

## THE MOTHER'S TRAGEDY

SCENE.—*The room is furnished with comfort as well as luxury. A crucifix is in the window to the East, and the room is flooded with a ray of sunlight.*

CORA VAVASOUR (*late of the Halls*).

ULRIC, *illegitimate son of Cora.*

MADELINE, "girl in love with" Ulric.

THE SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY, *as Chorus.*

### SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY

HERE, in the home of a friend,  
Here, in the mists of a lie,  
The pageant moves on to the desolate end  
Under a sultry sky.  
Noon is upon us, and Night,  
Spreading her wings unto flight,  
Visits the lands that lie far in the West,  
Where the bright East is at peace on her breast :  
Opposite quarters unite.  
Soon is the nightfall of Destiny here ;  
Nature's must pass as her hour is gone by.  
Only another than she is too near,  
Gloom in the sky.  
One who can never pass over shall sever  
Links that were forged of Love's hand ;

Love that was strong die away as a song,  
Melt as a cable of sand.

But I am watching, with unwearied eye,  
The wayfare of the tragedy.  
I see the brightness of the home ; I see  
The grisly phantom of despair to be.  
I see the miserable past redeemed,  
(Intolerable as its purpose seemed,)  
Redeemed by love : I see the jealous days  
Pass into sunshine, and youth-beaming rays,  
Quicken the soul's elixir. Let me show  
How these air-castles tumble into woe.

CORA.

Why did your eyelids quiver as I spoke ?  
A smile, a tear ? that trembling, in their deep  
Violet passion, of the beautiful  
Eyes that they half discover ? Speak to me.  
I have long thought a secret was your spouse,  
Shared your deep fancies and your lightest word,  
Partook your maiden bed, and gave you dreams  
Somewhat too troublous to be virginal.

MADLINE.

My dear kind Cora, do they lie to you,  
These fancies of my idle hours ? Believe,  
I seem to tremble at my inward thought ;  
My heart is full of wonder. When I go  
Nightward beneath the moon, and take my thoughts

Past her pale beauty through some glowing skies  
Not unfamiliar, through exulting gates—  
“Lift up your heads,” I hear the angels cry;  
“Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors.  
A child-heart seeks the Lover of the Child!”  
O meek and holy Jesus, hath Thy heart  
Yearned unto me, Thy maiden? For I knew  
A bliss so pregnant with the unforeseen  
As brought me to the very feet of Christ,  
Weeping. How clouded that mysterious  
Passion! I fell a-weeping in my bed,  
Forgetting, or not knowing. For a fire  
Too perfect for my sinful soul to touch  
Gathered me closely in itself, to hide  
Its utter glory from me. Now I feel  
Swift troubled tremblings in myself: I seek  
Again those visionary skies. Alas!  
That angel chorus swells another note  
I cannot understand.

CORA.

I am so moved,  
I cannot find it in my heart to say  
The words I purposed. Let my folly pass  
As an old worldly woman's talk.

MADLINE.

O no!  
Your bear the sainted fragrance of your love  
Higher than even my dreams. In earthly life

You are not earthly. I have often thought  
The Virgin has some special care for you,  
And given of her beauty and her peace  
A special dower. Your thoughts are ever pure ;  
Your soul in sweet communion with God !  
Why, you are crying ?

CORA.

    You say this to me ?  
O could you look within a magic glass,  
Holding my hand, such sights would come to you  
Beyond your knowledge—aye, beyond belief !  
I am no saintly virgin wrapped in prayer,  
Nor is my life one river of clear water  
Drawn from the wells of God. You foolish child !  
My love for you you cannot understand,  
Nor the low motive—you have shown it me—  
Of this beginning of our talk.

MADLINE.

    Say on !

CORA, *meaningly*.

Much less you understand the love I bear  
To Ulric !

MADLINE *gives a little cry*.

    Heart of Christ ! it cannot be !

CORA.

No, child ; I tricked you. Is your secret out ?

MADLINE.

I am dismayed at my discovery.  
(*Slowly.*) I never guessed my own poor silliness  
Until that moment when you frightened me.

CORA.

And now you know how dear he is to you!  
Come, child, I love you both. Your happiness  
Is my life's purpose. I have seen the truth  
Of this in you; it comes to every one.  
I know that he is half in love with you.  
Look once again as you did look just now,  
And he would die for you. O foolish girl!  
[MADLINE *weeps quietly for a little,*  
CORA *caressing her.*

MADLINE.

Please let me go: you are too kind to me!

CORA.

Rest, sunny head! A little while to sleep,  
And then—perhaps the Mother in a dream  
May comfort you. A woman's love is this  
To have one heart, an undivided love;  
But Hers—division in the universe  
Makes multiple each part. Sweet Madeline,  
Believe me, She will come to maiden dreams,  
Bestow Her peace, and so direct the life  
That is not unto God unconsecrate  
For being dedicated unto love! [*Exit* MADLINE.]

CORA *remains thinking.*

I was no bolder twenty years ago!  
Time, Time, thou maker and destroyer both,  
Only in resurrection hast no part! [Broods.

SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY.

How light and how agreeable,  
Paved pathway to the gate of hell!  
See how all virtues, graces, shine,  
Till woman half appears divine!  
But I am waiting, watching still  
The treason of the powers of ill.  
Soft, moveless, as a tigress glides,  
Strange laughing devilry abides  
Its hour to poison. How they gloat,  
The fiends, upon her lips and throat!  
They touch her heart, they spear her eyes,  
They linger on the lovely prize!  
O dead she thought them! It is written:  
"Eve's heel is by the serpent bitten,  
His head she bruises." No indeed!  
Not woman, but the woman's seed!  
Hark! in the cloak of "Love of Truth"  
They whisper "Memory of Youth";  
And, mindful of the deadliest sin,  
Hint: "Sinful woman, look within!"

CORA.

Ah me! if she could look within a glass  
With spells and pantacles well fortified!

I have a glass whose bitter destiny  
No wizard may conjure. Arise ye there,  
Old hours of horror, clear by one and one,  
In the confused and tossing ocean,  
Where memory picks spar and spar from out  
The dreadful whirlpool hardly yet appeased,  
To join together in imagination  
The ship—the wreck! And yet I stand at last  
Secure in my unselfish love to them,  
Repaid in mine own currency. I trust  
God that made smooth the road beneath the hearse  
Of my forgetful age. All must be well.

SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY.

Mortals never learn from stories  
How catastrophe becomes ;  
How above the victor's glories  
In the trumpets and the drums,  
And the cry of millions "Master!"  
Looms the shadow of disaster.  
Every hour a man hath said  
"That at least is scotched and dead."  
Some one circumstance: "At last  
That, and its effects, are past."  
Some one terror—subtle foe!—  
"I have laid that spectre low!"  
They know not, learn not, cannot calculate  
How subtly Fate  
Weaves its fine mesh, perceiving how to wait ;  
Or how accumulate

The trifles that shall make it master yet  
Of the strong soul that bade itself forget.

CORA.

Let me not shrink! Truth always purifies.  
I will go through those two impossible  
Actual years. The city was itself;  
Hard thinking if hard drinking—sober-sides!  
One night I stepped up tremulous on the stage,  
Sang something, found my senses afterward  
Only to that intolerable sound  
Of terrible applause. They shook the sky  
With calling me to answer. And I lay—  
A storm of weeping swept across my frame—  
Till the polite, the hateful manager  
Led me to face a nation's lunatic  
Roar of delight. I soon got over that,  
And over—yes, the other thing. Three months—  
They used to quote me on the Stock Exchange!  
I will say this to me, I will not shrink:  
Look up you coward, Cora Vavasour!  
Which fathered me the bastard? Every rag,  
Prurient licksores of society,  
Gave it a different father. Am I sure  
Myself? The shameful Mammon was his name,  
Glittering gold! I loved my opulence,  
Cursed my “misfortune.” Childbirth sobered me.  
I loved the child, the only human love  
I ever tasted, and I sacrificed  
The popularity, the infamy,

Of my old life ; I sought another world.  
I “got religion”—how I hate the phrase!—  
So jest the matron newspapers. The end.  
Since then I live, as I am living still,  
Wrapped in the all-absorbing love of him  
My child, my child! And now my selfishness  
Is shamed, and I have made the sacrifice  
To give this pure heart to that maidenly,  
And let mine old age grow upon my hair,  
Finding my happiness in seeing him  
The all-devoted, and in God’s good pleasure  
Have little children playing at my knees,  
That I may listen, in their innocent prayers,  
For Jesus’ voice. And I will never break  
The secret of his being to my boy  
Lest he despise me. This one reticence  
I think my long-drawn agony may earn.  
For I will do without a mother’s name  
If only I may keep a son’s love still!

[*Exit.*

SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY.

She will not break an oath so wisely sworn,  
Unlock her secret to disdain.  
Wisdom is hers—what angel need to warn?  
Since angels only seek to gain  
That wisdom of the unprofane.  
All future happiness I surely see.  
I am the Soul of Tragedy!

*Enter* ULRIC.

Naked as dawn, the purpose of the hour  
Grows on my vision, and my cynic laughter  
Chills in my veins: the old avenging power  
Shows me the thing that is to be hereafter.  
I gloated on the coming of the curse—  
I did create an hearse,  
Black plumes and solemn mourners; and I  
    saw  
The triumph of some natural law  
Fit for a poet's verse.  
I saw some common fate to lure, to tempt;  
(No mortal of the ages is exempt)  
Some notable disaster to the house  
Wherein such piety and love abide;  
I saw some hateful spouse  
Carry away the bride.  
That feeble prescience of events to come,  
That stultified imagining, hath lied;  
And I can see, though all the signs be dumb  
And auguries unfruitful—I can see,  
Now, some intolerable tragedy  
Fit for a god to picture, not a man!  
I see the breaking of the rosary,  
And Fate's cold fingers snap the span  
Of three most innocent and pleasant lives.  
So terrible a happening dives  
Swift from God's hand to the abyss of hell,  
And in its torment thrives,  
Gathering curses from the darkest cave,  
Calling corruption from the grave

to form one shape of aspect multiple  
Divided in its single spell;  
One spectre smooth and suave,  
More horrible than any fear or active  
doom,  
Beckoning with its lewd malignant finger,  
Beckoning, beckoning, to no pious tomb  
Where pitiable memory might linger.  
A creeping, living horror hems me in,  
A masterpiece of sin!  
Even my soul, inured to contemplate  
The dreadful, the perverse design of Fate,  
In many stories never meant to win  
Applause of mortals or of gods, but  
made  
To choke man's spirit in its shade,  
And make him, in his pride and happiness,  
In virtue's mantle and love's seemly dress,  
Immeasurably afraid.  
The hour is on them—let its weight express  
All blood, all life, from the disastrous grape!  
In God, in mercy, there is no escape,  
No anchor for distress.  
The hour strikes mournfully upon the bell  
Of the most awful precipice  
That merges hell in hell.  
There is deep silence in that dread abyss;  
There is deep silence in the sphered sun;  
There is deep silence where the planets  
run,

Majestic fires! Before the throne of God  
Deep silence waits the lifting of the rod,  
The moving nod.  
Silence, reflected thence, still and intense, into the  
firmament ;  
Such silence as befits the event.

*Re-enter CORA.*

CORA.

This is the hour, O child whom I have loved  
With love more tender than a mother's love,  
Bringing thy friend ; this moment have I sought,  
Awaiting always the propitious time,  
To speak some purpose grown more definite  
Than is our wont. We spend the honey days  
In gentle intercourse : high souls have stood  
Watching us drink from their crystalline stream  
Meandering through language : mighty kings  
Have listened as we read of their dead  
pomp ;  
Fair women blushed as their imagined shapes  
Flitted before us in the tender page.  
We too have followed every curve and line  
In fairy fancies on our canvas drawn  
Of stately people, and the changing rhyme  
Of virgins dancing before Artemis ;  
In all the pleasures that delight the mind,  
Invigorate the soul, lend favour to  
The body of the youth—for I am old—

ULRIC.

My Cora! old! But urgently a word  
Came of some purpose. I am half afraid  
To hear it—and yourself! Reluctance sits  
Dogged against the will to speak. Dear friend,  
Let us sit close and whisper.

CORA.

Listen, then!

You are grown man: young men seek happiness.  
Is there one joy your soul hath never felt?  
One pure sweet passion?

ULRIC.

Sweet! you speak of love!

You must have guessed I meant to question you,  
And smoothed the passage to my modesty.

CORA, *with bitter sorrow at her heart.*

You make me very glad. Yes, yes, indeed,  
Love is my meaning. Does it shame me much  
To talk so openly of love to you?  
But I am old enough to be—to be—

ULRIC.

My wife! O Cora, I have loved you so!  
My heart is like a fountain of the sea.  
I burn, I tremble; in my veins there swims  
A torrid ecstasy of madness. Ah!  
Ah God! I kiss you, kiss you! O you faint!

Sweetheart, my passion overwhelms your soul.  
Your virginal sweet spirit cannot reach  
My fury. You are silent. Yet you love!  
I read it in the terror of your eyes,  
The crimson of your burning face. I know,  
I know you love me! Cora, Cora, tell me!  
O she will die! I would not—I was rough—  
My overmastering desire to you—  
My queen, my wife, this maddens me.

CORA, *recovering*.

You fool!

You beast! I hate you for your stupid self!  
I am defiled! Go! touch me not! Speak not!  
I am accursed of the Lord my God. [Shrieks.

ULRIC.

Darling! my darling! How have I done this?

CORA.

Fool! It is madness! Yes, and punishment.  
O God, that all my love should come to this!  
You, you are mad! I speak of love, and you,  
You—you are acting! I was taken in!  
Let's laugh about it! [Tries to laugh, sinks back.  
It was not well done.

[ULRIC is silent, and, puzzled, waits for her to  
go on.

Surely you know that it was Madeline!

ULRIC.

What! I should wed that pretty Puritan?

The downcast eyes and delicate white throat,  
The lily, when I saw the rose before me ?  
Your full delicious beauty was as God !  
You are a bunch of admirable grapes  
Fit to intoxicate my being ! Yes !  
I would not give that sunny fruit of yours  
For twenty such frail flowers as Madeline.  
I am a man—you mate me with a girl ?

CORA.

Stop ! not a word ! My blasphemy to hear,  
Yours to speak out—when you are told the truth !

ULRIC.

What truth ? This word hath first an ugly sound.  
The truth ! God curse it to His blackest hell  
If but it stand between us and our love !

CORA.

O Ulric, Ulric ! bear with me awhile !  
Speak no more words—each syllable strikes here,  
*[Hand to heart.*  
A cloud of winged scorpions, that rage  
In mine own deepest self ; for there I know  
Tame harpies that had ceased to torture me ;  
And this more ghastly brood renews their sting,  
Adding a triple poison ! O my soul  
Is torn with pangs more horrible than hell,  
Scorching the very marrow of my bones,  
Corrupting me—corrupting me, I say,—



With your true, noble, and unselfish self—  
Were you the synthesis of all I hate,  
In mind and body leprous and deformed—  
Did every word and gesture fill my soul  
With hatred and its parody, disgust—  
It touches not my question! This one fact  
O'ermasters all eccentric circumstance :  
I love you—you, and not your attributes !

CORA.

Great noble soul! I hate myself the more  
That I must wound you further with the truth.  
A double prong this poisoned poinard  
Snaps in our hearts. I kept the secret long.  
Your breath, that burns upon me, wraps me round  
With whirling passion, pierces through my veins  
With its unhallowed fire, constrains, compels,  
Drags out the corpse of twenty years ago  
From the untrusty coffin of my mind,  
To poison, to corrupt, to strike you there  
Blind with its horror.

ULRIC.

Leave these bitter words!  
They torture me with terrible suspense,  
And you with fear. I see by these dread looks,  
Tedious prologues, that there is a truth  
You are afraid to speak.

CORA *aside*.

What subterfuge ?

What shield against the lightning of his love?  
(*Hastily.*) I have a husband living.

ULRIC.

Think you, then,  
I have lived so long and looked into your eyes  
To listen to so hastily disgorged  
A prentice falsehood not grown journeyman?  
Then, had you fifty husbands, am I one,  
Reared in the faith of high philosophy,  
Schooled from my childhood in the brotherhood  
Of poets, to descend to this absurd  
Quibble of tedious morality?  
Shame not your truth with that ignoble thought!  
And also—tell me, once for all, the truth! [*Bitterly.*]  
Say that you love him—it is on your tongue

CORA.

Learn the momentous horror of thy birth! [*A pause.*]

ULRIC.

I would not urge my suit against that plea,  
But—I have known you, and your own pure soul  
Should cast no doubt against me—you have said  
“Rather we love such as the child of love;  
And pity—he is not unpitiful  
In this vile system; and respect him too—  
He stands alone, the evidence of Strength!”  
You move your purpose with no bastardy!  
Only you claim to speak the generous thought:  
For you I wait, for you, to offer love!

CORA.

All is too true—my own philosophy  
Mars my world's wisdom. (*Suddenly.*) Can you  
tell me why  
I loved you as a child, and why I dare  
Now take your head between my hands and kiss  
Your forehead with these shameful lips of mine,  
These harlot lips, and kiss you unashamed?

ULRIC.

Strange are these words, and this emotion strange!

CORA.

Strange is the truth, and deadly as an asp.

ULRIC.

Wear me no more with this anxiety.

CORA.

How can I speak? For this will ruin us.

ULRIC.

Unspoken, I demand thy heart of thee.

CORA.

My heart is broken. This will murder thine.

ULRIC.

Kill, but not torture! Let me know the truth.

CORA.

This shaft is aimed even against thy life.

ULRIC.

What is my life without the love of thee ?

CORA.

I hate each word as I do hate the devil.

ULRIC.

I, each evasion. I am bound a slave  
To this wild passion. I will eat me up.

CORA.

You cannot guess the horror that you speak.  
I tell you, if I know your golden heart,  
This detestation of yourself shall cry  
The cry of Ædipus—"I have profaned——"

ULRIC.

What sphinx more cruel? What new Ædipus?  
You riddle, Cora, and it breaks my heart.

*[He sinks exhausted.]*

*(Rallying.)* By God, I swear to you no lie shall keep  
Its Dead Sea bar against our marrying.

CORA.

The truth! The truth! The truth! I am indeed  
That whore I told you. That makes nothing here.  
I am the mother of thy bastard birth!

ULRIC.

Stop! stop! I did not hear you. O my God!  
What agony is this? What have I done  
To earn this infamy? Or rather, Thou,  
What have I not done? Have Thou pity yet;  
Sustain me in this vile extremity!

*[He prays silently.]*

CORA *watching him.*

How wonderful! He will abide the shock.  
Death and mute horror fight within his face  
Against a will made masterful to Fate.

ULRIC *raises his eyes and lifts his arm in act  
to strike.*

Then I detest you! Mother! Treacherous!  
Vile as the worm that battens on the dead!

CORA.

Ulric! He's mad! Sweet heaven! what is this?  
*[CORA is now hysterical. URIC does not notice.  
She shrieks at each new insult.]*

ULRIC.

Say rather, what are you? I loved you once  
Childlike; then came the power of reasoning,  
And I beheld you, the unselfish one,  
Befriending me, the angel of my life.  
See what it rested on, my happiness!  
Your sacrifice is utter selfishness;

Me, the sole pledge of your debaucheries  
You keep—your love, the mere maternity  
You share with swine and cattle! All your care  
Is duty: let the harlot cleanse herself—  
Tardy repentance!—In the name of God!  
Worse, you have lied, and built me up a house  
Of trust in you as being truth and love,  
Who are in truth all lies, all treachery!  
You made me love you as an honest man!  
You watched this passion, this intolerable  
Desire, this flame of hell; you fed it full,  
Sunned it and watered—O my brain will snap!—  
Only to blast it. Take your story back;  
Be what you will except that infamous!  
For as my mother—I should spit on you!

[CORA *is at his feet grovelling. She half rises  
to listen.*

Ignoble is your foul maternity,  
The cattle-kinship. But the other crime  
Is viler than the first one. “Look!” you say:  
“His passion threatens to defile my bed!”  
And put a hideous abiding curse  
On both our lives to save your modesty  
From my incestuous embrace! O God!  
My love is nobler—to defy the past,  
Deny!—your love is merely natural;  
Mine, against Nature, is the love Divine!  
What crime is this? Thy pale Son’s martyrdom  
Cleansed earth from no such vile hypocrisy  
As this my mother’s. And I call thee, God,

To witness ; and I call mankind to hear ;  
This is my faith : I live and die by it.  
I, nobler, cast away the infamy,  
Break with my hands these rotten barricades,  
    *[He picks up his mother's Bible, tears it, and  
    casts it into the fire,*

And swear before the Spirit of the World,  
In sight of God, this day : I love you still  
With carnal love and spiritual love !  
And I will have you, by the living God,  
To be my mistress. If I fail in this,  
Or falter in this counsel of despair,  
May God's own curses dog me into hell,  
And mine own life perpetuate itself  
Through all the ages of eternity.

Amen ! Amen ! Come, Cora, to my heart !

*[He stoops to embrace her. Horror and madness  
    catch him, and he runs about the room  
    wildly, crying for CORA, whom he cannot  
    see. MADELINE enters.*

MADELINE.

O Cora ! Cora ! Ulric ! Help ! Help ! Help !

    ULRIC *regains his self-control.*

Hush ! All is well ! I cannot tell you now.  
Some news—a letter—it has frightened her.

MADELINE.

But you were crying as a madman would.

ULRIC.

Believe me, I am nervous and distraught.  
You know me, how excitable I am.  
A moment, and you see me calm again.  
Come, Cora, do not frighten Madeline!  
*[He raises her to lead her from the room.]*

CORA.

Where would you lead me? I am blind with tears.

ULRIC.

I have no tears. Mine eyes are hard and cold  
As my intention. Help me, Madeline.

CORA.

God will avenge me bitterly on you  
If you stretch hand to aid this infamy.

ULRIC.

You shall not wreck her life. Be silent now!  
Believe me, it is nothing, Madeline!  
She often falls into a fit like this.  
Excess is danger, equally in prayer  
(Her vice is prayer) as in debauchery.  
*[He is again going mad. He drags CORA from  
the room.]*

MADELINE.

It is not illness that hath made them mad.  
I cannot guess what storm has lashed itself

Thus in one hour from peace and happiness  
To such a fury that the very room  
Seems to my fancy to be tossed about,  
Rocking and whirling on some dizzy sea.  
There is a horrible feeling in the air. [*She shudders*]

SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY.

The keystone of this arch of misery  
Is set by the unfaltering hands  
Of Fate. How desperate the anarchy  
Wrought in one hour!  
The fickle sands  
Run through the glass, and all the light is gone.  
Abysses without name the mighty power  
Spans with spread fingers; on the horizon  
Blood stains the setting sun,  
The shattered sun; it shall not rise again!  
No resurrection to the trampled flower,  
No hope to angels watching as in vain  
Love—lies—slain!  
Madness and Terror and the deadly mood of  
Fortitude,  
A misbegotten brood  
Of all things shameful—O the desolate eyes  
Of the cold Christ enthroned! The weeping heaven  
Answers for angels: the oppressive skies  
See them dislink from bodily form and shape,  
Unloved and unforgiven,  
Unwept, unpenitent, unshriven!  
Their hell of horror knows no gate of any escape.

This tragedy is terrible to me.  
Even I, its spirit, shudder as I see ;  
I, passionless, the moulder of men's hope,  
The slayer of them, cast no horoscope  
Divining what befell. And I am moved :  
Both love, and both are worthy to be loved,  
Ah Fate! if thou hadst cast the dies  
Whence no appeal, in any other wise !  
I am the soul of the grim face of things :  
Mine are the Sphinx's wings ;  
Mine own live lives with this event !  
Yet even I, its very self, lament  
The execrable tyranny,  
The rayless misery  
Of this wild whirlpool sea of circumstance.  
Mine old eyes look askance :  
It is my punishment to dwell  
In mine own self-created hell. [CORA *rushes in.*

MADLINE.

What curse of God hath smitten you? I see  
Exceeding horror in abiding shape  
Blasting the countenance of peace and love  
With some distortion. O your mouth's awry!

CORA, *in a hoarse, horrible voice.*  
You cannot tell! I cannot tell myself.  
Some vital mist of blood is shrouding sight  
From all but my corruption's self. Come here  
And look within mine eyes, if you can see

Remembrance that there was a God! I say  
I see the whole bright universe a tomb,  
With creeping spectres moving in the mist,  
Some suffocating poison that was air.  
O Phaedra! lend me of thy wickedness,  
Lest I go mad to contemplate myself!  
I choke—I grope—I fall!

What name is this  
That strikes my spirit as a broken bell  
Struck by some devilish hammer? In my brain  
Reverberates some word impossible.  
O I am broken on the wheel of death;  
My bones are ground in some infernal mill;  
My blood is as the venom of a snake,  
Striking each vessel with unwonted pangs,  
Killing all good within me. I am—ah!

MADLINE.

Dear friend, dear friend, seek comfort in my arms!  
Look to Our Lady of the Seven Stars!

CORA.

Can you not see? I am cut off from God!  
Loathsome bull-men in their corruption linked  
Whisper lewd fancies in my ear. Great fish,  
Monstrous and flat, with vile malignant eyes,  
And crawling beetles of gigantic strength,  
Crushed, mangled, moving, are about me. Go!  
Go! do not touch the carcase of myself  
That is abased, defiled, abominable.

MADLINE.

O Heart of Jesus! Thou art bleeding still!  
This was Thy true disciple. Leave her not,  
Sweet Jesus, in this madness. Who is this?

*Enter ULRIC; He carries a razor.*

ULRIC.

I have a lovely bride at last, by dear!  
A phantom with intolerable eyes  
Came close and whispered: I am Wisdom's self,  
Thy spouse from everlasting. Mortal king  
Of my immortal self, I claim thy love!  
So, we are wedded close. Justice demands  
The punishment of this accursed one,  
Originator of the cruel crimes  
My mother-mistress carried to their close.  
It was your vile affection, Madeline,  
And your perverted hankering for me  
That caused this thing abominable. Come!  
I will not hurt you in the killing you!

*[He catches MADLINE gently by the hair, bending back her head. CORA sits thunder-struck, unable to move or speak.]*

MADLINE.

Help, Cora, help! he means to murder me!  
Jesus, my Saviour, save them from this deed!  
Help!

*[ULRIC cuts her throat.]*

ULRIC.

So perish the Queen's enemies!  
Well, little lover, have I done it well?  
Cora, my sweetheart, we are happy now  
To think our troubles should be ended so  
In perfect love and—I am feeling ill——

*[CORA recovers her mental balance.]*

CORA.

A blood-grey vapour and a scorpion steam  
To poison the unrighteous life of God!  
*[ULRIC looks on in a completely dazed manner,  
uncomprehending.]*

*CORA takes razor and puts it in his hand.*  
Kill yourself.

*ULRIC, smiling, as if with some divine and ineffable  
joy, draws the razor across his throat, cutting in  
deeply. He falls bleeding.*

My dear!

CORA.

That is my duty to my motherhood.  
Let me now think of all this happening.

*[She sinks slowly into a chair trembling. She  
puts her hand to her throat as if choking.  
She bites her lip and sits easily back, look-  
ing straight before her with uncomprehend-  
ing eyes.]*

CURTAIN.