

him the royal signet, and the letters he had received on the preceding day from the chancellor; and, binding him to secrecy, he hurried to fulfil his appointment with the princess, for whose sake he had exposed himself to so many dangers.

CHAPTER VII.

This clasp of love one bond shall be,
For this is your betrothing day,
And all these noble lords shall stay
To grace it with their company.

Scott.

ELEANORA continued to pace her apartment, in that restless state of mind which is the constant attendant on expectation, wishing to know the worst, yet dreading its approach. Observing the countess looked fatigued, she desired her to retire to rest; then casting an anxious glance on the small dial that was suspended over the chimney piece, she perceived that the minute hand pointed at the hour of four. The rosy steps of approaching day glowed in the summer sky, and the cool breeze wafted into her apartment, the perfume of the jessamine, which spangled with its white starlike flowers the balcony, and shed a soothing influence over her troubled mind. Hastily throwing a scarf over her shoulders, she descended into the garden, and sought the margin of the fountain, where she had promised to meet her lover.

With hasty steps she traversed the dark cypress walk which terminated in a lonely lawn, in the centre of which stood the fountain, surrounded by its marble basin, and supported by the fabled forms of water gods and nymphs of old.

The princess cast a timid glance round her, but the figure she sought was no where to be seen.

"Oh, man! man!" she mentally exclaimed; "how seldom art thou deserving of the deep, the unbought tenderness of woman's love. Can you, Adolphus, forgetful of your appointment, enjoy the sweets of slumber, while my bosom is only awake to bitter and painful feelings?"

She sighed deeply as he finished speaking, and cast a troubled look upon the waters, and then up to the golden heavens.

Nature, not yet roused from her slumbers, lay in tranquil beauty beneath the misty veil of light which hung over the east, and was fast dispelling the grey twilight which precedes the approach of day. The reflection of her own face in the fountain startled her, as she saw therein depicted its haggard and woe-begone expression. It is only when suffering under the deepest affliction, that a lovely woman becomes indifferent to her personal attractions.—ELEANORA, who a moment before had so impatiently anticipated the arrival of her lover, when she perceived the alteration which a few hours of mental

excitement had made in her appearance, felt a momentary regret in beholding him before her, till, observing that his countenance bore the traces of recent grief and strong agitation, she forgot her own discontented repinings in conjectures as to the cause of her lover's disquietude.

"You are a tardy wooer, Sir Count," she said, with more haughtiness in her tone and manner than she meant to assume; "to let the sun rise upon your appointment. Did you expect your suit to be more successfully pleaded in the eye of day than beneath the light of the moon and stars?"

"Spare your reproaches, gentle Eleonora—last night I pleaded for myself, and knew not the treason I was guilty of. Today, I must approach you as my queen, and bow the knee before you as one of your meanest subjects."

He sank at her feet, and would have taken her hand, but she drew proudly back—

"Rise, Count Dahl!" I never will receive your homage on such terms as these—where did you learn distinctions so different to the sentiments you expressed to me last night?"

"When I returned to my own apartment," said the king, "I found a courier waiting with a packet from my sovereign. Need I add that the contents of his letter were a death blow to my presumptuous hopes; and fortune, as if in mockery to my anguish, has instigated the king to elect me his proxy, and cheat my imagination with a bride, that I must woo and wed for another."

"And will you obey the mandate?"

The king hesitated, and the colour mantled even to his brow, as memory recalled the hour when a similar question had been put to him under circumstances so nearly resembling the present, that he more than once anticipated the same unfortunate termination to his suit.

"My duty, as a subject, demands me to yield implicit obedience to my sovereign's orders."

"But what says your own heart, Count Dahl," returned the princess; "which is the strongest master, love or duty?"

"Appeal not to my heart, Eleonora, it is already smarting from a deep immedicable wound. My presumption deserved a punishment, and it has received its just reward."

"Oh, say not so, Adolphus," said the princess in a faltering voice; "do I not owe my life—the preservation of my honour, to your courage? On whom can I better bestow my person and hand, than on him who rescued me both from disgrace and misery. I place my destiny in your hands, and feel confident that you will never betray the sacred trust."

As the princess sank on his bosom—as his arms encircled all that was dear to him at that moment on earth; and he imprinted the first passionate kiss of love on the struggling lips of the loveliest of her