

A short gallery communicated from the stairhead to the private chamber of Constance. They met her outside the door, and the timid girl grew pale as she beheld the official led on by her father.

"Constance," cried he, "thy chamber smacks of treason; it must be purged from this suspicion. This mousing owl will search the crannies even of a woman's wits ere he sate his appetite for discovery. Hast aught plotting in the hem of thy purle, or in thy holiday ruff and fardingale? Come with us wench; the gallant Earl of Tyrone would sport himself bravely in thy bedchamber, pretty innocent!"

"If my gallantry were akin to mine office, then, lady, would I spare thy bosom and mine own nature this extremity. Believe me, thou shalt suffer no rudeness at my hands."

The officer bowed low, observing her confusion and distress.

"Go with us," said her father, "and leave not until our search is over. Mayhap he may find a lover in thy shoe, or in the wrinkles of thy rose-tie." He entered the chamber as he said this. It was a little room, tricked out with great elegance and beauty. Indian cabinets were there, and other costly ornaments, inlaid with ivory and pearl, in the arrangement of which, and of the other furniture, considerable taste was displayed. A lute lay in one corner; tambour-work and embroidery occupied a recess near the window; the clothes' presses shewed their contents neatly folded, and carefully set out to the best advantage.

"I faith, wench, thy chamber seems well fitted for so good a brace of guests—not a thread awry. Everything in trim order for thy gallants, mayhap. Thou hast not been at thy studios of late: I have seen its interior in somewhat less orderly fashion. I marvel if it might not be pranked out for our coming. Now, to work, Sir, where does thy grubbing begin?"

Constance posted herself in a gloomy corner, where she could watch their proceedings almost unperceived. She hoped that in her chamber the search would not be so strict as in situations of more likelihood and probability for concealment. At any rate, the common

feelings of delicacy and respect—not quite extinct, she observed, even in this purveyor of justice—would prevent any very exact and dangerous scrutiny. Nor was she deceived. He merely felt round the walls, opened the presses and closets, but did not disturb the bed-furniture. He was retiring, when her father scornfully taunted him with the ill success of his mission.

"I wonder thou hast not tumbled the bed topsy-turvy. I am glad to see thou hast yet some grace and manners in thy vocation. Now, Sir Messenger, to requite thee for this thy country and forbearance, I will shew thee a secret tabernacle, which all thy prying has not been able to discover."

Saying this, he approached the bed: a spring was concealed in one of the posts communicating with the secret door behind which, Tyrone was hidden. As he turned aside the drapery to ascertain precisely its situation, Constance no longer able to control her apprehension of discovery, rushed before him. Terror, for the time, threw her completely off her guard.

"Do not, my father! he must not look there. For my sake, oh, spare this—"

She was silent: her lips grew deadly pale; and she leaned against the pillar for support. The officer's suspicions were awakened, and he gave a shrewd guess at the truth.

"Now, fair dame," he cried, "'tis but an ungracious office to thwart a lady's will, but I must see what lurks in that same secret-recess. Master Holt, I pry thee help me to a peep behind the curtain."

But Holt was too much astonished to comply. What could exist there to excite his daughter's apprehensions puzzled him greatly. He had not a thought the most remote, that could affect her fidelity; yet he hesitated. The officer, in a more peremptory tone, demanded admission. Rousing from his stupor, and mortified at the folly of those girlish fancies, he struck the spring: in a trice, a portion of the bed's head flew open, displaying a dark chasm beyond. Swift as thought, the officer darted through the aperture; but the door was immediately shut, and with great violence. A scuffle was heard within,