LUDWIG TIECK

THE LOVE-CHARM

MILIUS was sitting in deep thought by a table, waiting for his friend Roderick. A light was burning before him; the winter evening was cold; and, glad as he was at other times to dispense with his companion's society, on this occasion he was particularly anxious for his presence, as he wished to tell him a secret, and to ask his advice. The shy, retiring Emilius, in the common business and the ups and downs of life, found such difficulties and so many insuperable obstacles, that Destiny seemed to have been in one of her ironical moods when she connected him with Roderick, who was, in all respects, the very opposite of his friend. Unstable and flighty, with the first impression he was all on fire; there was nothing he would not undertake; he had plans for every thing; no project could be too difficult, no obstacle could deter him; while in carrying them out he soon tired, and flagged as rapidly as he had been eager and elastic at the outset; and difficulties, instead of being a spur to urge him to increased activity, then only caused him to fling aside in disgust what he had at first so enthusiastically undertaken. Hence he was for ever full of schemes of some sort, but throwing them away and forgetting them with as little reason as he had before thoughtlessly adopted them. Between two such contradictory tempers not a day passed without a quarrel, which threatened to be fatal to their friendship. Yet perhaps, what seemed at first sight only to be a cause of division, was, at bottom, one of the closest bonds that held them together. In their hearts they were exceedingly fond of each other, yet each found the greatest satisfaction in being able to complain of the way the other treated him.

Emilius was a young roan of property. His father and mother were dead, so that he was his own master. He was of an imaginative though somewhat melancholy turn of mind; and being now on his travels to complete his education, he had been staying some time at a large town to enjoy the pleasure of the carnival, about which he did not care a straw, and to transact certain business with some of his relations whom he had not yet taken the trouble to call upon. On his way there he had stumbled upon the quicksilver Roderick, who was living not on the best possible terms with his guardians, and, to rid himself of them and their troublesome admonitions, had gladly availed himself of his new friend's offer to take him with him as a companion on his travels. Again and again they had been on the point of separating, but their quarrels had only served to shew them how indispensable they were to each other. When they came to any place of importance, they were hardly out of their carriage before Roderick had seen every thing there was there worth notice—the next day most likely to forget all about it again. While Emilius, after first spending weeks in preparing himself with books, that nothing might escape his observation, out of indolence generally left the place having seen hardly any thing. Roderick went to all the public places, made a

thousand acquaintances, and not unfrequently would bring them to the solitary apartments of his friend, and as soon as he began to be tired of them himself, leave them alone for Emilius to entertain. Emilius's modesty too was often severely distressed by the way in which Roderick would speak of his talent and knowledge to sensible, well-informed people; for he never confined himself to strict truth; and although for himself he said he could never find time to listen to what his companion had to say on these matters, yet he gave them to understand there was scarce a subject in literature, history, or art on which they could not derive from him the most valuable information. If Emilius was disposed to do any thing, Roderick was sure to have been at a ball the night before, or to have caught cold at a sledging party, and be obliged to keep his bed; so that in the society of the most restless and excitable of sociable mortals, he lived almost wholly by himself.

This evening, however, Emilius counted on him with some certainty, as he had promised faithfully to spend it at home, to learn what it was that for some weeks past had been weighing on his friend's spirits. Emilius spent the interval in composing the following verses:

Spring-time, it is blithe and gay

When the nightingale sits on the hawthorn-spray,

And every leaf and every flower

Quivers with joy at the music's power.

The play of the gentle evening air

In the golden moonlight is passing fair,

As over the tree-tops it whispering sweeps

And its wings in the linden's fragrance steeps.

The glance of the new-blown rose is bright

As the gleaming of stars on a summer's night,

Like a bride for the altar the garden arraying,

And love in a thousand flowerets playing.

Yet brighter, and fairer, and lovelier far

Is the pale little lamplet's trembling star

Which yonder my love in her chamber shews

As she lingers at night, to her couch ere she goes.

Her delicate tresses I watch her unbind,

From around her fair temples the rose-wreath unwind;

Her exquisite form to my rapturous gaze

With each motion the tightening nightdress betrays.

And oh, when the lute in her fingers she takes,

And stirr'd at her bidding sweet music awakes,

With a thrill at her exquisite touch, from the strings

The spirit of melody laughingly springs.

She sends out a song to recall him again,

The wandering rogue—but she sends it in vain;

For he flies to my heart with a shout of loud laughter

For shelter; and there the pursuer flies after.

Oh, out with thee, mischievous villains, away!

But together they bar themselves in as they say,

"Till this shall be broken we budge not from here,

And the Love-god we'll teach thee to know and to fear."

Emilius stood up impatiently. It was now dark, and Roderick was not come; he was craving to tell him of his love for an unknown beauty who lived opposite to them, and kept him all day watching at the window, and all night waking in his bed. A sound of footsteps on the stairs. The door opened without any one knocking, and in came two gay-looking figures with very ugly masks on their faces; one dressed as a Turk, in a long gown of blue and red; the other as a Spaniard, in a doublet of red and light

yellow, and a plume of feathers in his cap. Emilius was getting impatient, when the Turk took off his mask, and shewed the well-known, broad, merry face of Roderick.

"My dear fellow," he said, "what a dismal-looking face! that is not the way to look at carnival-times. I and my young officer friend here are come to carry you off. There is a great ball to-night at the saloon. I know you have sworn never to go about in any other dress than this dingy old every-day black; but come along as you are—it is late."

"As usual," replied Emilius very angrily. "You have forgotten our agreement it seems.—I am exceedingly sorry," he added, turning to the stranger, "that it is not in my power to accompany you. My friend is too hasty in making engagements for me. I cannot possibly leave the house, as I have subjects of importance to talk over with him."

The stranger, who understood Emilius's manner, and felt his visit was ill-timed, took his leave immediately.

Roderick, however, who took it all with the greatest coolness, put on his mask again and stood up before the mirror. "What an object it makes of me!" he said; "it is a miserable, tasteless device after all: don't you think so?"

"What a question!" said Emilius in the greatest indignation. "To make a caricature of yourself, and drown your senses in dissipation, is just the sort of thing you most enjoy."

"Because you do not like dancing," said the other, "and take it to be a pernicious invention, no one else is to amuse himself. How ridiculous it is when a man is made up of nothing but whims and fancies!"

"Yes, indeed," replied his irritated friend, "I am sure I have reason enough to remark it too of you. I had hoped that, as you promised, you would give this one evening to me, but——"

"But it is the carnival," said Roderick, "and all my friends and a number of ladies are expecting me at the great ball to-night. Really, my dear friend, if you will but think of it, you will see it is mere disease in you to feel such extreme dislike to these things."

"Which of us two is most diseased," answered Emilius, "is a point I will not attempt to decide. Your astonishing levity, your craving for dissipation, your restless hunting after pleasures which do not reach the heart, but only leave it sick and weary, does not seem to me to indicate a very healthy frame of mind. Granted, however, if you will, that my feeling is mere weakness, you would do better in some things to let it take its way; and there is nothing in the whole world which drives me more frantic than a ball with its fearful music. Some one has said that to a deaf man, who cannot hear the

music, a ball-room must look like Bedlam let loose; but to me this terrible music itself, these infernal tunes whirling and whizzing round with inconceivable swiftness faster and faster, seizing all one's thoughts, saturating one's body and soul, and haunting one like so many spectres,—is not this the very jubilee of frenzy and madness itself? If dancing is ever to be endurable to me, it must be to the tune of silence."

"Well done, Mr. Paradox," said his friend; "you have got to this, have you? to find the innocentest, naturalest, pleasantest thing in the world a horrid, unnatural monster."

"I cannot help my feelings," said he very seriously; "as long as I can remember, these tunes have made me miserable, have often driven me to despair. To me they are the fiends and furies of the world of sound; they squeak and gibber round my head, and grin at me with hideous laughter."

"Mere nervousness," answered the other; "it is just like your ridiculous horror of spiders, and a number of other innocent creatures."

"Innocent you call them," he said passionately, "because they do not affect you; but some people feel, and I am one of them, at the sight of these hideous creatures, such as toads and spiders, or that most odious of all nature's abortions, the bat, their very souls shaken with unutterable horror and loathing; to them they can be neither indifferent nor unmeaning, because their very being is the contradiction of their own. Truly one may laugh at unbelievers whose imagination is too weak for ghosts and hobgoblins, and other children of darkness that we see in fevers or in one of Dante's pictures, when the commonest life gives us master-pieces of all that is most horrible. No one can have a real love for the beautiful unless he feels a hatred of these monsters."

"Why feel hatred?" asked Roderick. "Look at the sea, the great water-kingdom, full of the strangest, comicalest, most amusing figures, the whole deep looking like a grotesque masquerade; why is one to find nothing there but the horrible phantoms your mind makes them seem to you? But these fancies of yours do not stop here; you make an idol of the rose, while for other flowers you have as passionate a hatred. What has the poor orange-lily done to offend you, and the many other beautiful children of the summer? So there are colours you cannot bear, and scents, and thoughts. And you never do any thing to overcome these repugnances; you yield to the first temptation; so that at last, instead of a person, you will be nothing but a bundle of whims and caprices."

Emilius was now angry to the bottom of his heart, and would not answer. He had given up all present purpose of making his communication; indeed, importantly as he had said he had a secret that he wished to tell, his volatile friend seemed to have no curiosity to hear it, but sat playing with his mask on the sofa in the greatest indifference. At last he cried out suddenly, "Be so good, Emilius, as to lend me your

large cloak."

"What for?" he asked.

"I hear music in the church yonder," answered Roderick. "I have never happened to be at home any evening at this hour before, and now it comes in just at the very nick of time. I can put on your cloak over my dress; and when the service is over, go on straight to the ball."

Emilius muttered something, and fetched the cloak from his wardrobe, which he flung to Roderick, who had just risen, with an ironical laugh.

"Take my Turkish dagger I bought yesterday, if you please," Roderick said, as he wrapped the cloak round him. "It is rather too serious an article to have about one as a plaything. Some trifle goes wrong, an angry word or two, perhaps, with some one, and no one knows how one might not use it. Adieu till to-morrow then. Peace be with you." He did not wait for an answer, but ran down the stairs.

As soon as Emilius was by himself, he tried to forget his indignation, and take his friend's behaviour as absurd. He took up the white, glittering, beautifully-wrought dagger in his hand, and looked at it. "I wonder," he said to himself, "how a man feels that has run this sharp steel into an enemy's breast? or suppose he was to hurt with it the object of his love." He ran it into the sheath, and then carefully turned back the shutters from his window, and looked across the narrow street. The house opposite was all dark; there was no light stirring; the dear form that dwelt in it, and at this hour was generally to be seen engaged in some household matter, seemed to be away. "Perhaps she is at the ball," thought Emilius; "and yet it is not like her retired ways." Suddenly a light appeared, and a little girl, that his beloved unknown had as a companion, and was usually with her a great part of the day, carried a candle across the room, set it down, and closed the window-shutters. A broken binge prevented them from completely shutting, and an opening remained large enough for any one standing where Emilius was, to see over a part of the little room; and here he would sit in a trance of happiness till long after midnight, watching every gesture, every movement of his beloved's hand. Delightedly he would observe her teaching the child to read, or giving it lessons in sewing and knitting. On inquiry he learnt that this child was a poor orphan whom the beautiful maiden out of compassion had taken to live with her, and was herself educating. It was a mystery to Emilius's friends why he was living in this narrow, out-of-the-way street, in such inconvenient lodgings, and what he could possibly be doing that he was seen so little in society. By himself, and doing nothing, he was most happy as he was; all that vexed him was, that he could not so far overcome his shyness as to seek a nearer acquaintance with this beautiful being, who had more than once encouraged him with a smile of greeting or thanks for some trifling compliment he had ventured to pay. He little knew that she would sit gazing over at him as intoxicated as he; he never guessed what wishes were working in her

heart; of what an effort, what a sacrifice she was capable to gain possession of his love.

After walking uneasily up and down his room for some time, and the light and the child had again disappeared, he suddenly came to the resolution, contrary to his inclination and his nature, to go to the ball; it had struck him that his unknown must have made an exception to her usual retired way of living, and gone, for once in a way, to take a taste of the world and its dissipation.

The streets were brilliantly lighted; the snow crackled under his feet. Carriages rolled by, and masques in all sorts of guises past him, chattering and humming as they went along. In a number of houses he heard the odious music; and he could not prevail on himself to take the shortest road to the saloon, to which people were hurrying and streaming from all directions. He walked round the old church, and gazed at the tall spire as it rose up majestically across the sky; the loneliness and silence of the place forming a striking contrast to the thronging of the town. The deep porch of the church was covered with all sorts of carved work, which he had several times examined with the greatest pleasure, and had called back into his memory the days of ancient art and times gone by; and he now stept aside into it for a few moments to give himself up to his meditations.

He had scarcely entered, when his attention was caught by a figure moving restlessly backwards and forwards, and apparently waiting for some one. By the light of a lamp, which was burning before an image of the Virgin, he was able to make out the face as well as the strange dress. It was an old woman with features of the extremest ugliness, which struck the eye the more because they were set off, in a singular manner, against a scarlet boddice covered with gold lace. She wore a dark petticoat, and her cap also glittered with gold. He thought at first it must be some tasteless masque that had missed his way and strayed there by mistake. As she passed under the light, however, it was plain that the old yellow withered face was no imitation, but a real one. Presently two men appeared wrapped in long cloaks; they seemed to approach the place with caution, stop, looking often from side to side, to see if any one followed them.

The old woman went up to them. "Have you got the candles?" she asked hastily, in a gruff, hoarse voice.

"Here they are," said one of the men. "You know the price; it is all right."

The old woman seemed to give some money, which the man counted under his cloak.

"I may rely on it," she said again, "that they are made exactly by the prescription, and that there is no fear of their working?"

"Small doubt about that," answered the man, and disappeared again with hasty steps in the darkness.

The other, who stayed behind, was a young man. He took the old woman's hand, and said, "Is it possible, Alexia, that these rites and forms and strange old words, which I never can have any faith in, have power to fetter the free will of man, and force it to love and to hate?"

"Ay is it, young gentleman," said the old woman; "but one and one must make two before that can be. It is not these candles alone that can do the work, though they are steeped in human blood, and moulded at midnight under the new moon; nor the magic rites, nor the invocation; there are many other things wanted besides these, as the artists in these matters know well."

"Then I may depend on you?" said the stranger.

"To-morrow, after midnight, I am at your service," replied the old woman; "and you shall not be the first to have reason to complain of my skill. To-night, as you may have heard, I have some one else on hand, a fellow with sense and understanding, whom it may be my art shall produce some effect upon." The last words she muttered with a half laugh; and the two then separated and went off in different directions.

Emilius passed out shuddering under the dark arch, and raised his eyes to the image of the Virgin and Child. "Before thy eyes, thou blessed one," he said half aloud, "these children of darkness dare make their schemes for their infernal deeds! Oh, as thou holdest thy Child in thy embrace of love, so may the Invisible Love keep us continually in its all-powerful arms, and our poor hearts beat ever in joy and sorrow in the presence of One greater, who will never let us fall."

Clouds swept by over the tower and the sharp edge of the roof of the church. The everlasting stars looked down serene and calm; and Emilius with a strong effort flung off these horrors of darkness, and thought of the beauty of his unknown. He went back into the crowded streets, and approached the brilliantly illuminated mansion which contained the ball-room. A crowd was round the door, a confused din of voices and carriages rattling backwards and forwards, and at intervals the swell of the alarming music pealing upon his ears.

He had no sooner got into the room than he was lost in the rolling crowd. Dancers sweeping past him; masques running against him and pushing him from side to side; kettle-drums and trumpets dinning in his ear; life itself seemed on a sudden to be turned into a dream. He passed up and down among the rows of people with his eye alert only to find one pair of bright eyes and the brown tresses of one beautiful head. Never had he more passionately longed to catch a sight of her; yet, with the adoration he felt for her, he could not help being provoked to think she could find any pleasure

in losing herself in such a stormy ocean of madness and dissipation. "No," he said to himself, "she cannot love me; no heart that loves could seek such an infernal scene, where human beings are turned to fiends, and wild shrieks of laughter, and these trumpets clanging, drown every pure and holy feeling in devilish scorn. The rustling trees, the bubbling fountains, lute-music, and the voice of noble song streaming out from the impassioned bosom,—these are the sounds amidst which is the home of love; but this is the very jubilee and thunder-cry of hell in all the madness of despair."

He could not find the object of his search, however, though he had three times gone up and down the saloon, and scrutinised carefully all the unmasked ladies, either dancing or sitting; and the idea that that beautiful face was concealed under one of the disgusting masks was too intolerable to be admitted for a moment.

"You are here after all, then?" said the Spaniard, who came up and joined him. "You are looking for your friend, I suppose?"

Emilius had really never thought of him. Somewhat ashamed, he replied, "Indeed I am surprised not to see him here. His mask is remarkable enough."

"Only conceive what the strange fellow is about," said the young officer. "He has not danced once since he has been in the saloon. Directly he entered he fell in with his friend Anderson, who, it seems, has just come back from his travels. Their conversation fell upon literature; and as Anderson did not know the new poem which has just come out, nothing would satisfy Mr. Roderick but that they must shut themselves up in one of the back rooms; and there he is now with a single candle reading the whole production aloud to him."

"That is so like him," answered Emilius. "He is made up of whims and fancies. I have done all I could—I have even risked one or two friendly quarrels—to cure him of this way of living so altogether extempore, gambling away his existence in impromptus; but these follies are so grown into his heart, that he would sooner lose his dearest friend than part with them. This book you speak of he professes to be passionately fond of, and always has it about with him. The other day I asked him to read it to me, and he began to do so. We had scarcely got beyond the opening, and I had begun to enter into the beauties of it, when suddenly he jumped up, ran out of the room, and presently came back with the cook's apron on, made a prodigious fuss to light a fire, and all to do me a beef-steak, for which I had not the slightest inclination, and which, though he fancies he does them better than any one in Europe, few people that have tried once are very anxious to attempt a second time."

The Spaniard laughed. "Has he never been in love?" he asked.

"After his fashion," said Emilius bitterly; "as if he wanted to make a fool of himself and turn love into ridicule; with a dozen women at once, and, if you believe what he says,

to desperation. In a week he has forgotten them all."

They were parted by the crowd, and Emilius went off to the room the Spaniard had pointed out to him, where he heard his friend's voice declaiming long before he reached it.

"Ah! there you are, are you!" Roderick cried to him; "you are come in the very nick of time; we are just at the place you and I left off at the other day; so sit down and listen."

"I am not in the mood at present," said Emilius; "neither do place and time seem the best adapted for the purpose."

"And why not, pray?" answered Roderick. "It is all in ourselves. Every time is the right time to employ oneself in a proper way. Or perhaps you want to dance? They want men; and at the expense of an hour or two skipping about, and a pair of tired legs, you may make half a dozen grateful young damsels fall in love with you."

Emilius was already at the door: "Good night," he said; "I am going home."

"Stay one moment," called Roderick after him; "I am going away early to-morrow morning into the country with this gentleman. I will look in upon you before I go, to say good-by; but if you are asleep, don't trouble yourself to wake, as I shall be back again in two or three days.—That is the strangest fellow," he said, turning to his new friend; "so solemn, so serious and soberminded, he is a regular kill-joy; or rather, he does not know what joy means. Every thing must be lofty, ideal, exalted, for him. His heart must take a part, even if it be a puppetshow he is looking at; and when things do not come up to his notions, as of course most things can't, then he gets upon stilts, turns tragical, and the whole world is going to the devil. Under every clown's and pantaloon's mask he looks for a heart overflowing with longings and supernatural impulses; harlequins must philosophise on the nothingness of human wishes: and if these expectations are not exactly realised, tears start into his eyes, and he turns his back on the pretty show in a fever of scorn and indignation."

"Is he melancholy?" asked his hearer.

"Not exactly that," said Roderick; "only his parents, I think, indulged him too much, and he has taken no pains with himself. He has let his feelings ebb and flow regularly, till it has grown into a habit; and if ever the usual set of emotions are put out, he cries, 'A miracle!' and offers premiums to doctors to come and clear up a marvellous natural phenomenon. He is the best fellow in the world; but all the pains I have taken to cure him of these absurdities are thrown away: nothing does him any good. It is as much as I can do to keep in his good graces at all, he is so angry when I speak to him."

"A doctor would be the thing for him, I should think," said the other.

"It is one of his peculiarities," answered Roderick, "to despise the whole art of medicine from beginning to end. Disorders, he says, are all different in different persons, and all general rules and theories are mere absurdities. He would rather go to old women, and use their sympathetic simples. Again, on other grounds, he despises all prudential proceedings, and every thing like orderliness and moderation. From his childhood he has had his ideal of what a great man ought to be, and what his endeavour is to be to make of himself; and one of the points of this ideal is to have an utter scorn of all things, particularly of money; and so, that he may never be suspected of being economical, or not liking to give away, or indeed of thinking of money at all, he flings it away in the absurdest way in the world. Consequently, with all his fine property, he is always poor and in difficulties, and is made a fool of by every one who is not great in the sense in which he understands greatness. To be his friend is the most difficult of things; for he is so irritable, that if one does but cough, it is a sign one is not spiritual, and to pick one's teeth would throw him into convulsions."

"Has he never been in love?" inquired Anderson.

"Why, who is he to love?" answered Roderick: "he despises all the daughters of earth. If his ideal were to shew a fancy for a bow or a ribbon, much more to dance, it would break his heart. And if she did but catch a cold, I don't know what would become of him."

Emilius was again in the crowd; when on a sudden the shock and pain which such scenes and concourses often produced came over him again, and chased him away out of the room and the house, along the now empty streets, to his house. It was not till he found himself alone in his own room that he recovered his self-possession. His servant lit his candle and placed it on the table; and Emilius told him to go to bed. The other side of the street all was dark as the grave; and he sat himself down to let the thoughts the ball had awakened in him flow off into a poem.

There was calm in the spirit's depths;

In chains the demons slept;

With purpose fell to work his ill

Uprose the wicked will.

"Fling wide," he cried,

"The prison-gate,

Come forth, ye demons all!"

With yell and shout

That hideous rout

Sprung out at the welcome call.

Tralala! Tralala!

Whoop, whoop, whoop, hurrah, hurrah!

Trumpet crash and cymbal clash;

Flute, and fife, and violin,

Squeaking, shrieking, clattering;

Clarions ring with deafening din;

Now hell's chorus shall begin,

Now the fiends of madness reign;

Gentle child-like peace is slain.

In and out, across, about,

Whither pass this tumbling rout?

Merry dance we, and the lights flash free,

Jubilee, jubilee, jubilee!

Kettle-drums bang and cymbals clang,

And the devil drown care in the pool of despair.

With smiling lip and flashing eye

Yon fair one bids me to her side;

Yet silent soon those lips shall lie,

And wither'd be her beauty's pride.

Death's clammy hand is on her brow—

Ha! 'tis a skull that's beckoning now!

She must die; yet what care I?

Well to-day and well to-morrow,

What have I to do with sorrow?

Ay, grin as thou wilt, thou pale spectre, at me;

I'll live and dance on, and I care not for thee.

To-day that face is fresh and fair,

To-morrow 'tis bleach'd, and white, and bare:

Come then, dearest, while we may,

Let us drain love's sweets to-day.

Oh, seize the moment ere it flies!

Anguish and tears,

Sorrow and fears,

Have mark'd thee for their prize.

The angel of death

Swept by on the blast;

On thee fell his breath

Or ever he past.

Gnawing worms and rottenness,

Death, decay, and nothingness:

These are thy doom—how soon, how soon!

Thou must die, and so must I.

One touch of thy robe, as the dance sweeps by,

One squeeze of the hand, one glance of the eye,

And the grim king has clutch'd thee—on! on! let us fly!

Thou art lost, thou art gone; and away stagger I.

So why should I care?

There is joy in despair:

More maids by dozens at my feet,

With tempting bait of proffer'd sweet.

Here's a fair dame would be my bride,

And she is fair as are the maids

That wander in Elysian glades:

Shall it be she, or shall it be another?

There's a bold beauty at her side,

That looks as if she'd like a lover,

Ready to take whate'er she can,

Provided only 'tis a man.

Oh, these mad pleasures and these sirens smiling,

With cheating hopes and mocking shows beguiling—

Hell's curse is on them! Is the blossom fair?

Hate, envies, murders, are the fruit they bear.

So fast we whirl along the stream,

Life is death, and love a dream;

Ebbing, flowing, wave on wave,

Soulless, lifeless to the grave.

Nature's beauty is a lie—

She is all deformity;

Flower and tree the mocking guise

Which cheat our fond believing eyes.

On then, ye cymbals, with your din;

Scream clarionets, and bugles ring:

Crash, crash, crash! 'tis the fiend-world's knell,

Yoicks forward—forward—home to hell!

He had finished, and was standing at the window. Then came she into the room beyond him, beautiful as he had never seen her: her dark hair was loose, and hung in long waving tresses on her ivory neck. She was lightly dressed, and it seemed she had some household matter to arrange before retiring to rest; for she placed two candles on stands in front of the window, spread a cloth on the table, and again disappeared.

Emilius was sunk in his sweet dreamy visions, and the image of his beloved was still playing before his fancy, when, to his horror, he saw the fearful scarlet old woman stride across the room, her head and bosom gleaming hideously as the gold caught the light from the candles, and again vanished. Could he trust his eyes? The darkness had deceived him; it was but a spectre his fancy had conjured up. But no; she comes again, more hideous than before; her long grizzled hair in loose and tangled masses floating down upon her breast and shoulders. The beautiful maiden is behind her, with pale and rigid features, her fair bosom all unveiled, her form like a marble statue. Between them was the little lovely child, weeping and praying, and watching imploringly the maiden's eyes, who looked not down. In agony it raised its little hands and stroked the neck and cheeks of the marble beauty. She caught it fast by the hair, and in the other hand she held a silver basin. The old woman howled and drew a knife and cut across the little thing's white neck.

Then came there something forward from behind, which they did not seem to see, or it must have filled them with the same horror as it did Emilius. A hideous serpent-head drew out coil after coil from the darkness, and inclining over the child, which now hung with relaxed limbs in the arms of the old woman, licked up with its black tongue the spouting blood. And a green sparkling eye shot across through the open shutter into the brain and eye and heart of Emilius, who fell fainting to the ground. Roderick found him senseless some hours after.

On a beautiful summer morning a party of friends were sitting round a breakfast-table in a garden summer-house. They seemed very merry, laughing and chattering, and drinking the health of the young bride and bridegroom, and wishing them long life and happiness. The young couple themselves were not present; the beauty herself being still engaged at her toilet, while the bridegroom was wandering up and down the walks at the other end of the garden, to enjoy in solitude the sweetness of his own reflections.

"What a shame it is," said Anderson, "that we are not to have any music! All our young ladies are put out about it: they say they never longed so much for a dance, and it is not to be: it is said he cannot endure it."

"We are to have a ball though, I can tell you, and a right mad and merry one too," said a young officer; "every thing is arranged; the musicians are come, and we have stowed them away where no one shall know any thing about them. Roderick has taken the direction on himself; he says we ought not to give way to him too much; and that to-day, of all days in the world, his whims and fancies must not be indulged."

"He is so much more sociable and like his fellow-creatures than he used to be," said another young man, "that I do not think he will be displeased at the alteration. The whole affair of this marriage has come on so suddenly, so little like what we expected of him, he must be changed."

"His whole life," said Anderson, "has been as remarkable as his character is. You all know how he came last autumn to the city on a tour he was making, and lived all the winter through there by himself, shut up in his room as if he was melancholy mad. He never went near the theatre, or any other of our places of diversion; and had very nearly quarrelled with Roderick, who was his most intimate friend, for trying to dissipate him a little, and prevent him from for ever indulging his gloomy humours. All this excitableness and irritability of temper was at the bottom nothing but disease, as the event proved; for four months ago, I believe you know, he fell into a violent nervous fever, and was so ill that every one gave him up. He recovered at last, and got rid of some of his fancies; but the strange thing was, that when he came to his senses again, his memory was entirely gone: his memory, that is, of all that had happened immediately previous to his sickness. He could remember his childhood, and all his boyish adventures were fresh as ever; but the last year or two were blanks. All his

friends, even Roderick, he had to become acquainted with over again; and it is only by slow degrees that here and there faint glimmerings of the past are beginning to come back upon his recollection. When he was taken ill, his uncle took him into his own house, where he could be better attended to: he was just like a child in their hands, and let them do any thing they pleased with him. The first time he went out to enjoy the fresh spring-air in the park, he saw by the road-side a young maiden sitting apparently in deep thought on a bank. She looked up as he passed; their eyes met, and, as if overcome by some indescribable feeling, he sprung out of the carriage, sat down at her side, caught her hands in his, and dissolved into a flood of tears. His friends were afraid that this outburst of feeling was a relapse into fever; he was quite quiet, however, and seemed happy and good-humoured. He paid a visit to the parents of the young lady, and the first time he saw her again he asked her to marry him. Her father and mother made no difficulty, and she consented. He was now happy; a new life seemed to have sprung up in him; every day he got better and stronger, and his mind easier: a fortnight ago he came here on a visit to me, and the place delighted him so much that nothing would satisfy him but what I must part with it to him. If I had pleased, I might have turned his inclination to my advantage: any thing I asked he was ready to give, so that the bargain be concluded immediately. He made his arrangements, sent furniture down, and his plan is to spend all the summer months here. And so it has come to pass that here we are all of us to-day gathered together at my old place for his wedding."

The house was large, and most beautifully situated; on one side it looked upon a river, with a garden sloping down to the water's edge full of flowers, which filled the air with fragrance; and beyond, a long range of hills skirting the bank of the river, and magnificently wooded. Along the front was a broad open terrace, with rows of orange and citron trees, and little doors leading to the various offices underneath the house. The other side a lawn extended out to the park, from which it was only divided by a light fence. This front of the house had a very beautiful though very singular appearance. The two projecting wings enclosed a spacious area, which was partly roofed over, and divided into three stories, forming open galleries running along the centre of the building, supported on tiers of pillars rising one above another. From these galleries were doors opening into all the different rooms in the house; and the various figures passing along these spacious corridors, behind the columns above or below, and disappearing into the different doors, in their various occupations, produced a very singular effect. In one or other of them the party used to collect itself at teatime, or for any games that might be going on; so that from below the whole had the air of a theatre, when it was the greatest pleasure to stand and watch the passing forms above, as in a beautiful tableau.

The young party were just rising, when the bride crossed the garden to join them. She was richly dressed in violet velvet, with a necklace of brilliants on her ivory throat, and her white swelling bosom gleaming through the rich lace which covered it; a myrtle sprig and a wreath of roses formed her simple though most tasteful head-dress. She

greeted them kindly, and the young men were overcome by her extraordinary beauty. She had gathered some flowers in the garden, and was returning to the house to see after the arrangements for the banquet. The tables were set out in the lowest of the open galleries. Their white damask coverings, and the glass and crystal vessels on them, were of the greatest beauty. Multitudes of flowers of every hue and colour stood in elegant vases; the pillars were wound with wreaths of green leaves and roses; and how enchanting it was to see the bride moving up and down among the flowers, so gracefully passing between the table and the column, looking that all was right in the arrangement. Presently she vanished, and then appeared again for a moment at the upper gallery as she passed to her chamber.

"She is the most charming, the most beautiful creature I ever saw," Anderson cried; "my friend is a lucky man."

"And her very paleness," put in the young officer, "enhances her beauty; her dark eyes flash so above those marble cheeks; and those lips, so glowingly red, make her whole appearance truly enchanting."

"The air of silent melancholy," said Anderson, "which surrounds her, adds to the majesty of her bearing."

The bridegroom came up to them and asked for Roderick. The party had already missed him for some time, and no one could guess what had become of him; they now dispersed in search of him. At last a young man they asked told them he was down below in the hall, playing off tricks at cards, to the great amazement of a troop of grooms and servants. They went down and disturbed the circle of gapers. Roderick, however, did not let himself be put out, but went on for some time with his conjuring. As soon as he had done, he went with the rest of the party into the garden, saying, by way of accounting for his employment, "I merely do it to strengthen those fellows' faith for them. Their groomships are setting up to be free-thinkers, and it is as well to give them a staggerer now and then—it helps to their conversion."

"I perceive," the bridegroom said, "that my friend, among his other accomplishments, does not think charlatanism beneath his notice."

"We live in strange times," he answered; "one must not despise any thing now-a-days; nobody knows what he may not come to."

When the two friends were alone, Emilius turned again into the retired walk, and said, "Can you tell me why it is that to-day, which is or ought to be the happiest of my life, I feel so deeply depressed? Whatever you may think of me, I assure you I am not fit for the duties that devolve on me; I have no skill to move up and down a crowd of people with a civil speech for every one; entertain all these hosts of her and my relations, with respects for fathers and mothers, and compliments for ladies; receive visitors, and see

that horses and servants are taken care of—I cannot do it."

"Oh, all that goes right of itself," said Roderick. "Your house is capitally arranged for that sort of thing. There is your steward, a famous fellow, with omnipotence and omnipresence in his hands and legs; he is made on purpose to arrange these matters, and see large parties taken care of, and put properly in their places: leave it all to him and your pretty bride."

"This morning," said Emilius, "I was walking before sunrise in the plantation here: my thoughts had taken a very serious turn, for I felt, to the bottom of my soul, that my life was now become fixed and definite, and that this love had given me a home and a calling. As I approached the summer-house yonder, I heard voices. It was my beloved in earnest conversation. 'Has it not turned out as I predicted?' said a strange voice; 'exactly as I knew it must be? you have your wishes, so be content.' I could not prevail on myself to go in to them; and afterwards, when I came to the summer-house again, they were both gone. I can do nothing but think and think what these words could mean."

"Very likely she has long loved you," said Roderick, "and you have not known any thing about it: all the better for you."

At that moment a late nightingale began to sing, as if to wish all joy and good fortune to the lovers. Emilius became more and more gloomy.

"Come down with me into the village yonder," said Roderick; "I will shew you something to amuse you. You are not to suppose you are the only man that is to be made happy to-day. There is a second pretty couple. A young scamp, it seems, what with opportunity and having nothing else to do, got upon too intimate terms with a damsel that might be his mother, and the fool thinks he is in duty bound to make her an honest woman. They'll have dressed themselves out by this time. The scene will be rich; I would not miss it for the world."

The sad and gloomy Emilius let himself be dragged away by his talkative friend, and they reached the cottage just at the moment the cavalcade passed out on their road to the church. The young countryman had on his every-day linen smock, and his only piece of smartness consisted of a pair of leather gaiters, which he had polished up to make look as bright as possible. He was a simple-looking fellow, and seemed shy and awkward. The bride was tanned by the sun, and her face shewed very few remaining traces of youthfulness. She was coarsely and poorly dressed, but her clothes were clean, and a few red and blue silk ribbons, rather faded, were pinned up in bows on her stomacher. The worst part of her figure was her hair, which they had pasted up with a daub of fat and meal, and done into a great cone with hair-pins straight up from her head, on the top of which they had placed the marriage-garland. She tried to laugh and seem in good spirits, but she was ashamed and frightened. The old people

followed. His father was in the employ of the house; and the cottage, as well as the furniture and clothes, all betrayed the extremest poverty. A dirty-looking squint-eyed fiddler followed the troop, grinning and smirking, and scraping away on a thing professing to be a violin, which was made up half of wood and half of pasteboard, having three pieces of packthread for strings.

The cavalcade halted at the sight of the new landlord. Some saucy-looking servants of the house, young boys and women, began to laugh and cut jokes at the expense of the young couple, particularly the ladies'-maids, who thought themselves a great deal prettier, and saw that they had infinitely smarter clothes. A shudder passed over Emilius. He looked round for Roderick, but he had run away again. An impudent-looking boy, a servant of one of the visitors, who wanted to be thought witty, pressed up to Emilius, and said, "What does your worship say to this brilliant couple? neither of them know where they are to get a piece of bread for to-morrow, and this afternoon they are going to give a ball, and have engaged the services of that good gentleman yonder."

"Not know where they are to get bread?" cried Emilius; "can these things be?"

"Oh, yes," the other went on; "every one knows how miserably poor they are; but the fellow says he will do his duty to the creature, though she has not a farthing. Yes, indeed, love is all-powerful: the ragamuffins haven't got so much as a bed; they have begged enough small beer to get drunk upon, and they are to sleep to-night in the straw."

There was a loud laugh at this, and the two unlucky objects of it did not dare to raise their eyes.

Emilius pushed the chattering fool in bitter anger from him. "Here, take this," he cried, and flung a hundred ducats, which he had received that morning, into the hands of the astonished bridegroom: the parents and the bridal pair wept aloud, threw themselves on their knees, and kissed his hands and clothes. He struggled to free himself. "Keep want from your bodies with that so long as it will last," he said, half bewildered.

"Oh, you have made us happy for our lives, best, kindest sir!" they all cried.

He scarcely knew how he broke from them. He found himself alone, and ran with tottering steps into the wood, where, in the most secluded spot that he could find, he flung himself down upon a bank and burst into a flood of tears.

"I am sick of life," he sobbed, in the deepest emotion. "I cannot enjoy it, I cannot, will not be happy in it. Oh, take me quickly to thyself, kind Earth, and hide me in thy cold arms from these wild beasts that call themselves men. O God in heaven, what have I

done, that I sleep on down and wear silk apparel? that the grape spends her choicest blood for me, and men crowd round and cringe to me with love, and honour, and respect? This poor fellow is better, is nobler than I; yet misery is his nurse, and scorn and bitter mockery wish him joy upon his wedding-day. Every dainty morsel I enjoy, every draught from my cut glasses, my soft couches, and all this gold and ornament, oh, they are tainted with the poison of sin, so long as the world hunts to and fro these thousands upon thousands of poor wretches that hunger for the dry crumbs that fall from my table, and have never known what comfort means. Oh, now I understand you, ye holy saints; though the proud world turned from you with disdain and scorn when ye gave your all, even the cloak upon your back, to poverty, and chose rather as poor beggars to be trodden under foot, and bear the scoffs and sneers with which pride and selfish gluttony drive misery from their tables, rather to endure yourselves the last extreme of wretchedness, than bear upon your consciences this vile sin of wealth."

The world, and all its forms and customs, swam as a mist before his eyes; he thought he would find now his only friends and companions among the abject and the vile, and renounce for ever the society of all the world's great ones.

They had been waiting for him a long time in the saloon for the ceremony to be concluded; the bride became anxious, and her father and mother went out into the park to look for him. After some time, when he was partially recovered from his emotion, and his feelings were easier, he returned, and the solemn knot was tied.

And now they all left the great saloon for the open gallery, where the tables were set out, bride and bridegroom first, and the rest following in order. Roderick offered his arm to a lively-looking, chattering young lady.

"Why do brides always cry and look so serious and solemn at a wedding?" said she, as they entered the room.

"Because they never felt before this moment the true mysteriousness of life," answered Roderick.

"But our bride here," said his companion, "exceeds every thing I have ever seen; she looks perfectly miserable: I haven't seen her smile once."

"It is all the more honour to her heart," replied Roderick, who, strange to say, seemed really affected. "You do not know, perhaps, that some years ago she adopted a lone little orphan girl, and took her to live with her and educate her. She devoted the whole of her time to the child, and the love of the dear little thing was her sweetest reward. She was just seven years old, when one day she had gone out for a walk in the city, and never came home again; and notwithstanding all the trouble that was taken to recover her, no one has ever been able to tell what has become of her. This misfortune the noble-minded woman took so much to heart, that a silent melancholy has settled

upon her ever since; and nothing has been able to distract her from her regret for her little playfellow."

"What an interesting story!" said the young lady. "Some time or other we may have a most romantic conclusion, and a pretty poem written about it."

They seated themselves at the table, bride and bridegroom in the centre, looking out upon the beautiful landscape. There was a great deal of chattering and talking and drinking healths, and every one seemed to be in the best possible spirits. The bride's parents enjoyed themselves exceedingly; the bridegroom alone was gloomy and abstracted; he did not seem to enter into any thing that was going on, and took no part in the conversation. He started as he heard music ringing down from above through the air; but he soon recovered himself: it was but the soft note of a bugle which floated for a few moments over the garden, then swept across the park and died away among the distant hills. Roderick had placed the musicians in the gallery immediately over the banquet, and this arrangement seemed to satisfy Emilius. Towards the end of the feast he sent for his steward. "My dearest," he said, turning to his bride, "shall not poverty have a share of our abundance?" He desired that a number of bottles of wine, some roast meat, and a large portion of various other dishes, might be sent to the poor couple in the village, that they also might have reason to remember the day as a day of joy and happiness.

"Only see, my dear friend," cried Roderick, "how every thing hangs together in this world. This chattering and running about after every body else's business but my own you so often complain of in me, has given you the opportunity of doing this piece of kindness."

Many persons present began to say something complimentary about benevolence and compassionate hearts, and the young lady talked of generosity and nobleness of feeling.

"Oh, speak not so!" cried Emilius indignantly. "It is no kind action, no action at all; it is nothing. If the swallow and the linnet fill themselves with the refuse fragments of our abundance, shall not I think of a poor brother-mortal who has need of my assistance? If I followed the impulse of my heart, I should soon find little from you and the like of you but such scorn and laughter as ye gave the saints of old when they went out and made their homes in the wilderness, to hear no more of the world and its generosities."

No one spoke; and Roderick saw by the flashing eyes of his friend that he was violently displeased: he was afraid his excitement might lead him still more to forget himself, and endeavoured as quick as possible to give the conversation another direction. Emilius, however, had become uneasy and restless. His eyes were continually turned towards the upper gallery, where the servants, who occupied the highest floor of the

house, were busily engaged.

"Who is that ugly old woman in a grey cloak, going backwards and forwards, making herself so busy there?" he asked at last.

"She is one of my servants," answered the bride; "she is to have the overlooking of the ladies' maids and the younger girls."

"How can you bear to have so hideous a creature about you?" said Emilius.

"Oh, let the poor thing be," replied the bride; "ugliness must live as well as beauty, you know; she is a good honest soul, and can be of the greatest use to us."

They rose from table, and the party now pressed round the new bridegroom to wish him all joy, and to beg to be allowed to have their ball. The bride threw her arms round him affectionately as she said, "My first request, dearest, you cannot refuse; it will make us all so happy; it is so long since I have been at a ball, and you have never seen me dance—are you not anxious to know how I shall look?"

"I never saw you in such high spirits," said Emilius; "I will not spoil your pleasure, do just as you please; only don't expect me to jump and tumble about and make myself ridiculous."

"If you are a bad dancer," said she, laughing, "you may be sure you will be left in peace." She ran away to make the requisite alterations in her dress for the ball.

"She does not know," Emilius said to Roderick as they walked away together, "that there is a secret door into her room from the one adjoining; I will surprise her while she is dressing."

When Emilius was gone, and the ladies had also disappeared to put on their ball-dresses, Roderick took some of the young men aside and brought them to his own room. "It is getting late," he said,—"it will soon be dark; so now be quick all of you and get your masks on, and we will make this night a right mad and merry one. Any device you can think of, no matter what; the more hideous objects you can make yourselves, the better I shall be pleased—not a monster in creation but what I must have him—humpbacks, fat paunches, all of them. A wedding is such a strange piece of business, married people find, all of a sudden, such a wholly new fairy-tale set of circumstances round their necks, that we cannot make it absurd and mad enough to start them properly in their altered condition, and set them rolling along their new road; so to-night shall be a right wild mad nightmare, and never listen to any one that tells you to be reasonable."

"Don't alarm yourself," said Anderson; "we brought a box of masks and dresses from

town with us that will astonish even you."

"And only look here," said Roderick, "what a treasure I have got from my tailor! the tasteless wretch was going to clip it to pieces for lappets. He bought it, he said, from an old woman, who I fancy must have worn it at Lucifer's gala on the Block's berg. This scarlet bodice with its lace and fringe, and the cap here all over glittering with gold, will look infinitely becoming; and then with this green petticoat on, and saffron trimmings, and this hideous mask, I will go as an old woman at the head of the whole troop of travesters to their room, and we will lead off our young lady in triumph to the ball; come, be quick with you."

The bugles were still playing, and the company were either dispersed in groups about the garden, or sitting in front of the house. The sun was going down behind a mass of heavy clouds, and a greyish mist was spreading over the landscape, when suddenly its last beams burst out under the dark curtain, and all the landscape round, and the house itself, with its galleries and columns, and wreaths of flowers, was bathed in a blood-red glow. At that moment the bride's parents and the rest of the spectators saw the wild troop of figures sweep along the upper gallery, Roderick going first as the scarlet old woman; and after him humpbacks, fat-paunched monsters with huge periwigs, harlequins, clowns, pantaloons, spectral dwarfs, women with broad hoop-petticoats and yard-high frisures, all like the phantoms of a hideous nightmare. On they went, tumbling, twisting, staggering, tripping, and strutting along the gallery, and disappeared into one of the doors.

Suddenly a wild shriek burst from the inner chambers, and out dashed the pale bride into the crimson light; a short white petticoat was her only dress; her fair bosom all open, and her hair floating in wild disorder down her back. With quivering features, and eyes starting from their sockets, she rushed madly along the corridors. Blinded with terror, she could find neither door nor stairs; and fast behind her flew Emilius, with the Turkish dagger gleaming in his uplifted hand: she had reached the end of the gallery and could go no further; he caught her. His masked friends, and the grey old woman, were close behind; but ere they reached him the dagger was in her breast, he had cut across her white neck; the red blood glittered in the evening glow. The old woman flung her arms round him to drag him off; but with one fierce effort, he hurled himself and her over the balcony, and fell, dashed in pieces, at the feet of his relations, who, in silent horror, had witnessed the bloody scene. Above and below, along the stairs and corridors, were seen the hideous masks rushing wildly up and down; like accursed demons come from hell.

Roderick took the dying Emilius in his arms. He had found him in his wife's room playing with the dagger; she was nearly dressed as he entered. At the sight of the scarlet dress his memory had returned; the terrible scene of that night rushed before his senses; gnashing his teeth, he had sprung upon his trembling flying bride to avenge that murder and those devilish arts. The old woman confessed the crime that

had been committed before she died; and the whole house was turned suddenly to sorrow, and mourning, and woe.