

father fostered the hand he should have crushed, I, too, will act as becomes a drivelling fool."

"Name her not!" I answered, while an unnatural calmness pervaded my whole frame; "and this from thee. Whose was the arm that snatched her from the grave, when thou, poor boy, wert wallowing in mire; thrown from the saddle of an ambling nag? Name her not—"

"Peace, bastard, peace!" again he vociferated, while the tempest of passion raged within him, and his willing sword had already left its scabbard, and was aimed at my breast. I snatched it from him, as if it had been a bauble in an infant's hand, and striking him with its hilt, returned it, saying:

"It becomes not such as thee to draw their weapons upon bearded men. Yet stay, proud boy, tomorrow's sun will shine upon contending host—if thou wilt follow where I shall lead, and fight with me in the battle's front, and thine eye blenchest not before the flashing of a thousand swords, should we escape unscathed, I may not then deny thee an honourable conflict. Till then, there are none here who will deem me coward, when I say, let there be peace between us."

"Be it so," he said, and he became calm while I spoke, "'tis better thus, that my sword should first be fleshed upon my country's foes, it will be more worthy to decide my private quarrel."

There was no voice of dissent, and in a brief space the whole scene was forgotten by all, save the boy baron and him he had so grossly wronged.

Night had far advanced before we sought our pillows, and when I did, it was not to sleep—my thoughts were too busy with the day's events; and yet, I enquired, "What, indeed, did it concern me, who was the wooer of the daughter of Loridale! Why was it that to hear she had followed my expressed wish, should rob my life of its only light? Was it that hope had indeed been playing with so wild a chimera—building anticipations I dared not own to my heart's most secret questioning. I knew not. Former feelings were forgotten, and I longed to look upon the face of the only being who had ever awakened a human sympathy in my breast, and I resolved that if the night of the coming day saw me a living man, I should seek again the home of the Baron, and see Clara before she became a wife.

Day dawned, and the bugle echoed from rank to rank, calling the soldier to his task of blood. The morning sun shone gloriously on glittering helm and spear—horses pawed the earth, and their riders patted their curving necks, with a fondness their common danger awoke. Yet all seemed happy—with unheated blood, men thought of deadly strife, and mourned it not. Surely, they were all mad! Mad, when they smiled and spoke joyously of the beautiful morn, whose day was destined to go down in blood.

Once and once only, I met the young lord of Loridale, as we rode along the line, seeing that all were properly arranged, and a dark shade crossed his brow as he recognised me. We spoke no word; but in his stern countenance I read that he had formed a daring purpose.

The armies met, and shrunk back to meet again, heaving like the billows on the storm-tost sea, one moment they swerved this way—another that—but the post I sought was even in the foremost rank, and the young Baron of Loridale shrunk not from my side.—He seemed endowed with a new strength, and his slight form dilated into giant proportions. Wherever my dark plume waved, there his was also. Thousands fell beside us, and yet neither had received a wound. Once, indeed, a sabre descending on his helm was turned aside by my reeking blade, and the assailant slept among the trodden dead. The boy heeded it not! now here, now there, he emulated my own daring recklessness, and pierced the foemen's ranks as if it were a pleasure for him to sport with life. At length the foe recoiled. The contest became less doubtful; their ranks were broken, and their cohorts scattered, until victory, as was her wont, nestled in the folds of our banner.

The rout became a massacre. Flying thousands were hewed down without a thought of mercy. The blood of the men was heated, and nothing could withstand their fury. Gods! the shrieks of dying myriads yet ring in mine ear. The carnage was so dreadful, that even I felt my heart shrinking and sad while my falchion struck down all who made a last faint effort at resistance. Beside me still, in the front of the pursuit, as in the battle, the young Lord of Loridale tracked his course in death.

A friendly forest had formed a shade for the remaining few of the enemy who were able to drag themselves from the stricken field. And now, amongst the dead, they who had side by side, fought against the enemy of the common country, with blades yet reeking from the conflict dire, remembered the more pitiless contest yet to begin. Private hatred mingling with admiration of each other's prowess, bade them turn to each other. At that moment I had less of bitterness in my heart than he. Yes, I could have forgiven the barbed insult he had flung at my undefended and all humiliating feeling, and even when he claimed my promise, and his sword crossed mine, I said.

"My lord," I seek not to destroy thy life, nor curtail the fame that thou at least, may win—nor would I rob thee of the happiness thou mayest enjoy. The world smiles on thee—hazard not its brightness, nor put it in the balance against one for whom the world cares not, and who scorns the world. None could now impute other than generosity to either, should we decline the combat. The deeds this day achieved will form a shield around thy name.