, and blessed with all that makes her
worthy to be loved, and yet I fear I have not taught my wilful heart the tenderness I
ought.

I fear to draw aside the veil that hides her from me, for I cannot banish the sweet
image that forever floats before mine eyes. lone's soft gaze is on me, and the lips are
whispering, "I love thee!" But I have promised to be true,—no thoughts of her must

lead me now astray. My fate is here [*approaches the curtain*]. Let me gaze upon[Pg 204] it, and think gently of the wife so soon to be mine own. Why do I fear? Courage, my heart! [*He draws aside the curtain, and lone, veiled, appears as a statue upon its pedestal.*] Another veil to raise! How hard the simple deed hath grown. One last sweet thought of thee, lone, and then I will no longer falter. [*He turns away and bows his head.*]

lone. Constantine! [*He starts, and gazes in wonder as the statue, casting aside the veil, comes down and kneels.*] Here at thy feet kneels thy hated bride,—the "proud, cold princess," asking thee to pardon all the sorrow she hath given thee. Ah, smile upon me, and forget lone, who as a slave hath won thy love, but as the princess will repay it,—forgive, and love me still!

Con. Thou, thou Irene,—she whom I so feared to look upon? Ah, no!—thou art lone, the gentle slave. Say am I dreaming? Why art thou here to make another parting the harder to be[Pg 205] borne? Fling by thy crown and be lone again.

Irene [*rising*]. Listen, Constantine, and I will tell thee all. I am Irene. In my distant home I learned thou didst not love me, and I vowed to win thy heart before I claimed it. Thus, unknown, the proud princess served thee as a slave, and learned to love thee with a woman's fondest faith. I watched above thee that no harm should fall; I cheered and gladdened life for thee, and won the heart I longed for. I knew the sorrow thou wouldst feel, but tried thy faith by asking thee to sacrifice thy love and keep thine honor stainless. Here let me offer up a woman's fondest trust and most undying love. Wilt thou believe, and pardon mine offence? [*Kneels again before him.*]

Con. Not at my feet, Irene!—'tis I who should bend low before thee, asking thy forgiveness. For all thou hast dared for me; for every fearless deed; for every loving thought, all I can lay before thee is[Pg 206] a fond and faithful heart, whose reverence and love can never die, but through the pilgrimage of life shall be as true and tender as when I gave it to the slave lone [*embraces Irene*].

[*Tableau.*]

CURTAIN.

ION.

NOTE TO ION.

This play was found too uninteresting for presentation, and was left unfinished, but is here given as a specimen of what the young authors considered *very fine* writing.

The drama was, of course, to end well. Cleon, being free, at once assembles a noble army, returns to conquer Mohammed and release Ion, who weds the lovely Zuleika, becomes king, and "lives happily forever after."

CHARACTERS.

Mohammed *The Turk.*

Cleon *Prince of Greece.*

Ion *Son of Cleon.*

Adrastus *A Priest.*

Hafiz *Turkish Envoy.*

Hassan *A Slave.*

Murad *A Slave.*

Abdallah *A Slave.*

Iantha *Wife of Cleon.*

Zuleika *Daughter of Mohammed.*

Medon *A Slave.*

Selim *A Slave.*

ION.

SCENE FIRST.

[*Room in the palace of Cleon. Iantha and Adrastus.*]

Iantha. How wearily the days wear on, and the heavy hours so fraught with doubt press like death upon my aching heart. To the young, the fair, the happy, life is a blissful dream, filled with bright joys; for hope like a star beams on their pathway. But to the grief-worn heart, worn with weary watching, vexed with sad cares, whose hours are filled with fear, and ever thronging sorrows, whose star burns with a dim uncertain

light,—oh, weary, weary is the pilgrimage; joyless the present, dark the future; and the sooner all is o'er, the better.

[Pg 212]Adrastus. Daughter, thou hast forgot. The radiant star may pale and fade, but He who giveth it its light still liveth. Turn unto Him thy worn and bleeding heart, and comfortless thou shalt not be.

Iantha. Father, I cannot. When I would pray for resignation, words fail me, and my soul is filled with murmuring, while round me throng visions of battle-fields and death. Ever comes before me the form of Cleon,—no longer bright and beautiful as when, burning with hope and confidence in his high calling, he went forth to conquer or to die; but fallen, bleeding, perhaps dead, or a captive in the dungeon of the pagan, doomed to waste in hopeless misery the long years of his manhood. And my boy,—what will be his fate? Father, can I think on this and pray?

Adrastus. 'Tis hard, Iantha; but to His aid alone canst thou look up to save thy husband from the horrors of a bloody[Pg 213] war. Call on Him, and He, the merciful, will in thy great need be near thee.

[Enter Medon.

Medon. A stranger craveth audience.

Iantha [*rushing forward*]. A stranger! Cometh he from my lord?

Medon. I know not, lady; but as a messenger is he clad, and with great haste demandeth speech of thee, saying he bore tidings of great import.

Iantha. Admit him instantly. [*Exit Medon.*] Father, do thou follow, and speed him hither.

Adrastus. I hasten to obey thee. Bear a brave heart, my daughter. I feel that hope is near.

[*Exit Adrastus.*

Iantha [*joyfully*]. Hope,—thrice blessed word!—wilt thou indeed visit this doubting heart once more, and sweeten the cup thou hast so long forsaken? [*Enter Hafiz.*] Welcome! comest thou from my lord? Thy tidings speedily!

Hafiz. To the wife of Cleon, late commander[Pg 214] of the rebel Greeks, am I sent to bear tidings of their defeat by Mohammed, now master of all Greece.

Adrastus. And my lord,—the noble Cleon?

Hafiz. Betrayed, defeated, and now lying under sentence of immediate death in the dungeon of the Sultan.

Iantha. Lost! lost! lost! [*Falls fainting on a couch.*]

[*Enter Adrastus.*

Adrastus. Daughter, look up!—there is yet hope. There is no time for rest. Up! rouse thy brave, till now, unconquered heart and cast off this spell. And thou, slave, hence,—away!

[*Exit Hafiz.*

Iantha [*rousing*]. Defeated, imprisoned, condemned,—words unto one heart fraught with such dire despair. Tell me, Father, oh, tell me truly, do I dream?

[*Enter Ion, who stands listening.*

Adrastus. 'Tis no dream. The rough soldier did but tell thee in rude speech,[Pg 215] what I was hastening in more guarded words to bear thee. 'Tis true; thy lord is in Mohammed's power, a victim to the perfidy of pagans, and doomed unto a speedy death. Nay, Iantha, shrink not, but as a soldier's wife, glory in the death of thy brave knight, dying for his country; and in his martyrdom take to thy soul sweet comfort.

Iantha. Comfort! Oh, man, thou little knowest woman's heart! What to her is glory, when him she loveth is torn from her forever? What to the orphan is the crown of martyrdom, the hero's fame, the praise of nations, the homage of the great? Will they give back the noble dead, heal the broken heart, tear bitter memories from the wounded soul to whom earth is desolate? Nay, Father, nay. Oh, Cleon, would I could die with thee!

Adrastus. This mighty sorrow o'erpowers her reason and will destroy all hope. Iantha, daughter, rouse thyself; let the love thou dost bear thy lord now aid in his deliverance. From the wealth[Pg 216] of thy heart's true affection, devise thou some way to save him.

Iantha. Aid me, Father; I have no power of thought. I will trust all to *thee*.

[*Ion approaches.*

Adrastus. I know not what to counsel thee; my life hath ill fitted me to deal with soldiers and with kings. But if some messenger—

lantha. Nay, it will not serve. None will dare brave the anger of the pagan, and death were the doom of such as approach him other than as a slave. And yet,—perchance he might relent. Oh, were there some true heart, fearless and loving, to aid me now in mine hour of distress! Where can I look for help?

Ion [*coming forward*]. Here, Mother,—I will seek the camp of Mohammed.

lantha. Thou!—my Ion, my only one. No, no; it may not be,—thy tender youth, thy gentle, untried spirit. 'Tis madness e'en to think on!

Ion. Mother, am I not a soldier's son,[Pg 217] cradled 'mid warriors? Runs not the blood of heroes in these veins? Are not my father's deeds, his bright, untarnished name, my proud inheritance? What though this tender form is yet untried; what though these arms have never borne the knightly armor? No victor's laurels rest on this youthful brow, and I bear no honored name among the great and glorious of our land; yet, Mother, have I not a father, for whose dear sake I may yet purchase that knighthood for which this young heart glows? Am I not the son of Cleon?

Adrastus. Verily doth a spirit move the boy. Look on him now, lantha, and let no weak, unworthy doubt of thine curb the proud spirit that proves him worthy of his sire.

lantha. My son, my fair, young Ion, thou art all now left my widowed heart. How can I bid thee go! The barbarous pagan will doom thee to a cruel death. How canst thou, an unknown youth, move the fierce heart that hath slain thy sire?

[Pg 218]Ion. Fear not, Mother; he who calls me to this glorious mission will protect me. Shall I stand weeping while my father still breathes the air of pagan dungeons; while the base fetters of the infidel rest on his limbs, and his brave followers lie unavenged in their cold, bloody graves; while my country's banner, torn, dishonored, is trampled in the dust,—and he the proud, the brave, till now unconquered defender of that country's honor, lies doomed to an ignominious death? Oh, Mother, bid me go!

Adrastus. lantha, speak to the boy! Let him not say his *mother* taught him fear.

lantha. My Ion, go,—strong in thine innocence and faith, go forth upon thy holy mission; and surely He who looketh ever with a loving face on those who put their trust in Him, will in His mercy guard and guide thee [*girds on his sword*]. Farewell! Go,—with thy mother's blessing on thee![Pg 219]

Ion. Now is my heart filled all anew with hope and courage, and I go forth trustingly. Father, thy blessing [*kneels before Adrastus*].

Adrastus. Go, thou self-anointed victim on the altar of thy love. Bless thy pure, faithful heart!

Ion [*rising*]. Farewell! Embrace me, Mother.

lantha [*pressing Ion to her breast*]. Farewell, my Ion. And if the great Father wills it that I look not again on thee in life, into His care do I commit thee. Farewell!

Ion. Mother, farewell! And if I fall, mourn not, but glory that I died as best became the son of Cleon [*draws his sword*]. And now leap forth, my sword!—henceforth is there no rest nor honor till we have conquered. Father, I come, I come! [*Ion rushes out; lantha rushes to the window, tears off her veil and waves it to Ion.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 220]

SCENE SECOND.

[*Tent of Mohammed; maps and arms lying about. Mohammed and Hafiz.*]

Moh'd. And spake they no word of ransom or of hostage?

Hafiz. None, sire. The lady lay as one struck dead; and the priest, foul Christian dog, bade me go hence, and tarry not.

Moh'd. And held you no speech with those about the princess. Sure, there were some to listen to thy master's word.

Hafiz. Great master, I sought in vain to set before them the royal will. At first it were as though a spell had fallen on them. Nay, some did turn aside and weep, rending their hair, as though all hope were lost. Then, when I strove to win them to some counsel, they woke to such an uproar, cursing thy perfidy, and vowing most dire and speedy vengeance[Pg 221] on thee, clashing their weapons and crying, "Down with the pagan dogs!" Then, drawing forth their lances with fierce oaths, they drove me from the gates in such warlike manner, I could but strive with haste to make good mine escape, and without rest have I journeyed hither to bring thee tidings.

Moh'd. By the prophet! and is it thus they serve the royal messenger. But they shall rue it dearly. Cleon shall die. To-morrow's sun shall never shine for him. The proud Greeks shall learn to dread Mohammed's ire, and bend their haughty heads before him in the dust. I offer ransom, and they will not harken. I send them honorable terms, and they

thrust my messenger rudely from their gates. They have dared to brave me,—they shall feel my power!

Hafiz. Mighty Mohammed, if thy poor slave might offer counsel, were it not wise to tarry till the Greeks on cooler thought shall seek thee with some treaty which[Pg 222] may avail thee better than such hasty vengeance. How much more worthy were a heavy ransom than the life of a single miserable prince.

Moh'd. Peace, slave! I have said Cleon shall die, and, by Allah! so I have not word from these rebel dogs ere three days shall wear away, his body swung from the battlements shall bear them tidings of Mohammed's power. [*Enter Selim.*] What hath befallen, Selim, that thou comest in such haste?

Selim. Most mighty king, there waits without a youth, demanding speech of thee.

Moh'd. A youth! Who may he be, and what seeks he with us?

Selim. Most gracious sire, I know not. Our guard surprised him wandering without the camp,—alone, unarmed, save with a single sword; young, and I think a Greek. Abdallah seized him as a spy, and led him hither to await thy royal will. He doth refuse all question, demanding to[Pg 223] be led before thee, where he will unfold his errand.

Moh'd. A Greek! Bring him before us, an he prove a spy he shall hang before the day waxeth older by an hour. Hence,—bring him hither! [*Exit Selim.*] By Allah! my proud foes have deigned to send us messengers, and seek to win the favor so rudely scorned. They know not Mohammed, and, so they humble not themselves, will sue in vain.

[*Enter Selim, dragging Ion.*]

Selim. Your Mightiness doth behold the youth. [*To Ion, who stands proudly.*] Kneel, slave!

Ion. I kneel not unto tyrants.

Moh'd. How, bold stripling! Weigh with more care thy speech, and forget not before whom thou dost stand. [*To Selim.*] Go, slave, and stand without; see that none enter here unbidden. [*Exit Selim.*] Speak, boy! Who art thou, and why dost thou seek thus fearlessly the presence of thy foe?—and beware thou speakest truly[Pg 224] if it is as a friend to treat in honorable fashion, or as a spy, thou now standest before us.

Ion. I am a Greek, son to the noble Cleon, now thy captive; I seek his rescue.

Moh'd. Son to Cleon! Now, by the Prophet, 'tis wondrous strange! And thou hast ventured alone into the camp amid thy deadly foes? Speak, boy,—thine errand!

Ion. To offer hostage; to treat with Mohammed for a father's life; to move to pity or to justice the heart that hath doomed a noble soldier unto an unjust death.

Moh'd. And where, my bold prince, are thy followers, thy slaves, thy royal train?

Ion. On yonder plain, cold in their graves.

Moh'd. Hast thou brought ransom? Where is thy gold?

Ion. In the coffers of the Turkish Mohammed, plundered from his slaughtered foes.

[Pg 225]Moh'd. Thou spakest of hostage,—I see it not.

Ion. 'Tis here,—the son of Cleon.

Moh'd. Thou! and thinkest thou thy young, worthless life were a fit hostage for the leader of a rebel band, the enemy of all true followers, whose capture hath cost blood and slaves and gold? By Allah! boy, thou must name a higher price to win the life thou doth seek.

Ion. I have nought else to offer. Thy hand hath rent from me friends, followers, gold, a sire. But if this young life hath any worth to thee, if these arms may toil for thee, this form bear burdens to thy royalty, take them,—take all, O king, but render unto me that life without which Greece is lost.

Moh'd. Peace! Thy speech is vain; thy life is nought to me.

Ion. I will serve thee as a slave; in all things do thy bidding,—faithful, unwearied, unrepining. Grant but my boon, and monarch shall never have a truer[Pg 226] vassal than I will be to thee. Great Mohammed, let me not plead in vain.

Moh'd. Peace, I say; anger me not.

Ion. O king, hast thou no heart? Think of the ruined home, the mourning people, the land made desolate by thee; of her who now counts the weary hours for tidings of those dear to her,—tidings fraught with life or death as thou shalt decree; of the son by thee doomed to see his honored sire, hero of a hundred battles dragged like a slave unto a shameful death. As thou wilt have mercy shown to thee, that mercy show thou unto me. Oh, say to me, "Thy father lives!"

Moh'd. Away! I will not listen.

Ion. Nay, I *will* kneel to thee. I who never knelt to man before, now implore thee with earnest supplication. 'Tis for a father's life.

Moh'd. Kneel not to me,—it is in vain. Thy father is my captive, my deadliest foe, whom I hate, and curse,—ay, [Pg 227] and will slay. Boy, dost thou know to whom thou dost bow?

Ion [*rising proudly*]. To the pagan Mohammed,—he who with murderous hand hath bathed in blood the smiling plains of Greece; profaned her altars, enslaved her people, and filled the land with widows' tears and orphans' cries; he who by perfidy makes captives of his foes, refusing hostage and scorning honorable treaty; turns from all supplicants, closes his heart to mercy, and tramples under foot all pity and all justice,—the murderer, and the tyrant. Yes, king, I know to whom I plead.

Moh'd. [*in great anger*]. Ho, without there, guards!—Selim! [*Enter Selim and soldiers.*] Away with the prisoner! Bind him fast; see he escape not. Mohammed stands not to be braved by a beardless boy! Hence! [*Guards approach with chains.*]

Ion. Lay not hands upon me,—I am no slave! One more appeal: May a son look once more upon his father ere death [Pg 228] parts them forever? May I but for an hour speak with Cleon?

Moh'd. Once more thou mayst look upon the rebel Greek. When he hangs from yonder battlement thou mayst gaze unbidden as thou wilt. Away! With to-morrow's sun, he dies.

Ion. So soon, O king!—nay, the son of Cleon kneels not to thee again [*turns to go*].

Moh'd. Stay,—yield up thy sword! Bend thy proud knee, and surrender unto me the arms thou art unworthy now to bear.

Ion [*drawing his sword*]. This, my sword, girded on by a mother's hand, pledged to the deliverance of a captive sire, dedicated to the service of my country, unstained, unconquered,—*thus* do I surrender thee. [*He breaks the sword, and flings it down.*]

Moh'd. Again dost thou brave me! Away with the rebel! Bind him hand and foot. He shall learn what it is to be Mohammed's slave. Hence, I say!

[Pg 229] Ion. I am thy captive, but thy slave—never! Thou mayst chain my limbs, thou canst *not* bind my freeborn soul! Lead on,—I follow.

[*Exit Ion and guards.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 230]

SCENE THIRD.

[*Tent of Zuleika; guitar, ottoman, etc.*]

Zuleika [*pacing up and down*]. Night draweth on apace, and ever nearer comes the fatal hour. With to-morrow's dawn all hope is o'er, for Mohammed hath sworn the Greek shall die, and when was *he* ere known to fail in his dread purpose? In vain have I wept before him, imploring him to have some mercy; in vain have I sought with golden promises to move the stony-hearted Hafiz,—all, all hath failed, and I am in despair. And that brave youth, his true heart filled with love's pure devotion, seeking by the sacrifice of his own life to save a father! And now each moment bringeth nearer the death-hour of that father, and he is mourning in solitude that he may not say farewell. Where can I turn for help? Ah, Hassan! my faithful slave. He is true, and loveth me like his[Pg 231] own. He must aid me [*claps her hands; enter Hassan*]. Hassan, thou lovest me, and would not see me grieve?

Hassan. Allah, forbid! Thou art dear to old Hassan as the breath of life, and while life lingers he will serve thee.

Zuleika. Then must thou aid me in a deed of mercy. Who doth keep watch to-night before the tent of the young Greek?

Hassan. Mine is the watch. Wherefore dost thou seek to know?

Zuleika. Hassan, thou hast sworn to serve me. I have a boon to ask of thee.

Hassan. Speak, lady! thy slave doth listen.

Zuleika. Thou knowest that with the morning sun Mohammed hath sworn Cleon shall die. Such is the fierce anger he doth bear his foe he hath refused all mercy and scorned to listen to the prayers of the young prince who hath journeyed hither at peril of his own life to place himself in the power of the king as hostage for his father.

[Pg 232]Hassan. It is indeed most true. Poor youth!

Zuleika. 'Tis of him I would speak to thee. Mohammed, angered at his boldness, hath, as thou knowest, guarded him in yonder tent, denying him his last sad prayer to speak once more in life with his father. Oh, Hassan, what must be the agony of that young heart to see the hours swift speeding by, and know no hope.

Hassan. What wouldst thou have me do?

Zuleika. Lead him to his father; give him the consolation of folding to his breast the beloved one to save whose life he hath sacrificed his own.

Hassan. Dear mistress, thou art dreaming, and cannot know the danger of so rash a deed. Bethink thee of Mohammed's anger, the almost certain doom of such as dare to brave his mighty will. I pray thee let not thy noble heart lead thee astray. Thou canst not save him, and will but harm thyself.

[Pg 233]Zuleika. Hassan, thy love and true devotion, I well know, doth prompt thee to thus counsel, and in thy fear for me thou dost forget to think of mercy or of pity. I thank thee; but thou canst not move me from my firm resolve. Again I ask thee, Wilt thou aid me?

Hassan [*falling at her feet*]. Pardon, but I cannot. Heed, I implore thee, the counsel of thy faithful servant, and trust to the wisdom these gray hairs have brought. Thou art young and brave, but believe me, maiden, dangers of which thou dost not dream beset the path, and I were no true friend did I not warn thee to beware. Do not tempt me; I cannot aid thee to thy ruin.

Zuleika. Then will I go alone. I will brave the peril, and carry comfort to a suffering soul [*turns to go; Hassan catches her robe*].

Hassan. Maiden! once more let thy slave entreat. Thy father places faith in me. I am the captive's guard.

[Pg 234]Zuleika. Peace, Hassan, peace; if life be then so dear to thee, and thy duty to thy king greater than that thou dost owe to thy fellow-man, Allah forbid that I should tempt thee to forget it. But did death look me in the face, I would not tarry now.

Hassan. And thou wouldst seek the captive's cell?

Zuleika. This very hour. Soon it will be too late.

Hassan. Thou knowest not the way,—soldiers guard every turn. Oh, tarry till the dawn, I do implore thee.

Zuleika. The darkness shall be my guide, Allah my guard; shrouded in yon dark mantle none will deem me other than a slave. Again I ask thee, Wilt thou go?

Hassan. I go. I were no true man to tremble when a woman fears not. I will guide thee, and may Allah in his mercy shield us both. Say thy prayers, Hassan, for thy head no longer rests in safety.

Zuleika. Come, let us on! The moments[Pg 235] speed. The darkening gloom befriends us. First to the tent of the young prince, and while I in brief speech do acquaint him with mine errand, thou shalt keep guard without. Then will we guide him to his father, and unto Allah leave the rest [*shrouds herself in dark mantle and veil*]. Lead on, good Hassan. Let us away!

Hassan. Fold thy veil closer, that none may know the daughter of Mohammed walks thus late abroad. Come, and Allah grant we sleep not in paradise to-morrow!

[*Exit, leading Zuleika.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 236]

SCENE FOURTH.

[*Ion's tent. Ion chained, in an attitude of deep despair, upon a miserable couch. He does not see the entrance of Zuleika and Hassan.*]

Zuleika. Stand thou without as watch, good Hassan, and warn me if any shall approach. [*Exit Hassan.*] Young Greek, despair not; hope is nigh.

Ion [*starting up*]. Bright vision, whence comest thou? Art thou the phantom of a dream, or some blest visitant from that better land, come to bear me hence? What art thou?

Zuleika. I am no vision, but a mortal maiden, come to bring thee consolation.

Ion. Consolation! ah, then indeed thou art no mortal; for unto grief like mine there is no consolation, save that which cometh from above.

[Pg 237]Zuleika. Nay, believe it not. Human hearts are at this moment hoping, and human hands are striving earnestly to spare thee the agony thou dost dread.

Ion. Are there then hearts to feel for the poor Greek? I had thought I was alone,—alone 'mid mine enemies. Sure, those fetters are no dream, this dark cell, the words "Thy father dies!" No, no! it is a dread reality. The words are burned into my brain.

Zuleika. Is death, then, so dread a thing unto a warrior? I had thought it brought him fame and glory.

Ion. Death! Oh, maiden! To the soldier on the battle-field, fighting for his father-land 'mid the clash of arms, the fierce blows of foemen, the shouts of victory; 'neath the

banner of his country, the gratitude of a nation, the glory of a hero round his brow,— death were a happy, ay, a welcome friend. But alone, 'mid foes, disgraced by fetters, dragged to a dishonored grave, with none to whisper[Pg 238] of hope or comfort, death is a cruel, a most bitter foe.

Zuleika. Mine errand is to take from that death the bitterness thou dost mourn, to give a parting joy to the life now passing.

Ion. Oh, hast thou the power to save my father's life! Oh, use it now, and Greece shall bless thee for thy mercy!

Zuleika. Oh, that the power *were* mine, how gladly would I use it in a cause so glorious! I am but a woman, and tho' the heart is strong, the arm is very weak. I cannot save thy father, but trust I may still cheer the parting hours with a brief happiness.

Ion. Lady, thy words of kindly sympathy fall like sweet music on my troubled heart, and at thy magic call hope springeth up anew. Thou art unknown, and yet there is that within that doth whisper I may trust thee.

Zuleika. Thou mayst indeed. Heaven were not more true than I will be[Pg 239] unto my word. [Hassan *pauses before the door.*]

Hassan. Lady, the hours are fleeting. It were best to make good speed.

Zuleika. Hassan, thou dost counsel aright; morn must not find me here. [*To Ion.*] Young Greek, thou knowest with the coming dawn thy father dies.

Ion. Ay, ere another moon doth rise that life, so dear to Greece, shall be no more; the heart that beat so nobly at his country's call be still forever,—I know it well!

Zuleika. And hast thou no last word for him, no parting wish?

Ion. O maiden, my life were a glad sacrifice, so that I might for a single hour look on him,—for the last time say, "My father, bless thy Ion."

Zuleika. That hour shall be thine. Fold thyself in yonder cloak, and follow me.

Ion. Follow thee,—and whither?

Zuleika. To thy father's presence.[Pg 240] Thou shalt spend with him the last hours of his earthly life. Stay not; this friendly gloom will ere long pass away.

Ion [*falling on his knees and catching her robe*]. Art thou my guardian angel? Oh, may the consolation thou hath poured into a suffering soul, fall like heaven's dew upon

thine own; and if the prayers of a grateful heart bring hope and joy and peace, thy life shall bloom with choicest blessings. O maiden, how do I bless thee! [*Kisses her robe.*]

Zuleika. Speak not of that,—kneel not to me, a mortal maiden. Thy gratitude is my best reward. Hassan, lead on!

Hassan. Lady, I do thy bidding. First let me lead thee to a place of safety.

Zuleika. Nay, Hassan, I tarry here,—thou canst return; I will await thee. Now make all speed,—away!

Ion. Let us hence; my heart can ill contain its joy. Oh, my father, shall I see thee, hear thy voice, feel thine arms[Pg 241] once more about me, and die with thy blessing on my head. Heaven hath blessed my mission.

Zuleika. Shall we depart? The hour wanes.

Ion. I will follow whither thou shalt lead. But, stay! is there no danger unto thee? Will thy deed of mercy bring suffering to thee, my kind deliverer?

Zuleika. Fear not for me. Yet one pledge must I ask of thee on which my safety doth depend. 'Tis this: Swear that from the moment thou dost leave me until thou art again a prisoner here, though the path lie plain before thee thou wilt not fly.

Ion. I swear. Thou mayst trust me.

Zuleika. Yet once again. Breathe not to mortal ear the *means* by which thou sought'st thy sire, and let the memory of this hour fade from thy heart forever. [Ion *bows assent.*] What pledge have I of thy secrecy, and of thy truth?

Ion. The word of a Greek is sacred,[Pg 242] and were not my gratitude my surest pledge to *thee*?

Zuleika. Pardon, I do trust. Now haste thee.

Ion [*pointing to his fetters*]. Thou dost forget I am a prisoner still.

Zuleika. Hassan, unloose these fetters, and give the Greek his freedom. [Hassan *takes off the chains*; Ion *springs joyfully forward.*]

Ion. Now am I free again, and with the Turk's base fetters have I cast off my fears and my despair. Hope smiles upon me, and my father calls. Oh, let us tarry not.

Zuleika [*folding a dark mantle round him*]. Thus shrouded, in safety thou mayst reach his cell; this ring will spare thee question. Hassan will guide thee, and I—will pray for thy success. Farewell! May Allah aid thee!

Ion. Lady, though I may never know thee, never look on thee again, the memory of this brief hour will never fade.[Pg 243] The blessed gift of mercy thou dost bestow will I ever treasure with the deepest gratitude, and my fervent prayer that all Heaven's blessings may rest upon thee cease but with my life [*falls on his knee and kisses her hand*].

Pardon,—'tis my only thanks. Spirit of mercy, farewell! farewell!

[*Follows Hassan; Zuleika gazes after him, then sinks down weeping.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 244]

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Tent of Cleon the Greek. Cleon, chained, pacing to and fro.*]

Cleon. A few short hours and all is o'er,—Cleon sleeps with his fathers. I could have wished to die like a hero in my harness, and have known my grave were watered by my loved one's tears; to take my wife once more unto my bosom; once more bless my noble Ion; and pass hence with the blest consciousness of victory won. 'Tis bitter thus to die, ingloriously and alone. [*Proudly raising his head.*] But the name of Cleon is too dear unto his people e'er to be forgotten. The memory that he strove ever for his country's welfare shall strew with tearful blessings his unhonored grave. [*Steps approach; voices are heard.*] Ah, they come! They shall find me ready. [*Enter Ion.*] Has mine hour come? I am here.

[Pg 245][*Ion casts off his cloak, and springs forward.*]

Ion. Father! O my father!

Cleon [*starting back wildly*]. Thou? Here!

Ion. Yes, thy Ion; bless me, Father [*kneels*].

Cleon [*raising and clasping Ion to his breast*]. Here, on my heart, dear one. I turn to meet my executioners, and see thee, my boy. Great Heaven, I bless thee! [*They embrace tenderly and weep.*] Thou camest thither—how?

Ion. Alone, with my good sword.

Cleon. Thy guide through the perils of the way, my child?

Ion. The good Father who doth guide all who trust in him.

Cleon. And thine errand?

Ion. To behold thee, my father, and with my life to strive for thy release.

Cleon. My noble boy, thou hast come unto thy death. Oh, who could bid thee thus brave the doom that must await thee?

[Pg 246]Ion. My mother bid me forth; and as she girded on my sword, she bid me seek my father, with her blessing on my mission.

Cleon. My brave Ianthia, thus for thy country's sake to doom thine own heart to so deep a sorrow [*looks sadly upon Ion*]. Tell me, my son, did thy mother bear bravely up against the fatal tidings? I had feared her tender heart might but ill meet a blow so fearful. Speak to me of her.

Ion. When the rude Turk did in rough speech acquaint her with thy fell defeat, she sank as one o'erpowered by her grief, praying the friendly hand of death might take her hence; but soon the spirit of the Greek rose high within her, and, banishing her fears, with brave and trusting heart she sent me forth to seek, and if it might be, save thee. Ah, my father, that I might die for thee!

Cleon. And thou hast come to see me die! Dost thou not know that with the[Pg 247] night thy father passeth hence, and when the stars again look forth it will be upon his grave?

Ion. Father, 'tis because thou art doomed that I am here. And if my heart speak truly, those same bright stars shall serve to guide thee back to freedom.

Cleon. Thou doth speak wildly. What wilt thou do? Wilt *thou* brave the king?

Ion [*proudly*]. Nay, I have knelt for the last time unto Mohammed. I have offered him my liberty, my service, ay, my life itself, and he hath scorned me. I have deigned to bow before him as a suppliant, and he hath spurned me; I have sought by all the power love and despair could teach to move him, and his ear was closed to me. I seek him not again.

Cleon. Child, what hath led thee to the presence of the king? How didst thou brave the frown of him before whom even [armed](#) men do tremble? Didst thou dream thy feeble voice could reach a heart so cruel, that thy prayers could soften[Pg 248] one who knoweth not the name of mercy?

Ion. Love can brave all dangers. It giveth wisdom to the untaught, strength to the weak, hope to the despairing, comfort to the mourner. Love hath been my guide, my guard.

Cleon. My boy! my Ion! Truly doth God place in the pure heart of such as thou his truest wisdom, his deepest faith [*embraces him with deep emotion*]. But—art not thou in danger? Did not thy bold speech anger the proud king? Art thou still free?

Ion. Let not thy heart be vexed with fears for me,—I am unharmed.

Cleon. Ion, deceive me not, but as thou hopest for thy father's love, speak truly. Art thou in danger from the Turk, and in thy devotion to thy father dost thou seek to be thyself the sacrifice? Answer me, Ion.

Ion. Father, I sought to spare thy too o'erburdened heart another grief. I *am* a[Pg 249] prisoner in Mohammed's power, and know not if my fate be life or death.

Cleon. 'Tis as I feared; and thou, the last hope of thy country, must fall,—all, all, for me! Oh, mine own disgrace were bitter, but to see thee die! Oh, woe is me!

Ion. Father, were it not better thus to die, than in disgraceful peace to pass away with no thought for our fatherland, no proud consciousness of having at the call of duty sacrificed all we held most dear, and leave a name held sacred as one who yielded life and liberty on the altar of his country?

Cleon. But that thou in thine innocence and bloom should meet death at the hands of heartless foemen; and for *my* sake! 'Tis this that tears my heart.

Ion. The purer the victim the more acceptable the sacrifice. But fear not, dear father. The Turk is yet a man; 'tis 'gainst thee he wars, and he will not wreak his vengeance on a child. He may[Pg 250] relent, and for my love's sake, pardon mine offence.

Cleon. Child, thou knowest not Mohammed. He pardons none; all fall before him, with relentless hand,—all strew his pathway unto victory. Will he then spare and pity thee? Nay, sire and son must fall! [*Stands sorrowfully. Ion suddenly sees Zuleika's ring upon his hand, and springs forward.*]

Ion. Father, thou shalt yet breathe the air of freedom, shall clasp my mother to thy heart; once more shall lead thy gallant band onward to victory.

Cleon. Raise not bright hopes to crush them at their birth; wake not to dreams of triumph the heart that hath striven to drive hence all save the solemn thoughts meet for one so soon to pass away.

Ion [*pointing to the door*]. See, the gray morning 'gins to glimmer in the east. 'Tis no time for despair. Haste, Father, freedom is near!

Cleon. What doth thus move thee,[Pg 251] Ion? Dost thou forget these chains, the guards, the perils at each step? Thou art dreaming!

Ion. I tell thee 'tis no dream. Thou shalt be free. This mantle will disguise thee; this ring open a pathway through the guards; these stars shall be thy silent guide. Wilt thou go?

Cleon. 'Tis strange! Whence then that ring? How dost thou, a captive, wander thus freely, and offer liberty with such a bounteous hand?

Ion. A solemn oath doth forbid me to reveal to living man the secret of this hour; but if ever angels do leave their homes to minister to suffering souls, 'twas one most bright and beautiful who hath this night led me unto thee, and placed in mine hand the power to set thee free.

Cleon. Truth speaketh in thine earnest eye and pleading voice, and yet I dare not listen to thy tale.

Ion. Oh, Father, heed not thy fears, thy doubts! Take thy liberty, believing it[Pg 252] heaven-sent. No oath binds thee to Mohammed; thou art no rightful prisoner of war,—neither duty nor honor doth demand thy stay. Thy country calls, and Heaven doth point the way.

Cleon. 'Tis true; no oath doth bind me to the Turk, and yet to fly—My soldier's spirit doth ill brook such retreat.

Ion. Then stay not, my father, but whilst thou may, depart.

Cleon. Bright hopes call me hence. Life, love, fame, beckon me away.

[Hassan *looks in.*]

Hassan. The promised hour hath well-nigh gone. Prepare, young Greek; we must away.

Ion. A moment more. [*Exit Hassan.*] Father, time wanes. Once more I do entreat thee,—go!

Cleon. Heaven grant I choose aright! Come Ion, we will forth together. [Ion *folds the cloak about Cleon; gives him the ring.*] Come, let us go.

[Pg 253]Ion. Nay, but one can pass forth. Thou goest. I await the morning here.

Cleon. Then do I tarry also. Nay, Ion, I will not go hence without thee.

Ion. Then all is lost. Father, thy stay can nought avail me. It cannot save, and thou wilt but sacrifice thine own priceless life.

Cleon. Then fly with me; let me bear thee to thy mother. Alone, I will not go.

Ion. I cannot go; a vow doth bid me stay,—a vow that nought shall tempt me from the camp to-night; and when did a Greek e'er break his plighted word?

Cleon. If thine honor bid thee stay, thy father will not tempt thee hence; but he may stay and suffer with thee the fate of the faithful [*throws off the mantle*].

Ion. Oh, my father, do not cast from thee the priceless boon of liberty. Think of thy broken-hearted wife, thy faithful followers, thy unconquered foes; think, Father, of thy country calling on thee for [Pg 254] deliverance. What were my worthless life weighed 'gainst her freedom. And what happier fate for a hero's son than for a hero's sake to fall!

Cleon. Thou true son of Greece! Mayst thou yet live to wield a sword for thine oppressed land, and gird with laurels that brow so worthy them.

[Hassan *enters*.

Hassan. No longer may I stay: thine hour is past.

Ion. I come,—yet one moment more, good Hassan; it is my last. [*Exit Hassan.*] Once more, my father, do I entreat thee,—go. Thou dost forget a guardian spirit watcheth over me, and the power that led me hither may yet accomplish my deliverance. If nought else can move thee, for my sake go, and win for me that freedom mine honor doth now forbid me to seek. Break not my heart, nor let me plead in vain.

Cleon. My boy, for thy dear sake do I consent. I *will* earn thy deliverance [Pg 255] bravely, as a soldier should; and thy dear image shall be to me the star that leads me on to victory.

Ion [*joyfully*]. Away! Hassan will guide thee past the guards. Then fly,—and Heaven guide thee, O my father! [Ion *again shrouds Cleon in the mantle, concealing his chains in the thick folds.*] Thus muffle thy tell-tale fetters, that no sound may whisper to the Turks there walks a Greek under the free heavens forth to freedom.

Cleon. My Ion, one last embrace! God grant 'tis not our last on earth! Bless thee, thou true young heart! Heaven guard thee!

[Hassan *enters in haste*.

Hassan. Art ready? We must depart. [Cleon *bows his head and follows*. Ion *rushes after, looking from the tent.*]

Ion. Saved! saved! The morning sun that was to shine upon his grave, will smile upon him far, far from foemen's power. And Mohammed, thinking to look upon [Pg 256] a dying slave, shall waken to the sound of his victorious war-trump. Ion, thy mission is accomplished. Thou hast given a saviour to thy fatherland, and mayst fall thyself without a murmur [*looks up thankfully; a loud noise without*].

[*Enter Abdallah and Murad.*

Abd. Where is the prisoner? Come forth!

Ion. I am here [*comes forward*].

Abd. Ha!—here is treason! Without there!—the prisoner hath escaped!

Murad. Who flieth yonder, past the camp?

Abd. 'Tis he! Forth, call for aid! Search without delay! Here is foul work abroad. First, seize yon boy; fetter the base spy; bear him before the king. Speed hence!

Murad [*to Ion*]. Infidel dog, thou shalt learn what it is to brave Mohammed's ire!

[*They seize Ion, and drag him away.*]

CURTAIN.

BIANCA.

OPERATIC TRAGEDY.

NOTE TO BIANCA.

The peculiarity of this opera was that while the words were committed to memory, the music was *composed* and *sung* as the scene proceeded.

In spite of its absurdity, this play was a great favorite; for Jo was truly superb as the hapless Bianca, while her trills and tragic agonies were considered worthy of the famous Grisi herself.

CHARACTERS.

Adelbert *Betrothed to Bianca.*

Huon *His Rival.*

JuanA Page.

BiancaA Spanish Lady.

HildaA Witch.

BIANCA.

OPERATIC TRAGEDY.

SCENE FIRST.

[A wood. Enter Huon.]

Huon. Hist! All is still. They are not yet here. On this spot will the happy lovers meet. O wretched Huon! she whom thou so passionately doth love will here speak tender words to thy thrice hated rival. Yet I, unseen, will watch them, and ere long my fierce revenge shall change their joy to deepest woe. Hark! they come! Now, jealous heart, be still! *[Hides among the trees.]*

[Enter Bianca and Adelbert.]

Adel. Nay, dearest love, fear not; no mortal eye beholds us now, and yon bright moon looks kindly down upon our love.

[They seat themselves beneath the trees.]

[Pg 262]Bianca. Ah, dearest Adelbert, with thee I feel no fear, but thy fierce rival Huon did vow vengeance on thee, for I did reject his suit for thine. Beware! for his wild heart can feel no pity, tenderness, or love.

Adel. I fear him not. Ere long thou wilt be mine, and then in our fair home we will forget all but our love. Think not, dearest, of that dark, revengeful man; he does not truly love thee.

Bianca. Near thee I cannot fear; but when thou art far from me, my fond heart will ever dread some danger for thee. Ah, see the moon is waning; dear love, thou must away.

Adel. Ah, sweet moments, why so quickly fled? 'Tis hard to leave thee, thou bright star in my life's sky, and yet I must, or all may be betrayed. Fare thee well, dear love. One sweet kiss ere we part! *[They embrace.]*

Bianca. Farewell! Ah, when shall I again behold thee? Oh, be not long[Pg 263] away, for like a caged bird I pine for thee.

Adel. When next yon moon doth rise beneath thy lattice, thou shalt hear my light guitar.

Bianca. Fail not to come. I shall watch for thee the live-long night, and if thou comest not, this fond heart will grieve.

Both. Farewell, till yon bright moon doth rise,
Farewell, dear love, farewell!
Farewell, farewell, farewell!
Farewell, dear love, farewell!

[*Exit Adelbert.*]

Bianca. Ah, love, thou magic power, thus ever make my breast thy home. Adieu, dear spot! I fly to happiness and—

Huon. *Me—[Bianca shrieks, and seeks to fly. Huon detains her.]*

Bianca. Unmanly villain, touch me not. What dost thou here concealed?

Huon. I listen to thy lover's fond and[Pg 264] heartless vows. What is his love to mine? Ah, lady, he loves thee for thy wealth alone. Again I ask, nay, I implore thee to be mine! Oh, grant me now my prayer!

Bianca. Never! never! I will not listen to thee more. My heart is all another's; my hatred and contempt are thine.

[*Exit Bianca.*]

Huon. Now, by yon moon 'neath which thy tender vows were plighted, do I swear to win thee, proud and haughty lady, to these arms. Thou shalt curse the day when thou didst cast away my love, and wake my deep revenge.

[*Exit Huon.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 265]

SCENE SECOND.

[*A cave in the forest. Hilda leaning over a boiling caldron. Enter Huon.*]

Hilda. Ha! who art thou, and what wouldst thou with old Hilda? Speak, and be obeyed.

Huon. O mighty wizard, I have sought thee for a charm to win a proud and scornful woman's love,—some mystic potion that shall make her cold heart burn for me. Ah, give me this, and gold uncounted shall be thine.

Hilda. I will give to thee a draught that shall chase her coldness and her pride away, and make the heart now beating for another all thine own. Hold! 'tis here,—three crimson drops when mingled in her wine, will bring the boon thou askest [*gives Huon a tiny phial*].

Huon. Oh, blessed draught that wins for me the love I seek. Proud Bianca,[Pg 266] now art thou in my power, and shalt ere long return the love of the once hated and despised Huon. Great sorceress, say how can I repay thee? Fear not to claim thy just reward.

Hilda. I ask no gold. But when thy prize is won, remember thou old Hilda's warning. Woman's heart is a fragile thing, and they who trifle with it should beware. Now go; I would be alone.

Huon. Farewell! When my love and my revenge are won, I'll bless this hour and Hilda's charm.

[*Exit Huon.*]

Hilda. Poor fool! thou little thinkest thy love-charm is a deadly draught, and they who quaff it die. When thou shalt seek thy lady, hoping for her love, a dead bride thou wilt win. Ha! ha! old Hilda's spells work silently and well.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 267]

SCENE THIRD.

[*Room in the castle of Bianca. Evening. Enter Huon.*]

Huon. How can I best give the draught that none may see the deed? Ha! yonder comes her page, bearing wine. Now in her cup will I mingle these enchanted drops, and she shall smile on me when next I plead my suit. Ho, Juan, my boy! come hither; I would speak with thee. [*Enter Juan with wine.*] Where is thy lady now?

Juan. At her lattice, watching for Lord Adelbert, and gazing on the flowers he hath sent.

Huon [*aside*]. She shall never watch and wait for him again. [*Aloud.*] Whence bearest thou the wine, Juan? Is it to thy lady?

Juan. Yes, my lord. She bid me haste. I must away.

[Pg 268]Huon. Stay! clasp my sandal, boy; I will repay thee if thy mistress chide.
[*Juan stoops; Huon drops the potion into the wine cup.*] Thanks; here is gold for thee.
Away, and tell thy lady I will be here anon.

[*Exit Juan.*

Ha, ha! 'tis done! 'tis done!
My vengeance now is won,
And ere to-morrow's sun shall set,
Thou, haughty lady, shalt forget
The lover who now hastes to thee,
And smile alone, alone on me.

[*Exit Huon.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 269]

SCENE FOURTH.

[*Bianca's castle. A moonlit balcony. Enter Bianca.*]

Bianca. He comes not. Yon bright moon will ere long set, and still I hear not the dear voice 'neath my lattice singing. Adelbert! Ah, come! Hist! I hear his light boat on the lake. 'Tis he! 'tis he! [*Leans over the balcony.*]

[*Adelbert sings in the garden below.*

The moon is up, wake, lady, wake!
My bark is moored on yonder lake.
The stars' soft eyes alone can see
My meeting, dear one, here with thee.

Wake, dearest, wake! lean from thy bower,
The moonlight gleams on tree and flower.
The summer sky smiles soft above;
Look down on me, thou star of love!

Bianca. Adelbert, dear love, now haste thee quickly up to me.

[*Enter Adelbert upon the balcony.*

[Pg 270]Adel. Sweet love, why fearest thou? None dare stay me when I fly to thee. Ah, sit thee here, and I will rest beside thee. [*Bianca seats herself; Adelbert lies at her feet.*]

Bianca. Thou art weary, love. I'll bring thee wine, and thou shalt rest while I do sing to thee. [*She gives him wine; he drinks.*]

Adel. Thanks to thee, dearest love, I am weary now no longer. When here beside thee, pain, sorrow, time are all forgot. Ah! what is this?—a deadly pang hath seized me. All grows dark before mine eyes. I cannot see thee. Yon cup,—'twas poisoned! I am dying, dying!

Bianca. Ah, nay, thou art faint! Speak not of dying, love. [*Adelbert falls.*] Adelbert, Adelbert, speak!—speak! It is thine own Bianca calls thee! [*Throws herself beside him.*]

Adel. Farewell, dear love, farewell! Huon hath won his vengeance now. God bless thee, dearest. Oh, farewell! [*Dies.*]

[Pg 271]Bianca. Awake! awake! All, cold and still! Thou true, brave heart, thou art hushed forever. Huon! yes! 'twas he; and he hath sought to win me thus. But 'tis in vain! Where is the poisoned cup that I may join thee, Adelbert? [*Takes the cup.*] Ah, 'tis gone: there is no more. Yet I will be with thee, my murdered love. For me life hath no joy, and I will find thee even in death [*falls fainting to the ground*].

CURTAIN.

[Pg 272]

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Bianca's castle. The garden. Bianca singing.*]

Faded flowers, faded flowers,
They are all now left to cherish;
For the hopes and joys of my young life's spring
I have seen so darkly perish.

Cold, ah, cold, in the lone, dark grave,

My murdered love lies low,
And death alone can bring sure rest
To this broken heart's deep woe.

Faded flowers, faded flowers,
They are all now left to cherish;
For ah, his dear hand gathered them,
And my love can never perish.

[*Weeps.*

[*Enter Huon and kneels at her feet.*

Bianca [*starting up*]. Fiend! demon! touch me not with hands that murdered him!
Hence! out of my sight,—away!

[Pg 273]Huon. Nay, lady, nay! I swear by Heaven it was not I. The spell I mingled in thy cup was but to win thy love. The old witch hath deceived me, and given that deadly poison. Forgive me, I implore thee, and here let me offer thee my love once more.

Bianca [*repulsing him*]. Love! darest thou to speak of love to me, whose bright dream of life thou hast destroyed? Love! I who loathe, scorn, hate thee with a deep and burning hate that death alone can still! Oh, Heaven, have mercy on my tortured heart, and let it break.

Huon [*aside*]. His death hath well-nigh driven her mad. Dear lady, grieve not thus. Let me console thee. Forget thy love, and seek in mine the joy thou hast lost.

Bianca. Forget! Ah, never, never, till in death I join him! Forgive thee? Not till I have told thy crime. Yes, think not I will rest till thou, my murdered Adelbert, art well avenged. And thou!—ah,[Pg 274] sinful man, tremble, for thou art in my power, and my wronged heart can feel no pity now.

Huon [*fiercely*]. Wouldst thou betray me? Never! Yield thou to my love, or I will sheathe my dagger in thy heart, and silence thee forever!

Bianca. I will not yield. The world shall know thy guilt, and then sweet death shall be a blessing.

Huon. Then die, and free me from the love and fear that hang like clouds above me
[*stabs her*].

Bianca. Thy sin will yet be known, and may God pardon thee! O earth, farewell! My Adelbert, I come, I come! [*Dies.*]

Huon. Dead! dead! Oh, wretched Huon! Where now seek rest from bitter memories and remorse. Ha, a step! I must fly. Angel, fare thee well!

[*Exit Huon.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 275]

SCENE SIXTH.

[*Huon's room. Huon asleep upon a couch. Enter Bianca's spirit. She lays her hand upon him.*]

Huon [*starting in affright*]. Ha! spirit of the dead, what wouldst thou now? For long, long nights why hast thou haunted me? Cannot my agony, remorse, and tears win thee to forget? Ah, touch me not! Away! away! See how the vision follows. It holds me fast. Bianca, save me! save me! [*Falls and dies.*]

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

THE UNLOVED WIFE;

OR,

WOMAN'S FAITH.

CHARACTERS.

Count Adrian *Nina's Husband.*

Don Felix *His Secret Rival.*

Nina *The Unloved Wife.*

Hagar *A Fortune Teller.*

THE UNLOVED WIFE;

OR,

WOMAN'S FAITH.

SCENE FIRST.

[*Room in the palace of Count Adrian. Enter Nina.*]

Nina. 'Tis a fair and lovely home and well befits a gay young bride; but ah, not if she bear a sad and weary heart like mine beneath her bridal robes. All smile on me and call me happy, blessed with such a home and husband; and yet 'mid all my splendor I could envy the poor cottage maiden at her spinning-wheel. For ah, 'mid all her poverty one sweet thought comes ever like a sunny sky to brighten e'en her darkest hours, for she is loved; while I yet sigh in vain for one kind word,[Pg 280] one tender glance, from him I love so fondly. Ah, he comes, no sad tears now, sorrow is for my lonely hours and I will smile on *him* e'en though my heart is breaking.

[*Enter Count Adrian.*]

Adrian [*coldly*]. Good-even, madam, I trust all things are placed befitting a fair lady's bower and thou hast found thy home a pleasant one.

Nina. Adrian, husband, speak not thus to me. I could find more joy in some poor cell with thee, than all the wealth that kings could give if thou wert gone. Look kindly on me and I ask no more. One smile from thee can brighten all the world to these fond eyes. Oh, turn not away, but tell me how have I angered thee, and grant thy pardon for thy young wife's first offence.

Adrian. The pardon I could give were worthless for the time is past. 'Tis too late to ask forgiveness now. It matters not, then say no more [*turns away*].

[Pg 281]Nina. My lord, I charge thee tell me of what dark crime thou dost think me guilty! Fear not to tell me; innocence is strong to bear and happy to forgive. Ah, leave me not, I cannot rest till I know all, and if the deep devotion of a woman's heart can still repair the wrong, it shall be thine—but answer me.

Adrian. Canst thou unsay the solemn words that bound us at the altar three short days ago? Canst thou give back the freedom thou hast taken, break the vows thou hast plighted, cast away that ring and tell me I am free? Do it, and my full forgiveness shall be thine.

Nina. Give thee back thy freedom; am I a chain to bind thee to what thou dost not love? Take back the vows I made to honor thee; what dost thou mean? I am thy wife and dost thou hate me?

Adrian. I do.

Nina. God help me now. Tell me, Adrian, I implore thee, tell me what have I done to tempt such cruel words from [Pg 282] thee? I loved thee and left all to be thy wife, and now when my poor heart is longing for one tender word to cheer its sorrow, thou, the husband who hath vowed to love and cherish me, hath said thou dost hate me. Ah, am I sleeping? Wake me or the dream will drive me mad.

Adrian. 'Tis a dream I cannot banish. We must part.

Nina. Part—go on, the blow hath fallen, I can feel no more. Go on.

Adrian. Thou knowest I wooed thee. Thou wert fair and wondrous rich; I sought thy gold, not *thee*, for with thy wealth I would carve out a path through life that all should honor. Well, we were wed, and when I sought to take thy fortune it was gone, and not to me, but to thy father's friend, Don Felix. It was all left to him, and thou wert penniless; and thus I won a wife I loved not, and lost the gold I would have died to gain. Thinkest thou not I am well angered? But for thee I might yet win a noble bride whose golden fetters I would gladly wear.

[Pg 283]Nina. And this is he to whom I gave my heart so filled with boundless love and trust. Oh, Adrian, art thou so false? What is gold to a woman's deathless love? Can it buy thee peace and all the holy feelings human hearts can give? Can it cheer and comfort thee in sorrow, or weep fond, happy tears when thou hast won the joy and honor thou dost seek? No, none of these, the golden chains will bind thee fast till no sweet thought, no tender hope can come to thee. I plead not now for my poor self, but for thine own heart thou doth wrong so cruelly by such vain dreams.

Adrian. Enough. Thou hast a noble name and men will honor thee, thou wilt suffer neither pain nor want. I will leave thee and wander forth to seek mine own sad lot. Farewell, and when they ask thee for thy husband, tell them thou hast none, and so be happy [*turns to go*].

Nina. Oh, Adrian, I implore thee stay. I will bear all thy coldness, ay even thy contempt. I will toil for thee and seek to [Pg 284] win the gold for which thou dost sigh, I will serve thee well and truly, for with all my heart I love thee still. Leave me not now or I shall die! [*Kneels and clasps his hand.*]

Adrian. I am a slave till death shall set me free. We shall not meet again. Nay, kneel not to me. I do forgive thee, but I cannot love thee [*rushes out*].

Nina. This is more than I can bear. Oh, Father, take thy poor child home, and still the sorrow of this broken heart.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 285]

SCENE SECOND.

[*Home of Hagar, the gypsy. Enter Hagar and Nina.*]

Hagar. What brings thee hither, gentle lady, and how can the wanderer serve the high-born and the fair?

Nina [*sadly*]. There is often deeper sorrow in the palace than the cot, good Hagar, and I seek thee for some counsel that will cure the pain of a lonely heart. I have tried all others' skill in vain, and come to thee so learned in mystic lore to give me help. I am rich and can repay thee well.

Hagar. I can read a sad tale in thy pale and gentle face, dear lady. Thou art young and loving, but the hope of youth is gone; and thou art sorrowing with no fond heart whereon to lean, no tender voice to comfort and to cheer. Ah, have I read[Pg 286] aright? Then the only charm to still thy pain is death.

Nina. 'Tis death I long for. That still, dreamless sleep would bring me peace. But 'tis a fearful thing to take the life God gave, and I dare not. Canst thou not give me help?

Hagar. Within this tiny casket there is that which brings a quiet sleep filled with happy dreams, and they who drink the draught lie down and slumber, and if not awakened it will end in death. But thou, sweet lady, wouldst not leave this fair world yet. Tell me more, for this old heart is warm and tender still, and perchance I can help thee.

Nina. 'Tis strange that I can feel such faith in thee, kind friend, but I am young and lonely and I seek some heart for counsel. Thou art from my own fair land and I will tell thee of my sorrow. 'Tis a short, sad tale. I loved, was wed, and then—oh, darksome day—I learned my husband felt no love, and sought me only for my gold.[Pg 287] I was penniless, and thus he cast me off; and now for long, long weeks I have not seen him, for he would not dwell with her who loved him more than life itself. Now give me some sweet charm to win that lost heart back. Ah, Hagar, help me.

Hagar. I can give thee no truer charm than that fair face and noble soul, dear lady. Be thou but firm and faithful in thy love and it will win thy husband back. God bless and grant all happiness to one who doth so truly need it.

Nina. Give me the casket; and when life hath grown too bitter to be borne then will I gladly lay the burden down, and blessing him I love so well sleep that calm slumber that knows no awaking. Farewell, Hagar, thou hast given me comfort and I thank thee.

[Exit Nina.]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 288]

SCENE THIRD.

[*One year is supposed to have elapsed. A room in the palace of Nina. Enter Adrian disguised.*]

Adrian. Here last I saw her one long year ago. How the wild, sweet voice still rings in my ear imploring me to stay. I can find no rest save here; and thus do I seek my home, worn out by my long wandering, and trusting to learn tidings of poor Nina. If she be true and love me still I will cast away my pride, my coldness, and all vain hopes of wealth, and let the sunlight of that pure, young life brighten my life henceforth. I hear a step, and will hide here, perchance I may thus see her [*hides behind curtain*].

[Enter Nina.]

Nina. No rest for thee poor heart, ever whispering that dear name, ever sorrowing[Pg 289] for those hard words that gave so deep a wound. All is dark and lonely, for he is gone. Only these withered flowers, dearer by far than my most costly gems, for his hand hath touched them, and he smiled on me when they were given. Oh, Adrian, wilt thou never give one tender thought to her who still loves and prays for thee? Death will soon free thee from thy hated wife.

[Exit Nina.]

Adrian [*stealing forth*]. And this is she, whose pure young love I have cast away, the fond, trusting bride I left alone and friendless. She still loves on, and offers up her prayers for one who sought to break that tender heart so cruelly. I will watch well and guard thee, Nina; and if thou art truly mine thou shalt find a happy home with him thy patient love hath won.

[Exit Adrian and re-enter Nina.]

Nina [*with Adrian's picture*]. Ah, these cold eyes smile kindly on me here, and the lips seem speaking tender words. Other[Pg 290] faces are perchance more fair, but none

so dear to me. Oh, husband, thou hast cast me off; and yet, though lonely and forsaken, I still can cherish loving thoughts of thee, and round thy image gather all the tender feelings that a woman's heart can know. Thy cruel words I can forgive, and the trusting love I gave thee glows as warmly now as when thou didst cast it by and left me broken-hearted [*weeps; enter Don Felix*]. My lord, what seekest thou with me? Thou dost smile. Ah, hast thou tidings of my husband? Tell me quickly, I beseech thee.

Don Felix. Nay, dear lady—But sit thee down and let me tell thee why I came. [*He leads her to a sofa.*] Thou knowest I have been with thee from a child. I stood beside thee at the altar, and was the first to cheer and comfort thee when thou wast left deserted and alone. Let me now ask thee, Wouldst thou not gladly change thy sad lot here for a gay and joyous life with one who loves thee fondly?

[Pg 291]Nina. It were indeed a happy lot to be so loved and cherished; but where, alas, is he who could thus feel for one so lonely and forsaken?

Don Felix [*kneeling*]. Here at thy feet, dear Nina. Nay, do not turn away, but let me tell thee of the love that hath grown within my heart. [*Nina starts up.*] Thy wedded lord hath cast thee off. The law can free thee. Ah, then be mine, and let me win and wear the lovely flower which he hath cast away.

Nina. Lord Felix, as the wife of him thou dost so wrong, I answer thee. Dost thou not know the more a woman's heart is crushed and wounded the more tenderly it clings where first it loved; and though deserted, ay, though hated, I had rather be the slighted wife of him, than the honored bride of the false Costella. Now leave me—I would be alone.

Don Felix. A time will come, proud woman, when thou shalt bend the knee to him whom now thou dost so scorn. Beware,[Pg 292] for I will have a fierce revenge for the proud words thou hast spoken.

Nina. I am strong in mine own heart and fear thee not. Work thy will and thou shalt find the wife of Adrian de Mortemar needs no protector save her own fearless hand.

[*Exit Nina.*]

Don Felix. Now, by my faith, thou shalt bow that haughty head, and sue to me for mercy, and I will deny it. I'll win her yet, she shall not idly brave my anger. Now to my work,—revenge.

[*Exit Don Felix.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 293]

SCENE FOURTH.

[Apartment in palace of Nina. Nina alone.]

Nina. Ever thus alone, mourning for him who loves me not; was ever heart so sad as mine. Oh, Adrian, couldst thou but return even for one short hour to thy poor Nina.

[Enter Adrian, disguised.] Ha, who art thou that dares to enter here in such mysterious guise? Thine errand, quickly,—speak.

Adrian. Forgive me, lady, if I cause thee fear; I would have thee know me as a friend, one who will watch above thee, and seek to spare thee every sorrow. Dear lady, think me not too bold, for I have known thee long and have a right to all thy confidence. Thy husband was my nearest friend; and, when he left thee friendless and alone, I vowed to guard and *[Pg 294]* save thee in all peril. Wilt thou trust me? See, I bear his ring,—thou knowest it?

Nina. 'Tis indeed his ring. Whence came it? Ah, hast thou seen him? Tell me, and I will give thee all my confidence and thanks *[takes the ring and gazes beseechingly upon Adrian, who turns aside]*.

Adrian. He is well, lady, and happy as one can be who bears a cold, proud heart within his breast. He has cast away an angel who could have cheered and blessed his life, and sought to find in gold the happiness thy love alone could bring. He has suffered, as he well deserves to do. Spend not thy pity upon him.

Nina *[proudly]*. And who art thou to speak thus of him? Thou canst not judge till thou also hast been tried and like him deceived. He sought for wealth to bring him fame and honor; and when he found it not, what wonder that he cast aside the love that could not bring him happiness. Thou art no true friend to speak thus of *[Pg 295]* one so worthy to be loved. And think not I reproach him for my lonely lot. Ah, no, I still love on; and if he wins the wealth he covets I can give my heart's best blessing, and so pass away that he shall never know whose hand hath crushed the flower that would have clung about his life and shed its perfume there *[turns away weeping]*.

Adrian *[aside]*. She loves me still. I'll try her further *[aloud]*. Lady, idle tongues have whispered that when thy lord deserted thee thou didst find a solace for thy grief in a new lover's smiles. Perchance yon picture may be some gay lord who hath cheered thy solitude and won thy heart. I fain would ask thee.

Nina. Sir stranger, little dost thou know a woman's heart. I have found a comfort for my lonely hours in weeping o'er the face whose smiles could brighten life for me, or dim it by disdain and coldness. The face is there; my first, last, only love is given to him who thinks it worthless and hath cast it by.

[Pg 296]Adrian [*taking the picture*]. 'Tis the Count, thy husband. Lady, he is unworthy such true love; leave him to his fate, and let not thy life be darkened by his cruelty and hate.

Nina. Thou canst not tempt me to forget. No other love can win me from the only one who hath a place within my heart. Let me cherish all the memories of him, and till life shall cease be true unto my husband. Now leave me, unknown friend; I trust thee for his sake, and will accept thy friendship and protection. I offer thee my gratitude and thanks for thy kind service, and will gladly seek how best I may repay it.

Adrian. Thanks, lady. Thou shalt find me true and faithful, and my best reward will be the joy I labor to restore to thee [*kneels and kisses her hand*].

Nina. Farewell, again I thank thee.

[Exit Nina.]

Adrian. So young, so lovely, so forsaken, who would not pity and protect. I [Pg 297] will guard her well, and ere long claim the treasure I so madly cast away ere I had learned its priceless value. Nina, thou shalt yet be happy on the bosom of thy erring and repentant husband.

[Exit Adrian.]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 298]

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Hall in the palace of Nina. Enter Nina and Don Felix.*]

Nina. I tell thee, my lord, I will not listen, naught thou canst say will change my firm resolve. I cannot wed thee.

Don Felix. Nay, then listen. Thy cruel husband left thee and for one long year thou hast sorrowed in thy lonely home, and would not be comforted. He hath returned.

Nina. Ah—[*Rushes forward.*]

Don Felix. Thou may'st well start, but think not he will come to thee, chains hold him fast and—mark ye—'twas / who bound those chains.

Nina. Do I dream, my husband here and in captivity; nay, I believe thee not. 'Tis a false tale to anger me. I heed thee not [*turns away haughtily*].[Pg 299]

Don Felix. Thou wilt heed me ere I am done. What thinkest thou of this thy husband's dagger? See, here his name. 'Twas taken from his hands ere the cold chains bound them. Ah, thou dost believe me now!

Nina. Oh, tell on. I *will* listen now. Why hast thou done this cruel deed? Why make this his welcome home? Thou hast fettered and imprisoned him and now art here to tell me of it? Ah, dost thou hate him? Then give all thy hate to me; but oh, I pray thee, comfort him.

Don Felix. When thou didst reject my suit, I told thee I would be revenged; I said a day would come when thou, so cold and haughty then, would kneel to me imploring mercy and I would deny thee. That time hath come, and I am deaf to all thy prayers.

Nina. For his sake will I kneel to thee beseeching liberty for *him*. I had no love to give thee. Ah, pardon if I spake with scorn, and pity me. What can I do to[Pg 300] win thee back to mercy? Ah, listen and be generous.

Don Felix. 'Tis now too late. He is in my power; and a dagger can soon rid thee of a cruel husband, me of a hated rival.

Nina. God have pity on me now. Don Felix, let me plead once more. Set Adrian free, and I will take his place in yon dark cell and welcome there the dagger that shall set me free.

Don Felix. And wilt *thou* wear the chains? Wilt enter that lone cell and perish there? Canst thou do this?

Nina. Ay, gladly will I suffer pain, captivity, and death, for thee, Adrian, for thee.

Don Felix. Then woman's love is stronger than man's hate, and I envy him you would die for, Nina.

Nina. Ah, love alone can make home blest, and here it dwells not. I can free him from his fetters and his hated wife. Tell him I loved him to the last, and blessed him ere I died. Lead on, my lord, I am ready.

[Pg 301]Don Felix [*aside*]. I thought I had steeled my heart with hatred and revenge; but oh, they pass away before such holy love as this. Would I could win her to myself,

for she would lead me on to virtue and to happiness. Yet one more trial and she may be mine at last.

[*Tableaux.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 302]

SCENE SIXTH.

[*Street near Adrian's palace. Enter Adrian.*]

Adrian. 'Tis all discovered, my mysterious captivity and my release. Don Felix, whom I trusted, wove the dark plot and sought by false words to win Nina from me. He has dared to love her; and he shall dearly pay for his presumption. He knows not that I watched above her in disguise; and now while I was in captivity he hath taken her from her home. Let him beware. If aught of harm hath come to her, woe betide him who hath caused one tear to fall, or one sad fear to trouble her. I must seek and save her. No peril will be too great to win her back to this heart that longs so fondly for her now.

[*Exit Adrian.*

CURTAIN.

[Pg 303]

SCENE SEVENTH.

[*A cell in the palace of Don Felix. Nina chained.*]

Nina. 'T is strange; here in this dark cell, tho' fettered and alone, I feel a deeper joy than when a proud and envied bride I dwelt in my deserted home. For here his foot hath trod; these walls have echoed to the voice I love; these chains so cold and heavy I more gladly wear than e'en the costly gems once clasped upon these arms, for they were his. Here his sad tears fell perchance for his captivity; but I can smile and bless the hour when I could win thy freedom, Adrian, with my poor liberty. Hark—they come. Is it to claim the vow I made to yield my bosom to the dagger meant for his? I am ready. [*Enter Don Felix.*] Alone, my lord; methought it were too sad a task for thee to[Pg 304] take my life. Well, be it so; you claim my vow. I can die still blessing thee, my Adrian [*kneels before Don Felix.*]

Don Felix. Rise, Nina; ah, kneel not to me, nor think this hand could take the life it prizes more than happiness or honor. I came not here to harm thee; Heaven forbid! I came once more to offer thee my heart, my home, and all the boundless love you have so scorned. Thy husband hath deserted thee; no ties too fast to sever bind thee to him. Thou art alone, a captive, and I alone can free thee. Think of the love I bear thee, Nina, and be mine [*takes her hand*].

Nina. Where is thy boasted honor now? Where the solemn vow thou didst make me that my lonely cell should be as sacred to thee as my palace halls? Where is thy pity for the helpless wife of him whom thou didst call thy friend? I never loved thee, now I scorn thee. A true and pure affection never binds such chains as these, nor causes bitter tears like mine to [Pg 305] flow. Rather suffer death than cherish in my heart one tender thought of thee. Thou hast my answer, now leave me.

Don Felix. Not yet, proud captive. I have sought to win thee gently; but now, beware. Think not to escape me, thou shalt feel how deep a vengeance I can bring on thee and him thou lovest. Thou shalt suffer all the sorrow I can inflict,—shalt know thy proud lord forsaken and in danger when a word from me can save, and *that* word I will not speak. All the grief and pain and hatred that my jealous heart can give will I heap upon his head, and thus through him I will revenge myself on thee.

Nina. Thou canst not harm him, he is safe and free. Do thy worst, I care not what fate thou hast for me, a fearless hand soon finds a way to free a soul from sorrow and captivity. This heart thou canst not reach. It fears thee not.

Don Felix. Can I not make thee tremble, haughty woman? I love thee still, [Pg 306] and I will win thee. I go to work thee sorrow; and when next we meet I will bring thee token of thy husband's death or, what may touch thee nearer, his hate of thee.

[*Exit* Don Felix.]

Nina. 'Tis a dark and fearful dream,—Adrian in danger, and I cannot save him. Oh, that I were free again, naught should stay me; and I would win him back by the power of woman's love and faith. Lord Felix will return, he hath vowed revenge; where then can I look for a true heart to comfort and protect me [*sinks down in despair*].

[*Enter* Adrian, *still in disguise*.]

Adrian. Here is a friend to aid thee.

Nina [*starting up*]. Who—who art thou?

Adrian. Thy guardian. Lady, thou hast said thou wouldst trust me, and I am here to save.

Nina. Forgive me that I doubt thee; yet I do fear to trust, for I am well-nigh crazed with sorrow. Art thou my husband's friend?

[Pg 307]Adrian. I am true as Heaven to thee, poor lady. I have watched above thee and can save. Here, here is the ring thou knowest; ah, do not doubt me.

Nina. I know thee now and put all my faith in thee. Take me hence. Ah, save me! Lead me to my home, and the thanks of a broken heart are thine. Lead on, kind friend, I will follow thee.

Adrian [*aside*]. Oh, this is a bitter punishment for me. It breaks my heart. [*Aloud.*] This way, dear lady, a secret door doth let us forth; step thou lightly. Thus let me shroud thee.

[*He wraps Nina in a dark robe, and they disappear thro' the secret door.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 308]

SCENE EIGHTH.

[*Nina's chamber. Enter Nina and Hagar.*]

Nina. Welcome to thee, Hagar; sit thee down and tell me why hast thou come to seek me in my lonely home?

Hagar. Sweet lady, fear not; no evil tidings do I bring, but a wondrous tale of happiness in store for thee. When thy father died, few doubted but his wealth would come to thee; and it would, indeed, have all been thine had not that false Don Felix stolen the will away. He took the paper that left all to thee, and thus he won the orphan's gold. But three short days ago, a dreadful crime which he had done was brought to light, and he hath fled. He told me all and bid me give thee, this, thy father's will.

[*Hagar gives paper to Nina.*]

[Pg 309]Nina. 'Tis strange, most strange. But tell me, Hagar, how didst thou come to know that evil man?

Hagar. I knew him when he came from Italy with thee and thy father years ago. And as I watched thy path through life so I watched his, and thus he learned to trust me. 'Tis

thus I gained for thee that wealth so long withheld; and now my work is done. Thou wilt win thy husband's love, and so be happy. God bless thee, gentle lady, and farewell.

Nina. Ah, stay and tell me how can I best show the gratitude I deeply feel. Thou hast brought me wealth and happiness, how can I repay thee?

Hagar. I ask no other joy than that I see in thy fair face. I go now to my own dear land, and we shall not meet again; but old Hagar will remember thee, and pray that life may be one long, bright dream of love with the husband thou hast won. Farewell.

[Exit Hagar.]

[Pg 310]Nina. The clouds have passed away and I am happy now; and the wealth *he* longed for it is mine to give. Oh, Adrian, come back to her thou hast cast aside. [*An arrow bearing a letter is thrown in at the window and falls at her feet.*] What means this letter? Stay, let me see what it may tell me. 'Tis from Adrian. Ah, does an angel watch above me that such joy is mine? [*Opens the letter and reads.*]

Think not to win me back with thy new wealth; I cannot love thee. Be happy with thy gold; it cannot buy the heart of the unhappy

Adrian.

Nina. This from him! No, no, it cannot be; he would not speak such words to me; his wife. Yet, 't is his hand—I must believe—and a deeper darkness gathers round me. No joy, no hope, is left to bind me unto life. If I were gone he might be happy with another. I can never win his love, then why live on to dim his pathway. I will leave my gold to him, for it is[Pg 311] worthless now; and when, with her he loves in some fair home, he sends perchance one thought of her who died to free him, I shall be repaid for this last sacrifice. Ah, Hagar, little didst thou think the joy foretold would end so soon, and this thy gift would win for me the rest I long for now [*takes from her bosom the phial and drinks*]. It will soon be past. Now, till sleep steals o'er me, I will send one last word, Adrian, to thee. [*She writes, then sinks upon the couch.*] My heart grows faint, and my eyes are heavy with the last slumber they shall ever know. The poison does its work too soon; but I am done with life, and the soft, sweet sleep of death is holding me. Oh, my husband, may this last deed of mine give thee all the joy it could not bring to her who could only die for thee. Farewell life, farewell love; my latest prayer is for thee, Adrian. [*She lies down and falls gently asleep.*]

CURTAIN.

[Pg 312]

SCENE NINTH.

[Terrace in Nina's garden. Enter Adrian with letter.]

Adrian. What means this letter from her hand? 'Twas given me by her servant while she slept. Does she call me home again? Ah, little can she know how fondly now her cold, proud husband longs to fold her in his arms and bless the hour when he lost wealth and won her noble love. *[Opens the letter and reads.]*

I send thee back the cruel words that have banished all the hopes of happiness with thee. I cannot win thy heart; and this sad truth hath broken mine. And now, upon my dying bed, I leave thee all the wealth that could not win one tender smile for her who pined for it in vain. Thou hast scorned my love, take thou the gold which is worthless to me now. Farewell, my husband; I am faithful to the last, and my lips blessed thee ere they drank the draught that soon [Pg 313] will free me from my sorrow, and thee from thy unloved but loving

Nina.

Adrian. My cruel words? What means this? Stay, there is another paper, and it may tell me more. *[Reads Felix's forged letter and dashes it down.]* 'Tis false, false as the villain's heart who forged the lie and brought agony like this to that pure, loving heart. Oh, Nina, Nina, now when I so fondly love thee, thou hast been deceived, and died still blessing him thou deemed so cruel and so cold. Oh, that I could but win thee back for one short hour, that I might tell my penitence and my deep sorrow for the grief I have brought thee. Yet, blessed thought, it may not be too late. She slept but one short hour ago, when this was taken from her hand. She may yet linger at the gates of death, and I may call her back to happiness and life once more. Oh, if I may but win this blessing to my heart, my life shall be one prayer of thankfulness for the great boon *[rushes out]*.

CURTAIN.

[Pg 314]

SCENE TENTH.

[Nina's chamber. Nina lies in a deep trance upon her couch. Adrian rushes in.]

Adrian. Nina! Nina! wake, love, it is I thy husband who doth call thee. Oh, can I not win thee back to life now when I have learned to love with all my heart's faith and fondness. [*He kisses her hands and weeps.*] Calm and still she lies, all my tender words cannot awake her, and these bitter tears but fall unheeded and in vain. Was it for this I won that warm young heart,—for this short sorrowing life, this lonely death? Ah, couldst thou see this proud heart humbled now, and these repentant tears that wet thy quiet brow. Nina, wife, oh, wake and tell me I am forgiven! [*Kneels beside her.*]

Nina [*rousing*]. Adrian!

[Pg 315]Adrian [*starting up*]. She breathes, she lives, my prayer is heard. 'Tis not too late.

Nina [*still dreaming*]. Methought I was in heaven, for Adrian bent o'er me; the face I loved smiled lovingly upon me, sweet tender words were spoken, and the joy of that short moment well repaid the sorrow I had borne ere that last sleep came. I am happy now for Adrian hath said he loves me.

Adrian. Thy deathlike sleep still hangs about thee, thou art still on earth, and I am here to bring thee joy. Ah, waken and learn thy dream is true. Thy husband loves thee.

Nina. So the sweet vision said, but it hath passed, and this will vanish too. Ah, why hast thou called me back? Life is but a chain that binds me unto sorrow, then let me sleep again and dream that Adrian is true.

Adrian. Nina! Nina! rouse thyself, it is no dream; he hath bent above thee weeping[Pg 316] bitter tears and pouring forth his whole heart's love, remorse, and sorrow. His voice hath called thee back to life, and he is here. [*Nina rises and looks wildly about her.*] Here, love, at thy feet seeking thy pardon for the deep wrong he hath done thee, praying thy forgiveness! [*Throws himself at her feet. Nina stretches forth her arms, and they embrace with tears of joy.*]

Nina. Adrian, husband, I have naught to pardon. Thou hast won me from the sleep of death, I am thine, thy heart is my home, and I am only happy there.

Adrian. I am unworthy such great happiness. Oh, Nina, thou art the true angel of my life; and thou hast led me on to win a deeper joy than all the wealth of earth could give. I cast thy pure affection by, and sought in selfish sorrow to forget thee; but I could not. Thy dear face shone in all my dreams, and thy voice still lingered in mine ear, imploring me to love thee. Then I returned to find thee drooping like a blighted flower. All loved and[Pg 317] honored thee; and I vowed to watch, and, if I found thee true and loving

still, to tell thee all, and give my heart to thee forever. I have now won thee, and I love thee, dearest.

Nina. Oh, I am too blest! Life is a flower-strewn path henceforth, where I will gladly journey if thou wilt be my guide; and here upon thy breast, dear love, now smiles the happy wife,—no longer the lonely and unloved one.