

The justice of the quorum forced his hat down on his head, crossed his hands on his stomach, which is the height of majesty, and added,--

"It is decided, Master Nicless; you are to be taken to prison, and put into jail, you and the boy; and this house, the Tadcaster Inn, is to remain shut up, condemned and closed. For the sake of example. Upon which, you will follow us."

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

THE TITANESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE AWAKENING.

And Dea!

It seemed to Gwynplaine, as he watched the break of day at Corleone Lodge, while the things we have related were occurring at the Tadcaster

Inn, that the call came from without; but it came from within.

Who has not heard the deep clamours of the soul?

Moreover, the morning was dawning.

Aurora is a voice.

Of what use is the sun if not to reawaken that dark sleeper--the conscience?

Light and virtue are akin.

Whether the god be called Christ or Love, there is at times an hour when he is forgotten, even by the best. All of us, even the saints, require a voice to remind us; and the dawn speaks to us, like a sublime monitor. Conscience calls out before duty, as the cock crows before the dawn of day.

That chaos, the human heart, hears the fiat lux!

Gwynplaine--we will continue thus to call him (Clancharlie is a lord, Gwynplaine is a man)--Gwynplaine felt as if brought back to life. It was time that the artery was bound up.

For a while his virtue had spread its wings and flown away.

"And Dea!" he said.

Then he felt through his veins a generous transfusion. Something healthy and tumultuous rushed upon him. The violent irruption of good thoughts is like the return home of a man who has not his key, and who forces his own lock honestly. It is an escalade, but an escalade of good. It is a burglary, but a burglary of evil.

"Dea! Dea! Dea!" repeated he.

He strove to assure himself of his heart's strength. And he put the question with a loud voice--"Where are you?"

He almost wondered that no one answered him.

Then again, gazing on the walls and the ceiling, with wandering thoughts, through which reason returned.

"Where are you? Where am I?"

And in the chamber which was his cage he began to walk again, to and fro, like a wild beast in captivity.

"Where am I? At Windsor. And you? In Southwark. Alas! this is the first time that there has been distance between us. Who has dug this gulf? I here, thou there. Oh, it cannot be; it shall not be! What is this that they have done to me?"

He stopped.

"Who talked to me of the queen? What do I know of such things? I changed! Why? Because I am a lord. Do you know what has happened, Dea? You are a lady. What has come to pass is astounding. My business now is to get back into my right road. Who is it who led me astray? There is a man who spoke to me mysteriously. I remember the words which he addressed to me. 'My lord, when one door opens another is shut. That which you have left behind is no longer yours.' In other words, you are a coward. That man, the miserable wretch! said that to me before I was well awake. He took advantage of my first moment of astonishment. I was as it were a prey to him. Where is he, that I may insult him? He spoke to me with the evil smile of a demon. But see--I am myself again. That is well. They deceive themselves if they think that they can do what they like with Lord Clancharlie, a peer of England. Yes, with a peeress, who is Dea! Conditions! Shall I accept them? The queen! What is the queen to me? I never saw her. I am not a lord to be made a slave. I enter my position unfettered. Did they think they had unchained me for nothing? They have unmuzzled me. That is all. Dea! Ursus! we are together. That which you were, I was; that which I am, you are. Come. No. I will go to you directly--directly. I have already waited too long. What can they think, not seeing me return! That money. When I think I sent them that money! It was myself that they wanted. I remember the man said that I could not leave this place. We shall see that. Come! a carriage, a carriage! put to the horses. I am going to look for them. Where are the servants? I ought to have servants here, since I am a

lord. I am master here. This is my house. I will twist off the bolts, I will break the locks, I will kick down the doors, I will run my sword through the body of any one who bars my passage. I should like to see who shall stop me. I have a wife, and she is Dea. I have a father, who is Ursus. My house is a palace, and I give it to Ursus. My name is a diadem, and I give it to Dea. Quick, directly, Dea, I am coming; yes, you may be sure that I shall soon stride across the intervening space!"

And raising the first piece of tapestry he came to, he rushed from the chamber impetuously.

He found himself in a corridor.

He went straight forward.

A second corridor opened out before him.

All the doors were open.

He walked on at random, from chamber to chamber, from passage to passage, seeking an exit.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESEMBLANCE OF A PALACE TO A WOOD.

In palaces after the Italian fashion, and Corleone Lodge was one, there were very few doors, but abundance of tapestry screens and curtained doorways. In every palace of that date there was a wonderful labyrinth of chambers and corridors, where luxury ran riot; gilding, marble, carved wainscoting, Eastern silks; nooks and corners, some secret and dark as night, others light and pleasant as the day. There were attics, richly and brightly furnished; burnished recesses shining with Dutch tiles and Portuguese azulejos. The tops of the high windows were converted into small rooms and glass attics, forming pretty habitable lanterns. The thickness of the walls was such that there were rooms within them. Here and there were closets, nominally wardrobes. They were called "The Little Rooms." It was within them that evil deeds were hatched.

When a Duke of Guise had to be killed, the pretty Présidente of Sylvecane abducted, or the cries of little girls brought thither by Lebel smothered, such places were convenient for the purpose. They were labyrinthine chambers, impracticable to a stranger; scenes of abductions; unknown depths, receptacles of mysterious disappearances. In those elegant caverns princes and lords stored their plunder. In such a place the Count de Charolais hid Madame Courchamp, the wife of the Clerk

of the Privy Council; Monsieur de Monthulé, the daughter of Haudry, the farmer of La Croix Saint Lenfroy; the Prince de Conti, the two beautiful baker women of L'Ile Adam; the Duke of Buckingham, poor Pennywell, etc. The deeds done there were such as were designated by the Roman law as committed vi, clam, et precario--by force, in secret, and for a short time. Once in, an occupant remained there till the master of the house decreed his or her release. They were gilded oubliettes, savouring both of the cloister and the harem. Their staircases twisted, turned, ascended, and descended. A zigzag of rooms, one running into another, led back to the starting-point. A gallery terminated in an oratory. A confessional was grafted on to an alcove. Perhaps the architects of "the little rooms," building for royalty and aristocracy, took as models the ramifications of coral beds, and the openings in a sponge. The branches became a labyrinth. Pictures turning on false panels were exits and entrances. They were full of stage contrivances, and no wonder--considering the dramas that were played there! The floors of these hives reached from the cellars to the attics. Quaint madrepare inlaying every palace, from Versailles downwards, like cells of pygmies in dwelling-places of Titans. Passages, niches, alcoves, and secret recesses. All sorts of holes and corners, in which was stored away the meanness of the great.

These winding and narrow passages recalled games, blindfolded eyes, hands feeling in the dark, suppressed laughter, blind man's buff, hide and seek, while, at the same time, they suggested memories of the Atrides, of the Plantagenets, of the Médicis, the brutal knights of Eltz, of Rizzio, of Monaldeschi; of naked swords, pursuing the fugitive

flying from room to room.

The ancients, too, had mysterious retreats of the same kind, in which luxury was adapted to enormities. The pattern has been preserved underground in some sepulchres in Egypt, notably in the tomb of King Psammetichus, discovered by Passalacqua. The ancient poets have recorded the horrors of these suspicious buildings. Error circumflexus, locus implicitus gyris.

Gwynplaine was in the "little rooms" of Corleone Lodge. He was burning to be off, to get outside, to see Dea again. The maze of passages and alcoves, with secret and bewildering doors, checked and retarded his progress. He strove to run; he was obliged to wander. He thought that he had but one door to thrust open, while he had a skein of doors to unravel. To one room succeeded another. Then a crossway, with rooms on every side.

Not a living creature was to be seen. He listened. Not a sound.

At times he thought that he must be returning towards his starting-point; then, that he saw some one approaching. It was no one. It was only the reflection of himself in a mirror, dressed as a nobleman. That he? Impossible! Then he recognized himself, but not at once.

He explored every passage that he came to.

He examined the quaint arrangements of the rambling building, and their yet quainter fittings. Here, a cabinet, painted and carved in a sentimental but vicious style; there, an equivocal-looking chapel, studded with enamels and mother-of-pearl, with miniatures on ivory wrought out in relief, like those on old-fashioned snuff-boxes; there, one of those pretty Florentine retreats, adapted to the hypochondriasis of women, and even then called boudoirs. Everywhere--on the ceilings, on the walls, and on the very floors--were representations, in velvet or in metal, of birds, of trees; of luxuriant vegetation, picked out in reliefs of lacework; tables covered with jet carvings, representing warriors, queens, and tritons armed with the scaly terminations of a hydra. Cut crystals combining prismatic effects with those of reflection. Mirrors repeated the light of precious stones, and sparkles glittered in the darkest corners. It was impossible to guess whether those many-sided, shining surfaces, where emerald green mingled with the golden hues of the rising sun where floated a glimmer of ever-varying colours, like those on a pigeon's neck, were miniature mirrors or enormous beryls. Everywhere was magnificence, at once refined and stupendous; if it was not the most diminutive of palaces, it was the most gigantic of jewel-cases. A house for Mab or a jewel for Geo.

Gwynplaine sought an exit. He could not find one. Impossible to make out his way. There is nothing so confusing as wealth seen for the first time. Moreover, this was a labyrinth. At each step he was stopped by some magnificent object which appeared to retard his exit, and to be unwilling to let him pass. He was encompassed by a net of wonders. He felt himself bound and held back.

What a horrible palace! he thought. Restless, he wandered through the maze, asking himself what it all meant--whether he was in prison; chafing, thirsting for the fresh air. He repeated Dea! Dea! as if that word was the thread of the labyrinth, and must be held unbroken, to guide him out of it. Now and then he shouted, "Ho! Any one there?" No one answered. The rooms never came to an end. All was deserted, silent, splendid, sinister. It realized the fables of enchanted castles. Hidden pipes of hot air maintained a summer temperature in the building. It was as if some magician had caught up the month of June and imprisoned it in a labyrinth. There were pleasant odours now and then, and he crossed currents of perfume, as though passing by invisible flowers. It was warm. Carpets everywhere. One might have walked about there, unclothed.

Gwynplaine looked out of the windows. The view from each one was different. From one he beheld gardens, sparkling with the freshness of a spring morning; from another a plot decked with statues; from a third, a patio in the Spanish style, a little square, flagged, mouldy, and cold. At times he saw a river--it was the Thames; sometimes a great tower--it was Windsor.

It was still so early that there were no signs of life without.

He stood still and listened.

"Oh! I will get out of this place," said he. "I will return to Dea! They shall not keep me here by force. Woe to him who bars my exit! What is

that great tower yonder? If there was a giant, a hell-hound, a minotaur, to keep the gate of this enchanted palace, I would annihilate him. If an army, I would exterminate it. Dea! Dea!"

Suddenly he heard a gentle noise, very faint. It was like dropping water. He was in a dark narrow passage, closed, some few paces further on, by a curtain. He advanced to the curtain, pushed it aside, entered. He leaped before he looked.

CHAPTER III.

EVE.

An octagon room, with a vaulted ceiling, without windows but lighted by a skylight; walls, ceiling, and floors faced with peach-coloured marble; a black marble canopy, like a pall, with twisted columns in the solid but pleasing Elizabethan style, overshadowing a vase-like bath of the same black marble--this was what he saw before him. In the centre of the bath arose a slender jet of tepid and perfumed water, which, softly and slowly, was filling the tank. The bath was black to augment fairness into brilliancy.

It was the water which he had heard. A waste-pipe, placed at a certain height in the bath, prevented it from overflowing. Vapour was rising from the water, but not sufficient to cause it to hang in drops on the marble. The slender jet of water was like a supple wand of steel, bending at the slightest current of air. There was no furniture, except a chair-bed with pillows, long enough for a woman to lie on at full length, and yet have room for a dog at her feet. The French, indeed, borrow their word *canapé* from *can-al-pié*. This sofa was of Spanish manufacture. In it silver took the place of woodwork. The cushions and coverings were of rich white silk.

On the other side of the bath, by the wall, was a lofty dressing-table

of solid silver, furnished with every requisite for the table, having in its centre, and in imitation of a window, eight small Venetian mirrors, set in a silver frame. In a panel on the wall was a square opening, like a little window, which was closed by a door of solid silver. This door was fitted with hinges, like a shutter. On the shutter there glistened a chased and gilt royal crown. Over it, and affixed to the wall, was a bell, silver gilt, if not of pure gold.

Opposite the entrance of the chamber, in which Gwynplaine stood as if transfixed, there was an opening in the marble wall, extending to the ceiling, and closed by a high and broad curtain of silver tissue. This curtain, of fairy-like tenuity, was transparent, and did not interrupt the view. Through the centre of this web, where one might expect a spider, Gwynplaine saw a more formidable object--a woman. Her dress was a long chemise--so long that it floated over her feet, like the dresses of angels in holy pictures; but so fine that it seemed liquid.

The silver tissue, transparent as glass and fastened only at the ceiling, could be lifted aside. It separated the marble chamber, which was a bathroom, from the adjoining apartment, which was a bedchamber. This tiny dormitory was as a grotto of mirrors. Venetian glasses, close together, mounted with gold mouldings, reflected on every side the bed in the centre of the room. On the bed, which, like the toilet-table, was of silver, lay the woman; she was asleep.

The crumpled clothes bore evidence of troubled sleep. The beauty of the folds was proof of the quality of the material.

It was a period when a queen, thinking that she should be damned, pictured hell to herself as a bed with coarse sheets.[20]

A dressing-gown, of curious silk, was thrown over the foot of the couch. It was apparently Chinese; for a great golden lizard was partly visible in between the folds.

Beyond the couch, and probably masking a door, was a large mirror, on which were painted peacocks and swans.

Shadow seemed to lose its nature in this apartment, and glistened. The spaces between the mirrors and the gold work were lined with that sparkling material called at Venice thread of glass--that is, spun glass.

At the head of the couch stood a reading desk, on a movable pivot, with candles, and a book lying open, bearing this title, in large red letters, "Alcoranus Mahumedis."

Gwynplaine saw none of these details. He had eyes only for the woman. He was at once stupefied and filled with tumultuous emotions, states apparently incompatible, yet sometimes co-existent. He recognized her. Her eyes were closed, but her face was turned towards him. It was the duchess--she, the mysterious being in whom all the splendours of the unknown were united; she who had occasioned him so many unavowable dreams; she who had written him so strange a letter! The only woman in

the world of whom he could say, "She has seen me, and she desires me!"

He had dismissed the dreams from his mind; he had burnt the letter. He had, as far as lay in his power, banished the remembrance of her from his thoughts and dreams. He no longer thought of her. He had forgotten her....

Again he saw her, and saw her terrible in power. His breath came in short catches. He felt as if he were in a storm-driven cloud. He looked. This woman before him! Was it possible? At the theatre a duchess; here a nereid, a nymph, a fairy. Always an apparition. He tried to fly, but felt the futility of the attempt. His eyes were riveted on the vision, as though he were bound. Was she a woman? Was she a maiden? Both. Messalina was perhaps present, though invisible, and smiled, while Diana kept watch.

Over all her beauty was the radiance of inaccessibility. No purity could compare with her chaste and haughty form. Certain snows, which have never been touched, give an idea of it--such as the sacred whiteness of the Jungfrau. Immodesty was merged in splendour. She felt the security of an Olympian, who knew that she was daughter of the depths, and might say to the ocean, "Father!" And she exposed herself, unattainable and proud, to everything that should pass--to looks, to desires, to ravings, to dreams; as proud in her languor, on her boudoir couch, as Venus in the immensity of the sea-foam.

She had slept all night, and was prolonging her sleep into the daylight;

her boldness, begun in shadow, continued in light.

Gwynplaine shuddered. He admired her with an unhealthy and absorbing admiration, which ended in fear. Misfortunes never come singly.

Gwynplaine thought he had drained to the dregs the cup of his ill-luck. Now it was refilled. Who was it who was hurling all those unremitting thunderbolts on his devoted head, and who had now thrown against him, as he stood trembling there, a sleeping goddess? What! was the dangerous and desirable object of his dream lurking all the while behind these successive glimpses of heaven? Did these favours of the mysterious tempter tend to inspire him with vague aspirations and confused ideas, and overwhelm him with an intoxicating series of realities proceeding from apparent impossibilities? Wherefore did all the shadows conspire against him, a wretched man; and what would become of him, with all those evil smiles of fortune beaming on him? Was his temptation prearranged? This woman, how and why was she there? No explanation! Why him? Why her? Was he made a peer of England expressly for this duchess? Who had brought them together? Who was the dupe? Who the victim? Whose simplicity was being abused? Was it God who was being deceived? All these undefined thoughts passed confusedly, like a flight of dark shadows, through his brain. That magical and malevolent abode, that strange and prison-like palace, was it also in the plot? Gwynplaine suffered a partial unconsciousness. Suppressed emotions threatened to strangle him. He was weighed down by an overwhelming force. His will became powerless. How could he resist? He was incoherent and entranced. This time he felt he was becoming irremediably insane. His dark, headlong fall over the precipice of stupefaction continued.

But the woman slept on.

What aggravated the storm within him was, that he saw not the princess, not the duchess, not the lady, but the woman.

Gwynplaine, losing all self-command, trembled. What could he do against such a temptation? Here were no skilful effects of dress, no silken folds, no complex and coquettish adornments, no affected exaggeration of concealment or of exhibition, no cloud. It was fearful simplicity--a sort of mysterious summons--the shameless audacity of Eden. The whole of the dark side of human nature was there. Eve worse than Satan; the human and the superhuman commingled. A perplexing ecstasy, winding up in a brutal triumph of instinct over duty. The sovereign contour of beauty is imperious. When it leaves the ideal and condescends to be real, its proximity is fatal to man.

Now and then the duchess moved softly on the bed, with the vague movement of a cloud in the heavens, changing as a vapour changes its form. Absurd as it may appear, though he saw her present in the flesh before him, yet she seemed a chimera; and, palpable as she was, she seemed to him afar off. Scared and livid, he gazed on. He listened for her breathing, and fancied he heard only a phantom's respiration. He was attracted, though against his will. How arm himself against her--or against himself? He had been prepared for everything except this danger. A savage doorkeeper, a raging monster of a jailer--such were his expected antagonists. He looked for Cerberus; he saw Hebe. A sleeping

woman! What an opponent! He closed his eyes. Too bright a dawn blinds the eyes. But through his closed eyelids there penetrated at once the woman's form--not so distinct, but beautiful as ever.

Fly! Easier said than done. He had already tried and failed. He was rooted to the ground, as if in a dream. When we try to draw back, temptation clogs our feet and glues them to the earth. We can still advance, but to retire is impossible. The invisible arms of sin rise from below and drag us down.

There is a commonplace idea, accepted by every one, that feelings become blunted by experience. Nothing can be more untrue. You might as well say that by dropping nitric acid slowly on a sore it would heal and become sound, and that torture dulled the sufferings of Damians. The truth is, that each fresh application intensifies the pain.

From one surprise after another, Gwynplaine had become desperate. That cup, his reason, under this new stupor, was overflowing. He felt within him a terrible awakening. Compass he no longer possessed. One idea only was before him--the woman. An indescribable happiness appeared, which threatened to overwhelm him. He could no longer decide for himself. There was an irresistible current and a reef. The reef was not a rock, but a siren--a magnet at the bottom of the abyss. He wished to tear himself away from this magnet; but how was he to carry out his wish? He had ceased to feel any basis of support. Who can foresee the fluctuations of the human mind! A man may be wrecked, as is a ship. Conscience is an anchor. It is a terrible thing, but, like the anchor,

conscience may be carried away.

He had not even the chance of being repulsed on account of his terrible disfigurement. The woman had written to say that she loved him.

In every crisis there is a moment when the scale hesitates before kicking the beam. When we lean to the worst side of our nature, instead of strengthening our better qualities, the moral force which has been preserving the balance gives way, and down we go. Had this critical moment in Gwynplaine's life arrived?

How could he escape?

So it is she--the duchess, the woman! There she was in that lonely room--asleep, far from succour, helpless, alone, at his mercy; yet he was in her power! The duchess! We have, perchance, observed a star in the distant firmament. We have admired it. It is so far off. What can there be to make us shudder in a fixed star? Well, one day--one night, rather--it moves. We perceive a trembling gleam around it. The star which we imagined to be immovable is in motion. It is no longer a star, but a comet--the incendiary giant of the skies. The luminary moves on, grows bigger, shakes off a shower of sparks and fire, and becomes enormous. It advances towards us. Oh, horror, it is coming our way! The comet recognizes us, marks us for its own, and will not be turned aside. Irresistible attack of the heavens! What is it which is bearing down on us? An excess of light, which blinds us; an excess of life, which kills us. That proposal which the heavens make we refuse; that unfathomable

love we reject. We close our eyes; we hide; we tear ourselves away; we imagine the danger is past. We open our eyes: the formidable star is still before us; but, no longer a star, it has become a world--a world unknown, a world of lava and ashes; the devastating prodigy of space. It fills the sky, allowing no compeers. The carbuncle of the firmament's depths, a diamond in the distance, when drawn close to us becomes a furnace. You are caught in its flames. And the first sensation of burning is that of a heavenly warmth.

CHAPTER IV.

SATAN.

Suddenly the sleeper awoke. She sat up with a sudden and gracious dignity of movement, her fair silken tresses falling in soft disorder. Then stretching herself, she yawned like a tigress in the rising sun.

Perhaps Gwynplaine breathed heavily, as we do when we endeavour to restrain our respiration.

"Is any one there?" said she.

She yawned as she spoke, and her very yawn was graceful. Gwynplaine listened to the unfamiliar voice--the voice of a charmer, its accents exquisitely haughty, its caressing intonation softening its native arrogance. Then rising on her knees--there is an antique statue kneeling thus in the midst of a thousand transparent folds--she drew the dressing-gown towards her, and springing from the couch stood upright. In the twinkling of an eye the silken robe was around her. The trailing sleeve concealed her hands; only the tips of her toes, with little pink nails like those of an infant, were left visible. Having drawn from underneath the dressing-gown a mass of hair which had been imprisoned by it, she crossed behind the couch to the end of the room, and placed her ear to the painted mirror, which was, apparently, a door. Tapping the

glass with her finger, she called, "Is any one there? Lord David? Are you come already? What time is it then? Is that you, Barkilphedro?" She turned from the glass. "No! it was not there. Is there any one in the bathroom? Will you answer? Of course not. No one could come that way."

Going to the silver lace curtain, she raised it with her foot, thrust it aside with her shoulder, and entered the marble room. An agonized numbness fell upon Gwynplaine. No possibility of concealment. It was too late to fly. Moreover, he was no longer equal to the exertion. He wished that the earth might open and swallow him up. Anything to hide him.

She saw him. She stared, immensely astonished, but without the slightest nervousness. Then, in a tone of mingled pleasure and contempt, she said, "Why, it is Gwynplaine!" Suddenly with a rapid spring, for this cat was a panther, she flung herself on his neck.

Suddenly, pushing him back, and holding him by both shoulders with her small claw-like hands, she stood up face to face with him, and began to gaze at him with a strange expression.

It was a fatal glance she gave him with her Aldebaran-like eyes--a glance at once equivocal and starlike. Gwynplaine watched the blue eye and the black eye, distracted by the double ray of heaven and of hell that shone in the orbs thus fixed on him. The man and the woman threw a malign dazzling reflection one on the other. Both were fascinated--he by her beauty, she by his deformity. Both were in a measure awe-stricken. Pressed down, as by an overwhelming weight, he was

speechless.

"Oh!" she cried. "How clever you are! You are come. You found out that I was obliged to leave London. You followed me. That was right. Your being here proves you to be a wonder."

The simultaneous return of self-possession acts like a flash of lightning. Gwynplaine, indistinctly warned by a vague, rude, but honest misgiving, drew back, but the pink nails clung to his shoulders and restrained him. Some inexorable power proclaimed its sway over him. He himself, a wild beast, was caged in a wild beast's den. She continued, "Anne, the fool--you know whom I mean--the queen--ordered me to Windsor without giving any reason. When I arrived she was closeted with her idiot of a Chancellor. But how did you contrive to obtain access to me? That's what I call being a man. Obstacles, indeed! there are no such things. You come at a call. You found things out. My name, the Duchess Josiana, you knew, I fancy. Who was it brought you in? No doubt it was the page. Oh, he is clever! I will give him a hundred guineas. Which way did you get in? Tell me! No, don't tell me; I don't want to know.

Explanations diminish interest. I prefer the marvellous, and you are hideous enough to be wonderful. You have fallen from the highest heavens, or you have risen from the depths of hell through the devil's trap-door. Nothing can be more natural. The ceiling opened or the floor yawned. A descent in a cloud, or an ascent in a mass of fire and brimstone, that is how you have travelled. You have a right to enter like the gods. Agreed; you are my lover."

Gwynplaine was scared, and listened, his mind growing more irresolute every moment. Now all was certain. Impossible to have any further doubt. That letter! the woman confirmed its meaning. Gwynplaine the lover and the beloved of a duchess! Mighty pride, with its thousand baleful heads, stirred his wretched heart. Vanity, that powerful agent within us, works us measureless evil.

The duchess went on, "Since you are here, it is so decreed. I ask nothing more. There is some one on high, or in hell, who brings us together. The betrothal of Styx and Aurora! Unbridled ceremonies beyond all laws! The very day I first saw you I said, 'It is he!' I recognize him. He is the monster of my dreams. He shall be mine. We should give destiny a helping hand. Therefore I wrote to you. One question, Gwynplaine: do you believe in predestination? For my part, I have believed in it since I read, in Cicero, Scipio's dream. Ah! I did not observe it. Dressed like a gentleman! You in fine clothes! Why not? You are a mountebank. All the more reason. A juggler is as good as a lord. Moreover, what are lords? Clowns. You have a noble figure; you are magnificently made. It is wonderful that you should be here. When did you arrive? How long have you been here? Did you see me naked? I am beautiful, am I not? I was going to take my bath. Oh, how I love you! You read my letter! Did you read it yourself? Did any one read it to you? Can you read? Probably you are ignorant. I ask questions, but don't answer them. I don't like the sound of your voice. It is soft. An extraordinary thing like you should snarl, and not speak. You sing harmoniously. I hate it. It is the only thing about you that I do not like. All the rest is terrible--is grand. In India you would be a god.

Were you born with that frightful laugh on your face? No! No doubt it is a penal brand. I do hope you have committed some crime. Come to my arms."

She sank on the couch, and made him sit beside her. They found themselves close together unconsciously. What she said passed over Gwynplaine like a mighty storm. He hardly understood the meaning of her whirlwind of words. Her eyes were full of admiration. She spoke tumultuously, frantically, with a voice broken and tender. Her words were music, but their music was to Gwynplaine as a hurricane. Again she fixed her gaze upon him and continued,--

"I feel degraded in your presence, and oh, what happiness that is! How insipid it is to be a grandee! I am noble; what can be more tiresome? Disgrace is a comfort. I am so satiated with respect that I long for contempt. We are all a little erratic, from Venus, Cleopatra, Mesdames de Chevreuse and de Longueville, down to myself. I will make a display of you, I declare. Here's a love affair which will be a blow to my family, the Stuarts. Ah! I breathe again. I have discovered a secret. I am clear of royalty. To be free from its trammels is indeed deliverance. To break down, defy, make and destroy at will, that is true enjoyment. Listen, I love you."

She paused; then with a frightful smile went on, "I love you, not only because you are deformed, but because you are low. I love monsters, and I love mountebanks. A lover despised, mocked, grotesque, hideous, exposed to laughter on that pillory called a theatre, has for me an

extraordinary attraction. It is tasting the fruit of hell. An infamous lover, how exquisite! To taste the apple, not of Paradise, but of hell--such is my temptation. It is for that I hunger and thirst. I am that Eve, the Eve of the depths. Probably you are, unknown to yourself, a devil. I am in love with a nightmare. You are a moving puppet, of which the strings are pulled by a spectre. You are the incarnation of infernal mirth. You are the master I require. I wanted a lover such as those of Medea and Canidia. I felt sure that some night would bring me such a one. You are all that I want. I am talking of a heap of things of which you probably know nothing. Gwynplaine, hitherto I have remained untouched; I give myself to you, pure as a burning ember. You evidently do not believe me; but if you only knew how little I care!"

Her words flowed like a volcanic eruption. Pierce Mount Etna, and you may obtain some idea of that jet of fiery eloquence.

Gwynplaine stammered, "Madame--"

She placed her hand on his mouth. "Silence," she said. "I am studying you. I am unbridled desire, immaculate. I am a vestal bacchante. No man has known me, and I might be the virgin pythoness at Delphos, and have under my naked foot the bronze tripod, where the priests lean their elbows on the skin of the python, whispering questions to the invisible god. My heart is of stone, but it is like those mysterious pebbles which the sea washes to the foot of the rock called Huntly Nabb, at the mouth of the Tees, and which if broken are found to contain a serpent. That serpent is my love--a love which is all-powerful, for it has brought you

to me. An impossible distance was between us. I was in Sirius, and you were in Allioth. You have crossed the immeasurable space, and here you are. 'Tis well. Be silent. Take me."

She ceased; he trembled. Then she went on, smiling, "You see, Gwynplaine, to dream is to create; to desire is to summon. To build up the chimera is to provoke the reality. The all-powerful and terrible mystery will not be defied. It produces result. You are here. Do I dare to lose caste? Yes. Do I dare to be your mistress--your concubine--your slave--your chattel? Joyfully. Gwynplaine, I am woman. Woman is clay longing to become mire. I want to despise myself. That lends a zest to pride. The alloy of greatness is baseness. They combine in perfection. Despise me, you who are despised. Nothing can be better. Degradation on degradation. What joy! I pluck the double blossom of ignominy. Trample me under foot. You will only love me the more. I am sure of it. Do you understand why I idolize you? Because I despise you. You are so immeasurably below me that I place you on an altar. Bring the highest and lowest depths together, and you have Chaos, and I delight in Chaos--Chaos, the beginning and end of everything. What is Chaos? A huge blot. Out of that blot God made light, and out of that sink the world. You don't know how perverse I can be. Knead a star in mud, and you will have my likeness."

She went on,--

"A wolf to all beside; a faithful dog to you. How astonished they will all be! The astonishment of fools is amusing. I understand myself. Am I

a goddess? Amphitrite gave herself to the Cyclops. Fluctivoma
Amphitrite. Am I a fairy? Urgele gave herself to Bugryx, a winged man,
with eight webbed hands. Am I a princess? Marie Stuart had Rizzio. Three
beauties, three monsters. I am greater than they, for you are lower than
they. Gwynplaine, we were made for one another. The monster that you are
outwardly, I am within. Thence my love for you. A caprice? Just so. What
is a hurricane but a caprice? Our stars have a certain affinity.
Together we are things of night--you in your face, I in my mind. As your
countenance is defaced, so is my mind. You, in your turn, create me. You
come, and my real soul shows itself. I did not know it. It is
astonishing. Your coming has evoked the hydra in me, who am a goddess.
You reveal my real nature. See how I resemble you. Look at me as if I
were a mirror. Your face is my mind. I did not know I was so terrible. I
am also, then, a monster. O Gwynplaine, you do amuse me!"

She laughed, a strange and childlike laugh; and, putting her mouth
close to his ear, whispered,--

"Do you want to see a mad woman? look at me."

She poured her searching look into Gwynplaine. A look is a philtre. Her
loosened robe provoked a thousand dangerous feelings. Blind, animal
ecstasy was invading his mind--ecstasy combined with agony. Whilst she
spoke, though he felt her words like burning coals, his blood froze
within his veins. He had not strength to utter a word.

She stopped, and looked at him.

"O monster!" she cried. She grew wild.

Suddenly she seized his hands.

"Gwynplaine, I am the throne; you are the footstool. Let us join on the same level. Oh, how happy I am in my fall! I wish all the world could know how abject I am become. It would bow down all the lower. The more man abhors, the more does he cringe. It is human nature. Hostile, but reptile; dragon, but worm. Oh, I am as depraved as are the gods! They can never say that I am not a king's bastard. I act like a queen. Who was Rodope but a queen loving Pteh, a man with a crocodile's head? She raised the third pyramid in his honour. Penthesilea loved the centaur, who, being now a star, is named Sagittarius. And what do you say about Anne of Austria? Mazarin was ugly enough! Now, you are not only ugly; you are deformed. Ugliness is mean, deformity is grand. Ugliness is the devil's grin behind beauty; deformity is the reverse of sublimity. It is the back view. Olympus has two aspects. One, by day, shows Apollo; the other, by night, shows Polyphemus. You--you are a Titan. You would be Behemoth in the forests, Leviathan in the deep, and Typhon in the sewer. You surpass everything. There is the trace of lightning in your deformity; your face has been battered by the thunderbolt. The jagged contortion of forked lightning has imprinted its mark on your face. It struck you and passed on. A mighty and mysterious wrath has, in a fit of passion, cemented your spirit in a terrible and superhuman form. Hell is a penal furnace, where the iron called Fatality is raised to a white heat. You have been branded with it. To love you is to understand

grandeur. I enjoy that triumph. To be in love with Apollo--a fine effort, forsooth! Glory is to be measured by the astonishment it creates. I love you. I have dreamt of you night after night. This is my palace. You shall see my gardens. There are fresh springs under the shrubs; arbours for lovers; and beautiful groups of marble statuary by Bernini. Flowers! there are too many--during the spring the place is on fire with roses. Did I tell you that the queen is my sister? Do what you like with me. I am made for Jupiter to kiss my feet, and for Satan to spit in my face. Are you of any religion? I am a Papist. My father, James II., died in France, surrounded by Jesuits. I have never felt before as I feel now that I am near you. Oh, how I should like to pass the evening with you, in the midst of music, both reclining on the same cushion, under a purple awning, in a gilded gondola on the soft expanse of ocean! Insult me, beat me, kick me, cuff me, treat me like a brute! I adore you."

Caresses can roar. If you doubt it, observe the lion's. The woman was horrible, and yet full of grace. The effect was tragic. First he felt the claw, then the velvet of the paw. A feline attack, made up of advances and retreats. There was death as well as sport in this game of come and go. She idolized him, but arrogantly. The result was contagious frenzy. Fatal language, at once inexpressible, violent, and sweet. The insulter did not insult; the adorer outraged the object of adoration. She, who buffeted, deified him. Her tones imparted to her violent yet amorous words an indescribable Promethean grandeur. According to Æschylus, in the orgies in honour of the great goddess the women were smitten by this evil frenzy when they pursued the satyrs under the

stars. Such paroxysms raged in the mysterious dances in the grove of Dodona. This woman was as if transfigured--if, indeed, we can term that transfiguration which is the antithesis of heaven.

Her hair quivered like a mane; her robe opened and closed. The sunshine of the blue eye mingled with the fire of the black one. She was unearthly.

Gwynplaine, giving way, felt himself vanquished by the deep subtilty of this attack.

"I love you!" she cried. And she bit him with a kiss.

Homeric clouds were, perhaps, about to be required to encompass Gwynplaine and Josiana, as they did Jupiter and Juno. For Gwynplaine to be loved by a woman who could see and who saw him, to feel on his deformed mouth the pressure of divine lips, was exquisite and maddening. Before this woman, full of enigmas, all else faded away in his mind. The remembrance of Dea struggled in the shadows with weak cries. There is an antique bas-relief representing the Sphinx devouring a Cupid. The wings of the sweet celestial are bleeding between the fierce, grinning fangs.

Did Gwynplaine love this woman? Has man, like the globe, two poles? Are we, on our inflexible axis, a moving sphere, a star when seen from afar, mud when seen more closely, in which night alternates with day? Has the heart two aspects--one on which its love is poured forth in light; the

other in darkness? Here a woman of light, there a woman of the sewer. Angels are necessary. Is it possible that demons are also essential? Has the soul the wings of the bat? Does twilight fall fatally for all? Is sin an integral and inevitable part of our destiny? Must we accept evil as part and portion of our whole? Do we inherit sin as a debt? What awful subjects for thought!

Yet a voice tells us that weakness is a crime. Gwynplaine's feelings are not to be described. The flesh, life, terror, lust, an overwhelming intoxication of spirit, and all the shame possible to pride. Was he about to succumb?

She repeated, "I love you!" and flung her frenzied arms around him. Gwynplaine panted.

Suddenly close at hand there rang, clear and distinct, a little bell. It was the little bell inside the wall. The duchess, turning her head, said,--

"What does she want of me?"

Quickly, with the noise of a spring door, the silver panel, with the golden crown chased on it, opened. A compartment of a shaft, lined with royal blue velvet, appeared, and on a golden salver a letter. The letter, broad and weighty, was placed so as to exhibit the seal, which was a large impression in red wax. The bell continued to tinkle. The open panel almost touched the couch where the duchess and Gwynplaine

were sitting.

Leaning over, but still keeping her arm round his neck, she took the letter from the plate, and touched the panel. The compartment closed in, and the bell ceased ringing.

The duchess broke the seal, and, opening the envelope, drew out two documents contained therein, and flung it on the floor at Gwynplaine's feet. The impression of the broken seal was still decipherable, and Gwynplaine could distinguish a royal crown over the initial A. The torn envelope lay open before him, so that he could read, "To Her Grace the Duchess Josiana." The envelope had contained both vellum and parchment. The former was a small, the latter a large document. On the parchment was a large Chancery seal in green wax, called Lords' sealing-wax.

The face of the duchess, whose bosom was palpitating, and whose eyes were swimming with passion, became overspread with a slight expression of dissatisfaction.

"Ah!" she said. "What does she send me? A lot of papers! What a spoil-sport that woman is!"

Pushing aside the parchment, she opened the vellum.

"It is her handwriting. It is my sister's hand. It is quite provoking. Gwynplaine, I asked you if you could read. Can you?"

Gwynplaine nodded assent.

She stretched herself at full length on the couch, carefully drew her feet and arms under her robe, with a whimsical affectation of modesty, and, giving Gwynplaine the vellum, watched him with an impassioned look.

"Well, you are mine. Begin your duties, my beloved. Read me what the queen writes."

Gwynplaine took the vellum, unfolded it, and, in a voice tremulous with many emotions, began to read:--

"MADAM,--We are graciously pleased to send to you herewith, sealed and signed by our trusty and well-beloved William Cowper, Lord High Chancellor of England, a copy of a report showing forth the very important fact that the legitimate son of Linnæus Lord Clancharlie has just been discovered and recognized, bearing the name of Gwynplaine, in the lowest rank of a wandering and vagabond life, among strollers and mountebanks. His false position dates from his earliest days. In accordance with the laws of the country, and in virtue of his hereditary rights, Lord Fermain Clancharlie, son of Lord Linnæus, will be this day admitted, and installed in his position in the House of Lords.

Therefore, having regard to your welfare, and wishing to preserve for your use the property and estates of Lord Clancharlie of Hunkerville, we substitute him in the place of Lord David Dirry-Moir, and recommend him to your good graces. We have caused Lord Fermain to be conducted to Corleone Lodge. We will and command, as sister and as Queen, that the

said Fermain Lord Clancharlie, hitherto called Gwynplaine, shall be your husband, and that you shall marry him. Such is our royal pleasure."

While Gwynplaine, in tremulous tones which varied at almost every word, was reading the document, the duchess, half risen from the couch, listened with fixed attention. When Gwynplaine finished, she snatched the letter from his hands.

"Anne R," she murmured in a tone of abstraction. Then picking up from the floor the parchment she had thrown down, she ran her eye over it. It was the confession of the shipwrecked crew of the *Matutina*, embodied in a report signed by the sheriff of Southwark and by the lord chancellor.

Having perused the report, she read the queen's letter over again. Then she said, "Be it so." And calmly pointing with her finger to the door of the gallery through which he had entered, she added, "Begone."

Gwynplaine was petrified, and remained immovable. She repeated, in icy tones, "Since you are my husband, begone." Gwynplaine, speechless, and with eyes downcast like a criminal, remained motionless. She added, "You have no right to be here; it is my lover's place." Gwynplaine was like a man transfixed. "Very well," said she; "I must go myself. So you are my husband. Nothing can be better. I hate you." She rose, and with an indescribably haughty gesture of adieu left the room. The curtain in the doorway of the gallery fell behind her.

CHAPTER V.

THEY RECOGNIZE, BUT DO NOT KNOW, EACH OTHER.

Gwynplaine was alone--alone, and in the presence of the tepid bath and the deserted couch. The confusion in his mind had reached its culminating point. His thoughts no longer resembled thoughts. They overflowed and ran riot; it was the anguish of a creature wrestling with perplexity. He felt as if he were awaking from a horrid nightmare. The entrance into unknown spheres is no simple matter.

From the time he had received the duchess's letter, brought by the page, a series of surprising adventures had befallen Gwynplaine, each one less intelligible than the other. Up to this time, though in a dream, he had seen things clearly. Now he could only grope his way. He no longer thought, nor even dreamed. He collapsed. He sank down upon the couch which the duchess had vacated.

Suddenly he heard a sound of footsteps, and those of a man. The noise came from the opposite side of the gallery to that by which the duchess had departed. The man approached, and his footsteps, though deadened by the carpet, were clear and distinct. Gwynplaine, in spite of his abstraction, listened.

Suddenly, beyond the silver web of curtain which the duchess had left partly open, a door, evidently concealed by the painted glass, opened wide, and there came floating into the room the refrain of an old French song, carolled at the top of a manly and joyous voice,--

"Trois petits goretts sur leur fumier
Juraient comme de porteurs de chaise,"

and a man entered. He wore a sword by his side, a magnificent naval uniform, covered with gold lace, and held in his hand a plumed hat with loops and cockade. Gwynplaine sprang up erect as if moved by springs. He recognized the man, and was, in turn, recognized by him. From their astonished lips came, simultaneously, this double exclamation:--

"Gwynplaine!"

"Tom-Jim-Jack!"

The man with the plumed hat advanced towards Gwynplaine, who stood with folded arms.

"What are you doing here, Gwynplaine?"

"And you, Tom-Jim-Jack, what are you doing here?"

"Oh! I understand. Josiana! a caprice. A mountebank and a monster! The

double attraction is too powerful to be resisted. You disguised yourself in order to get here, Gwynplaine?"

"And you, too, Tom-Jim-Jack?"

"Gwynplaine, what does this gentleman's dress mean?"

"Tom-Jim-Jack, what does that officer's uniform mean?"

"Gwynplaine, I answer no questions."

"Neither do I, Tom-Jim-Jack."

"Gwynplaine, my name is not Tom-Jim-Jack."

"Tom-Jim-Jack, my name is not Gwynplaine."

"Gwynplaine, I am here in my own house."

"I am here in my own house, Tom-Jim-Jack."

"I will not have you echo my words. You are ironical; but I've got a cane. An end to your jokes, you wretched fool."

Gwynplaine became ashy pale. "You are a fool yourself, and you shall give me satisfaction for this insult."

"In your booth as much as you like, with fisticuffs."

"Here, and with swords?"

"My friend Gwynplaine, the sword is a weapon for gentlemen. With it I can only fight my equals. At fisticuffs we are equal, but not so with swords. At the Tadcaster Inn Tom-Jim-Jack could box with Gwynplaine; at Windsor the case is altered. Understand this: I am a rear-admiral."

"And I am a peer of England."

The man whom Gwynplaine recognized as Tom-Jim-Jack burst out laughing.

"Why not a king? Indeed, you are right. An actor plays every part.

You'll tell me next that you are Theseus, Duke of Athens."

"I am a peer of England, and we are going to fight."

"Gwynplaine, this becomes tiresome. Don't play with one who can order you to be flogged. I am Lord David Dirry-Moir."

"And I am Lord Clancharlie."

Again Lord David burst out laughing.

"Well said! Gwynplaine is Lord Clancharlie. That is indeed the name the man must bear who is to win Josiana. Listen. I forgive you; and do you know the reason? It's because we are both lovers of the same woman."

The curtain in the door was lifted, and a voice exclaimed, "You are the two husbands, my lords."

They turned.

"Barkilphedro!" cried Lord David.

It was indeed he; he bowed low to the two lords, with a smile on his face. Some few paces behind him was a gentleman with a stern and dignified countenance, who carried in his hand a black wand. This gentleman advanced, and, bowing three times to Gwynplaine, said, "I am the Usher of the Black Rod. I come to fetch your lordship, in obedience to her Majesty's commands."