

he was to be the founder of a new school of Italian literature, and she was to place upon his brow the laurel chaplet which would be decreed him by the general voice.

But now the air became oppressive; the horizon gathered clouds, first beautiful and bright, and varying in color like the dying dolphin, then growing deeper and darker, until the whole heavens were covered with a sable pall. The party on horseback became alarmed, the servants were sent forward to find a carriage or safe shelter for the Lady Beatrice, who, though terrified, kept her jennet to its utmost speed, and clung almost breathless to the saddle. But the storm burst upon them; the heavens were rent with the forked lightning; and the thunder, reverberating from the distant hills, was terrific, while the horses dashed on, maddened by the roar of the elements. Beatrice's strength was nearly exhausted when they were met by their own carriage, which her mother, knowing they were to return, had sent to meet them. The half-fainting girl was lifted into it, and she soon arrived at home, well nigh dead with fatigue and agitation, and shivering with cold.

Beatrice's angelic spirit had been enclosed, as is often the case, in too frail a casket; and those who looked upon her, often prophesied that she was a flower destined in its bud for heaven; meet offering for that holy shrine! It was soon evident to all about her that disease had laid his withering hand upon her. The unnatural excitement of her spirits ended in delirium. A messenger was despatched to Florence for an eminent physician, and to Duranti, informing him of her illness.

The physician arrived the same night, and his sad looks as he surveyed the fair girl indicated his fears; but there was hope that the youth of the patient would enable her to triumph over the malady. The servant brought back the letter for Duranti; he was not in Florence, having been suddenly summoned to Pisa by the illness of an uncle, to whom he was much attached. Portonari hesitated whether to send for him thither, but at length decided that it might prove unnecessary thus to alarm him.

For several days Beatrice continued delirious, and in her wanderings she fancied Dante by her side. She talked to him ever of love and poetry, exhorting him to immortalize himself by some great work. Again she would reproach him for not being by her, and in such agonizing tones, that her father despatched a messenger to bring him to his villa without delay. But the days of his daughter were numbered. Her delirium ceased, but every hour wasted her little strength.

Very beautiful it was, and yet most sad to see that fair girl sinking so gently to her last sleep! She asked once for her lover, and being told a messenger had been sent for him, she did not again ask for him, though her countenance brightened, and her glance was eager and anxious at the least sound without. She felt the sands of life were wasting swiftly, and her only aim seemed to be to administer comfort to her parents, to reconcile them to her irreparable loss.

Towards evening of the sixth day of her illness, she begged to be placed upon a couch near the window, and to have the curtain undrawn, that she might once again see the beautiful sun, which was never more to gild those loved scenes for her eyes. She gazed upon it long and earnestly; and as she lay with the last rays of the sinking luminary upon her features, she looked like the angel she was so soon to become. All earthly taint seemed gone, when suddenly a painful shade crossed her face, and she murmured:

"Mother in Heaven! holy and pure! for thy blessed Son's sake! bless him, bless him!" Then turning to her weeping parents, she said: "Will you be father and mother to him—to my beloved? Would that I could once more see him—only to bless him! But it may not be! Tell him to live for Beatrice. She will watch over him; though her mortal body has left him for ever, her soul will still be in communion with his; she will be his guardian, his friend. And now your blessing, my beloved parents! Forgive me if I have ever been undutiful. The cold grasp of death is upon me..... I must leave you!..... I must be gone!..... Farewell!".....

She closed her glazing eyes, her lips moved as if in prayer; one slight shudder passed over her frame, and that angelic spirit had left its beautiful tenement for its native home.

The passionate grief of the mother, and the agony of the father, it were impossible to describe. Life had lost for them its charm; and they longed to lay themselves beside the cold insensate marble, which was all that was left them of their heart's best treasure. But even in this most trying hour, they thought of Duranti Alghieri, his long attachment, and the heart-rending surprise which awaited him. They dreaded his arrival, which they knew would not long be delayed. That night he came! His impatient summons at the door was soon answered; and breathless with agitation, he demanded of the trembling servant:

"How is the Lady Beatrice?"

Before he could be answered, Count Portonari met him in the hall. With a strong effort, the father composed himself, and said: