

huge fireplace, a wood-fire that had nearly burned itself down to ashes, was slowly expiring. The furniture was chintz-covered, and curtains of chintz draped the three high narrow windows. Standing in one corner, between the quaintly-carved legs of a mahogany chiffonier, was a tall Mandarin jar, with an open-work lid, from which was exhaled a faint indescribable perfume, as of the bruised sweetness of a hundred flowers; in the opposite corner stood a harp; books richly bound were scattered about the room, which was lighted by a number of wax-candles fixed in lustres over the mantel-piece.

Seated at a little fancy table, was a girl, eighteen or twenty years old, making believe to be busy with her embroidery, but with a mind evidently preoccupied by some more important subject. She had on a short-waisted white dress, after the fashion of those days, from which her long narrow skirts fell away in sedate folds, utterly guiltless of all modern modes of extension of circumference. Her face was beautiful, and she had the air of a person quite conscious of that fact; but underlying this charm of regular features, there was something resolute and proud, that carried the mind back, as by an instinct, to the portrait over the fire-place. She had loosened the thick masses of her chestnut hair, and they now fell low down over her shoulders, confined only by a narrow band of blue velvet. Round her neck was a thin chain of gold, from which hung a locket, which she drew every now and then from the bosom of her dress, and pressed with feverish eagerness to her lips. The same impatience was visible in the way in which she would put a few quick stitches into her embroidery, and then pause, with the needle in her fingers, to listen intently, and so lapse into a dreamy absent mood, out of which she would wake up in a minute or two with a start, and begin to ply her needle again as restlessly as before.

That something for which she was so impatiently waiting came at last—a low, clear, peculiar whistle, heard by me so distinctly through the midst of my dream, and remembered so well when I awoke, that I could afterwards reproduce it exactly. The young lady started to her feet the moment the signal fell on her ear. Her eyes flashed with a newer radiance; her soft lips pouted into a smile; while from her bosom upward a lovely flush spread swiftly, as though Eros had touched her that instant with his torch, and already the celestial flames were coursing through her veins. A brief minute she stood thus, like a lovely statue of Expectancy; then she hurried to one of the windows, and drawing aside the long chintz curtain, she placed a lighted candle close to the window as an answering signal. Then, having withdrawn the candle, and replaced the curtain, so that the window from the outside would seem quite dark again, she left the room, to return presently with a ladder of thin rope, to which were affixed two hooks of steel. Her next proceeding was to lock the three doors which opened into the drawing-room, and having thus secured herself from intrusion, she passed out of sight, behind one of the curtains; and then I heard the faint sound of a window being cautiously lifted, and I knew, as well as though the whole scene was visible to me, that she was fixing the rope-ladder to the balcony by means of his hooks, and that presently her lover would be with her.

And so it fell out. A little while, and the curtain was lifted; the lady came back into the room; and following close upon her steps came a tall stranger, dark and handsome, like a true hero of romance.

"My darling Lenore!"

"My dearest Varrel!"

He took her in his arms, and stooped, and kissed her fondly; and then he drew her to the light, and gazed down into her eyes, in which nothing but love for him was then visible, and then he stooped again and kissed her not less tenderly than before. His roquelaure and hat had fallen to the ground, and he now stood revealed, a man of fashion of the period. As before stated, he was eminently good-looking, with languishing black eyes, and a pensive smile, such as one usually endows Romeo with in

imagination. He wore his hair without parting of any kind, in a profusion of short, black, glossy curls, in which there was no trace of the elaboration of art, and he was clean-shaven, except for a short whisker that terminated half-way down his cheek. He wore a blue coat with gilt buttons, swallow-tailed, short in the waist, and high-collared. His waistcoat was bright yellow as to colour, crossed with a small black stripe; a huge seal depended from the fob of his black small-clothes; and the Hessian boots in which his lower extremities were encased, were polished to a marvellous degree of brilliancy. His cravat, white and unstarched, and tied with a large bow, was made of fine soft muslin; and the frilled bosom of his shirt had been carefully crimped by conscientious feminine fingers. In this frill he wore a small cluster of brilliants; while a large signet-ring, a genuine antique, decorated the first finger of his right hand.

Such was the appearance of Sir Derwent Varrel; and absurd as a costume like his would now seem on the classic flags of Bond Street or St. James's, it yet became the baronet admirably, while he in return lent it a grace and distinction which made it seem the only attire proper for a gentleman.

"Why did you not come last night?" said Lenore. "Hour after hour, I waited for you in vain."

"Twas not my fault, dearest, that I did not; of that rest well assured," answered Varrel. "Business that brooked not delay kept me from your side. I was hugely chagrined."

"That weary, weary business!" sighed Lenore, "Tis ever men's excuse. But now that you are here, I will not be melancholy. Ah, that I could be for ever by your side!"

She nestled her head shyly on his bosom. He stroked her chestnut hair softly with his white hand, and looked down on her with a crafty and sinister smile—such a smile as might light up the face of a fowler when he sees the fluttering innocent which he has been doing his best to entice, begin to turn longingly towards the snare.

"Little simpleton!" he replied, pulling her ear. "You speak as if what you long for were impossible of attainment; whereas one word from you would make it a blissful certainty, and render two loving hearts happy for ever."

"I cannot, Varrel—I cannot say that word. Ah, why does my father dislike you so much?"

"My faith! how should I know? But dislike is not the word, little one. You should ask, why does he hate me so intensely? There are those who gladly calumniate me, and for such he has ever a ready ear; for I am unfortunate enough to have many enemies, and doubtless twice as many faults."

"No, no, I will not hear such language," exclaimed Lenore. "In time my father will relent, and then—"

"Never, girl!" said Varrel fiercely. "Colonel Lomond is not made of melting stuff. His hatred of me he will carry with him to the grave. Never look for change in him.—Sweet one," he added, changing his tone in a moment to one of low-breathing imploring tenderness—"sweet one as I have told thee before, both thy fate and mine are dependent on a single word from those rosy lips. Be mine, in spite of every one! I am rich, and can supply thy every want. We will go abroad; and in some lovely Italian valley, or fair isle of the eastern seas, we will forget our bygone troubles, and watch the happy days glide softly past, while rounding our lives to that perfect love which alone can bring back Eden to this weary earth. O Lenore, dearest and best-loved, flee with me at once and for ever!"

She was standing by the little table, smiling, trembling, and yet with tears half starting from her lids, while he, kneeling on one knee, was covering her hand with passionate kisses.

"O Varrel, you try me almost beyond my strength," she murmured. "But I cannot, I dare not do as you wish. You know not my father as well as I do. He would seek me out and kill me—and you too, and you too, Derwent! wherever we might be. His vengeance would be terrible and pitiless."

"Timid little puss!" he said, half scornfully,

as he rose and encircled her waist with his arm. "Am I not competent to protect thee against the world? Fear nothing. For this house of bondage, for this stagnation of heart and soul, I will give thee life, and light, and love. Thou shalt exchange this—"

"Hush!" exclaimed Lenore suddenly with a smothered shriek. "I hear my father's footfall on the stairs. To the window, Varrel, or you are lost!"

One hasty kiss, and then Varrel dashed aside the chintz curtain, and sprang to the window, only to fall back next moment into the room like a man stricken in the dark. "A thousand devils! I have been betrayed," he exclaimed. "The rope-ladder is gone, and I see the figures of men moving about the lawn. Lenore, you must hide me!"

"Too late—too late!" she sobbed.

They both stood for a moment as though changed to stone, while the footsteps came with a heavy tramp along the echoing corridor, and halted outside the door. The eyes of Lenore and Varrel turned instinctively to the door-handle, and they saw it move as it was tried from the other side, but the door was still locked.

"Open, Lenore—it is I," said a stern voice from without; and the summons was emphasised by a heavy blow on the panel of the door.

"O Varrel, I dare not disobey!" said Lenore in an agonised whisper. "Hide yourself behind the curtains; perhaps he may not know of your presence here; and when he shall have gone to his own room, we must plan your escape. Hush! not a word. Hide! hide!"

"Why this foolery of locked doors?" said he who now came in. "Am I to be barred out of my own rooms by a child like you?"

"The night was dark, and—and I felt so lonely, and—and—"

"And—and you did not expect your father back so soon," he said, mimicking her tone with a sneer. "Is it not so, you white-face jade?"

"Indeed, papa, I"—pleaded the trembling Lenore.

"Don't prevaricate, girl!" he said with a savage stamp of the foot. "Come, now, you will tell me next you have had no visitors—eh?"

"Indeed, no, papa," said Lenore with painful eagerness.

"Been quite alone ever since I left home this afternoon?"

"Quite alone, papa."

A faint dash of colour was coming back into her cheeks by this time; she began, perhaps, to hope that after all this questioning his suspicions would be allayed, and he would go to his own room. If such were the case, his next words must have undeceived her terribly.

"You lie, girl—you lie!" he said, in a voice whose sternness was not without a tremble in it; and as he spoke he touched Varrel's hat contemptuously with his foot, which up to that moment had lain unheeded on the floor. "Oh, that child of mine should ever live to deceive me thus!" His clasped hands and upturned face seemed to appeal to Heaven against the falsehood that had just been told him; but next instant the look of anguish died from off his face, and his features settled back into more than their former harshness as he strode across the floor and flung back the curtain, behind whose folds Varrel was concealed. "Behold the proof!" he cried. "Behold the damning proof! O Lenore!"

For a moment the two men stood eyeing each other in silence. Lenore, with a pitiful cry, fell at her father's feet, but he heeded her no more than if she had been a stone.

In the father of Lenore I beheld the original of the picture over the drawing-room mantel-piece; only he seemed older and more grizzled, and his features more deeply marked with the carving of Time's chisel than in his portrait. He had on a sort of military undress suit, with a pair of heavy riding-boots and spurs, and a short heavy whip in his hand.

"This, Sir Derwent Varrel, is an unexpected honour," said Colonel Lomond, in a tone of unconcealed irony, as he made the baronet a sweeping and ceremonious bow. "Pray—pray let me beg of you to emerge from an obscurity