

"My dear Monica, you are too severe upon my son," said Dame Fenwick, who marked the change which passed rapidly over Walter's countenance. "He has your father's sanction in thus addressing you."

"Ah!" returned Monica, "I see how it is: you are all conspiring against my liberty, but I mean to remain free. My father shall not choose a husband for me, as he would choose a horse. In a matter which so nearly concerns my happiness, I mean to judge for myself."

"Monica, you are not worthy of the love of such a gallant gentleman," said Barbara, blushing; "a few years hence, and you will be sorry for your neglect."

"That is as much as to say: 'Good Mistress Monica, have compassion upon Master Walter, or thou wilt lose thy chance of matrimony, and die a virgin.' Gratitude, cousin! is there no other gallant in the county of Leicestershire, worthy of a maiden's favor, but the inconstant gentleman now present. It is true, I am a novice in the art of love; but I will not take for my master, one who has repeated the same stale compliments to a dozen damsels. The heart that has wooed so often, is in no danger of breaking for love."

"Say that you prefer another, Monica, and I will abandon the pursuit," said Fenwick, turning upon her the bright blue eyes that had won for their owner, golden opinions from the first and fairest in the land.

"I cannot utter a falsehood, even to free myself from your importunity, Master Walter. You are as dear to me as any other bachelor; and so little do I care for your favour, that it would not deprive me of an hour's sleep if we never met again."

"Cruel girl! how you love to torment me. But I gather hope from your frank confession. The heart that is not enthralled by another, in time may learn to love me."

"Nay! don't flatter yourself, but seek out another sweetheart as soon as you can. I will be her bride's-maid, and dance at the wedding."

She said this so joyously, and looked so bewitchingly handsome, that Walter interpreted her words to suit his own wishes; and pouring out a cup of canary, he drank happiness to his bride, and nodded to Monica.

"You think I am only in jest, Master Walter," she replied; "but time will shew."

"Hush! time! give me the present, which is all that legitimately belongs to man."

Then taking up Monica's lute, and running his hand over the strings, he sang in a clear, melodious voice:

"Time ever was a foe to man,
He brings grey hairs and sad regrets;
I'll cheat the tyrant while I can,
And court the sun before he sets.
While the morning light,
And the summer flowers,
Around my path in glory shine,
I'll leave dull care to envious night,
And woo young love in rosy bowers,
Defy stern fate, and laugh at time!"

CHAPTER V.

A broad well-trodden footpath led from the park of Conway Place through the park to the town. The foot passenger did not immediately gain the high road by this track, but found himself in a deep green lane, which formed a dense shade in the hottest days of summer weather. There the wild rose and the eglantine flung their fantastic wreaths from spray to spray, filling the air with their delicious odours; and the black-bird tuned his shrill pipe, and whistled sweetly the live long day. A picturesque old stile, overhung by an immense weeping willow, was reflected in the brook, which, issuing from a thick grove of willows, crossed the lane and entered the park, to form the pretty fairy lake already described. A bridge of planks, upon which you stepped from the stile, was the connecting link between the park and the rare natural avenue of sweets that led to the main road. About fifty yards from the stile, a neat cottage, surrounded by its fragrant hedge of hawthorn, and a pretty garden of herbs trimly kept, attracted attention and charmed the eye. This was owned by Roger Snell, the basket-maker—a man who was well to do in the world for his station, and made an excellent living by his business, as he supplied most of the shops in Leicester with his wares. Snell's wife had been dead for several years, and his family, consisting of five children, the eldest of whom was a girl of eighteen, all lent their assistance in the basket-making. Even the youngest, two boys of six and seven years of age, were employed in sorting and peeling the willows for their father's work.

Now it happened that these two urchins thought fit to play truant, and were busy, not in the sallow grounds, but chasing a flock of geese in a neighbouring field, which were shrieking and hissing with all their might at their juvenile tormentors.

"Brats! monkeys! troublesome pests! that you are. Come home to your work instantly, or I will fetch you home with a long stick!" screamed a sharp female voice, and Dorothy Snell darted across the lane with a long peeled wand in her hand to put her threat into execution.

Never did sudden anger mar a prettier face than