

crimsoned, and she dashed the tear from her soft blue eye, which terror had called forth—the Earl smiled.

“Did I not hear there was a thorn,” said he, gently taking her hand, “do you think I shall be more fortunate in discovering it?”

“No doubt you will, my lord, your youthful eyes will see it in an instant,” returned dame Ursula, rising and resigning her seat, which he very readily accepted. He closely examined the tiny hand he held between his—yet notwithstanding infinite pains, some time elapsed ere the thorn was visible even to him, at length, with the assistance of Ursula’s finest needle, he was so happy as to remove it. The young lady thanked him courteously and with simplicity as she now rose. She was too young to affect a coyness she did not feel—and her engaging manner as she spoke, added yet another charm to a face and form perfectly enchanting.

“This is the Lady Amanda de Manfredonia,” said Dame Ursula, as she perceived with mingled pride and gratification the respectful admiration of the young Earl.

“And where does the Lady Amanda reside, that I may have the honour of escorting her home?” asked his Lordship, “you must permit your faithful chirurgeon so great a happiness.”

“We live in the low white house in the valley,” replied Lady Amanda.

“Ha, that house which has so often of late called forth my curiosity from its secluded situation, and the jealousies forever being closed. I remember one morning particularly, I was tantalized by seeing a white veil appear at one of the windows for an instant, and as suddenly withdrawing—have you lived there long?”

“Only a few weeks,” replied Lady Amanda, “and I fear we shall not be suffered to remain there, we are never long together in one spot.”

“Is that from choice?” enquired Lord Blondenville, becoming more and more interested in the beautiful being before him.

“Oh no, indeed it is not,” returned Lady Amanda, clasping her hands, and looking him earnestly in the face, “but from fear.”

“From fear! of whom? of what? you astonish me.”

“My dear young lady, we had better hasten home,” interrupted dame Ursula, “we have already been absent longer than usual, and Mrs. Somerville will be alarmed.”

Lady Amanda instantly assented to the propriety of this remark and taking the Earl’s offered arm, proceeded homewards, while Ursula followed at a respectful distance, occasionally drawing nearer to join in the conversation.

“We are strangers to your Lordship,” said she, “but you are well known to us, both by report and by sight—we have always felt safe in taking our

walks through your woods, and have frequently seen you ride past.”

“Can this indeed be possible,” replied Lord Blondenville, turning to his young companion, “can I have ever passed you, without seeing you?”

“We came out here often to gather the wild flowers,” replied Lady Amanda, “and you have sometimes been near to us, but never so near as to-day.”

He pressed the arm which so confidently rested on his, as she uttered this in real unaffected innocence. “Then what terrified you so, when you first beheld me near you today, Lady Amanda?” he asked.

“Oh! I scarcely looked at you, when I took you for another. We see few strangers, and we dread them; particularly at this time when we are expecting—”

Here she paused and slightly shuddered. The Earl was too delicate to press her on what appeared a painful subject, but he paused a moment in their walk, and taking her hand, he said in an impressive serious tone, rendered more emphatic by his noble commanding and very handsome appearance.

“Lady Amanda, will you believe me when I say, that if you require a protector from any impending evil, I will prove one to the utmost—will you trust me?”

“Who would not trust the Earl of Blondenville,” she sweetly replied, while the tears rose to her eyes.

“Do we not hear of you daily from every poor person who comes to our gate,” said Ursula; “all have cause to bless your name, which is beloved by many, who, perhaps, you never saw, but who still are the objects of your bounty.”

“I should be a wretch, indeed,” he warmly replied, “if I did not endeavour to scatter the rich inheritance I own, and which I feel, has been intrusted to my care by a bountiful Creator for the good of others; by withholding it, I should defraud them of a right. I am sure you think with me, Lady Amanda?”

“I do indeed think that the inclination to do good is an enviable feeling—but when it is united to the power of conferring it—it then becomes a gift beyond all price.”

They had by this time struck into a more open path, which commanded a view of the road—two horsemen were visible riding at a brisk pace.

“Ursula, Ursula, look out,” cried Lady Amanda, in a tone of agony, as she clung to her companion, “is not that Father Anselm, and—”

“No, no, dear lady,” replied Ursula, straining her sight in following the travellers, “they appear honest countrymen.”

“Heaven be praised,” uttered the poor girl, much relieved.

“This terror of yours is very distressing to me,” said Lord Blondenville, feelingly, “and is unnatural