

but Beatrice, seizing her by the hand, said softly—

"Do not move from this—I do not wish the door opened to any one."

"Lauretta! Lauretta!" the voice of Pelagrus was now heard calling without; "a cavalier has just arrived, who brings news from my lord Ottorino, and wishes to be admitted to thy mistress."

"Tomorrow," answered Lauretta, in obedience to a sign from her mistress; "let him return tomorrow; she cannot receive him at present."

"He must speak to her immediately," persisted the castellan; "he hath good news for her. Open, foolish wench! open, I say, or——"

A tempest of blows on the door drowned the rest of his speech; but all was in vain. The companions in misfortune, looked in each other's arms, answered not a word, and the door, fastened by a massive bolt, resisted all efforts to open it. After some time the noise ceased, and the damsels were just recovering from their fright, when they were alarmed by a strong current of air, which, suddenly rushing in behind, almost extinguished their feeble lamp. Both turned round immediately, and saw that a side panel had been noiselessly removed, and that from the dark entrance beyond, two men were now stepping through it into the apartment.

Lauretta, throwing herself back on the couch, and covering her face with her hands, uttered a piercing shriek; but Beatrice, rising proudly to her feet, addressed herself to Pelagrus, whom, as well as Lodrisio, she recognised, with a voice and action full of calm firmness and severe majesty.

"Castellan!" she said; "methinks thou hast mistaken thy way. This is the apartment of her whom thou wast wont to call the spouse of thy lord."

The indignation experienced by Beatrice, on the first discovery of this offensive and treacherous proceeding, had overcome even her terror. She felt herself animated with her former spirit, and nerved with new strength; her cheeks were suffused with a bright crimson, her eyes shone with a lustre now unusual to them; her whole countenance and attitude displayed a modest boldness and maidenly self-possession. The intruders were struck with surprise at this reception, and with a reverence, transient certainly, but for the moment irresistible. The fiendish eyes of Pelagrus sunk abashed before the steady gaze of the young girl, and Lodrisio himself appeared quite disconcerted: the cold and condescending smile in which he had dressed his countenance, melted away; the half-formed words of insulting familiarity, died upon his lips; and he

inclined his head with a humility which was for the moment sincere.

"Pardon me, *Madonna!*—I knew not——," he stammered out, and was about to retire precipitately; but, recovering something of his natural boldness, he added—"I thought that a message from Ottorino would be a sufficient passport——"

"Cavalier!" interrupted Beatrice, unable longer to conceal the terror she felt in the presence of this implacable enemy of her husband; "do not insult the misery of an innocent woman. I tremble," she added, noticing the gleam of satisfaction that lighted his countenance, as an involuntary tremor shook his frame; "I tremble to find myself in your power, as I fear he also too certainly is, whom you have just mentioned, and whose name on your lips sounds to me only as an insult. I am here, a weak, defenceless woman, drawn by heartless treachery, to this unknown corner, far from those who would protect me, and without other witness of the injustice done me, than this poor fellow sufferer," (pointing to Lauretta, who at these words raised her head a little reassured, hoping that the hearts of their persecutors would surely be touched)—"I am in your hands, like a trapped deer, whom you may slay at your pleasure; but there is a Sovereign Lord above us—a Lord before whom the most secret corner of the earth lies full-exposed—a Lord before whom the mightiest strength of man is the weakness of an infant—a Lord who marks the tears of the afflicted, and who will not fail to question the oppressor."

Lodrisio, incensed at finding himself unmasked and reproved by a girl, and ashamed of having shown before Pelagrus, even that transient sense of timidity and respect, had become altogether himself again; and, assuming his former air of insolent familiarity,

"Harkye! my little paragon of wisdom," he said; "fancy not that these airs become a pretty girl like thee! Eye on it! how they wrinkle thy fair brow! Off with them! off with them!"

So saying, he made a few steps forward; but the alarmed girl, crying "Stand off! approach no nearer!" rushed to the side door, and threw it hastily open.

"Come, little madcap!" said Lodrisio, as she paused in the doorway, "why this alarm?—Think'st thou I would eat thee! I will return to my former place if thou wiltest. See! art thou content now? *Diavolo!* I only wish to speak with thee for thy good——"

"For my good?" repeated Beatrice. "Be gone—leave this apartment—that is the only good thou canst do me!"