"Swear it!" cried I.

"I swear!" she said; and as she spoke the moonlight streamed upon her face, flushed as it was with the ardor of the moment and the strangeness of the scene; her eye burnt with a steady and deep fire; and her figure, round which the light fell like the glory of a halo, seemed indistinct, and swelling, as it were, with the determinate energy of the soul. I gazed—and my heart leapt within me. I answered not, but stole silently away; for months she heard of me no more.

I fled to a lonely and far spot. I surrounded myself once more with books. I explored once more the arcane of science; I ransacked once more the starry regions of poetry; and then upon the mute page I poured the thoughts and the treasures which I had stored within me! I sent the product, without a name, upon the world. The world received it—approved it; and it became fame. Philosophers bowed in wonder before my discoveries; the pale student in cell and cloister pored over the mines of learning which I had dragged into day; the maidens in their bowers blushed and sighed, as they drank in the burning pathos of my verse. The old and the young, all sects and countries, united in applause and enthusiasm for the unknown being who held, as they averred, the genii of wisdom and the spirits of verse in mighty and wizard spells, which few had ever won, and none had ever blended before.

I returned to her; I sought a meeting under the same mystery and conditions as of old; I proved myself that unknown whose name filled all ears and occupied all tongues. Her heart foreboded it already! I claimed my reward! And in the depth and deadness of night, when not a star crept through the curtain of cloud and gloom, when not a gleam struggled against the blackness, not a breath stirred the heavy torpor around us—that reward was yielded. The dense woods and eternal hills were the sole witness of our bridals; and girt with darkness as with a robe, she leant upon my bosom, and shuddered not at the place of repose!

Thus only we met; but for months we did meet, and I was blessed. At last the fruit of our ominous love could no longer be concealed. It became necessary, either that I should fly with her, or wed her with the rites and ceremonies of man, as I had done amid the more sacred solemnities of nature. In either case disclosure was imperious and unavoidable; I took, therefore, that which gratitude ordained. Beguiled by her assurances, touched by her trust and tenderness, maddened by her tears, duped by my own heart, I agreed to meet her, and for the first time openly reveal myself—at the foot of the altar!

The appointed day came. At our mutual wish only two witnesses were present besides the priest and the aged and broken-hearted father, who consented solely to our singular marriage because my story was less terrible to him than disgrace. She had prepared them to see a distorted and fearful abortion; but—ha! ha! ha!—she had not prepared them to see me! I entered; all eyes but hers were turned to me; a unanimous cry was uttered; the priest involuntarily closed the book and muttered the exorcism for a fiend; the father covered his face with his hands and sunk upon the ground; the other witnesses . . . rushed screaming from the chapel. It was twilight; the tapers burned dim and faint; I approached my bride, who, trembling and weeping beneath her long veil; had not dared to look at me.

"Behold me!" said I; "my bride, my beloved, behold thy husband!"

I raised her veil; she saw my countenance glare full upon her, uttered one shriek, and fell senseless on the floor. I raised her not; I stirred not; I spoke not. I saw my doom was fixed, my curse complete, and my heart lay mute, and cold, and dead within me, like a stone. Others entered; they bore away the bride. By little and little the crowd assembled to gaze upon the monster, in mingled derision and dread. Then I recollected myself, and arose. I scattered them in terror before me, and uttering a single and piercing cry, I rushed forth and hid myself in the wood.