

'Madam,' replied the earl, 'my will ought to be a sufficient reason. If you desire more, consider how this Tressilian is leagued, and with whom. He stands high in the opinion of this Radcliffe, this Sussex, against whom I am barely able to maintain my ground in the opinion of our suspicious mistress; and if he had me at such advantage, Amy, as to become acquainted with the tale of our marriage, before Elizabeth were fitly prepared, I were an outcast from her grace for ever—a bankrupt at once in favour and in fortune, perhaps, for she hath in her a touch of her father Henry,—a victim, and it may be a bloody one, to her offended and jealous resentment.'

'But why, my lord,' again urged his lady, 'should you deem thus injuriously of a man of whom you know so little? What you do know of Tressilian is through me, and it is I who assure you that in no circumstances will he betray your secret. If I did him wrong in your behalf, my lord, I am now the more concerned you should do him justice. You are offended at my speaking of him, what would you say had I actually myself seen him?'

'If you had,' replied the earl, 'you would do well to keep that interview as secret as that which is spoken in a confessional. I seek no one's ruin; but he who thrusts himself on my secret privacy, were better look well to his future walk. The bear* brooks no one to cross his awful path.'

'Awful, indeed!' said the countess, turning very pale.

'You are ill, my love,' said the earl, supporting her in his arms; 'stretch yourself on your couch again; it is but an early day for you to leave it.—Have you aught else, involving less than my fame, my fortune, and my life, to ask of me?'

'Nothing, my lord and love,' answered the countess faintly; 'something there was that I would have told you, but your anger has driven it from my recollection.'

'Reserve it till our next meeting, my love,' said the earl fondly, and again embracing her; 'and barring only those requests which I cannot and dare not grant, thy wish must be more than England and all its dependencies can fulfil, if it is not gratified to the letter.'

Thus saying, he at length took farewell. At the bottom of the staircase he received from Varney an ample livery cloak and slouched hat, in which he wrapped himself so as to disguise his person, and completely conceal his features. Horses were ready in the court-yard for himself and Varney;—for one or two of his train, entrusted with the secret so far as to know or guess that the earl intrigued with a beautiful lady at that mansion, though her name and quality were unknown to them, had already been dismissed over-night.

Anthony Foster himself had in hand the rein of the earl's palfrey, a stout and able nag for the road; while his old serving-man held the bridle of the more showy and gallant steed

which Richard Varney was to occupy in the character of master.

As the earl approached, however, Varney advanced to hold his master's bridle, and to prevent Foster from paying that duty to the earl, which he probably considered as belonging to his own office. Foster scowled at an interference which seemed intended to prevent his paying his court to his patron, but gave place to Varney; and the earl, mounting without further observation, and forgetting that his assumed character of a domestic threw him into the rear of his supposed master, rode pensively out of the quadrangle, not without waving his hand repeatedly in answer to the signals which were made by the countess with her kerchief, from the windows of her apartment.

While his stately form vanished under the dark archway which led out of the quadrangle, Varney muttered, 'There goes fine policy—the servant before the master!' then, as he disappeared, seized the moment to speak a word with Foster. 'Thou look'st dark on me, Anthony,' he said, 'as if I had deprived thee of a parting nod of my lord; but I have moved him to leave thee a better remembrance for thy faithful service. See here! a purse of as good gold as ever clinked under a miser's thumb and forefinger. Ay, count them, lad,' said he, as Foster received the gold with a grim smile, 'and add to them the goodly remembrance he gave last night to Janet.'

'How's this! how's this!' said Anthony Foster hastily, 'gave he gold to Janet?'

'Ay, man, wherefore not?—does not her service to his fair lady require guerdon?'

'She shall have none on't,' said Foster; 'she shall return it. I know his dotage on one face is as brief as it is deep. His affections are as fickle as the moon.'

'Why, Foster, thou art mad—thou dost not hope for such good fortune as that my lord should cast an eye on Janet?—Who, in the fiend's name, would listen to the thrush when the nightingale is singing?'

'Thrush or nightingale, all is one to the fowler; and, Master Varney, you can sound the quailpipe most daintily to wile wantons into his nets. I desire no such devil's preferment for Janet as you have brought many a poor maiden to. Dost thou laugh? I will keep one limb of my family, at least, from Satan's clutches, that thou mayest rely on—She shall restore the gold.'

'Ay, or give it to thy keeping, Tony, which will serve as well,' answered Varney; 'but I have that to say which is more serious. Our lord is returning to court in an evil humour for us.'

'How meanest thou?' said Foster. 'Is he tired already of his pretty toy—his plaything yonder? He has purchased her at a monarch's ransom, and I warrant me he ruses his bargain.'

'Not a whit, Tony,' answered the master of the horse; 'he dotes on her, and will forsake the court for her—then down go hopes, possessions, and safety—church-lands are resumed, Tony, and well if the holders be not called to account in Exchequer.'

* The Leicester cognisance was the ancient device adopted by his father, when Earl of Warwick, the bear and ragged staff.