

THE TREACHEROUS DUKE.

"Did not thy blood run cold when his true hand
Grasped thine ?

Is there no hope,
No wild escape, no glimmering ray of light ?"
Mrs. Norton.

It was a bright morning in June, and the sunbeams, broken by the mossy foliage of a cluster of oaks, shone through the richly stained glass of a gothic window, and played with an ever shifting radiance over the floor of an apartment exhibiting the marks of Moorish splendor and taste. The ceiling, covered with gold and azure wrought in arabesque displayed a delicacy and carefulness of finish unsurpassed in more modern times, and the blue silk that draped the walls—so successful had been the cunning hand of the artist—seemed glowing with living flowers. On a slab of snowy marble were arranged a number of vases of light and elegant workmanship filled with perfume, which shone through the clear porcelain like melted rubies, and diffused a fragrance through the room, rendered more agreeable by being blended with the odour of orange trees, myrtles and various kinds of flowers, wafted by the morning breeze through an open door.—This door was the only opening into a spacious court, in the centre of which was a jet of the purest water, which ascending nearly to the roof of the building, fell in a sparkling shower into an alabaster basin and imparted a most grateful and refreshing coolness. The airy elegance of the apartment and adjoining court, which might almost have been thought to belong to some enchanted palace, with the exception of the gothic window with its heavy but richly carved frame, suggested no idea of the gloomy, castellated structure to which they belonged.

On one of the cushions by which the whole of the interior of the apartment was encircled, and which were embroidered in the same rich and elaborate style as the drapery ornamenting the walls, sat a young and very lovely female. Over a garment of light coloured silk closely fitted to her form, she wore a robe of so dark and rich a crimson, that the shadows that rested in the folds deepened almost to a purple. It was gathered at the waist by a cincture of the purest gold, and the edges of the robe were beautifully embroidered with thread wrought from the same precious metal. Floating back from a plume of snowy feathers, which interspersed with small diamonds, seemed sparkling with dew-drops, she wore a mantilla of such

exceeding lightness, that at a short distance it appeared like nothing more than a silvery mist, while the minute sprigs of gold which thickly gemmed it, with every slight movement or fresh breath of air, had the appearance of glittering insects revelling over the soft dark ringlets which fell in glossy luxuriance to the cushions where she reclined. The close sleeves of her under dress left her arms bare below the elbow, which were fully revealed by the wide open sleeves of her robe, beneath the skirts of which peeped the fairy slippers which covered her feet, and which were half buried amid the yielding softness of a small, superb foot-cloth. From the neck of a guitar, which rested by her right side, a broad ribbon or sash, lightly fringed with gold, crossed her left shoulder, but her fingers rested idly on its strings, and she would at that moment willingly have consigned the instrument to eternal silence, could she have heard the tones of a well-beloved voice floating through the solitude of her magnificent apartment. But he was, so she believed, far away, and as the sweet and thrilling memories associated with his idea faded gradually from her thoughts, a langour came over her spirits which approached almost to slumber, as she listened to the grateful and soothing fall of the *jet d'eau* into the alabaster basin, and the low whisperings of the wind as it dallied with the leaves of the orange-trees and the myrtles.

The summer twilight was drawing to a close, when a cavalier mounted on a noble steed richly caparisoned, was seen approaching the castle.

"Who can it be ?" said a soldier to his companion, as they stood together on the battlement.

"I should not wonder if it were the Constable de Clission, himself," was the reply.

"But the Lady Amira does not except him so soon as this."

"It must be he, nevertheless, for we can see very well through the gloom, that the steed is a grey one, and to my mind the bearing of the rider is much like Sir Oliver's."

"It will be well to let the Lady Amira know then," and the soldier went to seek some one by whom to send the message.

Amira was now seen moving about her apartment with the grace and lightness of a fairy, and if her countenance had been beautiful when in repose, it was doubly so now, radiant as it was with joyful anticipation. She had ordered her attendant to bring candles, and she was alone when the door opened and the stately cavalier who had just arrived, with his plumed