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# UNDINE

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS



By Whitworth Wynne



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BY

WHITWORTH WYNNE

*Charles W. Cady,*

PAUL R. REYNOLDS

NEW YORK

1908

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## DEDICATION

*My Dearest Sister,*

*The opening scene of this drama relies for its picturesque setting upon a lake that bears your name. It was inevitable, then, that my thoughts should turn to you—thoughts that are never far absent from you—when I considered a sponsor for this latest child of my muse. Under the aegis of your gentle heart I feel that Undine cannot fail to win approval, nor could I wish for a sweeter guardian deity.*

*The play is founded upon a romance by the German poet, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. And when one reflects upon the mystical source of his inspiration, may we not appositely recall the lines of a great English poet, his contemporary?—*

. . . "Tis a ditty  
Not of these days, but long ago' twas told  
By a cavern wind unto a forest old;  
And then the forest told it in a dream  
To a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam  
A poet caught as he was journeying  
To phœbus' shrine; and in it he did fling  
His weary limbs, bathing an hour's space,  
And after, straight in that inspired place  
He sang the story up into the air,  
Giving it universal freedom."

*So, you see, the lake was involved—the Lake of Constance!  
In hoc signo spes mea.—Your affectionate brother,*

THE AUTHOR.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DUKE OF FREIBURG.

SIR HULDBRAND OF RINGSTETTEN.

SIR KONRAD,

SIR BELVEDERE, } *suitors to Bertalda.*

SIR GAUCELM,

KUHLEBORN, *King of the Water-spirits.*

FATHER HEILMANN, *a priest.*

KARL, *an aged fisherman.*

DUCHESS OF FREIBURG,

BERTALDA, *her adopted daughter.*

GERTRUD, *tire-woman to Bertalda.*

MARTHA, *wife to Karl.*

UNDINE, *adopted in infancy by Karl, afterwards wife to Sir  
Huldbrand.*

Lords, Ladies, Citizens of Freiburg. Water-spirits, Rowers,  
Tire-women and other attendants.

SCENE: *Firstly, on the shore of Lake Constance; afterwards  
at Freiburg and Ringstetten, and on the Danube.*





# UNDINE.

## ACT I

SCENE I.—*Spring. The Lake of Constance, flushed with the lights of sunset. To left centre, on a small peninsula, a fisherman's cottage, with boat drawn up on the beach. To right and left front a forest of pines. In foreground a strip of silver strand, leading down to the lake. As the curtain rises, sea-nymphs are discovered disporting themselves on the brink of the waves and singing the refrain of the water-spirits. The sky becomes momentarily more lurid and threatening, as the sea-nymphs take up in turn the stanzas of the Undines' song.*

### THE SONG OF THE UNDINES OR WATER-SPIRITS.

#### I

We dwell in the depths of the opaline sea;  
Far older than man's must our lineage be—  
Whilst the waters yet cover'd the face of the earth,  
The mermaidens sang of man's mystical birth.

Loo-a-lala, loo-a-lala, sing we low;  
Wind and wavelet wafts us idly, to and fro.  
Men live on hereafter;  
We must pass and go:  
Therefore, thro' our laughter,  
Wails the note of woe.

#### II

We dance on the edge of the low-rippling wave,  
In the curl of its foam-crests our light limbs we lave;  
We chase the white horses far over the main,  
And shepherd them back to their pastures again.

## III

We sleep in the dews till the Summer night closes,  
 And ope the lush lids of the soft-petal'd roses;  
 But when the plumed sun shoots his arrowy beams,  
 We trip o'er the meadows, and bask in the streams.

## IV.

We float past the cresses; we skim the wide meres—  
 Not swifter in flight the rath swallow appears—  
 We tumble o'er cataracts, yeasty in foam,  
 To the translucent floor of our crystalline home.

## V

We glide down the glaciers and snows of the mountain,  
 To upbubble in mirth from the heart of a fountain;  
 We meet and commingle in fields of the air,  
 When the rain-clouds are lower'd and the thunder-claps blare.

## VI

We sport on the breakers; we love the wild roar  
 Of ocean retreating far down the loud shore;  
 We plunge in the cascades of emerald spray,  
 Which the prows of the fishermen cast in our way.

## VII

And when the pale moonlight steals over the deep,  
 We dream of dead heroes long pillow'd in sleep:  
 Our spousals take place in that mystical hour,  
 When our hearts blossom forth like the rose in her bower.

## VIII

But the greatest of wonders beneath the dark sea  
 Is the palace where Kühleborn rules o'er the free;  
 Thro' millions of years hath its colonnades grown,

On the spoils of the ocean is builded his throne.

Loo-a-lala, loo-a-lala, sing we low;

Wind and wavelet drift us idly, to and fro.

Men live on hereafter;

We must pass away:

Rippling tones and laughter

Are but for a day!

[*The lights in the cottage now stand out clear,  
throwing silvery beams across the water.  
The scene darkens amid thunder and  
lightning.*

[*Exeunt.*

*Enter (from cottage) Karl.*

*Karl (calling).* Undine! Undine! Thou wayward child, where art thou?—

The very heavens are drench'd with driving mist:

O not a boat could live on the wild waters!—

Thou ever choosest for thy impish pranks

Such nights as these. Never a thought thou hast

For thy poor foster-father's burdening years!

The dews and damps of this unwholesome eve

Will creep into my joints, and rheumy pains

Reward my watchful care.

*Enter Huldebrand, with drawn sword, groping his way  
through the forest.*

*Huld.*

A light—a light!

Thank God, at last, a human habitation!

Methought that forest stretch'd to the world's end.

(*Perceiving Karl*) Ah, friend, canst give me shelter for the night?

*Karl.* If friend, why that so threatening blade?

*Huld.*

Good, my man;

Such unimagined creatures have I met

[*Sheathing sword.*

In yon dark forest that, till I found thee,

This (*tapping sword*) seem'd the only friend I could rely on.

*Karl.* A better friend thou hast suspended there:  
The holy rood alone can ward their evil!

[*Crossing himself.*

'Tis said (*lowering his voice*) its shades are haunted.

Few make choice

Of its unhallow'd depths—the darksome home

Of elf and pixy, gnome, and savage sprite.

Who ventures there hath seldom travell'd back.

To tell his tale.

*Huld.* Not without knowledge speak'st thou;

For, from the moment that I lost my way,

Its gloom grew deeper. Fierce and waspish imps

Stung, harass'd, snapp'd at me with threat and gibe.

A tall, white man, shrouded in yeasty foam,

For ever nodding his rime-fretted locks.

Seem'd most to urge them on.

*Karl.* Speak low, young sir!

We are too near his element. How cam'st

Thou thro' his toils?

*Huld.* Where'er I urged my steed,

His shadow cross'd my path and forced me back.

I struck at him; but, ever as I struck,

I did but notch my sword against the rock:

He vanish'd, tauntingly, in powdery spray.

And, where I struck, a laughing waterfall

Fell, sousing me with spume.

*Karl* (*alarmed*) 'Tis he himself—

King Kühleborn that did command these sprites!

*Huld.* The spirtling fiend!

[*Kühleborn is seen to rise menacingly from  
the lake, and slowly disappear.*

*Karl* (*falling back in terror*). Come, sir, I do beseech thee!

It is not safe to speak of him near water.

*Huld.* (*drawing*). The same malicious face!—the same lithe  
arms

That wound about the neck of my poor charger

And strangled it!

[*Kühleborn again rises.*

*Karl.* Back to my hut, I pray thee!

*Huld.* (*entering*) Curse him! Curse him, and all his kind!

[*Thunder.*

[*Exeunt into cottage, Huldbrand and Karl.*

Kühl.

So!—Curses

Come home, young sir, and sooner than youth reckons.  
 Yet 'tis a brave spirit! Right valiantly he bore him  
 Thro' trials numerous and unaccustom'd  
 Undine shall give him back his steed unharm'd.

*[Kühleborn sings: the sea-nymphs, one by one, peer above the waves to listen to his song.]*

## KUHLEBORN'S SONG.

## I

Blow, winds! and war, ye waters!  
 King Kühleborn commands!  
 The fairest of our daughters  
 Now thrills at touch of hands.

## II

Let him, who comes to woo her,  
 The soul of honour shrine!  
 Should mortal love undo her,  
 The Sword of Vengeance mine!

## III

Who weds a water-maiden,  
 His love must never wane:  
 Twin hearts, with rapture laden—  
 One soul in bodies twain.

## IV

Crash out, ye waves, your thunder,  
 Roll up the silver shore;  
 For, lost in Love's sweet wonder,  
 Undine is ours no more!

*[The scene fades out, the howling of the tempest gradually drowning the distant wail of the sea-nymphs.]*

SCENE II.—*A room in the fisherman's cottage, with door opening into porch at the back. Lattice-windows to right and left of door. The right wall is covered with fishing nets and gear. The fireplace is on the left-hand side of the room, with curtain beyond it leading to a bedchamber. Everything about the room is neat and cosy. A log-fire is burning brightly on the hearth, near which the fisherman's wife, Martha, is seated knitting. As the curtain rises, a splashing, as of water, is heard at the lower casement.*

*Mart.* O that elf-child! that water-splashing pixie!  
 No sooner am I seated than I must  
 Be on my feet to chase the runaway.  
 Never a moment's peace—never a moment!  
 'These socks I should have knit a sennight since  
 But for that malapert! I will not stir.

*[Water is splashed on the floor through the half-open lattice: Martha rises indignantly.]*

You fathers! O you fathers! How can we  
 Bring up, or ever hope to discipline,  
 Your daughters, when you teach them to defy us?  
 We strive to break them in; you say they're i' th' right:  
 And no conceivable wrong can they commit,  
 So long as they hang fondling on your necks!

*[Opens door.]*

Undine! Undine! come in out of the storm.  
 And cease your wantonness!

*[A mocking laugh heard without.]*

I'll not pursue her:

She shall not mock *me* with her elfin laughter.

*[Comes in, and shuts door.]*

The child is past forbearance! There's her father,  
 Well nigh bent double with rheumatic pains,  
 Breasting the pitiless night and plaguy winds.  
 In search of her; whilst she, the ungrateful one,  
 Dashes our panes with water!

*Enter Karl and Huldbrand*

*Karl.* Ah, good wife,

I bring a stranger-knight to entertain thee.

*[She smiles a greeting to the knight, but remains seated.]*

She meaneth no discourtesy, young sir:

With us poor folk it ever is the custom

To give the seat of honour to the old.

*Mart.* Bless his young heart! he would not have me rise

To give him room? But you are welcome, sir.

*Huld.* Kind dame, my thanks: your hospitality

Is doubly graced when 'tis so frankly given.

*Karl.* Hath Undine yet return'd?

*Mart.*

Aye, to her pranks:

Now look you there (*pointing to spilt water*). The girl is quite beyond me!

*Karl.* God's heaven, she makes the world more merry for us!

*Mart.* Merry, say you? You'll aye excuse the lass;

You do abet her mischief. (*To Huld.*) Be seated, sir.—

Her father hath nigh spoilt the maid.—But you

Are travel-stain'd? you have, then, ridden far?

*Huld.* But yestermorn I set out on a quest

To probe the mysteries of that dark wood.

*Mart.* Speak not of it—and, least of all, at nightfall!

*Huld.* Your pardon, dame; for without thought I spoke.

I have a castle by the Danube's source:

There am I known as Huldbrand of Ringstetten.

All young men love adventure—I, not least—

*[Water is splashed against casement.]*

*Mart.* That girl, again!

*Karl.*

Wait: I will call her in.

*[Opens door.]*

Undine, desist thy childish tricks for once!

A stranger-knight hath honour'd us this day:

Come thou, and give him welcome.

*[Low laugh heard without.]*

My gracious guest,

O'erlook th' unseemliness of her behaviour:

Her playful, every-varying modes appear,

To those who know her not, unmannerly;

Yet, in the main, the child is full of goodness.

*Mart.* So you may say! When you return from fishing,  
 Or from your journeys thro' that darksome forest,  
 Playful her moods may seem—O yes, and pretty!—  
 But to abide her waywardness all day,  
 To hear no word of sense but artless chatter  
 Of crystal castles underneath the sea,  
 Would tax the patience of the best of women.

*Karl.* Well, well, good mother, what thou say'st is true.  
*Thou* hast to do with Undine, *I*—with the sea:  
 It often breaketh thro' my dykes and nets;  
 I love it, all the same; and thou, too, lovest  
 That dainty maid, in spite of her caprice?

*Mart.* In truth, I cannot long be vex'd with her;  
 And yet methinks she might—

[*The door is flung open, and Undine enters.*]

*Und.* Father, hast thou  
 But mock'd me? Where is, then, thine honour'd guest?

[*She perceives Huldebrand; they gaze raptly  
 at one another.*]

*Huld.* Art thou of earth, or heaven, thou beauteous maid?

*Und.* Of neither, sir: nor sun, nor stars, me cradled.

*Huld.* Thou art too light for earth, too gay for heaven—  
 Of dream-land then? Such wonderment doth hold me,  
 I scarce believe mine eys.

*Und.* (*archly*). Yet are thine eyes  
 True servitors, for they are frank and piercing:  
 Not so thy thoughts!

*Huld.* A very sylph art thou!  
 Only a sylph could move with such light grace.

*Mart.* Turn not her head, young Sir.

*Und.* Mother, be still!

The knight *shall* guess my lineage. (*To Huld.*)

Hast not heard  
 That sylphs are of the air—and unsubstantial?  
 Touch me, and I am very flesh and blood  
 As thou.

*Huld.* Would that I might!

Not till thou hast

More narrowly conjectured of my kin.

*Huld.* Thy kin are here?



*Und.* Nay: they are foster-parents,  
And, therefore, kinder than most kinsfolk are.

[*Caressing her father.*]

*Huld.* Earth, air, and heaven have I already ventured—  
What then remaineth but the unplumb'd deep?  
The sea could not produce so rich a jewel,  
A pearl so peerless?

*Und.* Scant is thy knowledge, sir,  
Of those who dwell beneath the purple ocean.  
What *if* the water were my home; wouldst then  
Despise me, gentle knight?

*Huld.* Wonder of wonders,  
Almost thou art too fair to look upon!—  
Could my enthralled eyes deny thy beauty,  
Or my enraptured soul withhold its homage?

*Und. (aside).* Oh, if he ever could draw back again,  
This heart would tremble out into the dark,  
To lose itself within the misted main!  
For nothing have I yet beheld so noble.

[*Sits on a stool before Huldbrand, and plays  
with the chain suspended from his neck.*]

*Mart.* Your conduct is unseemly, Undine. Rise,  
And set you to some task. Not so did maidens  
Disport themselves, in presence of a stranger,  
When I was young!

*Karl.* Disturb them not, good Martha:  
Look they not well together?

*Huld. (aside to Undine).* That dainty hand,  
How it doth urge my kiss!

*Und. (examining chain).* How beautiful!  
How wondrously inwoven are these links!  
So beautiful, so closely interlaced  
Are hearts that love. (*Aside, rising.*) O would I were that  
chain,

So I might lodge me ever on his breast!

*Mart.* Your spinning, child: come, set your stool by mine.

*Und. (placing her wheel near Huldbrand).*

I shall work here, if it so pleaseth me.  
O soft-voiced stranger, with the luminous eyes.  
How cam'st thou to our cottage? Didst wander long

Thro' desolate wastes and reaches of the world  
Or e'er thine alterable heart found peace at last  
Beneath this roof?

*Karl.* Forbear thy questions, Undine.

*Und.* I have but ask'd our guest how he came hither:

He has not answer'd me—I now command him!

*Huld.* Thro' the wild wood I came, thou lovely being.

*Und.* Then tell me, friend, why thou didst enter it,

Also what strange adventures there betid,

For, without such, none—

*Karl.* Hold thy peace, young Sir.

An thou'dst not slight our hospitality.

*Und.* (*approaching Karl angrily*). He shall not answer?

Father, say'st thou so? But (*stamping her foot*)

I will be answer'd!

*Mart.* Respect your parents, child.

*Karl.* Go to thy room, Undine; thou hast forgot

Thyself.

*Und.* Forgot myself! Is't thus thou choosest

To scold and to upbraid me? Then I'll go

Out in the storm, where I can breathe more freely.

[*Darts out of door.*]

*Karl* (*restraining Huldebrand*). It were no use to follow.

Now shall sleep

Leave us this livelong night; anxiety

And slowly-creeping fear invest our hearts

Till the day break and Undine comes once more.

Go thou to rest, dear wife. We will sit on:

Sleep would not visit now the smoothest pillow.

[*Exit Martha.*]

[*Karl pours out wine, and places his guest in  
the big leathern arm-chair.*]

*Huld.* Tell me, my worthy host, how that bright child  
First came into thy life.

*Karl* (*placing a log on fire*). 'Tis a long story

And strange beyond belief. In our mid age

The gracious God gave us our hearts' desire,

A little child to sanctify our home—

A flower of flowers, fresh-blown from paradise!

Joy grew with her, and in her sunny laughter

We found a salve for every passing wound  
 That Time or Fate could fashion or inflict.  
 Yet she was dark as this dear maid is fair.  
 One afternoon—ah, how I mind it well!—  
 My Martha met me coming thro' the wood,  
 With streaming eyes and tear-befurrow'd cheeks,—  
 'My God! where is the child?' I falter'd forth.  
 'With Him on Whom thou callest,' sobb'd my wife,  
 And for one long and agonizing hour  
 We rock'd upon each other for support . . .  
 That awful night of speechless misery!

*Huld.* How chanced this grievous and most sudden loss?

*Karl.* The day was sultry; the September haze  
 Hung low and moist, blotting out field and fallow;  
 So, to revive the child, grown listless from  
 The close and curdled atmosphere within,  
 My wife, noon past, had sought the water's edge,  
 Where the first coolness comes and the faint breeze  
 The longest tarries. There, as it did dabble  
 Its little dimpled feet within the lake,  
 Something beneath the glassy mirror took  
 The child's bright fancy.  
 A merry laugh, two tiny, outstretch'd hands,  
 And all we loved had disappear'd for ever!

*Huld.* Didst find her body?

*Karl.* Never; tho' I search'd  
 The shore for weeks: no trace of her was found.  
 That evening we sat on—too sorely stricken  
 For words, too numb'd for tears, but hand in hand,  
 With dim eyes blear'd before the misty hearth.  
 Towards dawn there came a rattling at the door:  
 It open'd, and upon the threshold stood  
 A little maid, some three or four years old.  
 It seem'd as though a sunbeam had stolen in,  
 So brighten'd all the room at her soft entry!  
 Straight to my arms she flew: her golden locks  
 Streaming with moisture, and her fair apparel  
 All-verdured with sea-foam. . . . Her childlike story,  
 Lisp'd in few words, held strange bewilderment:  
 Little we glean'd, save that her name was Undine.

*Huld.* Her parents? Did they never——?

[*Kühleborn appears at the window: Huldebrand looks up apprehensively.*]

*Karl.* Happily not:

For they had robb'd us of our god-gift then.  
We made close search thro' all the country-side,  
But no one claim'd our treasure.

*Huld.* How long ago

Did all this happen?

*Karl.* Let me call 't to mind:

It must be now some fifteen summers past.

[*The storm, which has been increasing in violence during Karl's speech, now breaks with terrific force. The windows are burst in, and, by the light of the newly risen moon, a mighty stream is seen to be rushing past the cottage, carrying all before it. Karl and Huldebrand stand for one moment aghast, then both rush out into the night, calling 'Undine—Undine!'*]

SCENE III.—*A forest by moonlight: driving clouds course rapidly over the moon, and partially obscure it. A stream in spate issues from the wood l., past great boulders, carrying with it the trunks of trees and other debris of the storm, and disappears to right of stage. The pines howl and crack beneath the lash of the wind, their tall spires bending, as if to mingle with the rushing waters.*

*Enter Huldebrand (left)*

*Huld.* Undine, dear Undine, whither art thou flown?

O why did I not warn thee of the forest!  
My tale half told, thou hadst not ventured here!  
Was ever such a night! The warring winds  
Now pitilessly with the clouds contend;  
Yet how unequal the embattled strife!  
The squadrons reel, the misted ranks give way—  
They break, they flee before the fierce oncomer!

Like sheep they are driven across the bleared moon.  
 Hark, how the giant pines do groan aghast!  
 Like anger'd serpents hiss th' uncoiling waters.

[*Kühleborn rises.*]

There—there! that face! it tempts me to the tide.  
 Hast thou engulf'd my love, thou tortuous fiend,  
 That with malignant smile thou beckonest  
 Towards the champing flood? I'll close with thee.

[*Leaps in.*]

The torrent twines about my limbs—I fail!  
 Ah, Undine——!

[*The moon shines out, and Undine is discovered on a small island near the further bank.*]

*Und.* Peace, Kühleborn! Thou shalt not plague him further:  
 Make not too strong a trial of his love!

*Kühl.* Ha, ha! he thought to mock me, foolish mortal!

[*Disappears.*]

*Und.* Thou brave and gentle knight, strike out once more;  
 The stream abates its fury.

*Huld.* Undine, thy voice  
 Comes to me faintly, as from some far shore:  
 Let me but list that melody again!

*Und.* O look about thee, dear deluded youth!  
 Cling to this branch. At last, I have thee safe!

[*Seats Huldbrand besides herself*]

*Huld.* Perils are light that bring me to thy side.

*Und.* Thy love hath come thro' water for my sake:  
 How will it fare thro' fire—thy passionate manhood?  
 Thou wilt reject me for some new-found face?  
 Men's hearts are easily kindled!

*Huld.* May I die,  
 That moment when I first prove false to thee!

*Und.* Is it not early to declare thy love  
 —Scarce one day old? What canst thou know of me?

*Huld.* Oh, I have known thee all my life, Undine:  
 'Twas thee I imaged in my boyish dreams;  
 Thee I prefigured in my glowing manhood,  
 And thro' precipitate pleasures kept me pure;  
 I look into thine eyes—they are the eyes

Of mine own soul, seen as within a mirror;  
 I listen to thy voice—it is the voice  
 That whisper'd hope in moments of despair.  
 Thou art my life! the lodestar of my being!—

*Und.* A cold and distant light to match me by!  
 Come, my so ardent lover, answer this—  
 When madest thou discovery of this star?  
 Was't yestereve? or at times less remote?

*Huld.* The dawn kindles—O kindle thou to me!  
 Else must I sink beneath this load of love  
 I carry at my breast.

*Und.* Not yet—not yet;  
 Thou art not made so frail, believe me, Sir!  
 Thy story, first! for in this leafy bower  
 Are none to cross or scold on slight occasion.  
 Why can'st thou thro' the forest?

*Huld.* Because I  
 —I undertook a very foolish quest.

*Und.* Ah! for a lady's favour? Thou art forsworn!

*Huld.* Dear Undine, hear me out.

*Und.* What more's to tell?  
 Is't not enough that thou dost love another?

*Huld.* I never loved—I never yearn'd—till now.

*Und.* Yet thou didst undertake this quest for love?

*Huld.* Say, rather, for adventure. Listen thou?—

At Freiburg, not so many noontides since,  
 Were held high jousts, with tiltings and like sports,  
 And I, 'mongst other noble aspirants,  
 Enter'd the lists, to prove my strength in tourney  
 Upon the bravest there. But ever as  
 I rested my foam'd steed anigh the barriers,  
 My vizor raised to admit the welcome air,  
 I just so often and so surely met  
 The covert glance of one who scann'd me closely—  
 A pale, sweet lady in the duke's pavilion.  
 Each time her darkling eyes encounter'd mine,  
 I felt the raying sunshine in my heart:  
 Thus fired, I spurr'd again into the conflict,  
 For the sheer joy a simple smile conferr'd.  
 That night she was my partner in the dance,

And I, who laugh'd at love as woman's pastime,  
 Felt strangely that first fervour of the soul  
 That moves a man in presence of a maid—  
 That welling up of service infinite,  
 To do her bidding now and evermore.

*[Undine flings off the hand which she had  
 been holding.]*

*Und.* And so, Sir Knight, thou never loved'st till now?

*(Rising)* Thou shalt not trifle, thus, with me!

*Huld.* *(drawing her back)* Stay, Undine!

I could not so misuse thy pure affection.

*Und.* *(softly)*. It was thine own fault, Huldbrand; thou shouldst  
 not have

Encouraged her.

*Huld.* This high-born lady was

Too haughty to demean herself with love;

'Twas admiration only that she craved—

The service of the lip, not of the heart—

She would have dragg'd me at her chariot wheels,

So I but graced her triumph—this Bertalda!

*[Undine nestles to him.]*

*Und.* Yet thou didst risk thy life to win her favour?

*Huld.* I was elated—who would not have been?—

Since she so signally exalted me

Above her many gallants; and, in sport,

I begg'd of her a glove: she promised it

On one condition—that I would adventure,

Alone, this drear and unfrequented wood.

*Und.* Little she could have loved thee—that proud maid.

To put thee to so perilous a journey.

Why didst thou not refuse her vain request?

*Huld.* An honour-loving knight could not withdraw;

My courage was in question. So *she* will'd it!

Yet it was Fate that led my footsteps hither.

And now I thank Bertalda from my heart;

For was she not the means by which we met?

*Und.* The means she was, but it was not her meaning

That she should lose her knight by such a means.

Dos't not feel pity for her?



*Huld.* If she had cared,

I had indeed felt pity: for, of a truth,  
I could not lose *thee* now, Undine, and live.

*Und.* Then, as thou lov'st me, O my love, remember  
Thou never must upbraid me on the water!

[*Eerie and ominous music*

That moment's passion would be my undoing,  
Then were I lost to thee for evermore!

*Huld.* How could I speak unkindly to thee, Undine,  
On land or water? Could I so wrong my soul?

*Und.* Ah me, what is it to possess a soul?—

We have no souls, unless we wed with mortals.—

A soul must be a very precious thing,  
And yet—a perilous charge! Oh, is it wise,  
Being happy in a blest unconsciousness  
Of this great spirit gift, this sense of Godhead,  
That seemeth to perplex and sadden men,  
To take upon myself terrestrial griefs,  
To probe the mysteries of life and death,  
To learn of good and evil, pain and sorrow,  
And that continual dimming of the eye  
That speaks the wrung heart of humanity?

*Huld.* All this thou wouldst endure, if thou didst love:  
Think of my life, without thee!

*Und.* Listen, then:

And tell me, O thou love-enamour'd knight,  
If thou wouldst bring this mortal doom upon me.

[*Sings.*

#### UNDINE'S SONG

##### I

Gay are we and without care;  
Cheerly, blithely, forth we fare;  
Laugh we from the breaking wave,  
Chaunt we from the sirens' cave.

##### II

Corals, white as ocean foam,  
Guard the portals of our home;  
Silver voices of the deep  
Lull us in our tranquil sleep.



## III

We, who live in twilight bowers,  
 Heed no murmur of the hours;  
 Pine not for new heavens, new earth—  
 Life was given for joy and mirth!

## IV

We are far too wise to scan  
 What God meant when He made man;  
 Quite content that He disposes  
 Both the Summer and the roses.

*Huld.* A happy and serene philosophy!

Can man, soul-gifted, find on earth a better?

*Und.* Stay! I would have thee love all that I love,  
 And, first, th' all-fathering Ocean; for this Earth,  
 So dear to thee, is but a foster-parent:  
 Not so the waters—they first gave man birth.

*Huld.* Our loves we'll hold in common—and our griefs  
 By sharing them, will so be cut in twain.

*Und.* True:

Joys that are shared bring other joys to light,  
 Griefs that are shared pass almost out of sight.

*Huld.* Take thou this ring as earnest of my love.

*Und.* And thou this jewel of the cloistral seas:  
 May it remind thee, when thou look'st thereon,  
 That love is deep and boundless as the ocean,  
 And that like chiming seas are hearts that love.

[*They exchange rings.*]

*Huld.* Undine, my pledge upon thy lips—the sweetest  
 That ever yet received love's passion'd imprint!

[*They kiss*]

*Enter Karl (left)*

*Karl.* Hold—hold, Sir Knight! I thought thee a true man:  
 Requit'st thou, thus, my hospitality?  
 To take advantage of a simple girl  
 Lacks chivalry and wanteth much of honour!

*Huld.* Her honour is my honour, my good friend;  
For see she is my true, affianced bride.

*Karl.* Then haste, Undine, and bring thy lover over;  
My benison awaits my maid's betrothal.

*Und.* Thou wilt not scold or cross me any more?

*Karl.* Ah, far from frequent have my scoldings been!  
Too often have I spoilt thee for thy welfare,  
Else wert thou not so wayward and so wilful.

[*Undine leads the Knight across, and caresses  
Karl.*]

*Und.* Thou art the most indulgent foster-father  
That ever maid was blest with. (*To Huld.*) Is he not?

*Huld.* (*shaking hands with Karl.*) I do believe him worthy of  
thy love.

*Karl.* And mayst *thou* prove as worthy! that is all,  
And more than all, I wish for my sweet child.

[*Exeunt.*]

*Several months elapse between Acts I. and II.*

## ACT II

SCENE I.—*Freiburg: a room in the Duke's Palace.*  
*Bertalda discovered weeping.*

*Bert.* I gaze and gaze upon that parching plain;  
The very ground doth seem to pulse and quiver  
In a white shimmer and dance of liquid light.  
So fiercely glows that coruscating orb  
That, like a branding-iron held too close,  
It misteth all before me. My vision aches;  
I search, and know full well I search in vain:  
The form I love I nevermore shall see.  
My Huldbrand cometh not—will never come!  
How that dim forest knocks at my heart's door!  
So loud its beat, I wish that I were dead. . . .  
Was't not enough to have him at my side,  
But I must make rash trial of his love!  
O cruel lips; to send my love away,  
When my wrung heart petition'd him to stay.

*Enter Gertrud*

*Gert.* Sweet mistress, put aside this trenchant grief:  
Woes that we cannot mend need no such medicine  
As idle tears give. There's no second youth-time!  
Feed not a hopeless passion with vain longing;  
Starve it—why soon it dies for want of thought!  
'Tis in your will to do so.

*Bert.* Heartless sophist!  
Come you to comfort me with words like these?

*Gert.* A love that's dead, my lady, were best buried—  
Folded away in decent lavender  
Until Grief's harvesting is gather'd in.  
Bitter may be the reaping, but there follows  
An aftermath of pleasant memories.

*Bert.* I could not live without my thoughts of him—  
 O not one moment is he absent from them!  
 I cannot think of him as with the dead.

*Gert.* There are worse things than death—life without love!  
 Suppose he had lived—and come to love another,  
 As men so often do?

*Bert.* Gertrud, he could not—  
 Not with such wealth of love as I had given him.

*Gert.* Do not believe it! Men are changeable,  
 And that which first did whet their appetite  
 Not seldom palls when they grow surfeited:  
 Some newer dainty then doth take their fancy!  
 They are all alike!

*Bert.* O class him not with others!  
 If all were false, yet would he still be true.

*Gert.* Dull not the present with a past regret!  
 Unless you wish to exchange your golden youth  
 For the sere and silver garniture of age.  
 Oh, who would cling to visionary love,  
 When Love, the Real, is storming at her threshold?

*Bert.* Why will you plague me with these other loves?  
 If he is dead, then wedlock I forswear:  
 Such penance, as I can, I will perform;  
 But never that!

*Gert.* Wedlock a penance! la!  
 And with so kind a husband as Sir Gaucelm?

Or, if your fancy listeth an Apollo,  
 Where shall you find a manlier type of beauty  
 Than bold Sir Belvedere? or, choose you wit  
 And all the courtliness that comes of years,  
 Sir Konrad would insure you happiness.

*Bert.* The first—a mere poltroon, not worth a thought.  
 Contemptible, if not beneath contempt!  
 The second—arrogant and overbearing,  
 Too swollen with his own pretentiousness  
 To apprise his wife much higher than his chattel.  
 The third—I like not marriage with grey hairs:  
 It is an outrage against Nature's law!  
 The young alone can consummate true marriage.  
 The senile lion vaunts no lusty bride.

But in the desert turns his eye towards death,  
 And why should man, because of wealth, fare better,  
 Transmitting to a listless progeny  
 The burden of his vitiated years?

*Gert.* These three, at any rate, have leave to speak;

But there, you have the choice from out so many!

*Bert.* What mean you—leave to pay me their addresses?

*Gert.* This very morn. The Duke dislikes their suit,  
 But looks to humble their high confidence  
 Best at your hands. Quoth he, 'Bertalda's pride  
 Will send them home again with sousing ears:  
 They'll not attempt *her* twice.'

*Bert.* Ha, ha, my father  
 Hath a sweet eye for comedy!

*Gert.* Heart of mine,  
 Deal not too harshly with them!

[*Sir Gaucelm announces*]

*Bert.* Hide you there.

[*Gertrude conceals hers*  
*behind arras.*]

*Gauc.* Unparagon'd and most celestial lady,  
 The Duke your father—

*Bert.* My *adoptive* father

*Gauc.* The guardian of your honour and your hand—

*Bert.* Indeed! methinks I can take care of both.

*Gauc.* I speak in courtesy.

*Bert.* Speak as you please!

*Gert.* (*aside*). She'll fluster him with her o'erwhelming scorn.

*Gauc.* You deem my love presumptuous, out of place;

Yet this continual clamour at my heart  
 Emboldens me to speak. Then hear me, lady!  
 And, if you cannot countenance my suit,  
 But doom me to a bottomless despair,  
 At least show pity.

*Bert.* A cheap commodity!  
 Freely bestow'd on those whom we despise.

*Gauc.* Despise me not, till you have put to the proof  
 My love for you.

- Bert.* A fair request, Sir Gaucelm:  
 And one that I most readily accede to.  
 You heard the wager that I gave Sir Huldbrand;  
 You know that I have lost—a valued friend.
- Gert. (aside).* Ah, now she comes to the matter next her heart.
- Bert.* Find him; and my respect and gratitude  
 Are yours to claim.
- Gauc.* Your gratitude and respect?—  
 Commensurate reward for one who sets  
 His life upon the hazard!
- Gert. (aside)* A spiritless gibe!
- Bert.* Fie, fie, Sir Knight! you are reputed brave—  
 What if I put your valour to the test?  
 And not your valour only, but—your love  
 For me?
- Gauc.* And you—you offer, in exchange,  
 Respect and gratitude?
- Bert.* And what else may follow:  
 Respect is the true corner-stone of love,  
 And gratitude hath often turn'd the scales  
 When a maid's heart is in the balance. Come now?
- Gert. (aside).* How cleverly she brings him to the fence!  
 But he'll refuse: he pricks not up his ears.
- Gauc.* You speak in riddles.
- Bert.* Could I speak much plainer?
- Gauc.* So, then, you'd have me undertake this quest  
 For the mere chance of love?
- Bert.* Nay more, Sir Gaucelm:  
 If you will dare all that Sir Huldbrand dared,  
 I'll not reject your suit. (*Aside*) I venture little!
- Gert. (aside).* A rash discharge, but the arrow cleaves the gold!
- Gauc. (going).* An idle dare-devil! a contemptuous fellow!  
 I came not here to emulate his feats.
- Bert.* Next time you go a-wooing, good Sir Gaucelm,  
 Assume not the brave front and frown of Mars:  
 O lay aside those blazonments of war!  
 The pigeon-liver'd have no need of swords,  
 Like women, they engage best with their tongues.
- Gauc.* 'Sdeath! 'Sdeath! but I'll be avenged on you for this.

[Exit.]

*Bert.* O said I not he was a mere poltroon?

*Gert.* That's proven: but soft, here comes Sir Belvedere.

[Retires]

*Enter Sir Belvedere*

*Belv.* Lady, my faith and sword are at your service:

Methinks they may bestead you: for Sir Gaucelm

But just now pass'd me, puffing windy scorn

Beneath an ugly lip: he's bent on mischief,

As surely as a charger means to kick

When's ears go back. 'Ware heels, my lady, 'ware heels!

*Bert.* When I require your service, I will ask it:

Sir Gaucelm's sword is worn for ornament

And not for use.

*Belv.*

Ha! ha! I fear'd not that.

But the thrust that comes unseen—the stab i' the back

Is much more to his liking.

*Gert.* (*aside*)

Damn your rivals.

And so dance into favour! 'Tis the way

Of the world!

*Bert.*

Which deem you, Sir, the deadliest—

The stab of the stiletto or the tongue?

Savours your warning not of jealousy?

*Belv.* Jealous of him! Respect for your discernment

And my high confidence alike forbid me

To underrate myself with such a rival.

Jealous of others, of a truth, I am:

Since every glance directed at your beauty

Is a dagger at my heart. I cannot abide

The lawless look that searcheth a response

\* From your pure eyes: it maddens to distraction.

*Bert.* Methinks, too soon, you claim seignourial rights,

To set a fortalice about this face,

With spies and sentinels at every watch-tower.

The best of women love to be admired!

*Belv.* My love for you burns with so fierce a flame,

Like smoke I am whirl'd upon the winds of passion:

I cannot spare a look, a smile, a sigh:

I'd have you wholly mine.

*Bert.* And, having won me,  
 You'd rate me little higher than your horse!  
 Possibly lower, after the first bloom  
 And burgeoning of marriage had worn off.  
 Follows the day when you would find me restive;  
 The lash would be *your* method of subjection—  
 I should be ridden ever on the curb.  
 Truly, a pleasing prospect!

*Belv.* It is false!

You speak of one who is a ruthless tyrant.

*Bert.* I merely hold the mirror to your face—

You do not like the picture? Why, then, should I?

*Gert. (aside).* He stands as shrunken as some well-worn beauty,  
 Stripp'd for the night of all her bravery!

*Belv.* You mean, then, to insult me?

*Bert.* Oh, far from it!

But, if the world contain'd one man alone,  
 And *you* that man, I would not marry you.

*Belv.* My passion spurn'd! Myself held up to scorn!  
 Truly your tongue foretold the fitting means  
 To hold you in subjection! The serpent's tooth  
 Is not more venom'd than those fangs of yours:  
 They were best drawn!

*Bert.* So men, like *you*, go free!

Take comfort in the thought that you can whip  
 A poor dumb beast that cannot answer you.  
 But *me* you cannot!

*Belv. (aside).* My lady, I have a whip  
 That shall yet lower your crested insolence.

[*Exit Sir Belvedere.*]

*Gert.* My dear, how shall we ever marry you!

[*Sir Konrad announced.*]

Speak softly to the good old knight.

*Bert.* He shall

Have glossing words, as best befitteth him.

[*Gertrud retires.*]

*Enter Sir Konrad*

*Kon.* Lady,

I came to pay my court—but find that Sorrow  
 Hath even now forestall'd me in my suit:



Some trouble holds you? O that my sun of love  
 Might dissipate the clouds about your brow!  
 And yet how precious is the pearly mist  
 That veils from me the splendour of your face!  
 Look up—Ah, now it brightens; and the glow  
 Suffuseth this old heart with happiness.

*Bert. (softening).* Ah me! Sir Konrad—what have *I* to bestow?

The fount of love is seal'd within my breast;  
 I have no heart, no pity, no compassion  
 For all the suffering that I see around me;  
 And for the joy, the human earthly joy—  
 The linkéd lips of lovers, and the eyes  
 That smile and shine defiance at the world—  
 I hate them! for their happiness I know not:  
 They tantalize me with the gleam of hope,  
 And hope is sunk beneath that far horizon:  
 No vernal sun shall bring the brightness back.  
 I may not look upon the face of love.  
 That countenance is veil'd to me forever.  
 There is no healing for the wounded spirit  
 But the deep waters washing to oblivion!

*Kon.* Lady, tho' now you deem your gentle soul

[*Takes her hand.*

Callous to others' grief, 'tis only transient:  
 Your spirit's action is awhile suspended,  
 Numb'd by the sudden impact of the blow  
 That misted all the field of your true vision.  
 Yet Time, that softens even the fire-fused rock,  
 Will melt the stony chasms of your heart,  
 And o'er the void shall richer blossoms spring.  
 Light permeates all! and in its healthful beams  
 You shall not count your loss irreparable.

*Bert.* No sun can ever ease me of my loss,  
 No time assuage.

*Kon.* You will rise stronger for it:

In passion's furnace are we moulded all,  
 'Tis there our characters are form'd and frank'd  
 True coin or false, true gold or counterfeit;  
 For both are issued from the mint of Nature.  
 I loved Sir Huldbrand—could I have loved him more,

If he had been my son?—I had rejoiced  
 To see you two affianced to each other;  
 And, in *your* joy, I had found consolation  
 For my so narrow'd and uncrownéd life.  
 I ne'er can take his place within your heart——

[*Bertalda weeps.*]

*Gert. (aside).* O there is wisdom in an old man's wooing!

*Kon.* You must not shame the greatness of his soul  
 By unavailing tears.

*Bert.* Oh, 'tis *my* shame,  
 My lasting shame! *I* sent him to his death.  
 'Tis that that weighs like lead upon my heart;  
 Tho' one so brave as Huldbrand had absolved me.

*Enter Huldbrand, leading Undine by the hand*

*Huld.* You are absolved forthwith: your mandate proved  
 Richer in quest than maiden hopes had vision'd.  
 For see I bring you from the forest depths  
 This flawless flower. Let me unite your hands,  
 As prelude to the union of your hearts;  
 For I would have you love as sisters love.

*Bert.* And may I ask who is this winsome lady,  
 That you would wake in me a sister's longing?

*Huld.* My wife—Undine.

*Bert.* Your wife! This is most strange:  
 I never heard—the news—of your betrothal.

*Kon. (aside to Bertalda).* Master yourself! O never let him  
 peer

Into your inmost heart!

*Huld.* Bertalda—I——

*Bert.* Ah, yes—

I might have known good tidings travel slowly:  
 'Tis ill news flies apace.

*Kon. (aside to Bertalda).* That's bravely spoken.

*Bert. (embracing Undine).* I never had a sister—had I known  
 one,

As sweet and pure and trustful as yourself,  
 How very different might my life have been!

*Und.* I, too, have never known a sister's love,  
 Tho' ever-present the wish. But now, Bertalda,  
 I can indulge my heart in this new joy.

*Bert.* Undine, your loving words relume my life:  
 Hope blossoms in your smile. Come, for you will  
 Have much to tell that I do long to hear.  
 I leave Sir Huldbrand to your care, Sir Konrad.

[*Exeunt Bertalda and Undine.*]

*Huld.* (*gazing rapturously after Undine*).  
 As maid—thou never saw'st a child more wilful,  
 As wife—there lives not one so sweet and true.  
 She dims the pearl in purity and lustre,  
 And robs the moon of beauty, she being by!

*Kon.* Has Love, the mighty fashioner of poets,  
 In his fierce crucible fused your strong soul?  
 You must relate how you came by your bride.

*Huld.* Gladly will I, Sir Konrad—tho' my story  
 Is for the open air.

*Kon.*

Precede me.

[*Exeunt Sir Huldbrand and Sir Konrad.*]

*Gert.*

Well—well,

Was ever such a topsy-turvy world!  
 The one flies love, and finds it in the forest;  
 The other pours libations to the Gods  
 For his so safe return, and when she sees him,  
 Spills the warm wine of life upon the ground,  
 To wean herself on sisterly affection!  
 I wonder how she'll thrive on that thin juice!  
 I trust them not—these sudden loves of women,  
 That mushroom-like spring up within a night,  
 Only to wither on a palsied stalk  
 At the first rude shock of winter. Well—Time proves all!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*The same. The palace grounds illuminated: a fountain playing at left center. Bertalda and Huldbrand are seen conversing in an arbour up stage.*

*Enter Sir Gaucelm and Sir Belvedere*

*Gauc.* A week ago she spurn'd me with her foot  
As tho' I were a worm.

*Belv.* Vex not yourself;

We are all worms to her ungovern'd pride:  
We must find means to lower it. There's not one  
So firmly set, so safely pinnacled,  
Whose tower'd strength may not be undermined  
By an insidious and determined foe.  
And her foundations are not too secure!

*[Kühleborn rises from fountain, with menacing gesture towards Bertalda. He then sinks into concealment behind the water-lilies.]*

*Gauc.* Ha! Rumour has not left her unassail'd—  
A foundling, is she not?

*Belv.* Foundling or no,

I mean to track her to her parent source.  
Her airs, her scorn, her contumelious pride,  
That overlooks those less indulged of fortune,  
Denote no patent of nobility!  
E'en tho' she deem herself a prince's daughter.

*Gauc.* Belike she thinks it, hence the high disdain  
With which she flung me, 'my adoptive father.'

*Belv.* Soft! Mark you them—tempting the Tempter's might?  
The moth ne'er hover'd round the taper's brim  
Like she about that boy's face. Curse them both!

*[Kühlborn steps out of fountain, and approaches them in the guise of an old beggar man.]*

*Gauc.* Draw we within the shadow of the fountain,  
Where we may watch them, unobserved. (*Perceiving Kühl.*)  
Old Rags,  
How got you past the gates? I've half a mind  
To toss you in the fountain. 'Twill rinse you, dog!  
And teach you not to intrude upon your betters.

*Kühl* (*aside*). Toss me to mine own element! Ha! ha! ha!

*Gauc.* Why laugh you? but I'll turn that laugh awry.

Zounds! but the man's all slime: I'm slaver'd o'er

As tho' I'd roll'd on a fish-heap. Off with you, filth!

*Kühl.* Scorn none! the meanest may have much to teach you.

*Belv.* Let be, Sir Gaucelm: the fellow speaketh fair.

Now come, my man, wherefore these vile contortions?

*Kühl.* Observe the minx! Well, let her trail her snares:

I have my price, and I have that to sell

Would set you gallants dancing to the fiddle

From now until his orient majesty

Peep'd on your unpress'd pillows.

*Belv.*

How know you this?

*Kühl.* I have ears—and hearing is a practised art

Amongst my confraternity: it buys bread.

*Belv.* You, then, have play'd the spy upon us here?

*Kühl:* I spied a meal—and when I heard your speech,

I spied a dozen meals. Nay, now my hunger grows:

Such news as I possess should satisfy

My natural appetite, my corporeal wants,

With just enough of sack to dream my dreams,

Till my poor light is quench'd.

*Gauc.*

I'll quench it straightway

You spying cur!

*Belv.* (*restraining Sir Gaucelm*). Nay, nay; let's draw him further.

*Kühl.* Oh, I can play the spy as well as you,

And to more purpose! Your honours fain would know

The parentage of that dark-eyed enchantress?

Belike her feline fingers have left scars

Where wounds heal slowly?

*Belv.*

Come to the point, rogue, or—

*Kühl.* Then, for that reason, you would humble her?

*Gauc.* Aye, that we would.

*Kühl.*

If I, then,—at a price—

Can prove she is of lowly origin—

Can—so to make the bargain square—produce

Her parents, you will pay me well?

[*Bertalda and Huldbrand stroll down stage*

*Belv.* (giving him purse). There's for you,  
And more anon—the eastern gate at midnight.

[*Exit Kühleborn.*]

*Gauc.* He hath a briny smell. If he speaks truth,  
We'll not have long to wait for our revenge.

[*Exeunt Sir Gaucelm and Sir Belvedere*]

*Huld.* Why slink these two away with such ill grace?

Their brows do lower upon us as they go.

*Bert.* They're envious of your double fortune, Huldbrand.

*Huld.* How double?

*Bert.* Solve it upon your pillow—when you dream  
Of Undine.

*Huld.* Ah yes, fortune has favour'd me  
Doubly, aye trebly, in her perfect love.

*Bert.* If perfect, were it not immeasurable?

Not doubling this, nor trebling that? Oh, I,

If I should ever give my heart in love,

Would deem the bounds of space too close, too narrow

Environment for my enlargéd soul:

It would soar out into infinity!

*Huld.* (taking her hands). And, when you love, what can I  
wish you more

Than just so great a happiness as mine?

*Bert.* Th' invariable wish of those new-wedded!

I'll value it the more, if you can say it

A year hence with the fervour of to-day.

*Enter Sir Konrad and Undine.*

*Kon.* I bring you back your wife, Sir Huldbrand: she

Has entertain'd me with such glowing tales

Of radiant nymphs that dwell beneath the ocean,

That, if Bertalda still proves unrelenting,

'Tis there I'll seek my future bride.

*Bert.* Sir Konrad,

I wonder that your choice still favours me,

After such kindling visions?

*Kon.* The first always!

Much as I fear thou'rt unattainable.

[*Kühleborn rises from fountain.*]

*Kühl.* (aside to Undine). Beware Bertalda!

*Und.* (*aside to Kühleborn*). Trouble not my peace!  
 [*Kühleborn disappears.*]

*Bert.* (*approaching Undine*). What do the water-lilies say to you?

*Und.* O, Nature's myriad voices breathe one word—  
 So soft it falls that thousands scarcely heed it!  
 The mystic word that fills the world with song.  
 The swallows chirp it on my window-sill;  
 The flowers can speak naught else; and the tall reed-grass  
 On that one flute-like stop sways to the stream;  
 The pines just whisper it; the silver poplar  
 Sighs out her soul with it the livelong day.  
 O what a chorus is there in the woods,  
 From the soft ringdove's coo to the wild thrush's  
 More stormy wooing!—unutterable longing  
 In every note of his o'erburden'd breast!

*Bert.* Undine, your sweet bride-face is all aglow.  
 Who knows but that your lips may fire me also?

[*Kissing her.*]

*Kühl.* (*aside*). Let this, then, quench it! Ha! ha! he! he! he!  
 [*Drenches Bertalda, and then sinks into concealment.*]

*Bert.* Who was't that laugh'd?

*Huld.* Bertalda! How came this?

*Bert.* The fountain!

*Und.* (*aside to Kühleborn*). Kühleborn this is ill service!

[*Kühleborn disappears.*]

*Huld.* Zounds, you are drench'd! Come, you must doff these garments.

(*Going*) Ha! Kühleborn's hand in this!

[*Excunt Bertalda and Huldbrand.*]

*Kon.* There is no wind:

It is most strange that it should spirtle forth  
 With such fell fury! Almost I could believe—

*Und.* Had we not best attend upon Bertalda?

[*Excunt Undine and Sir Konrad*]

*Re-enter Sir Gaucelm and Sir Belvedere*

*Gauc.* How to abase her—that's th' immediate question—  
 And without fear of failure! We must not miss  
 One link i' the chain of evidence. My brain

Whirls at the task that we have set ourselves.  
 Like to a captive tigress, in her wrath,  
 Her glittering eyes still fascinate; and her snarl  
 Inspires as live respect, as quick resource,  
 As that low sound, deep-throated in its terror,  
 Which awes the jungle to its inmost depths.  
 Hate clouds my reason, when clear-thinking is  
 Imperative to our design.

*Belv.* Leave that to me:

This banquet, given in honour of Bertalda,  
 Will furnish forth the opportunity.  
 Her Birthday feast! Well, we will season it  
 With seasonable thoughts—what more harmonious  
 Than the sweet hark-back to her cradling years?

*Gauc.* Ha! there we hit her.

[*Clock strikes twelve.*

*Belv.* Once! twice!—

*Gauc.* O let her have

The round o' the clock—a lash for every stroke!

*Belv.* That last note tolls the knell of her curst pride.

Come, we must keep our tryst. (*Going*) But three days  
 more,

And then—Bertalda, then——!

[*Exeunt.*



SCENE III.—*The same. The Banqueting Hall of the Palace: large oak doors at the back r., leading to outer hall; tapestry curtains screening arches to right and left front. The table, which is in a recess to left back, is sumptuously furnished; the windows beyond it are open, showing glimpses of the country. On a raised dais r. are displayed Bertalda's birthday gifts. Bertalda is seated at the head of the table, with Huldbrand and Undine on either side of her. The Duke is at the centre, and amongst the guests are the Duchess, Sir Konrad, Sir Belvedere and Sir Gauclm. As the curtain rises, attendants are seen bringing in fruit and wine.*

*Duke.* My noble guests, two toasts I'd have you pledge—  
 First, our fair bride and bridegroom. I must confess  
 This marriage fell against my expectation:  
 Methought our Huldbrand was invulnerable  
 To beauty's shafts; but when I look upon  
 The delicate sweet lady of his choice,  
 I am constrain'd to think no mortal armour  
 Could have avail'd our friend. She seems, indeed,  
 The veritable princess we have read of  
 In our flush youth, enchanting all beholders;  
 And he—Prince Fortunatus! May God give them  
 Ever increasing joy of one another!

*[Their healths are drunk with acclamation.]*

Fling wide the doors. It is an old-time custom  
 That all should share our joy on such occasions.  
 No richer harvest reaps the human heart  
 Than in the goodwill of our fellow-men.

*Enter citizens; amongst them are Karl and his wife, with Kühleborn, in long, white, flowing beard, disguised as a minstrel. Wine and cakes are served to all.*

You're welcome all. This time I raise the chalice  
 To my dear child. Friends, when our great All-Father  
 Sprinkled the earth with flowers, He gave us that  
 Which should enamel and enrich our meads:  
 But children are the flowers that He hath given  
 To beautify our homes. And so it seems,  
 Each year that I have watch'd this tender plant  
 First strike its graceful shoots, then burst in bloom,  
 The full, rich bloom of perfect womanhood,

I have been privileged exceedingly;  
 Nor can I count the sum of all the joy.  
 The fragrance she has brought into my life.  
 I drink to you, my child!  
 And may the purple grape within this goblet  
 Bear health, grace, and abiding happiness,  
 In sun and shower, to you, my rose of roses!  
 Pass blithely round the bowl, and all make merry.

*[Her health is drunk amid cries of 'The  
 Lady Bertalda.'*

(*Perceiving Kühleborn*) A minstrel!—who more welcome!  
 Reverend, sir.

We call upon you to add grace to mirth;  
 In midmost joy, chasten and thrall us with  
 The tender pathos of the old folk-songs.

*[Undine recognises her foster-parents, and sits  
 near them whilst Kühleborn sings to the  
 harp.*

## SONG

### I

Fishman, fisherman, why do you weep,  
 Hauling your nets 'neath the moon?  
 Silvery shadows steal over the deep,  
 And the billows are all aswoon.

### II

There is that in your face, my sweet mermaid,  
 Which recalleth a long-lost child;  
 Far down in the deep is my darling laid,  
 Whom the glittering mere beguiled.

### III

O better the waters should fold and keep  
 Your little one in her shroud,  
 Than ever you famish'd eyes should weep  
 A heart grown cold and proud!

## IV

If, but for a moment, she might draw near—  
 Should I find her heart grown cold?  
 She would rush to my arms, my joyous dear,  
 And greet me as of old.

## V

O vain is the love of all mortal kind!  
 And vain are the tears you shed!  
 Ere you pale sickle wane, you will wish you were blind  
 Or else that your child were dead.

[*Martha weeps.*]

*Karl.* Control your grief, bear bravely up awhile,  
 We must not mar our kind host's entertainment.

*Duke.* It hath set quivering some long-silent chord—  
 Lost you a child in that way?

*Karl.* We are deeply moved;  
 We crave your pardon, my lord. The song recall'd  
 A grief that we could never put in words,  
 That, therefore, lay the heavier on our hearts.  
 Some years ago we lost a little maid—  
 As dark maybe as that fair lady yonder,  
 And with a smile—O, not unlike to hers—  
 In just such a way! The song hath touch'd us home,  
 So nearly doth it fit our history.

*Belv.* The song foreshadows an impending doom,  
 'Ere you pale sickle wane, you will wish you were blind  
 Or else that your child were dead.'

(*To Karl*) Hast a presentiment of trouble—coming?

*Karl.* The very air seems charged with mystery.  
 I am compell'd, against my conscious self,  
 To strive to grasp a truth that still eludes me.  
 These many years I have believed her dead,  
 Now feel I here (*striking his breast*) she lives! the veil is  
 lifting:

As thro' a mist I do behold my lost one—  
 Her smile that I should know amid a million—  
 Her smile—dear God, the darkness falls away:  
 Light, light, at last, in fulness everywhere!  
 There, at the table-head, sits my lost child!  
 My hunger'd heart acclaims—

*Kon.*

The man is mad!

*Karl. (to Bertalda).* Let none, my child, dispart us!

*Duke.* Hold—forbear!

How many years ago lost you your daughter?

*Bert.* Father, why question him? Put him out of doors.

'Twill cool his wits—the wine has heated them.

*Duke.* Patience, my child.

*Karl.* God! can she so receive me?

*Duke.* Answer my question.

*Karl.* I doth need no answer.

I care not to claim kinship, since my daughter

Despiseth me already in her heart.

*Duke.* First, prove she is your daughter.

*Karl.* That I cannot.

*Kon.* Out with him; the old man is an impostor.

[*Some of the guests lay hands on him, and  
hustle him towards the door.*]

*Karl.* I little thought that I should rue the day

That gave her to my sight. These eyes are failing—

Ah, I could wish the night had gather'd in

Ere I should look on such a thankless child!

*Belv.* The old seer's prophecy!

*Gauc.* A strange fulfilment!

*Duke.* Gently, my friends, gently; he shall have justice.

(*To Karl*) You cannot prove 't?—on what, then, do you base  
Your claim?

*Mart.* Ah, but *I* can; and humble her

I will—tho' you are welcome to the shrew!

These breasts that suckled her are not mistaken!

These eyes that cherish'd her have not forgotten!

What proof would you? Shall I retail her birthmarks?—

Those signs which once I look'd upon as blessings,

Tho' now I deem them but the curse of Cain,

Who slew his brother: *she* would slay her father

With her death-dealing tongue.

*Duke.* Enough—enough!

Let all those here, who are not of our party,

Retire. (*To Karl*) Remain you and your wife, also

The agéd minstrel whose prophetic sight

Hath forced this issue.

[*Exeunt citizens.*]

Now, good dame, your proof?

Touching these birth-marks—what have you to say?

*Bert.* Why dost thou shame me thus before my friends?

*Duke.* Truth must prevail, however harsh to hear!

No shame to you, unless you shame yourself!

Honour your parents is an old injunction:

Observe it now—by silence.

*Mart.*

One upon

Her left instep, shaped like a violet;

The second lise between her shoulder-blades,

Bearing the imprint of the self-same flower.

If she will only come with me a moment—

*Bert.* I, to unrobe myself before a peasant!

Canst thou, my father, countenance such insult?

Oh, it speaks volumes—thy impassive silence!

This 'tender plant,' that thou so hardly rear'dst,

Is of a sudden to be bruised and blighted

By the rude wind of a dull peasant's wit!

This 'graceful flower,' that brought such 'joy and fragrance'

Into thy life, is to be hustled forth

To meet the glaring rays of the harsh sun,

The vulgar sun of vile publicity!

Look round thee! note the almost fiendish joy,

Unmask'd, exultant, yonder. Need I name them?

Unmanly glee at my discomfiture

Leers from each craven face.

*Gauc. and Belv.*

'Tis false!

*Bert.*

O sirs,

I wish you joy of your conspiracy

To rob a maiden of her name and honour!

So belted knights can stoop to bribery!

And snow-white hairs serve as a cloak for fraud!

[*Exit Bertalda.*]

*Duke (to Duchess).* Go you to her—she will unrobe to you—

And send us swift assurance. God forbid

That I should stand between this agéd couple

And—their child!

*Duch.*

Would that they had never come!

These many years have they believed her dead:

Better they should have thought so to the end!

[*Exit Duchess.*]

*Huld.* My lord,

This matter of the birth-marks proveth nothing.  
 The merest gossip of her chamber-maid  
 Might have convey'd so much. 'Twill not establish  
 Their poignant claim to her paternity,  
 Deeply as their indubitable loss  
 Hath stirr'd the fount of pity in us all.  
 Yet, as to the good-faith of these old people—  
 What needs *my* testimony to their worth,  
 Who rear'd, in fear and love of the Most High,  
 This gracious lady, now my honour'd wife?  
 I am convinced no bribe could influence them:  
 Rightly, or wrongly, they believe the maid  
 Is theirs.

*Enter Maid*

*Duke.* What says your mistress?

*Maid.*

They have spoken

Truth.

*Karl.* What else should we speak?

*Maid.*

My lady says.

'Such knowledge might be secretly obtain'd,  
 And publicly abused.'

*Duke.*

Go, tell your mistress

I shall not yield her up till all is proven.

*Kühl.* The proof you lack, my lord, myself can furnish:

You recognise this chain? 'twas that you gave me  
 The day I found her by the water-flags  
 And to your charge resigned her. The little maid  
 Had perish'd else, for how could *I* have rear'd  
 So frail a thing? Years afterwards I learnt  
 The story of her birth and disappearance——

*Duke.* And you disclose it *now*?

*Kühl.*

Sire, I forebore

To press a truth that had brought pain to all.  
 These honest folk were happy in the child  
 They had adopted; you were happy, too.  
 In fostering the love of this fair maid:  
 This two-fold peace I could not, then, disturb.  
 But times are changed; and since the truth must out,  
 Your foster-daughter *is* that old man's child.

*Enter Attendant (breathless)*

*Attend.* The Lady Bertalda, my lord—

*Duke.* What of her?

*Attend.* Has fled the palace—nowhere can be found.

*Duke.* My troubles thicken. Friends, I bid you leave me:

But you—await me here.

[*Motions Karl, Martha, and Kühleborn to room r. Guests retire. Huldbrand and Undine remain.*

(*To Attendant*) Summon the guard.

[*Exit Attendant.*

God send me never such a day as this!

*Huld.* Can I not be of service?

*Duke.* No, my friend;

Within this hour I'll have her safe again,  
Unless—O God, if her high pride could forge  
Weapons against herself!

*Und.* O, never that!

She is incensed, but she will not forget

Your fostering care, even in her darkest hour.

*Huld.* She will return, when reason conquers passion.

*Duke.* Is there on earth solicitude so deep,

Grief so importunate, as that we feel

When threaten'd with the loss of one we love?

How a child can wring the heart! My poor Bertalda!

[*Exit Duke.*

*Enter Attendant*

*Attend.* Your equipage, Sir Huldbrand.

*Huld.* Let it wait.

*Attend.* Pardon, Sir Huldbrand; a tall fisher maid

Begs speech of you—will noways be denied.

*Huld.* Where is she?

*Attend.* In the vestibule.

*Huld.* I will

Attend her there. (*To Undine*) One moment, sweet!

Perchance

[*Exit Attendant.*

I may glean somewhat of this mystery.

[*Exit Huldbrand.*

*Und.* Bertalda—daughter of the fisherman?

This is some vengeful trick of Kühleborn's!

His spite against her is most manifest.

Why 't should be so—passes my wit, unless  
 He's jealous of the love that I do bear her.  
 And yet, how strangely doth his tale accord  
 With that the dear old people used to tell  
 In those long winter evenings on the island!

*Re-enter Huldbrand, leading Bertalda disguised as a  
 fisher-girl*

*Bert.* Thou'lt not betray me?

*Huld.*

Only to my wife.

Undine, you can preserve a secret?

*Und.*

Surely:

Tho' when had fisher-maid such tell-tale feet?

*[Embracing Bertalda.]*

*Bert.* Yet am I, verily, what now thou look'st on—

A fisher-maid, whom faithless fortune fondled.

The past is past; and all its foolish dreams

Are beggar'd by the close reality

Of what I am!

*Und.*

You're nothing but yourself—

How can you think so meanly of our love?

*Bert.* One last farewell—then swiftly break, my heart!

My life is over! Over me the sea

She chant such requiem as best befits

My lowly birth. Oh, how I long to drown

The bitter memory, the degradation,

In those cool waters where at last is peace

For hearts too fever'd and for souls too frail!

*Und.* There, sob your grief out on this breast. The Duke

Will not too lightly part with you, Bertalda;

You are very dear to him.

*Bert.*

Never again

Will I set foot across his threshold!

*Und.*

Then

Return with these old people: they will forgive

Your petulance.

*Bert.*

O well thou judgest me!

Who, in my place, had not shown petulance?

Doth one court poverty with pleasure? or

Rear'd as a bride for princes, rush elate

Into the arms of menials?



*Und.* Why, no:  
 Still might you with less hauteur have received  
 Their humble suit. If they are not your parents,  
 It had become you better; if they are,  
 You have done great wrong—to them and to yourself.

*Bert.* Thou, too, my enemy? Go, join with those  
 Who have brought me to this pass!

*Und.* Belov'd Bertalda,  
 Believe me never was I more your friend;  
 But, as your friend, I would preserve you from——

*Bert.* Myself—is't that thou'dst say? Ah me, my friends  
 Are Summer friends, flown with the Summer's sweets!  
 This noon I had a many, now not one!  
 Who shall convince me after this—of friendship?

*Und.* O doubt not mine, Bertalda! . . . List! To-night  
 We make the first stage in our homeward journey.  
 Come with us to our Castle of Ringstetten.  
 There shall you live at peace, there prove our friendship;  
 There learn the sweet delights—not to be found  
 I' the courts of princes, where falsehood and intrigue  
 Disgust and disillusion all true hearts.  
 My mantle, Huldbrand! to protect her from  
 The prying gaze of all-too-curious eyes.

[*Exit Huldebrand*]

*Bert.* How can I thank thee, Undine? Shall I not  
 Intrude upon your happiness—your home-life?

*Und.* As sisters, have we not already pledged  
 Our loves? how, then, could you intrude? (*Taking her hand*)  
 So come!

And in our dear home-life you will forget  
 This bitterness that wars against your spirit.

*Bert.* Was ever sister half so sweet as thou?  
 The debt thou layest on my soul this day,  
 How shall I e'er find measure to repay?

[*The curtain falls as they embrace*]



## ACT III

SCENE I.—*The Spring of another year. The courtyard of the Castle of Ringstetten, with octagonal fountain in the foreground. To right a cloistered walk, with gothic archway leading to terraces beyond. Above the cloisters a beautiful rolling country is disclosed. As the curtain rises, a number of serving-men are seen leisurely hauling a large stone into position before the fountain.*

- 1 *Serv.* Ay, it be a cumbersome house wi' two mistresses.
- 2 *Serv.* The Book says one mayn't serve two masters, but nowt a word about two mistresses!
- 1 *Serv.* It reckon'd one should know that, wi'out telling: women are allus more difficult to serve than men—they're aye contrarious.
- 3 *Serv.* Thou'rt right, mate, contarious be the word. Now t' fair lady cannot abide to have the fountain open—folks say as an evil spirit lurks i' its depths, for there be times when the waters do froth and bubble wi' strange fury. But t' dark lady as roundly avers that there is no spirit—leastways no evil spirit—and vows that the waters are healing waters, and a powerful medicine agin sun-spots, freckles, moles an' all such-like blots and blemishes.
- 2 *Serv.* So we be a-sealing and unsealing of the fountain as fair lady or dark lady be favourite!
- 3 *Serv.* Gossip do say as he keeps to' fair lady for holy days, an' t' other for days that be not holy.
- 2 *Serv.* Ha, ha! so t' other has t' best o' t' bargain!
- 1 *Serv.* He be a sorry fool, and a mean fool, who allows his wife to be disrated and dishonoured in his own house. I say a't be agin his own dignity.
- 4 *Serv.* Dignity!  
Illicit dalliance knows no dignity!
- 2 *Serv.* The wife's to blame: she is too gentle with him.
- 4 *Serv.* The more shame he, to take advantage of her!  
Never a sweeter lady walk'd this earth,  
Never a truer—look ye, where she comes.

*Enter Undine*

*Und.* Not finish'd yet? The well should have been closed  
An hour ago. It is not to your credit  
To loiter over such a trivial task.

4 *Serv.* The stone is weighty, lady.

*Und.* Not weightier than your tongues!  
'Tis they methinks have proved your heaviest hindrance.  
I' faith, you tire yourselves! Why, women and sparrows  
Are quite outgossip'd here! (*Aside*) Embarrassment  
Sits plain on each; they look on me with pity—  
Pity from serving-men! O Huldbrand, Huldbrand!

4 *Serv.* Heave all together, lads! Steady now, steady!  
There she sits plumb and fast.

2 *Serv.* Fast-sure indeed: why,  
The Deil himself might not remove our labour!

*Und.* Hand me that implement. Now you may go.

[*Exeunt serving-men*]

(*Writing on stone*) These hieroglyphics none but he may  
read

Who is the Lord o' the fountain. Kühleborn,  
I do command you by the love you bear me  
Never to raise this stone. Withdraw in peace:  
The Danube is your tributary: leave me  
My home.

*Enter from archway Bertalda and Huldbrand*

*Bertalda, singing to guitar—*

What word wakes the woodland to music and life?

Spring, Spring, ting-a-ling Spring;

Ting-a-ling, ring-a-ding Spring.

What spell sets all nature in search of a wife?

Spring, Spring, ting-a-ling Spring.

Far down in a glade where the daffodils blow,  
Each spear-head uplifted, each helmet aglow.

A thousand bright banners are tost in the breeze,

As the March wind pipes lustily thro' the loud trees—

Spring, Spring, ting-a-ling Spring;

Ting-a-ling, ring-a-ding Spring.

*Und.* So you have returned!

- Bert.* And none too soon it seems!  
 (To *Huld.*) Observe you that? (*Aside*) O woman like  
 revenge,  
 To rob my toilet and dethrone my face!
- Huld.* Why seal'dst thou it?
- Und.* Ask me not here.
- Huld.* Explain!  
 Or I must countermand it. Methinks of late  
 Thou hast exceeded far thy wifely warrant.  
 Comes it to this—thy chiefest pastime now  
 Is a continual trespass on my patience!  
 Thy ghostly ways, thy—
- Und.* My dear and anger'd lord,  
 You would not so upbraid your meanest henchman,  
 Himself unheard in his defence. How much less  
 Do such harsh words become you, spoken in ire  
 Against your wedded wife!
- Huld.* Say, then, what moved thee to so strange an act?  
 A brilliant housewife thou, to cut us off  
 From this prized source!
- Bert.* In all the country round  
 No spring to equal it!
- Huld.* Wilt thou not answer?
- Und.* I did it to avert a greater evil;  
 Yet what I fear'd—is for your ear alone.
- Huld.* Bertalda's one of us: thou may'st as well  
 Speak in her presence.
- Und.* If thou biddest me,—  
 But bid me not, my lord!
- Bert.* I shall withdraw,  
 O not for worlds would I intrude upon  
 This precious secret!
- Huld.* Wait me on the terrace.  
 [*Exit Bertalda.*]
- Und.* My lord, sit by me here, as you were wont.  
 Bear with me yet a little—for my tale  
 Is hard to tell. 'Tis a far-back beginning—  
 O help me, husband mine! or I shall fail  
 From sheer perplexity: so much—so much  
 Is at stake!

*Huld.* How can *I* help thee, Undine?  
 Thy chief coadjutor is Kühleborn:  
 No doubt he will assist thee. I' faith thou hast  
 Merely to turn thy head, he's at thine elbow!

*Und.* Hark back, my lord,—  
 Can seven short months have wrought such change in  
 you  
 That your dear lips can licence irony?  
 In simple faith and maiden innocence,  
 To ward me from the evil of the world?  
 Ah no, this is not Huldbrand! 'tis another,  
 As different from the Huldbrand that I love  
 As truth from falsehood!

*Huld.* Deemest thou me false?

*Und.* False only to your true and nobler self:  
 What's Kühleborn to me?

*Huld.* His spirit haunts the place:  
 This castle, hallow'd by my boyish dreams,  
 Still more endear'd by reason of the presence  
 That fill'd these halls with radiance and light,—  
 Here moved my queenly mother, here she died.—  
 Is now a charnel-house, where spectres flit  
 And grisly phantoms glide all noiseless by.  
 These things came not, until I married thee  
 And the curst Kühleborn usurp'd my towers!

*Und.* His reign is o'er; he—

*Huld.* Nay, 'tis but begun:

Nightly I hear him in the howling blast;  
 His mocking laugh along the corridors  
 Comes hollowly as from the mouth of hell;  
 His taunts, his threats—I fear not flesh and blood,  
 But his chill breath assails me everywhere.  
 Mark'st thou his vengeful spite towards Bertalda?  
 What hath she done to thus incur his hate?  
 He comes unbidden, steals away unseen,  
 And none can trace his coming or his going  
 Save thou—and thou art silent! Would to God  
 That I had married woman born of man  
 And not of a sea-monster! such thy sire!

*Und.* Haply the fount is seal'd, or those harsh words  
 Had banish'd me for ever from your sight!

Yet, Huldbrand, if my presence hath grown hateful.  
 Speak, and I rid you of't! Marriage, so dear to me,  
 I cannot hold except on terms of love—  
 Bars my life the way? Oh, 'tis a little gulf  
 That I must cross to set you free again!  
 My happiness is centred in your own,  
 Derives its breath and being but from you;  
 Yours then removed, mine dries up at its source,  
 And all the well-springs of my nature starved,  
 Better oblivion than the lingering years!

[*Undine weeps.*]

*Huld.* Undine, forgive me! Treasure of my soul,  
 How despicable must I now appear!  
 How fall'n from that high pinnacle whereon  
 I woo'd and won thee for my peerless bride!  
 O that thy wrongs bred stripes, to lash and scourge  
 This baseness out of me! And yet thy suffering,  
 Borne with such quiet grace and dignity,  
 Hath moved me to a livelier repentance  
 Than burning anger or meek-voiced reproof  
 Could e'er have done.

*Und.* Dearest, you must not kneel:  
 I, too, have been to blame. A wife should never  
 Conceal within her bosom that which seems  
 A treason to her lord, for in heart-frankness lies  
 The true security of wedded love.  
 Misgivings, doubts, and foolish apprehensions  
 Have troubled me. Had I been plain with you,  
 This had not happen'd. Kühleborn, alack!  
 Is evil-minded, full of jealous fears:  
 He thinks—O well I know he wrongs your nature—  
 Some secret understanding hath sprung up  
 Betwixt you and Bertalda, and whene'er  
 He sees me weep—as in my childishness  
 I am too prone to do, who quake and tremble  
 At the first flash and frown of your displeasure—  
 His fancies run awry. Little he dreams  
 How smiles succeed to tears, laughter to sadness  
 As surely as the sunbeams chase the shadows,  
 Joy follows sorrow in the House of Love!  
 Lovers may clash, but ever lover knows

The breathing balm of reconciliation.  
 The fountain was the crown of my offending;  
 Yet thro' that channel only could my kindred  
 Gain access to our home. That door being fast,  
 Lord Kühleborn may knock in vain for entry!

*Huld.* Dove-like, thou bearest peace o'er the troubled waters.  
 Seal what thou wilt, so we are one again!  
 But first seal up the lips that did impugn  
 Thy sovranal devotion.

*Und.* (*kissing him*). My seal is set:  
 Oh, may it hold, when your ungovern'd words  
 Would rush with murderous precipitance  
 Upon Love's citadel!

*Huld.* When next I fail,  
 Seal up my lips in everlasting silence!

*Und.* A three-fold seal I place upon your lips  
 When on, or near, the water (*kissing him thrice*). For there,  
 oh there,  
 My relatives recover their lost power  
 Upon my life. Reprove me not before them,  
 Or you would place betwixt my heart and yours  
 A gulf unbridgeable. They would not suffer  
 One of their race to be rebuked, but i' th' instant  
 Would snatch me from your arms in jealous wrath.  
 So were I of all women the most wretched,  
 Forced to comply with Ocean's stern decree—  
 Never to see your face! unless—unless  
 You were about to break your marriage vow:  
 Then might they send me up to you; but oh,  
 I dare not think what such a call portendeth!

*[Eerie and ominous music.]*

*Huld.* Dismiss such dark forebodings from thy mind:  
 The stone remains, and all remains, sweet Undine,  
 As thou wilt have it.

*Und.* Now am I blithe again:  
 Only in the dear sun of your approval  
 I live; without it, I should droop and die.

*[Huldbrand lovingly conducts her towards  
 castle.]*



*Enter Bertalda (from archway) with Serving-Men*

*Bert. (aside).* So!

The conference has ended happily.

*(To Serv.)* About your task: why do you hesitate?

*Huld. (turning).* The stone remains where it is placed.

*(To Serv.)* Begone!

The orders of your mistress are conclusive:

See you observe them!

*[Exeunt Serving-Men with gestures of delight.]*

*Bert.* So, 'tis your sovereign will

Me to humiliate? you thwart my wishes—

Not once, but with recurring constancy!

To-day it is the fountain—doubtless, because

I have found this spring of passing benefit;

But yesterday you disallow'd our journey

By water to Vienna, since forsooth

The Danube renders tribute to that Spectre

Whose presence here hath scared the plundering owls

From their old haunts, and not a bird now sings

In measured distance of this dread abode!

To-morrow you will find some new occasion

To cross my will, and to restrict my pleasures.

You shall not find it! Better the fisher's hut,

And peace, than all this lavish insolence!

*[Exit Bertalda.]*

*Und.* She knows not what she says. If you desire it,

Open the well, my lord: but hold me blameless

For all that follows. Against her Kühleborn

Bears special spite. We cannot let her leave us

Like this—yet, if she stay, she will provoke

Fresh mischief at his hands, that door unbarr'd.

I have't: we will console her for this loss

By the cruise upon the Danube. There's no danger,

Now that my Huldbrand is all graciousness.

I shall prevail upon her to remain.

With that in prospect.

*Huld.* Haste to intercept her.

*[Exit Undine.]*

*(Seating himself)* I may no longer evade it: I must face

The issue set before me. Can a man

Love—to distraction and to his undoing—  
To women equally? I doubt it! Yet,  
Deprived of either, neither could console me.  
I love them both—but oh, how differently!  
Bertalda, queen of passion and of tears,  
Being veritable woman, fires my blood;  
She wields a sway about each several sense;  
In her magnificence I am undone!  
Undine hath nestled closer to my heart:  
So wilful in her wooing! yet, as wife,  
A visionary presence, sweet and pure;  
Dower'd with every grace, and breathing goodness  
As simply as the lily yields her fragrance  
Upon the Summer air. Traitor as I am,  
I dare not bring on that devoted head  
Such measureless woe, such mute, insurgent pain,  
As the indulgence of this ill-starr'd passion  
Would soon or late provoke. It must not be!

[*Rising.*

O bountiful Nature, why didst thou create  
Two beings so diverse, yet so alluring!

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*On the Danube. Bertalda and Huldbrand conversing apart: Undine asleep.*

*Huld.* Seems it not like a dream?

*Bert.* A dream indeed,

Too beautiful to last! I shall awake  
To find the old-time sorrow round my heart  
Reproving the futility of dreams.

*Huld.* Break not the spell, Bertalda; for to-night  
We are blended, soul and spirit, with the music  
Oh the myriad harps of heaven.

*Bert.* Ah, Huldbrand, mine,  
If only we might glide like this forever  
Adown the tranced and glossy flood of Time,  
With but the clustering stars for canopy!

*Huld.* We should have found a heaven beyond all dreams.

*Bert.* (*trailing her hand in the water*). Think you it would content you?

*Huld.* Until thy lips  
Gave up to me a heaven with that heaven.

[*Kühleborn is seen to rise and snatch her bracelet.*]

*Bert.* My bracelet—O my bracelet!

[*A mocking laugh heard.*]

1 *Rower* (*affrightedly*). The sea-monster!  
[*Uproar and confusion, in which Undine awakes.*]

2 *Rower.* Ha, there he dives with his ill-gotten spoil!

3 *Rower.* Mark how he phosphorus plays about his form!  
The pitchy depths reveal this monstrous bulk  
Like to a shouldering whale's!

4 *Rower.* He sinks! he's gone!

*Huld.* Th' accurséd Kühleborn! he hath tried my patience  
This time too far! (*To Undine*) O thou hast hand in this—  
Thou, and thy scaly——!

*Und.* (*placing her hand over his mouth*). Spare me, my lord!  
suppress

This once thy towering wrath. I will replace  
An hundredfold the trinket that is lost

*Bert.* That can you never!—Not the gold of Ophir  
 Nor yet Golconda's gems could recompense me  
 For this so grievous loss.—It was a link  
 In a long chain of tender memories:  
 That chain is broken, and I am fordone!

[*Weeps.*

*Huld.* (*aside to Bertalda*). Weep not, Bertalda! that which I  
 have given

I can give: a worthier yet shall grace  
 The delicate moulding of thy mantled arm,  
 That lures the drowsy cherub to a couch  
 As soft as Cupid's pillow.

*Bert.* Can you recall  
 The day you gave it me? Ah no, you cannot!  
 How, then, can you recall this cherish'd keepsake?

*Und.* (*crooning to water-spirits*).

Bring me corals rich and rare,—  
 Carcanet or girdle fair, —  
 Tinct with prisms of the brine,  
 Pink, and white, and crystalline.

*Huld.* How thou delight'st to linger on the past!

*Bert.* The past is all I have. It is a woman's way  
 To linger over things men soon forget.

*Und.* (*coming forward with coral necklace*). Wear this, thou  
 dear Bertalda. Will it not  
 In some degree console thee for thy loss?  
 Ah, sweet, forgive my kindred! for this chain  
 Is treasured above all the spoils of Ocean:  
 These corals are unmatched.

*Bert.* Take back your corals!  
 I make no peace with your malevolent kind.

*Und.* Persuade her, Huldbrand.

*Bert.* Nothing *shall* persuade me!  
 Aught that reminds me of your finny brood  
 But stirs my hate.

*Huld.* I fear it is no use:  
 And—for myself—I do not wish to see  
 Her wear it. Zounds! think'st thou I'd be beholden  
 To Kühleborn for this?

*Und.* Be gracious, O my lord.

*Huld.* Gracious to that unmitigable fiend?  
 To pleasure thee, what have I not condoned?  
 How long must I endure this meddling kinsman?  
 I must suppress my feelings—never speak,  
 For fear he overhears me—'tis a life  
 I care not for!

*Und.* Thou disregardest me.

*Huld.* Thou art a fool to force this gift upon her!

*Und.* I do implore thee—as thou lov'st me—silence!

*Huld.* Silence! I have done with silence! Let him hear!

*Und.* Take it, Bertalda; have pity on us both,

And end this foolish wrangle.

*Huld.* (*snatching necklace, and flinging it into river*). So thou  
*still*

Hast traffic with him? Then go to him, thou Sorceress—  
 Thou, and thy gifts! Abide with him, an thou wilt!  
 For to be rid of thee and all thy kin  
 Were like blest peace after the pestilence.

*Und.* The sea is calling me! . . . O my beloved,  
 Thou doom'st me, in the springtide of my life,  
 To eternal banishment from thy dear arms!

*[She floats over the side of the barge.]*

*(In mid-air)* I charge thee, be thou faithful unto death!  
 Farewell, my Huldbrand! Husband, fare thee well!

*[As Undine disappears, a mist rising from  
 the river gradually envelops the barge.  
 Low wailing voices are heard in the mist,  
 and the scene fades out.]*



*An interval of over a year between Acts III. and IV.*

## ACT IV

SCENE I.—*The coral palace under the sea: the vast hall illumined with a soft and mystic light. As the curtain rises, the ocean-nymphs are discovered at play: some are dancing to the accompaniment of small golden harps, but the dance is frequently disordered by their comrades pelting them with pearls and multicoloured shells; others are seen combing out their long lustrous tresses, and decking their persons with sea-flowers.*

*Enter Undine.*

*Und.* Cease—cease, my sisters! O, for pity cease!  
Your harping but augments the brief I bear:  
Music hath lost its charm—Oh, had it ever  
The power to soothe a heart so heavily laden?

1 *Nymph.* Thou wouldst not have us dull and woebegone,  
Because thy marriage proved——?

*Und.* Speak no more of it!

I was not ever thus. . . . This mortal soul  
Hath its attendant cross and crown of thorns;  
Yet would I not exchange it—no, nor pass  
Back to that soulless life that knows no sorrow;  
Where never falls the shadow of affliction  
Over bent head or agonizéd brow;  
Where laughter fills the eyes, but smiles do never  
Break in soft ripples round the lips of pain.  
O lives perdurably dispassionate!  
How do ye lack the glamour and the thrill.  
The leap of the pulse, the yearning infinite! . . .  
Better the aching heart, the surging brain,  
Trials that shake the spirit's fortitude,  
Tears that take up the running count of grief,  
Than all the sweet and liliated indolence  
Of lives like yours—spent in the search of pleasure!  
Flower-like you live, flower-like you pass away!  
The mind that suffers with humanity

Hath richer hold of joy, hath surer hope,  
 And at the last—after life's tempest—peace,  
 And happy winds to waft the voyager home.

2 *Nymph*. Keep thou thy soul; leave us our fleeting pleasures:  
 Enough for us th' enjoyment of To-day!

[*Nymphs retire up stage.*]

*Und.* (*rapturously*). Huldbrand, my lover thro' th' eternal years!  
 To you I owe this dear and wondrous gift:  
 Bring 't joy or pain, I thank you for my soul.

[*Flourish.*]

*Enter Kühleborn, with his retinue of mermen bearded  
 like himself and bearing arms.*

*All.* Hail Kühleborn!

*Kühl.* My gentlest Undine, I  
 Am grieved to be the bearer of ill news.

*Und.* Hath harm befallen him?

*Kühl.* Harm will befall him  
 —Soon. Thou must make thee ready to deliver  
 Thy husband from dishonour.

*Und.* You demand—death?

*Kühl.* Thou hast said it! One penalty alone  
 Obliterates dishonour and the wrong  
 Done to thy kin. Then, see to it. I charge thee!

*Und.* Is his offence not greater towards myself?

If I forgive the injury,—what have *they*  
 To urge that he should die?

*Kühl.* Them thou shalt hear.  
 Fain had I spared thee process of his trial,  
 But, since thou claimest justice, thou shalt have it.  
 And plead thy cause in person, an thou wilt.  
 My chair of state!

*éThe royal chair is brought forward. Kühle-  
 born sits, and the mermen and mermaids  
 group themselves about the throne.*

Attend all ye, my people,  
 Not lightly do we undertake this duty—  
 Hateful at all times, but most painful here,  
 As touching one so near our royal person—  
 Sir Huldbrand, who is wedded to this lady,  
 Our niece, and blood-relation of the throne,  
 This morning was contracted to another,



With all the solemn ritual of his Church.  
I would it were not so!

*Mermen.*

Death to the Traitor!

*Kühl.* You go too fast—you strike too near ourself!  
The verdict, at the last, must rest with you;  
But, ere you give 't, first hear the injured wife:  
If she can plead aught in her lord's defence  
Why sentence should not follow in the terms  
Prescribed by th' immemorial law of the sea.

[*Murmurs of dissatisfaction.*]

*Und.* My lord,

And ye, who constitute yourselves his judges,  
I claim a wife's first privilege—to share,  
In sickness or in health, in weal or woe.  
Her husband's fortunes. If you, then doom to death  
The man I love—know that you doom me also!  
One shroud shall serve for both; one grave unite us.

*Kühl. (to Court).* That point you may dismiss. Who ever  
heard

A wife should suffer for her husband's guilt?

*Und.* All wives do suffer for their husband's guilt—  
Daily and hourly—suffer silently—  
It is the lot of women so to suffer!

*Kühl.* Not in *our* kingdom! Defilement is so rare  
As scarce to constitute a cause of suffering.

*Und.* Happily so: but, in the greater world of men,  
Such sorrows do prevail.

*Kühl. (angrily).*

Leave me mankind!

*Und.* Ay, but you are judging one of human kind—  
He shall have justice! My husband deems me dead,  
And, by the laws of God and Man, he's free  
To solemnize these second nuptials—and  
With rites of Holy Church.

*Kühl.*

The law is the law:

*We* know no soft gradations for divorce:  
This sacred bond is indissoluble!  
With us there's no remarrying! hence it follows  
That whoso violates his marriage vow  
Inviteth death.

*Und.*

Alas, he is prejudged!

What can I urge, that would delay one moment  
The stroke of doom?

*Kühl.* Thou'rt right; he is prejudged:  
And so be all, who do forswear their vows!

*Und.* This trial is, then, a mockery!

*Kühl.* Yet it serves  
To show thee what thy kinsfolk think of those  
Who would profane these solemn mysteries.

Enough! (*To Court*) Your verdict?

*All.* Strangle him! strangle him! death to the traitor!

*Und.* (*aside*). And, oh, to think that I was once like these!

*Kühl.* There was no other verdict possible.

Yet, seeing thou art a princess of the blood,  
We will stretch mercy to its furthest limit—  
Thyself shalt be the instrument to summon  
This wanton worlding to the land of shadows.

*Und.* I—I, my lord! Mercy begins her reign!

Who, but myself, should bear the fatal mandate?

Sweet, Reconciler, Death! dear Liberator! [*Aside.*

Two stricken hearts this eve thou shalt enfranchise.

[*Faints.*

*Kühl.* (*in a broken voice*). Take her away! Let me not see  
her face

Until he is no more. (*As if to himself*) My little Undine,  
Would that I could have spared him for thy sake!

[*Sinks back dejectedly upon his throne.*

SCENE II.—*A bedchamber at Castle Ringstetten: Bertalda's tire-women busy about the room. On the bed a number of sumptuous robes are displayed.*

1 *Wom.* What colour think you she will choose to-morrow?

2 *Wom.* If the day should be fair,—

*Gert.*

Take it from me,

It will be fellow to the one now closing.

2 *Wom.* Could there be such another? so aghast?

For not within the mind of any living

Are like scenes chronicled.

3 *Wom.*

No, nor of the dead:

'Faith, 'twas enough to wake them from their sleep

I' the quiet churchyard yonder!

1 *Wom.*

The chapel rock'd,

What time these two stood blanch'd before the altar;

And when he placed the ring upon her finger,

The lightning play'd about the golden circlet

Till 't seem'd her hand took fire.

*Gert.*

Have done—have done!

This bitter day calls for no second count.

Go, put those trapping by: select you that

Empieced with green and mauve. Men seldom heed

The dexterous subtleties of our attire:

A robe doth please, or fail, as it hath power

To reinvest the wearer with the charm,

The attributes that on a day were hers.

That robe she wore at his first tournament:

It suits her, and he will remember—Ah,

[Sighs.

Better Sir Konrad than this stricken Knight,

For death sits on his frontlet! All's not well.

3 *Wom.* Thou'rt gloomier than ourselves.

*Gert.*

I cannot think

That good will come of this—Ha, heard you that?

3 *Wom.* 'Twas but the screech-owl calling to his mate.

*Gert.* Often I have thought throughout this livelong day

That the dear, gracious lady, his first wife,

Was looking on at this ill-fated marriage

With sorrowful eyes. As often did I turn,

Thinking the door would give her to my sight.

I am shaken with misgivings!—What was 't that stirr'd?

2 *Wom.* The gnawing rodent burrowing i' the wainscot:  
Sure, it could be naught else!

*Gert.* Much as I love  
My mistress, it were a most blest relief  
To put a many miles between myself  
And this devil-haunted place! Listen! that wail—?  
That moaning as of spirits from the tomb! .

1. *Wom.* Belike the wind searching the chimney-stacks.  
There! if you give your nerves the rein like this,  
You'll fright us all. The hour calls for mirth.

*Gert.* Oh, my dears,  
God grant no greater evil chance this night!  
My limbs are all a-tremble.

*Enter Bertalda*

*Bert.* Such a greeting!  
And on my bridal night! Why, what hath scared you?  
As terror-eyed as tho' you look'd upon  
My wraith—and not on me! Am I not fair?  
Then let my beams break thro' your cloudy bars!  
Come, kiss me, all of you, and wish me joy.  
(*Kissing them*) Poor startled doves, this is no hour for  
trembling!—  
'Faith! 'tis the blithest hour of all my life—  
If I should tremble, 'twere to better purpose!  
But all my tremors, like silly, huddling sheep,  
Are shepherded in folds of sweet content.  
Come now, unpin me straight.

*Gert.* Ah, what a picture!  
Your cheeks are like sea-shells to-night, my child,—  
Rose-pink and pearl, yet tinct with living hues:  
Such colours as invest the streaming sands  
At sunset, flushing back the crimson glow:  
Now rich, now pale, now softly interchanging  
With all the shades that lie 'twixt pink and pearl.

*Bert.* You praise too warmly, Gertrude! My dancing blood  
Makes beautiful what might not seem so else.  
If *now* I look not fair, when shall I ever?  
The fruit is ripe, hangs trembling on the tree—  
Now at its mellowest, should it not taste sweet?  
May he, who comes to pluck it, find it so!

*Gert.* Oh, that I'll warrant!

*Bert.*

Yet methinks this neck

Is freckled more than it was wont to be.

1 *Wom.* They are beauty spots, my lady: why, such a skin,

Softer than peach-bloom, more delicately vein'd

Than pansies in the flush of Summer's prime,

Is sorely tried by these moist July mists,

That do inflict more desultory ravages

Than the fierce burnings of unclouded days.

*Bert.* Ha! that remedial water from the well—

Why should I not apply 't?

1 *Wom.*

If only we might!

*Bert.* Who now shall cross my will, or thwart my wishes?

Was 't by *my* orders that the spring was closed?

*Gert.* Be guided by your lord in this, my lady:

He knows what's best, believe me!

*Bert.*

So all men think;

But do they? where we women are concern'd?

But that's beside the point? Know, from this hour,

I will be sovereign lady at Ringstetten.

Go you and see to it.

[*Exit Maid.*

*Gert. (aside).*

A rash beginning!

They are not wise who use their power too soon.

*Bert.* A good start is the prelude to success

I' the managing of men as of affairs.

For mark you this—if we would rule our husbands,

We must subdue them whilst they are suitors to us.

The male is arrogant when in possession;

But—short of it—he bends to seek our favours.

I'll strike! while yet his passion's at the full.

[*The clank of metal upon stone heard without.*

The chimes of freedom; that's the merriest music

I have heard this many a day! Strike on! Strike hard!

And let the sparkling waters bubble free!

Not Moses to the parching multitude

Gave keener joy than this, when he smote the rock

And the bright stream gush'd forth in full abundance—

A visible deity to their famish'd eyes!

So end my trials here.



SCENE III.—*Another room in the Castle.*

*Enter Huldbrand and Karl.*

*Karl.* Come, come,—a livelier countenance! or the bride  
Will think you do not value as you should  
The gift a woman can bestow but once.  
The Church has given her blessing; you are sped  
Thro' all formalities; now young and old  
Alike are envying you your happy fortune.

*Huld.* Yet, if they knew,—if they could darkly guess,—  
The unimagined terrors that assail  
Me, night and day, they would not envy me!  
These vague forebodings—

*Karl.* What can you have to fear?

*Huld.* Naught tangible; could I but give a name  
To this my fear, I were the master of it.  
'Tis the unknown that doth affright us most.

*Karl.* Well—well, we run from shadows, and stand firm  
When danger truly fronts us. The mind rules all!  
(*Pouring out wine*) Drink, and away with shadows! for you  
have

Realities now to deal with—such, methinks,  
As should enliven older veins than yours.  
If youth but knew the fulness of its measure!  
Why came not Father Heilmann to the feast?

*Huld.* I met him in the forest yestereve  
And ask'd him wherefore he did sconce himself  
Within a narrow hut so nigh my castle.  
After his stern refusal to pronounce  
The marriage blessing.

*Karl.* Ah; and what said he?

*Huld.* 'There be yet other rites than those of marriage,  
Which may call for my presence. For, my son,—  
Except to those who blindly shut their eyes  
Towards evil, and permit presumptuous thoughts  
To hold dominion of the heart,—life shows us  
How often mourning follows after joy,  
The widow's weeds close on the wedding garment'

*Karl.* 'Tis a lugubrious priest! you would do well  
To put him from your mind.

*Huld.*

If that were all!

Last night I dreamt that I was poised above  
 The purple Mediterranean, borne aloft  
 On the backs of many swans, and as we drifted  
 To the low song men say portendeth death,  
 I saw beneath me, far as eye could see,  
 The ocean caves and the bright-gemm'd pavilions  
 Where Kühleborn holds his court; for the still waters  
 Were crystal clear to their profoundest depths.  
 And, whilst I watch'd, Undine herself appear'd,  
 Not blithe and artless as the day I woo'd her  
 Upon the strip of land, but a tristful woman,  
 Wearing the luminous crown that hallows grief:  
 Tearless she sat, with parted lips, and eyes  
 Dim gazing as upon some far horizon,  
 Whilst those about her gave themselves to mirth.  
 And last came Kühleborn, with cruel taunts  
 And brutal inquisition of his peers  
 On my approaching marriage.

*Karl.*

Ha! and she——?

*Huld.* Not a word: but she wrung her hands and wept—  
 Not Niobe more piteous! Oh, I had given  
 Life, and the Hope beyond, to feel once more  
 That golden head close-gather'd to my breast.

*Karl.* (*dashing a tear from his eye*) 'Twas ever a tender heart  
 for all her moods!

*Huld.* The more she wept, the more she did enrage  
 Her ferine kinsman; who, now past restraint,  
 Flung at her words of such ill-omen'd sound  
 That vengeance sang i' my heart the song of blood—  
 The song that makes men rush with joy on death.

*Karl.* What was their import?

*Huld.*

'Meet it is, Undine,

Thou straightway free thine husband from dishonour:  
 Death settles all accounts!

*Karl.*

So he would dash

Your joy, and use *her* as the instrument!  
 How faced she this?

*Huld.*

She laugh'd defiance, saying,

'The well is closed: I may not now approach him;  
 And so thy fell decree falls to the ground.'



'I'll find thee present opportunity,'  
The fiend made answer. At that my dream dispersed.  
And I awoke to the sound of marriage-bells—  
My wedding-day had dawn'd.

*Karl.* You have ta'en precautions,  
Then, in the matter of the well?

*Huld.* Why should I?  
Bertalda is more fearful of its opening  
Than I: she'd never countermand my order,  
And none else dare.

*Karl.* Yet stranger things have happen'd.  
The wind hath fall'n—how sultry hangs the night,  
Burden'd with mystery!

*Huld.* Thou, too, grown fanciful!  
Avaunt such fears!

*Karl.* (*going*). Better to know all's safe  
I'll sleep the sounder for that certain knowledge.

[*Exit Karl* .]

*Huld.* Invisible Powers! that rule our destiny,  
Ye I invoked to grant my heart's desire,  
And ye have answer'd me! almost before  
My speeding thought could ripen to fulfilment.  
To-night she's mine! All—all that I have hoped.  
When hoping seem'd but to augment despair,  
Has come to pass—is now within my grasp!  
Yet in this moment of complete possession,  
'Tis not her face, that moves across my sight,  
But Undine's!—patient, gentle, and submissive:  
It seems to plead with me against myself.  
If there be spirits in the air around us,—  
Surely I could believe she touch'd me then?  
Lightly, upon the brow? I should know her touch.

[*Knock heard without.*

The bride grows restive: what a bridegroom, I!  
Why tarrieth my desire? Its wings are fur'd  
In the close stillness of this mystic night,  
That seems to breathe of Undine. . . . O gentle heart,  
'Tis a last tribute that my soul must pay thee:  
For thou wert true and tender—never wife  
Was more devoted, lovelier in her life.

[*Knock repeated.*

How like her knock! when she was wont to play  
The truant to my love, to lure me on  
To flame-engirdled raptures of pursuit.

[*Knocking continues.*

What can it be but fancy? . . . Undine—Undine!  
I pledge thee in one long and last farewell.

[*Drains goblet.*

Now to the wedding-chamber!

[*The door opens slowly (left), and Undine  
glides into the room.*

*Und.* Yes, Huldbrand,  
But—to a cold one!

*Huld. (turning).* The touch, and now the voice!

*Und.* The well is open'd: and lo! I am come.  
The embrace thou seekest, thou shalt never know!  
I claim thee for the love that was between us;  
I claim thee *now*, before thy soul has mingled  
In that sweet mystic union, which was ours.  
No other heart shall beat upon thy bosom  
But this—the heart thou searest with thy passion.  
Mine thou shalt be in death—mine, mine for ever!  
Oh, not in hate. but mercy, am I come,  
To guide thee down the lone paths of the tomb.

*Huld.* Raise not thy veil, but slay me where I stand:  
Disclose not to me, in my dying hour,  
The face of some sea-monster—spare me that!  
O horrible to look on the dark brood  
Of Ocean when it spawns upon the land!  
Half sea-fish and half ape!

*Und.* Thy fears are groundless.  
I came not here to torture thee, my lord—  
(*Unveiling*) Am I not she whom once thou fondly cherish'd  
Within thy heart of hearts?

*Huld.* My Undine! my—

*Und.* Ah, kiss me not! for in that kiss lies death:  
And I have much to ask thee.

*Huld.* Say on, my soul!

*Und.* Thy love returns, now that it is too late?

*Huld.* My love flows back with a redoubled force.  
I have been blind, and Fate has punish'd me!

*Und.* Thou still dost love me—more than this Bertalda?

*Huld.* A thousand times! I realise, too late,  
The worlds that lie betwixt my love for thee  
And this poor, fleeting passion for Bertalda.

*Und.* O perjure not thy soul at this last hour!

*Huld.* It is not perjury: I speak but truth.

*Und.* Then art thou willing to go down with me  
Into the dark and silent grave?

*Huld.* Hush, Undine!

I, only, am adjudged worthy of death.  
Why shoudest thou lose the light, and shut such beauty  
Up in that narrow room? I go—alone.

*Und.* How would that bring me peace? Could I live on,  
And know that thou wert gone from me for ever?  
Since thou must die, I too, must nestle here:

[Laying her head on his breast.

This is my sanctuary, where I will lie  
Until the Great Awakening. We shall sleep sound,  
Lock'd in each other's arms. 'Tis but 'good-night,'  
And then to wake upon some bright To-morrow,  
Where pain and passion shall have pass'd away.

*Huld.* Thou makest me in love with this sweet sleep:  
Give me thy lips, and so 'good-night—good-night!'

[She gives him the kiss of death, and then  
sinks down upon his body.

*Re-enter Karl with Father Heilmann*

*Karl.* What, Undine!—dead—both dead!

*Heil.* God's over all!

No more shall passion tempt this purblind knight!

[Pauses to cover Huldbrand's face.

So passion lures us! and so passion endeth  
In dust and ashes! bitter the remembrance!  
Love's torch was never lit with wanton fires,  
But with a steady and serener light  
That burneth, on and on, till the low flame  
Sinks in the lamp of life—to shine elsewhere.  
For the light God puts out here, He kindles anew  
In nobler mansions of transmuted clay,  
Where spirit and flesh are one. and serve His ends—

## UNDINE

Not, in eternal conflict, as on earth,  
But striving each to consecrate the other—  
By love made whole, by union perfected.

[*Curtain.*

1907.



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