

actions? How dare you be so insolent?" he said, in a voice that made her blood run cold...

"And how dare you play false to me, and to the lady who little guesses you cannot carry out your implied courting of her favor?" she replied, calmly.

"It matters little to you, since you can never expect anything more than you have now from me!" he replied, scotchingly.

"Oh, go, and do your worst, then!" he exclaimed, in an ungovernable burst of passion.

"Wretch! villain!" burst from her parched lips. "You dare not! You know that I am your wedded wife, sworn solemnly before the altar!"

CHAPTER III.

It was a strange contrast—so Althea thought—from the bitter Christmas morning on which she had eloped from her father's house...

She had returned to her deserted birthplace with a chill sickness that paralyzed the blood in her veins...

But it was still early—too early to risk the observation of many wayfarers; and Althea could reasonably hope to reach her home unobserved...

What did she expect? To be received and pardoned, and reinstated in her former enviable lot?

Not but to implore—to wreat, as it were, a pardon from her father's lips...

A disobedient daughter, a disowned wife, could hope for no better or happier fate. She had but death to hope for as the shelter and excuse for her folly and her sin...

meant her no good, they say, last Christmas as ever was; and poor young Mr. Rawdon, who was to have married her, followed him as chief mourner to the grave.

Althea waited to hear no more. She could not speak. She hardly knew that she breathed.

She knew the spot. It was where her mother was buried that he would be laid; and she crawled, rather than walked thither, in a vague hope that it would be for the last time.

She dragged on her course. She seemed to see the name on the gravestone as if written in characters of fire, and unable to endure the sight, she sank crouching on the damp ground.

"Miss Althea!—Miss Althea, did you call? Is anything the matter?" sounded in her ears, and a tap at the door of the room sounded the appeal.

Althea started from the chair she still occupied. Her hat lay on the floor—her dress was still unchanged from the walking costume of the previous night.

"Could it be? Was it a dream? A real picture; but still a vision of the future, and not its reality."

Althea gasped in actual bewilderment of mingled joy, and shame, and wonder. For some minutes she could scarcely distinguish between the true and false in her position; but by degrees she remembered the whole.

She had prepared for the fatal deed, of which the consequences had been thus singularly and mercifully presented to her in the dream which had occupied her fevered and busy brain.

"Papa, I do not deserve it. I do not deserve your love nor Leonard's! I am a vain, false, rebellious girl!" broke from her lips.

And then the whole tale was poured out—her folly and her waywardness, her nearly accomplished flight, and her deep, deep repentance.

Dr. Fordyce listened with a half sad, half-astonished smile to the rapid confession of his child.

But when she finished with, "Papa, darling papa, can you ever forgive me?—can Leonard ever pardon such treachery, or think me worthy to be his wife?" he drew her closer to his parental breast, and let her head droop on his shoulder, to hide its tears and its blushes.

"My Althea! answer me one question, as truly as a good and pious maiden should speak at the altar, where you will soon stand! Is this infatuation past? Do you altogether renounce this false and unprincipled man, who would have thus tempted you to deception, disobedience, and disgrace? Would you wed him in preference to the good and true, and long-tried suitor who awaits you at the altar, and who loves and believes in you so completely?"

Althea waited a moment, and her father could feel, as well as hear, her heart beat against his own in the struggle.

Dr. Fordyce smiled happily. "My noble, true child! this does indeed redeem your fault!" he said. "I can fear nothing, either for Leonard or you, so long as you stand by the truth, and obey the vows you will promise from your very heart Leonard shall know all. Meanwhile, my love, it is time for you to begin your preparations, since the ceremony must take place before the service time, and you will have no leisure to spare for needless thought and speculation."

Althea was too thoroughly humbled and subdued to demur; though she did, perhaps, feel some sickening dread that the lover might be less indulgent than the parent, and her bridal robe donned in vain.

She commenced her toilette with strange and mingled feelings; but the arrival of the maid who was to assist her in its completion, the unconscious influence that it exercised over the female mind by the actual business of dressing for such an occasion, and the utter revulsion of sentiment that had been wrought by the like-like vision, gradually calmed her nerves.

And when her father at length tapped at the door, and once more entered the apartment of his child he almost let fall an expression of surprise and admiration at the loveliness of the fair young bride.

She was indeed a beautiful and spiritual-looking creature in her snowy robe and veil, that were well-nigh as dazzling as the dress which nature was wearing at that Christmas-tide.

And although agitation and the want of her accustomed refreshing repose might take something from her bloom, it but added softness and timid feminine charms to her usual brilliant, sparkling loveliness which completed the idea of a bride.

"Come with me, my darling; Ruth can finish all these trifles afterwards," he said, leading her to the adjoining apartment which had been the especial morning apartment of the young bride in her happy girlhood.

Althea perhaps guessed whom she was going to meet. Her eyes were dimmed and her lips trembled. She tried to ask the question ere they passed into the saloon.

But she was not long kept in suspense. Her hand was taken in the grasp of one she felt and knew she could trust for life; and the words, "My own, my beloved Althea! let all that is painful be forgotten between us!" came like music on her ears.

"But, Leonard, can you forgive me and can you ever trust me more?" she murmured, falteringly.

"With my life—with more than life—with my honor and happiness, Althea!" he said, firmly. "The woman who could reveal the passing error to which she was tempted, but did not yield, has a double safeguard for me, and a double charm. Now and for ever, my faith, and love, and hopes are bound up fearlessly in you! I know you will nobly use the trust!"

"As may Heaven prosper and help me in my hour of need I will!" came solemnly from the young bride's lips; and had her father and lover doubted before, they would have been satisfied by that fervent humble vow.

A brief hour afterwards, and they were at the altar, and pledged their troths as man and wife, till death should them part.

A gleam of winter sunshine sparkled on the holly berries and the Christmas roses that decorated the antique and tasteful chancel of the venerable collegiate church, as if to greet the first step of the young pair in life's journey together; and the crash of the musical peal in the tower spoke of the double joys and solemnities of the occasion to the bridal party, and to all who witnessed the ceremony that preceded the public service of the day.

But there was one who half concealed himself, looked on with a dark brow and scornful lips, and who stood with a mocking bow in the doorway through which they passed.

Cecil Talboys, irritated by his disappointment of the night before, had determined to test the real cause of Althea's failure of promise, and to revenge himself—so far as the intrusion in the most agitating moment could effect.

DR. ELLEN E. MITCHELL, Physician and Surgeon, graduate of the Woman's Medical College of the N. Y. Infirmary, then resident physician for a year in the Woman's Hospital in N. Y.; after four years' practice in Fon Du Lac, Wisconsin, has located in Montrose.

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