

he would never sanction their union until he had acquired sufficient wealth to maintain her in a style she had been accustomed to from her childhood. From that hour the proud soul of Dayton swelled with ambition. Eager to seek his fortune in the wars, where he hoped to win a name more congenial to the lofty pride of Burton, he obtained a commission in the army, which severed for years the dearest tie that bound him to his native land.

Since his departure from the village, the visits of Col. Morton, who had long entertained an unrequited passion for Alice, were renewed with a frequency of forced attention very annoying to her feelings. Being an intimate friend of her father's, wealthy and of high standing, his claim to respect caused her to repress the repugnance she felt to his pretensions. Thus emboldened, by a misconceived success, and to further his own suit, (having previously intercepted her lover's letters,) he endeavored to prove him dead or inconstant. But failing in his base attempt to weaken her faith in his constancy, and despairing of ever realizing his hopes by gentle means, he resorted to the powerful influence of his wealth. Agreeably to the solicitation of her father, he loaned him a large amount of money in paper, subject to demand, which Mr. Burton intended to liquidate on the payment of a heavy note due him, in a few days; but the maker failing in business, dishonored his note, which placed its holder, Mr. Burton, completely in the power of Col. Morton.

A period of more than three years had now elapsed since the departure of Arthur Dayton; during which time not a line had been received by Alice that he ever lived. Yet her trusting heart had encouraged the hope that he survived, and would return at the expiration of his appointed time; but now that the time had expired by several months, hope gave way to despair; and in the deepest anguish of her soul she mourned him as among the slain. Since her father's late embarrassment, the power of Col. Morton, over her destiny began to assume a serious aspect. He threatened her father with instant imprisonment for debt, unless he sanctioned with her consent their immediate union. To save her only remaining parent, at the sacrifice of her own happiness, she yielded; and he was forever released from his obligation by signing with her the marriage contract. The day was appointed—the fatal day that was to consummate her misery. Her heart melted at the idea of such an unhallowed union; yet it was to save an affectionate father from the gloomy walls of a prison, which to his proud soul was even worse than death.

'Yes,' she mentally exclaimed, 'I will save him—at the sacred altar I will cancel mine obligation to his heartless persecutor,—and then the grave shall be my bridal couch' in the bosom of the cold earth, in virgin purity. I will seek that repose that hath been denied me on its surface. And my dear Arthur,—oh! no! no! no! It must not be,—I would be for ever lost to heaven and to him. Alas! what have I rashly meditated—oh! my God! forgive me, bear with me,—'twas my momentary flight of reason that left my speech unguarded,—'twas madness,—'twas despair.'

It was a beautiful morning, and the sun like bars of gold, lay on the verdant hills and plains afar, rosy and beautiful. The morning hymn of the birds went upward, rejoicing with the breeze. The tree tops stirred on the lifting winds and the green leaves whispered to themselves in dalliance sweet. The air was fragrant with the breath of blossoms, and musical with the flow of rippled waters, for summer was the time and sweet the hour. The bell of the village church, in slow and measured tones, announced the arrival of the wedding suite. Slowly they moved along the broad aisle, and approaching the sacred altar where the priest was in waiting, arranged themselves for the solemn ceremony. The bell had ceased tolling, and a breathless silence reigned

within the holy sanctuary, save when broken by the audible tones of the priest administering the bonds of matrimony. The nuptials being concluded, the company dispersed and sought their carriages, and while the Colonel was in the act of entering his own, a gentle tap on his arm arrested his attention, followed by a respectful bow from a stranger who politely tendered him a note. Throwing himself beside his bride, and hastily breaking the seal he read as follows:

VILLAGE HOTEL, 3 o'clock, A. M.

To COLONEL MORTON.—Sir,—I am happy to announce to you my arrival here this morning; and having business of momentous interest to submit to your consideration, as a gentleman of military discipline, honor, and talent I hope you will favor me with an immediate interview.

Yours in haste,

MAJOR GEN. MELVILLE.

'And this is indeed, news,' exclaimed the Colonel, carefully refolding the note, for it was flattering to his vanity, in being consulted by so famed and renowned a General as Melville, the brave the intrepid warrior, whose name was familiar to every ear; and whose deeds, as his virtues, were dear to every heart. Arrived at the dwelling house of his father-in-law, the Colonel and his bride received the usual congratulations of numerous friends and acquaintances, and after a suitable time had elapsed, he excused himself an hour's absence, pleading business of vital interest; and hastily entering his carriage, he soon reached the hotel of the illustrious stranger. A servant in reply to his inquiry for the General, politely conducted him to a splendid apartment, and ere the door had firmly closed upon him, another suddenly opened; but judge of his astonishment, his dismay, on finding himself in the presence of Arthur Dayton, in the full uniform of Major General of the army. The Colonel being married in military costume, was armed, and grasping his sword, he demanded an explanation, for what he deemed an outrageous deception fabricated for the purpose of taking his life.

'By what authority,' he exclaimed, dare you assume the honored title of General Melville?

'The honored title of General,' replied Dayton, with a look of withering contempt, 'I have won by noble and daring deeds in battle; such,' he continued in a sarcastic tone, 'as never made you a Colonel; and, the name of Melville was that of a deceased uncle, which conformably to his will, I have legally inherited with an immense estate. Thus, you see, Colonel Morton, there has been no deception practised in seeking this interview, which must prove fatal to one, and perchance to both of us. Nay, do not start—the doors are secured—we must fight, for nothing less than blood can wipe away the vengeance I have sworn. You have robbed me of that which was dearer to me than life—my own devoted Alice, yet do not flatter yourself that a victory over my happiness is so easily achieved. Behold these scars! they were gained in battle—and I bear no malice to the hand that dealt them, but you, like an assassin, in the dark, have inflicted upon my heart a wound that cannot heal until I have made thy bride a virgin widow. I am not a stranger to your crimes, for I have been fully apprised of your dastardly acts.'

'Dastard! By heavens!'

'Nay, nay, Colonel put up your sword, and reserve your valor till a more fitting occasion; 'twere a pity to dim its lustre for the first time, by an act of violence, for I pledge my honor you shall have ample cause to wield it ere long in self-defence.'

'Then be it now,' he replied 'for thy insulting taunts,—and, violently thrusting his sword at the General, who was unprepared for so dishonorable an attack, wounded him severely in the left arm, which aroused the deadly ire of his soul that burst from his lips.

'Assassin, thy blood be upon thy own head! and grasping his trusty sword, it leaped flashing from its scabbard, like lightning from the heavens, and furious was the conflict; the clashing of steel, and the hurried tread of feet, aroused the

inmates of the hotel, who burst the door just as the Colonel was staggering with his death wound. Fortunately, they witnessed his dying confession, which forever released the brave Melville from worldly restraints.

Summoning his servant, the General ordered his carriage, and hurriedly left the apartment, lest they, too, should recognize in him the person of Arthur Dayton. Great was the wonder and excitement created in the quiet village by this fatal affair. The dying words of Colonel Morton reflected no light on the mystery, further than to exonerate the General, as acting on the defensive. Various were the conjectures in circulation, and while some supposed the dispute of a military nature, others shook their heads, and more rightly deemed it—to use their own language—'an old grudge of long standing.'

Many were the eyes strained to catch a glimpse of the famous Melville, who, by this time, was sliding from the village in his splendid equipage at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles an hour. But to return to Alice. What a favorable change a few hours had wrought in her condition,—and how apparently the reverse of feeling was manifested. The smiles and congratulations of friends were changed to condolence and sympathy, and, although naturally shocked herself at the sudden catastrophe, yet, nevertheless, like the captive unfettered and restored to freedom, her heart beat lighter, and her features though pale and pensive, were more calm and collected. But alas! with her those feelings were transitory as an evanescent gleam of sunlight over a clouded heart; for her own were borne on the wings of imagination to the supposed grave of her beloved Arthur. And though she sighed over her dashed hopes, still there existed a being her bosom fondly cherished—and that was her father—to whom she now devotedly clung; undefiled in purity; as the pale and drooping lily clings to its parent stem.

Several days had elapsed since the mysterious occurrence, as related at the hotel, when one evening the family of Mr. Burton were aroused by the hasty ringing of the hall bell. The servant announced that a stranger lately arrived from the wars, as the bearer of an important message, desired an interview with Mr. Burton and his daughter.

'Admit him instantly,' was the prompt reply of Mr. Burton, as he arose from his chair, and the last words had scarcely died upon his lips, when a tall commanding figure, enveloped in a military cloak, entered the apartment. His features were concealed by a mask, not unusual in the days to which our story refers. Declining the proffered seat, he introduced himself as the friend of Arthur Dayton.

'Arthur Dayton!' repeated Alice and her father with one accord,—and does he live? she eagerly continued.

'He does,' replied the stranger, turning to Alice, who sat—

"Pale and motionless, with lips apart  
Like ancient sculpture of Italian art"

'And he bade me ask from thine own lips if thou had ceased to love him, for reports reached his ear—though his many letters have been unanswered, yet, lady, his soul is so devoted to thee, he dare not doubt thy constancy; and, through me, he would learn his destiny.'

'Alas!' she sighed, and a tear as pure as the dew of heaven, rolled down her cheek—'since thou art indeed his friend, oh! tell him that mine eyes never gazed upon a single line that was breathed by him—tell him that my heart is unaltered—that it beats for him alone, as in the joyous time when sorrow was a stranger to my bosom; oh! say that I love him yet—that his image is blended in my dreams and in my prayers—that when I cease to think of him, the spirit that nourished my devotion will have departed for ever.' The stranger was evidently touched, for a deep sigh from his bosom, followed the close of her declaration.

'Lady,' he replied folding his arms with apparent composure, 'I would bid thee hope for brighter days—perchance the torture of thy love