

'My lord's pleasure,' answered the countess; 'and I am bound to seek no other motive.'

'His pleasure it is indeed,' said Varney, 'and his pleasure arises out of a love worthy of the object which inspires it. But he who possesses a treasure, and who values it, is oft anxious, in proportion to the value he puts upon it, to secure it from the depredations of others.'

'What needs all this talk, Master Varney?' said the lady, in reply; 'you would have me believe that my noble lord is jealous—Suppose it true, I know a cure for jealousy.'

'Indeed, madam!' said Varney.

'It is,' replied the lady, 'to speak the truth to my lord at all times; to hold up my mind and my thoughts before him as pure as that polished mirror; so that when he looks into my heart, he shall only see his own features reflected there.'

'I am mute, madam,' answered Varney; 'and as I have no reason to grieve for Tressilian, who would have my heart's blood were he able, I shall reconcile myself easily to what may befall the gentleman, in consequence of your frank disclosure of his having presumed to intrude upon your solitude.—You, who know my lord so much better than I, will judge if he be likely to bear the insult unavenged.'

'Nay, if I could think myself the cause of Tressilian's ruin,' said the countess, 'I who have already occasioned him so much distress, I might be brought to be silent.—And yet what will it avail, since he was seen by Foster, and I think by some one else?—No, no, Varney, urge it no more. I will tell the whole matter to my lord; and with such pleading for Tressilian's folly, as shall dispose my lord's generous heart rather to serve than to punish him.'

'Your judgment, madam,' said Varney, 'is far superior to mine, especially as you may, if you will, prove the ice before you step on it, by mentioning Tressilian's name to my lord, and observing how he endures it. For Foster and his attendant, they know not Tressilian by sight, and I can easily give them some reasonable excuse for the appearance of an unknown stranger.'

The lady paused for an instant, and then replied, 'If, Varney, it be indeed true that Foster knows not as yet that the man he saw was Tressilian, I own I were unwilling he should learn what nowise concerns him. He bears himself already with austerity enough, and I wish him not to be judge or privy-councillor in my affairs.'

'Tush,' said Varney; 'what has the surly groom to do with your ladyship's concerns?—No more, surely, than the ban-dog which watches his court-yard. If he is in angust distasteful to your ladyship, I have interest enough to have him exchanged for a seneschal that shall be more agreeable to you.'

'Master Varney,' said the countess, 'let us drop this theme—when I complain of the attendants whom my lord has placed around me, it must be to my lord himself.—Hark! I hear the trampling of horse—He comes! he comes!' she exclaimed, jumping up in ecstasy.

'I cannot think it is he,' said Varney; 'or that you can hear the tread of his horse through the closely-mantled casements.'

'Stop me not, Varney—my ears are keener than thine—it is he!'

'But, madam!—but, madam!' exclaimed Varney anxiously, and still placing himself in her way.—'I trust that what I have spoken in humble duty and service will not be turned to my ruin?—I hope that my faithful advice will not be betrayed to my prejudice?—I implore that.'

'Content thee, man—content thee!' said the countess, 'and quit my skirt—you are too bold to detain me—Content thyself, I think not of thee.'

At this moment the folding doors flew wide open, and a man of majestic mien, muffled in the folds of a long dark riding-cloak, entered the apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

—This is he
Who rides on the court gale; controls its tides;
Knows all their secret shoals and fatal eddies;
Whose frown abases, and whose smile exalts;
He shines like any rainbow—and, perchance,
His colours are as transient.

OLD PLAY.

THERE was some little displeasure and confusion on the countess's brow, owing to her struggle with Varney's pertinacity; but it was exchanged for an expression of the purest joy and affection, as she threw herself into the arms of the noble stranger who entered, and, clasping him to her bosom, exclaimed, 'At length—at length thou art come!'

Varney discreetly withdrew as his lord entered, and Janet was about to do the same, when her mistress signed to her to remain. She took her place at the farther end of the apartment, and continued standing, as if ready for attendance.

Meanwhile the earl, for he was of no inferior rank, returned his lady's caress with the most affectionate ardour, but affected to resist when she strove to take his cloak from him.

'Nay,' she said, 'but I will unmantle you—I must see if you have kept your word to me, and come as the great earl men call thee, and not as heretofore like a private cavalier.'

'Thou art like the rest of the world, Amy,' said the earl, suffering her to prevail in the playful contest; 'the jewels, and feathers, and silk are more to them than the man whom they adorn—many a poor blade looks gay in a velvet seaboard.'

'But so cannot men say of thee, thou noble Earl,' said his lady, as the cloak dropped on the floor, and showed him dressed as princes when they ride abroad; 'thou art the good and well-tried steel, whose duly worth deserves, yet disdains, its outward ornaments. Do not think Amy can love thee better in this glorious garb than she did when she gave her heart to him who wore the russet-brown cloak in the woods of Devon.'

'And thou too,' said the earl, as gracefully and majestically he led his beautiful countess towards the chair of state which was prepared for them both.—'thou too, my love, hast donned a dress which becomes thy rank, though it cannot