

To ope her gates to wave-tossed mariners—
 Now Heaven forefend your narrow cells were cumbered
 While these free halls stood empty—tell your prior
 We hold the custom of our castle still.

(Exeunt)

END OF ACT I



ACT II

SCENE I *An Apartment in the Convent, the Stranger lies sleeping on a couch.
 The Prior watching him.*

PRIOR. He sleeps, if it be sleep; this starting trance
 Whose feverish tossings and deep muttered groans,
 Do prove the soul shares not the body's rest—*(Hanging over him.)*
 How the lip works, how the bare teeth do grind—
 And beaded drops course down his writhen brow—
 I will awake him from this horrid trance,
 This is no natural sleep—ho, wake thee, stranger—
 STRAN. What, wouldst thou have, my life is in thy power—
 PRIOR. Most wretched man, whose fears alone betray thee—
 What art thou,—speak.

STRAN. Thou sayest I am a wretch—
 And thou sayest true—these weeds do witness it—
 These wave-worn weeds—these bare and bruised limbs,³⁵
 What wouldst thou more—I shrink not from the question.
 I am a wretch, and proud of wretchedness,
 'Tis the sole earthly thing that cleaves to me.

PRIOR. Lightly I deem of outward wretchedness,
 For that hath been the lot of blessed saints—
 But in their dire extreme of outward wretchedness
 Full calm they slept in dungeons and in darkness—
 Such hath not been thy sleep—

STRAN. Didst watch my sleep—
 But thou couldst glean no secret from my ravings.—
 PRIOR. Thy secrets, wretched man, I reck not of them—
 But I adjure thee by the church's power³⁶
(A power to search man's secret heart of sin)

35. The Larpent version has "bruised and wasted limbs." 36. The Abbotsford manuscript again has a clearer religious reference: "But I adjure thee by the blessed saints— / Yea, I command thee by the Churches power."

Show me thy wound of soul—
 Weep'st thou, the ties of nature or of passion
 Torn by the hand of Heaven—
 Oh no! full well I deemed no gentler feeling
 Woke the dark lightning of thy withering eye—
 What fiercer spirit is it tears thee thus?
 Shew me the horrid tenant of thy heart—
 Or wrath, or hatred, or revenge, is there—

STRAN. (*Suddenly starting from his Couch, falling on his knees; and raising his clasped hands.*)

I would consort with mine eternal enemy,³⁷
 To be revenged on him.—

PRIOR. Art thou a man, or fiend, who speakest thus?

STRAN. I was a man, I know not what I am—
 What others' crimes and injuries have made me.
 Look on me—what am I?—(*Advancing.*)

PRIOR. I know thee not.

STRAN. I marvel that thou say'st it—
 For lowly men full oft remember those
 In changed estate, whom equals have forgotten:
 A passing beggar hath remembered me,
 When with strange eyes my kinsmen looked on me—
 I wore no sullied weeds on that proud day
 When thou a barefoot monk didst bow full low
 For alms, my heedless hand hath flung to thee—
 Thou dost not know me.—(*Approaching him.*)

PRIOR. Mine eyes are dim with age—but many thoughts
 Do stir within me at thy voice.

STRAN. List to me, monk, it is thy trade to talk,
 As reverend men do use in saintly wise,
 Of life's vicissitudes and vanities—
 Hear one plain tale that doth surpass all saws—
 Hear it from me—*Count Bertram*—aye—*Count Bertram*—
 The darling of his liege and of his land
 "The army's idol, and the council's head—" ³⁸
 Whose smile was fortune, and whose will was law—
 Doth bow him to the prior of St. Anselm
 For water to refresh his parched lip,

37. The Abbotsford manuscript adds a line of demonic imagery: "Yea, clutch his fiery talon in my grasp." 38. Was this line cut because it might be taken to refer to Wellington? Napoleon?

And this hard-matted couch to fling his limbs on.—

PRIOR. Good Heaven and all its saints!—

BER. Wilt thou betray me?

PRIOR. Lives there the wretch beneath these walls to do it?

Sorrow enough hath bowed thy head already

Thou man of many woes.—

For more I fear lest thou betray thyself.

Hard by do stand the (halls of Aldobrand

(Thy mortal enemy and cause of fall),

Where ancient custom doth invite each stranger

Cast on this shore to sojourn certain days,

And taste the bounty of the castle's lord—

If thou goest not, suspicion will arise

And if thou doest (all changed as thou art),

Some desperate burst of passion will betray thee

And end in mortal scathe—

What dost thou gaze on with such fixed eyes?

BER. —What sayest thou?

I dreamed I stood before Lord Aldobrand

Impenetrable to his searching eyes—

And I did feel the horrid joy men feel

Measuring the serpent's coil whose fangs have stung them;

Scanning with giddy eye the air-hung rock

From which they leapt and live by miracle;

"Following the dun skirt of the o'erpast storm

"Whose bolt did leave them prostrate—"

—To see that horrid spectre of my thoughts

In all the stern reality of life—

To mark the living lineaments of hatred,

And say, this is the man whose sight should blast me;

Yet in calm dreadful triumph still gaze on:—

It is a horrid joy.

PRIOR. Nay, rave not thus—

Thou wilt not meet him, many a day must pass

Till from Palermo's walls he wend him homeward—

Where now he tarries with St. Anselm's knights.—

His dame doth dwell in solitary wise

Few are the followers in his lonely halls—

Why dost thou smile in that most horrid guise?—

BER. (*Repeating his words.*) His dame doth dwell alone—perchance
child—

Oh, no, no, no—it was a damned thought.

PRIOR. I do but indistinctly hear thy words,
But feel they have some fearful meaning in them—

BER. Oh, that I could but mate him in his might,
Oh, that we were on the dark wave together,
With but one plank between us and destruction,
That I might grasp him in these desperate arms,
And plunge with him amid the weltering billows—
And view him gasp for life—and—

PRIOR. Horrible—horrible—I charge thee cease—
The shrines are trembling on these sainted walls—
The stony forms will start to life and answer thee.³⁹

BER. Ha, ha—I see him struggling—
I see him—ha, ha, ha (*A frantic laugh.*)

PRIOR. Oh horrible—
Help, help—to hold him—for my strength doth fail—

Enter 1st Monk.

MONK. The lady of St. Aldobrand sends greeting—

PRIOR. Oh, art thou come, this is no time for greeting—
Help—bear him off—thou see'st his fearful state.

(Exeunt bearing him off)

SCENE II *Hall in the castle of St. Aldobrand.*

Enter Hugo shewing in Bertram's comrades, Clotilda following.

HUGO. This way, friends, this way, good cheer awaits you.

SAIL. Well then, good cheer was never yet bestowed
On those who need it more.

HUGO. To what port bound,
Did this fell storm o'ertake you?

1ST SAIL. No matter
So we find here a comfortable haven.

HUGO. Whence came you?

39. A possible echo of the Don Juan story, to which Coleridge compared *Bertram* in the *Biographia Literaria*. *Bertram's* next speech is longer in the *Abbotsford manuscript* (where this is I, v and the end of the first act): "(*Without bedding him.*)—aye, and after death / To grasp his shuddering sprite, if spirit be tangible / And hold it shuddering over the dark abyss / Where groans, and gnashing, and the torturous shriek / Tuned to the tossing of the fiery waves / Do make the vile music of despair— / Then, then to hurl him down ten thousand fathom / Aye, though I plunge with him. Ha,—ha—ha! I see him struggling / I see him—ha—ha."