

measured tread of the lonely sentinel was the only sound that broke the stillness. A slight rustling was heard among the birches, and a man emerged from their covert.

"Can you tell me," said the page, "if the Constable De Clisson has been here to-day, in company with the Duke of Brittany?"

"The Duke has been here," he replied, "in company with several brave looking cavaliers, but I knew not their names. I will conduct you to yonder sentinel, my pretty lad, and he may be able to tell you."

The sentinel ceased his measured walk, as the slight and beautiful figure of the page stood before him.

"I have a message for Sir Oliver De Clisson," said he, "which, if he be in the castle, I must deliver to him without delay."

"Sir Oliver is in the castle and a prisoner," he replied, "and no message can be delivered to him, except through his keeper."

"Where can I find his keeper?" inquired the page.

"I cannot leave my post," replied the sentinel, "but in half an hour my first watch will be past, and I will then show you."

The impatient page was obliged to wait the half hour, and the sentinel then performed his promise. Before the keeper had time to reply to his request, a horseman was seen coming towards the castle at full speed. In a few moments he was beside them.

"Villaret," said he, "I have a letter for you which requires immediate attention. It is from the Duke of Brittany."

"I would rather he would send ten verbal messages than one written one," said Villaret, advancing to a lamp burning near. "I have not had a pen in my hand since I was a boy, and I had as lief undertake to decipher the characters within the charmed circle of the magician, as these fine lines.

It was in vain that Villaret held the letter so as to receive the full benefit of the lamp-light; the contents, to him, remained an impenetrable mystery, and he was obliged to request the aid of the bearer, who being better skilled in chirography, was able to read it.

"It is an order," said he, "for the execution of the Constable De Clisson, to-morrow, at sunrise."

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

"I almost wish that you had been as ignorant of writing as myself."

"Will you obey the order, then?"

"I dare not do otherwise."

During this short colloquy, the page had stood pale and motionless, as a marble statue, but his feelings now, spurning all control, he threw himself at Villaret's feet, and adjured him by all he held dear to suffer De Clisson to make his escape. There was a bewildering sweetness in his broken and passionate tones of entreaty, and a wild, almost unearthly beauty in his pale, uplifted face, which at first seemed to chain the faculties of the keeper, as if he were spell-bound. Rousing himself, with an effort, he raised the kneeling page, and at the same time averting his face as if he feared there was fascination in his glance, he replied--

"No, my good boy, I cannot grant your request—if I should, the doom intended for De Clisson will fall on me."

"Fly—go beyond the sea, where the Duke can have no power over you."

"Better die than leave my country."

The page took a purse, well-filled with gold, and handed it to Villaret. "Open De Clisson's prison-door," said he, "and this, besides wealth more than you ever dreamed of possessing, shall be yours."

"It would take a far less eloquent tongue than this gentle boy's," said the bearer of the letter, "to persuade me from doing so foul a deed. I should much rather live in a foreign land with plenty of gold and a good conscience, than live in my own country with no better companions than poverty and guilt.

Villaret stood musingly. The page felt that he was making a final decision in his own mind, whether to obey the mandate of the Duke, or to suffer the prisoner to escape, and there was a look in his large dark eyes, as they rested upon him with their intense and mournful gaze, that seemed to say that his words would be to him life or death. He spoke at last, mildly but firmly—

"My poor boy," said he, "the Constable De Clisson has been a kind master to you, no doubt, or you would not be so anxious to save him. I would willingly spare your heart a pang, but I dare not disobey the orders of the Duke. If I should, I shall be hunted like a beast of prey. The prisoner must die."

A faint cry burst from the page. He staggered back a few paces, grasped an open door to prevent falling, while a stream of blood gushed from his parted lips.

"Your words have killed him," said Villaret's companion. As he spoke, he gently placed him on the ground, and supporting his head on his knee he loosened the silken doublet which was buttoned closely round his throat.