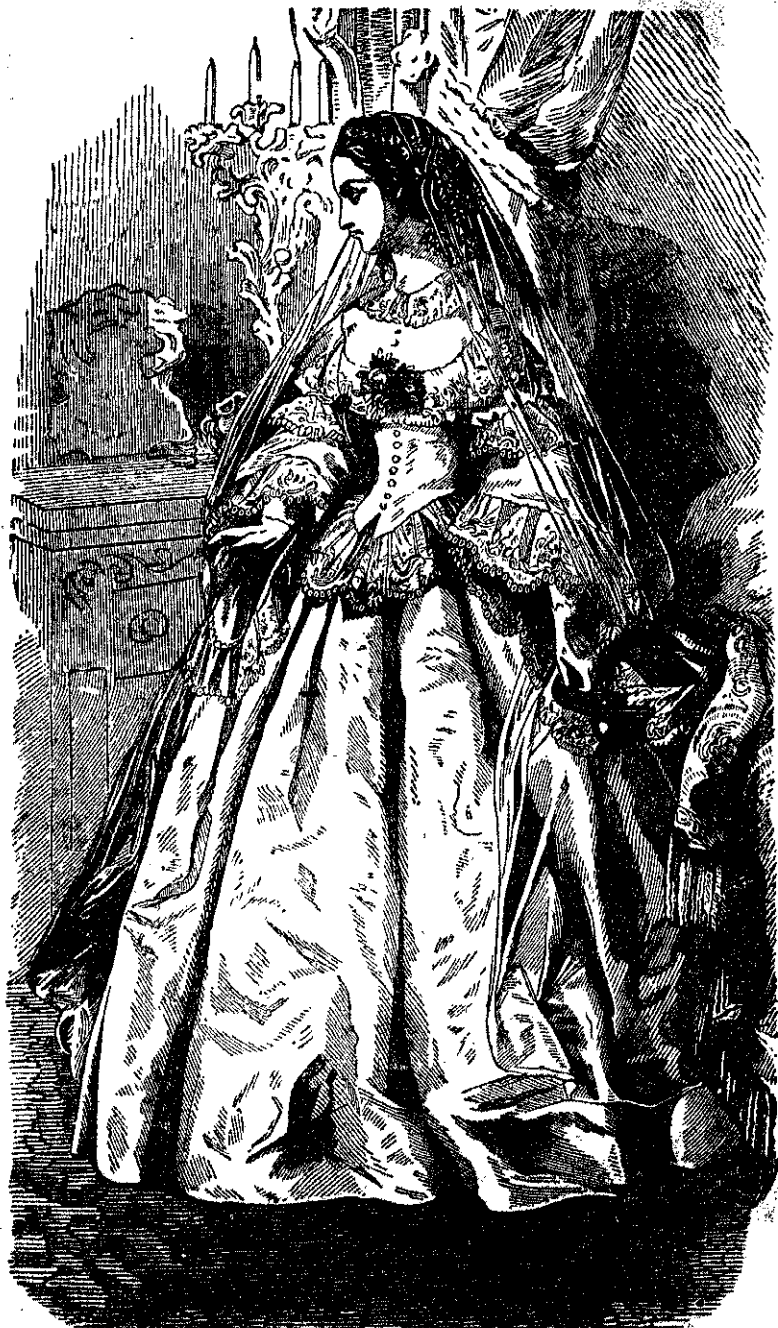


ELIZABETH MASTERS
THE DOUBLY AFFIANCED:
BEING THE LIFE OF A SOUTHERN BELL.



MISS MASTERS. FROM A PORTRAIT BY FRANKENSTEIN.

PHILADELPHIA.

PUBLISHED BY BAILEY & CO., No 1 SOUTH SIXTH STREET



THE FEARFUL LEAP OF ELIZABETH MASTERS.

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SOUTHERN BELLE:

OR THE

TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES

OF BEING BETROTHED TO

TWO LOVERS AT ONCE.

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LIFE OF LIZZY MASTERS.

I shall not trouble the reader with the details of my family history, or the chain of events which placed me, at the age of nineteen, a student at the University of Virginia; sufficient to say, that such was my position at the time I am now about referring to.

About two years after my advent at college, I formed a strong attachment for a young fellow-student by the name of Maurice—a generous, frank, and kind fellow. A more perfect young man, in truth, I never knew. With one of the strongest frames, he had almost feminine delicacy of appearance; so nicely proportioned was each muscle and limb. His heart was as tender as a woman's, with the spirit of a tiger, and his features bore the stamp of rectitude of principle, and an honorable mind.

We were both passionately fond of country rambles, and it was frequently our custom to ride abroad on horseback, seeking and finding adventures, which a sober denizen of either a city or town might envy.

It was one sweet March morning. The rough, burly wind swept shrilly through the branches and boughs of the yet leafless trees. A heavy dew hung on the grand green sward, glittering in the glad sunshine, and the songs of birds, trilled in wild delight, rang merrily through the meadow, copse and wild. Spring—smiling, pretty spring—was dancing in her earliest, unfolding loveliness. Flowers peeped out from their frosted trance, and welcomed their mistress as she pressed each bud and blossom. The busy bee stole out from its almost storeless hive, and recommenced his busy, thrifty task. Things that loved the summer hailed the herald of their joy, and revelled in nature's freshly-decked beauty.

We had ridden several miles from the University grounds, when we suddenly came near to an indian mound, so common in that part of the country, and were somewhat surprised at seeing a lady sitting alone upon it, attired in a green riding habit, and holding the rein of a beautiful white horse, cropping the grass at her feet. There was something strange in the expression of her features, as we met her gaze, although more beautiful man's eyes never rested

on. Her dark thick brows arched above a pair of hazel eyes, that flashed again as they seemed to penetrate the object of their regard, and her complexion rivalled the half-blown rose that she was carelessly pulling, leaf by leaf, to pieces, and letting them fall scattering to the wind. Her figure was tall and slight, but the tight habit showed a bust exquisitely moulded, and there was something inexpressibly strange in her intense and almost fiery glance, which fixed our attention upon her.

"Who can she be?" exclaimed Maurice.

"Heaven only knows!" replied I; "but there will be no difficulty in learning. I'm only astonished we've not heard of her before."

"Heard of her before?" repeated Maurice, involuntarily. "She cannot reside near, or we must have heard of her," continued he, portraying by his manner an extraordinary interest in the fair stranger.

"Here comes somebody who doubtless can inform us," said I, seeing old Nixon, the well-known purveyor of the University, approaching.

"Aye," returned Maurice, "that old fellow is acquainted with every one, from the minister to the bell-ringer, within a circle of thirty miles. We will sound him upon this subject," continued he, spurring his horse toward the old man.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Nixon, taking the cap from his bald and frosted head, and saluting our approach. A beautiful wind from the south; only a *leetle* too much of it, gentlemen."

"There's a young lady, dressed in green, sitting on the mound, yonder," said Maurice, pointing to the spot where he had seen her; "perhaps she will join us in our ride. Do you know who she is?"

"Know who she is, sir?" said Nixon, "that I do; there can be only one of her sort in this country."

"What do you mean?" I enquired.

"I hav'nt much time to talk about her," replied he, pulling out his watch, "but I'll tell you her name. It is Miss Lizzy Masters; and a nicer lady never lived anywhere, although some folks think her rather odd in her ways, and, perhaps they are, seeing that they are different to most ladies. She lives about five miles from here, in a very old, queer-shaped building, and is quite her own mistress, being without father and mother ever since her childhood, and no one ever seeing after her, except an old woman, provided by a gentleman called her guardian, I believe. Miss Lizzy doesn't visit many of her neighbors—folks say because she can't sing, play and dance like other young ladies of quality. But, gentlemen," continued Nixon, turning his eyes to heaven, "if you'd only heard her

sing as I have heard her sing, as I have once or twice, at sunrise, you'd say it was really angelical. However, it's quite true she doesn't go to parties, or give any, but keeps herself to herself, and seems to think of nothing else but doing all the good she can to everybody, everywhere. There's not a poor person anywhere round here that knows what it is to want. Her bounty never comes to a check, but is always the same on a right scent. And then her riding! But if she's going your way, you'll have a sample o' that, gentlemen. She goes like a pigeon! Is she on a white horse?" inquired he.

"Yes!" replied Maurice.

"Ah! that's her mare—Silverbeam—that is," rejoined Nixon, "and a most splendid animal she is, too; only a little shy for the lady."

At this moment, to our surprise, 'Squire Jones came suddenly in sight, and without hardly deigning to bow to us, went and saluted Miss Masters. She thereupon mounted upon her snowy horse, at the same time causing the 'Squire to laugh immoderately at something she said to him.

"She's a wonderful favorite of the 'Squire's," said Nixon, in an under tone, bearing his head and bowing, as the two rode toward us.

"Well, Nixon," said the young lady, in one of the most musical voices I had ever heard, and looking archly at the old man—"shall we have a pleasant ride to-day? Is the ground too dry or too wet? or is the wind from the frigid north? or which of the many ills to which blank and bloodless days are prone, may be ascribed to this?"

"Not one, I hope, ma'am," replied Nixon, smiling; "and the mare, I hope, she will behave herself—though 'pon my word, I am sometimes afraid of Silverbeam when I see you ride."

"Pshaw," exclaimed the lady, "she's as gentle as a lamb—she knows the gait of her mistress;" and switching the animal into a racer's pace, she almost flew from our presence.

"There's a Diana!" exclaimed the 'Squire, delighted, and spurring his horse after her. "Hold hard, my flower," continued he—"give us time to overtake you."

In a few minutes we had joined the 'Squire in the race. High on her haunches Silverbeam reared, as she fretted and pulled upon the checking-rein; but it, when it was slackened, away she bounded with her fair mistress, with the speed of a bird on the wing of sudden and ecstatic freedom.

Miss Masters, glancing back, and occasionally catching a glimpse of our party, made her laugh fairly echo far and wide; and waving her hand, beckoned to the 'Squire in derision; but on she still went.

"That's what I call reckless riding," said the 'Squire, spurring his horse to urge the animal to a still greater speed.

A light laugh came from the lady in response, and switching Silverbeam, she made a still greater distance between us and herself, as if determined that none should cope with her beautiful white steed.

"Hold hard," hollowed the 'Squire, as Miss Lizzy left loose her horse's head on the verge of a dangerous precipice which he was aware we were approaching. "To the right—to the right! Don't go near that side!" waving his hand to beckon her away.

"By St. Denis!" continued he, with terror expressed in his voice and features, "the mare can't turn there—she's lost, gentlemen!"

It was true enough. Straight as an arrow from a cross-bow, her horse took the fearful leap—rising in the air, like a bird springing for its flight, for a brief moment, and then over they went without even ringing a clink from Silverbeam's ironed hoofs.

"My God!" exclaimed Maurice, pale with fear for her safety, "both horse and rider must be dashed to pieces!"

The 'Squire was too frightened to utter a single word. In fact he seemed to be perfectly paralyzed; for, at that moment, without even looking over the precipice, he asked Maurice to ride for a doctor. For my own part, I involuntarily sprang from my horse, and almost instantly gained a winding lane which commenced a deep descent on the right. It was so thickly studded with bushes and brush, that I could not see a yard ahead; and, but for the fact that I knew I was descending, I could not have imagined whether I was going right or not.

For more than an hour I wandered in the intricacies of this crooked path, trying alternately to regain the summit of the hill or to find some definite road to the bottom. At last, as I turned one of its abrupt corners, my heart leaped to my throat at seeing Silverbeam stretched dead in the road. The side-saddle, with its broken pummel, was twisted under her, the crupper snapped, and her bridle dragged from over her ears.

It was too obvious that the worst had occurred; and that in leaping down the dizzy height she must have entailed destruction on her fair mistress, as well as herself.

Expecting to see the confirmation of what I feared, I looked tremblingly about the road, and saw within a few feet of the horse's head, a few drops of blood, and, upon a bush close by, some small pieces of green cloth, which hung on the thorns. These were sufficient proofs of what had happened; and almost palsied with horror, I directed my course in the only direction the unfortunate lady could have been borne, should she have been discovered, which was the one I was pursuing down the hill.

I had not gone far, when I came into a fair road, and presently I saw Maurice's horse tied to the gate of a farm-house. Groans and sobs saluted my ear before I reached the threshold; and as I was about flinging open the door, Maurice, ghastly white, hurried out, and seeing me, exclaimed "My God! she's killed!" and rushed past me.

Upon entering the house, I discovered Miss Masters stretched upon a bed in an inner room, surrounded by a group of weeping children and a woman. The latter was almost frantic with grief, continuing to ring her hands, beat her bosom, and between her sobs and groans, exclaim "Lord have mercy on us! The poor young lady is killed! Sorrow to all! sorrow to all!"

The sight was truly heart-breaking. With hair dishevelled, and streaming down her pale features, scratched and torn in rude gashes, lay Miss Masters, without a symptom of life remaining. Her dress was severed into rags and tatters, and the terrific violence of the fall was portrayed in every part of her disfigured person.

"Do you think she is *quite* dead?" said I, as I pressed my fingers on her pulse. I could discover no fluttering in this index of life, but gave immediate directions for the loosening of her dress, and other trifling orders preparatory to the doctor's visit, which was momentarily expected.

As I continued to watch anxiously for a sign of returning life, the neighboring farmers' wives stole silently into the room, and whispered their grief and forebodings one to the other, while tears of sincere sorrow coursed down their cheeks in streams.

"She's gone! Mrs. Melville," said one, choking with grief, "she's gone. Our friend's in heaven!"

"God be merciful to her," added another. "The flower's nipped in the morning of her life. Lord have mercy on her!"

Some knelt by the bed-side and prayed fervently for her restoration. Others, whose grief was beyond their control, wept like their half-frightened, half-sorrowing children; and all evinced an intensity of grief for their beautiful, generous, and ill-fated friend.

In about twenty minutes, which appeared to me the slowest that were ever ticked in the balance of time, the doctor entered the room. Taking a glance at the inanimate lady, he shook his head despondingly, and said, "I fear all earthly aid is futile!"

"Say not so, sir! say not so!" ejaculated a voice in the deepest consternation. It was 'Squire Jones, pushing his way through the throng congregated in the room.

"I fear such to be the case, sir," added the doctor, taking a case of instruments from his pocket. "But this room must be cleared," added he, "I can have no one present but those who are necessary for my assistance."

All except myself, Maurice, and the 'Squire, who although incapable, from his agitation, to render any assistance, could not be persuaded to leave the apartment.

"Raise her gently in your arms, in a reclining posture," said the doctor to me.

Quickly running his fingers over her limbs and body, he twisted a ligament round her exquisitely moulded arm, and forcing a lancet into the vein, a crimson drop or two reluctantly came from the wound; but that was all. The doctor gave a look of entire hopelessness, and motioned me to place her in her former position, when, as I moved to do so, a clear current trickled from the opened vein; and, as her head rested on the pillow, a sigh broke from her lips.

"Cheering symptoms! cheering symptoms!" exclaimed the doctor. "We shall save her!" continued he.

The 'Squire clutched the doctor's hand and said,—“A thousand thanks for that hope.”

"There's not a limb fractured," continued the doctor; "and I begin to think no bone; but we shall see that presently," added he.

"Thank God! there are sparks of life remaining."

"Amen! amen!" replied the 'Squire.

"There's a great crowd outside," observed Maurice, "scarcely able to remain there, such is their desire to hear how the dear lady is. Shall I inform them of our hopes?"

"By all means," replied the 'Squire.

Scarcely had Maurice gone from the room, when a murmur, like the hum of bees, was heard, and a suppressed but audible shout of joy.

"I should feel," said the 'Squire, "that the sun had set forever, if any thing took from us Miss Masters."

"Ah, indeed, Mr. Jones," added the doctor, "she's the sunshine to many hearts, and may God restore her to them."

"He will, sir," returned the 'Squire confidently, and rising from the edge of the bed to take a closer view of the sufferer's pallid features, "He will, sir!—He will, I am sure!"

The blood had flowed freely for some seconds, and the fluttering pulse, like a flame kindling from smothered embers, flickered, beat, and stopped, and then throbbed again—as if impatient of its newly-gained action. At length the ashy lips separated from being firmly fixed, and the silken lashes of the eyes gradually became untwined, until the eyes were once more visible. A faint smile spread itself over her countenance, as Miss Masters endeavored to raise herself; but the doctor instantly checked her, and said, "Now, gentlemen, I can dispense with your presence for that of the good woman of this house, if you will send her to me."

The 'Squire pressed the hand of the patient, and then followed us from the room. After about the lapse of an hour, the doctor joined us, and said he had left his patient in a most refreshing sleep, and that there was nothing more serious than a slight concussion of the brain, and some severe contusions.

"Then you deem her out of danger?" said the 'Squire.

"Out of all immediate danger," was the reply; "and there is nothing to make me anticipate any; although from such an accident we cannot form a hasty conclusion."

"When do you think she can be removed home?" asked the 'Squire.

"I hope in the course of to-morrow," replied the doctor; "but I shall remain here during the night, and attend her in the double capacity of nurse and surgeon."

"Aye, do my good fellow," rejoined the 'Squire; "and should anything occur, be sure and let me know. By sunrise," continued the 'Squire, "I shall be here myself."

Taking leave of the doctor, who appeared one of the most interested of the party, we mounted our horses, and turned their heads toward home.

"How did you find the poor young lady?" asked the 'Squire of Maurice.

"It happened that a woodman was passing below, when the leap took place," said Maurice. "I was hailed by him, and directed to the spot where she lay. I discovered Miss Masters lying in a bush on the opposite bank, which, doubtless, broke the violence of the fall, and Silverbeam in the middle of the lane,—as I have since learned, with his neck broken. Without the loss of a moment, I hastened to the spot, and raising Miss Masters in my arms, bore her instantly to the nearest house."

In the course of our journey home, I put several questions to the 'Squire concerning Miss Masters, and learned from him her history.

"She's one of the most extraordinary girls living," observed the 'Squire; but her eccentricities have been, as they generally are in most people, created by the peculiarity of the circumstances in which she has been placed. It may now be sixteen years since her father and only parent came from the city of New Orleans, and purchased a large farm of eight hundred acres, within a short distance of mine. For a series of years, the house, an old ruinous place, had been untenanted, and I was much pleased at the prospect of a new neighbor. But all advances to become friendly were rejected, not only to me, but to every one who made them. Ill health and an irritable temper, occasioned by an impaired constitution, made Mr. Mas-

ters avoid all society; and, with the exception of his daughter—Lizzy—whom he suffered to grow up as wild as the flowers of the forest, no one, and nothing—not even a dog—was the sharer of his melancholy existence. Except on the very warmest days in summer, he never stirred from his roof, but occupied the whole of his time in smoking, and in watching the play of his beautiful self-willed child, but, without joining in it. But notwithstanding this sullen disposition, he was liberal and kind to his farming men, and was never known to turn a deaf ear to the calls of charity.

"Without a companion, teacher, or instructor of any kind, Lizzy continued to while away her hours, by coursing the butterfly or the humming-bird; and so shy was she of meeting anybody, no sooner did she catch a glimpse of the approach of a stranger, than away she would bound with the fleetness of a fawn. Often did I attempt to waylay the timid, pretty child, but her ears and eyes were as quick as those of a fox; and I never could succeed in stealing within a short distance of her foot-fall.

"Thus slipped away some four years, and at last the hermit,—as Mr. Masters was called,—no longer excited curiosity, speculation, and wonderment. He pursued the same monotonous life, and at length the old house was as little thought of, and as little visited or inquired about, as previous to its being occupied.

"At last one morning brought the intelligence that Mr. Masters had suddenly expired in a fit of apoplexy. Being the nearest neighbor, and knowing the lonely situation of his orphan, Mrs. Jones and myself hastened to his house, and there found the child maddened with grief at the bereavement of her father. We used all our powers of consolation, and, finally, that sympathy which she wanted she found in my good lady, and after some coaxing and persuading, we got her to accompany us home. This was the commencement of our intimacy, which has lasted uninterruptedly until this day. And, now, I should like to know," added the 'Squire, proudly, "If any one can show me a better Christian, or more lovely girl on this earth? I know," continued he, "that she has many peculiarities; among others, there's the fire of old Nick in her veins. I've not seen her roused more than once or twice in my life; but when she is—heaven and earth!—she can look a man of common courage white. I've seen a lawyer, who is the only executor and guardian under the will, tremble, as though he had the ague, when she had bent her fiery glance on him."

"Does Miss Masters still live retired and alone, then?" inquired I

"Yes, replied" the 'Squire, "She has imbibed her father's taste in not visiting or being visited by her neighbors; for, besides my-

self and Mrs. Jones, no one ever enters her house except her domestics, and she will meet no one at mine. And now, gentlemen," added the 'Squire, as we arrived at a branch of a road which lead to his home, "You have the history, as far as I know it, of Miss Lizzy Masters, whom, I fervently trust, we shall soon see again in her wonted health and beauty." With this, he bade us farewell, and took leave of us.

"This lady fair, is a very strange sort of character," observed I to Maurice, after Mr. Jones had quitted us.

"As the 'Squire says," replied Maurice,—“circumstances have rendered her different from the generality of her sex. But it would have been more strange if they had done so, considering the peculiar way in which she has been treated.”

"Total neglect of her education, and abstinence from all social association, appear to be the passive causes of her singularities," returned I.

"But then, how beautiful she is! Like a wild, uncultivated flower,—fresh, and blooming in all its natural loveliness,—unnoticed, uncared for, unseen; and yet superior to all that art can train! Never was there such captivation in a woman before."

I looked at my friends face. His cheeks were flushed,—his eyes sparkled as he spoke; and I saw that the unfortunate lady had made an indelible impression.

On the following morning, Maurice and myself proceeded on horseback, at an early hour, to the farm-house where we had left Miss Masters, and had the satisfaction of learning that she had had a night of tranquil rest, and was so far recovered as to have been removed to her home about an hour previous to our arrival. We therefore determined to proceed thither, and make some personal inquiries concerning her.

After keeping a cross-country road for a few miles, we entered a tall rusty-looking gate, as directed, and wended our way up a wide path, flanked by thick and widely-spreading maple trees. On emerging from this avenue, we came in sight of a substantial but ancient-looking edifice, which had defied the winter's blast and summer's sun for many a year. The whole scene around looked so old and so solitary, that we gazed in silence for some time, previous to clanking the brass-headed lion, as a summons for our entry.

A well-dressed Indian girl answered it readily, and confirmed the statement of the morning,—that Miss Masters was progressing rapidly and favorably.

We were about taking our departure on the receipt of this intelligence, when Mr. Jones hurried from the house, and requested us

to dismount. Nothing loath to do so, we gave our horses to a servant, and followed the 'Squire into a spacious and handsomely furnished room.

"I am commissioned by Miss Masters," said he, addressing both of us, after we were seated, "to express her deep obligations for the great kindness and attention she met with at your hands yesterday; and am desired to add to you, Mr. Maurice," said he, laughing, "that she will hold the future at your disposal, being satisfied that she is indebted to you for her life."

"The assistance I was enabled to render her," replied Maurice, "was purely accidental, and, therefore, no obligation is due to me."

"She thinks otherwise," returned the 'Squire. "However, I care not which way it is. In a short time we shall again hear her merry laugh; and there's not a scratch on her pretty face, thank God!"

"I would submit to have a scar an inch deep carved in my own, rather than she should have the shadow of one," returned Maurice.

"A gallant declaration," said the 'Squire, "and one which I shall not fail to convey to the lady."

"The doctor gives hopes of a speedy convalescence?" observed I, enquiringly.

"Not only hopes," replied the 'Squire, "but certainty. I have his professional word that she shall be out again in less than a month."

It is now necessary that I should speak of myself, and refer to some past occurrences, which, although trifling in themselves, are indispensable joints of my narrative.

Soon after Miss Masters' recovery, which took place within a month of receiving her injury, Maurice and myself became constant visitors at her house; and, to speak the truth, we appeared to be far from unwelcome ones. Occasionally we used to meet the 'Squire and his wife there, but no one else, and thus a strong intimacy arose between us.

Immediately that Maurice had the opportunity, he undisguisedly evinced the passion which he had entertained from the first moment of seeing the beautiful girl whose life he was chiefly instrumental in saving. And although she sometimes received his attentions with great favor, there was a fickleness of manner about her which continually left him between doubt and hope.

From a cause hardly to be explained, and yet not difficult to be conceived, this subject of all-engrossing interest to himself was never mentioned to me, either directly or indirectly, although the friendship existing between us became daily stronger than ever.



Miss Masters, from a Portrait by Frankenstein.

But, suspecting, which was the case, that he had in myself a rival in feeling, although not so expressed by word, and I hoped not by look or gesture, Lizzy was tacitly a subject never alluded to by either of us.

It may appear strange that any thing like a good understanding, or even common civility, could exist between two men thus situated; but so it was; and in the belief that my friend was the favored one, and in every way the most eligible, I yielded to his superior claims, without the faintest struggle for precedence. More than once, indeed, I was staggered with an expression from the lady's sparkling eyes, as they met my own, but not dreaming for a moment that I found an answering spirit within them, the sensation was like the fleeting sound of something thrilling and unexpectedly touched.

To say that I did not envy Maurice would be to declare myself more immaculate than every other man could be, placed in such circumstances; but to declare that I threw in his way every facility in my power to insure him speedy success, and that he was the constant theme of my sincerest commendation, is to say no more than is strictly in accordance with the truth. The eulogy sounds but ill from me; but I hesitate not to assert, that deeming my own feelings totally disregarded by the object of their solicitude, I was sufficiently generous to assist my friend in succeeding to win the prize he so ardently longed to call his own. Little progress, however, seemed to be made, for no sooner were his attentions favorably received, than the next day—perhaps the next hour—produced as opposite a change.

The 'Squire, who took as much interest in the proceedings as if he had been her parent, was a decided advocate to our cause, for such I may call it, and rated Lizzy soundly for her "waywardness and fickleness," as he called her conduct.

So things went on for some two months, when one morning I was startled, at sunrise, by Maurice rushing into my bed-room in a state of great trepidation, holding an unfolded letter in his hand.

"Fielding," said he, "I've this moment received an unwelcome letter from home," and a tear dropped as he spoke, "the most so," continued he, "that I ever received in the course of my life. My mother is at the point of death, and desires instantly to see me. Will you—as I shall have made my arrangements for departing within a quarter of an hour—proceed early to Miss Masters', and, as I promised to be there before noon, tell her the cause of my unavoidable absence? My return must, of course, depend upon circumstances; but you may also add that I shall take the earliest

opportunity of fulfilling the appointment, and that a letter will herald the keeping of it."

Expressing my regret at the cause of his hasty departure, and exchanging friendly grasps of the hands, with a promise to obey his instructions, we parted.

From the time I undertook to convey Maurice's message to Miss Masters, I felt an irresistible inclination to bend my steps towards her house almost daily. The attraction was as the needle to the magnet, a force beyond opposition. Imperceptibly our hearts became entwined and our sympathies folded within each other, without even the knowledge of either. Of the most ardent temperament, equally ignorant and careless of the conventional rules of society, Lizzy portrayed, at length, in every look and gesture, the pleasure she experienced in my undivided society. Early in the morning I met her in the fields, brushing the dew from the daisy cups; and it was not often till the nightingale had piped on the thorn that we separated.

Thus weeks were past without my hearing a word from Maurice, and in the enjoyment of my daily intercourse with Lizzy I had almost forgotten him, or, if remembered, it was only as one I had now entirely supplanted. Neither did I reproach myself with the cause or the effect. Indeed, I was too devoted to care, perhaps, by that means I had won the affections of Miss Masters; but at the same time I was conscious of not using any treacherous ones, or other than I was fully entitled to employ.

Thus matters stood, when a morning post brought intelligence of Maurice's intended return on the following day. Then, and not till then, I determined to propose in form for the hand of Miss Masters, for, although my advances had been met with too decided a favor to admit of any doubt as to the result, I had not yet spoken of that which was nearest and dearest to my heart. With the intention of putting this resolution in force, I mounted my horse and proceeded to her residence.

It was a sultry evening, late in August. The distant rumble of the thunder was now and then heard, and the black, heavy masses of clouds rolling heavily from the west, tinged with the purple light of the sinking sun, betokened a coming storm. Hurrying forward, I just managed to gain the portal of the house as the tempest burst in all its gathered violence. Lizzy, expecting me, was at the entrance, and as she took my proffered arm, to conduct her within, a crash of heavens artillery roared above our heads, and reverberated, from hill to hill, miles distant. Flash after flash of the forked lightning succeeded, and then a deluge of water spouted on the

earth, bubbling and hissing as it fell. Roll after roll, of the war-ring elements succeeded; and the heavy clouds floated slowly on, spouting forth their over-charged contents.

"Tis a dreadful storm," observed Lizzy.

"Yes!" replied I, "but, from its violence, it cannot last."

"It appears that extremes can never last in any thing," rejoined Lizzy.

"Such seems to be one of Nature's immutable decrees," returned I.

"I hope not—sincerely hope not!" said Lizzy, excitement kindling fire in her eyes. "I would not think so for ages of certain happiness hereafter."

"And why not?" inquired I.

"Because," she added, "the thought would insure me rack now; a refinement of torture to contemplate."

"And yet," said I, "we should never fear to think of what *must* be."

"There I differ with you," replied Lizzy. "It seems to me but poor philosophy to think of, and thereby anticipate many disagreeable and inevitable certainties. For instance, decrepid age, infirmities, or premature death—consequences attendant upon life; but 'twould be far more agreeable to dwell upon closing scenes of our drama, and foretaste their bitterness previous to the allotted period."

"We are taught otherwise," rejoined I; "and are bid, by thinking of them to prepare against their visitation."

"And our stern teachers, with their proselytes, may enjoy the study, but it shall be none of mine," returned Lizzy. "'Tis sufficient occupation for me to render the present as pleasurable as possible,—the past is gone, and the future is a mystery none can solve."

"But we should be like mariners at sea," continued I, "equally ignorant of latitude or longitude, without helm or compass, were it not that the experience of the past guides us to the future. And, in the like manner, when sailing before the wind, buoyantly and joyously, we should strike upon some hidden rock or quicksand, and when least expecting it, become a hopeless wreck."

"I'll not deny but that you have the best of the argument," she returned; "but still I might be able to puzzle you. However," continued she, "as I might perhaps suffer in your estimation, by confessing my peculiar ideas concerning this sublunary existence, we'll permit the subject to drop now and forever."

The storm by this time had abated. The last rays of the setting sun shot from the verge of a frowning cloud, and streamed gladly on the saturated ground. The air, stilled from the songs of birds while the tempest raged, was now filled by them. The cricket chirped merrily from his grassy bed, and the locust sung in concert. Creeping insects crawled from their flooded homes, and their enemies took advantage of their migration.

On the border of the lawn, to the right of the house, was a grove of thick maples. So dense were they that hours of continued rain could scarcely penetrate to the serpentine walk which wound for a considerable distance between them. Thither, as had been our wont for some time, we proceeded to take our evening walk.

At the end of this path was a rude, uncultivated bower, formed of wild hops clinging to the boughs and stems of the over-hanging trees. The vines had been cleared in the centre of one thick clump, and a seat, roughly hewed from the solid trunk of an oak, was placed within it.

Upon this we rested, and after a silence of some duration, I told the tale she had read before in the silent language of the heart. And long and passionately did I plead my cause; never were words to me so apt before. At length I paused, without much fear, to learn my doom. Eagerly I gazed upon her eyes, as they were lit by a moon's ray stealing between the leaves. I saw the tear of joy and love floating in them. In a moment I snatched her to my breast, and the reciprocated affection and consent were murmured in kisses upon my lips.

All Nature was hushed. The wind toyed with the leaf so softly that it scarcely flapped in his gentle breath, and every thing seemed calm and at peace.

The next day Maurice returned; and although I felt that the communication I determined to make without loss of time, would give him poignant anguish, I was totally unprepared for the expression of intense and indescribable horror and surprise which was displayed in his features when I informed him of my becoming his successful rival. He looked at me as if in doubt of my sanity, or the correctness of his own senses. Silently he continued to gaze, while all the color forsook his cheek, and his lips became pale and ashy.

"Yes!" he at length muttered, "it seems and sounds impossible, but 'tis true. You could not—no! your tongue would refuse to utter an untruth. I have heard of such things before," continued he, bitterly; "but, my God! my God! they're monstrous and incredible!"

"Calm yourself," replied I. "Although I can feel for your disappointment, I don't think there is sufficient cause for the disappointment and anger you express. Miss Masters was not affianced to you, and, if it is any consolation, I may say, never would have been."

"Not affianced!" exclaimed Maurice. "Not affianced!" and his amazement increased tenfold.

"No!" returned I, "and I repeat never would have been."

"Give me your hand," continued he, holding out his own. "I wronged you in thought. Forgive me! You did not know. Then—but it matters not at this moment," breaking off thus suddenly. He hurriedly paced the room, clasping his hands, and looking the very picture of despair.

After a short time he became more composed, but still was greatly excited, and continued to exclaim against the cruelty and heartlessness of women in general. At length he said—

"I've a request to make, and although it may appear unreasonable, and one decidedly I have no right to make, still I hope you will grant it to me."

"It is granted," replied I, "before being made."

"Then go not to her to day," returned he, "but wait till I have seen her once again. I need scarcely say, it will be the last visit I will pay."

"As you please," added I. "But saying I should not see her throughout the day, I beg that you will explain the cause of my absence."

"I will," said he. "Accept my thanks for your abstinence from so much pleasure," continued he, smiling sarcastically, and leaving the room.

I almost repented of having complied with Maurice's request, and, after he quitted me, began to think I had acted unwisely in permitting him to seek an interview alone with Lizzy, at such a moment. "However, as I had done so, I, of course, did not attempt to recall it. His look, as he parted, struck me as being full of turbulent passion, and his previous portrayal of it all tended to increase my uneasiness at his going.

And here I will pause in my narrative to confess that which I believe the majority of men entertain in like circumstances, although few, perhaps, would acknowledge it. Since the scene of the last evening in the fir grove, Lizzy had become to me an altered being. The flower was bruised and sullied, and no longer offered its former attractions. I thought of her as of one that I must make my wife,

not as of one that I wished to make so, if honor did not so sternly decree, love had vanished, and duty now usurped his post. To save her reputation and my own, I never thought of doing other than performing my plighted word; but had there been a choice, I would have retracted it with more ecstasy than I had pledged it.

Notwithstanding, however, this revulsion of feeling, I became more disturbed in mind as the hours flew past without Maurice's returning. At length I could not restrain the inclination of seeking him, conjuring up in my imagination a multitude of horrors, crowding upon each other, like colored forms in the Kaleidoscope. But, just as I was issuing from my room, I heard his step approaching. Never shall I forget the impression his appearance made upon me. He reeled toward me like one intoxicated, with a face so distorted, that it was scarce possible to trace a single feature. His lower jaw dropped from the other, as in a corpse, and his eyes had the dull, leaden look which showed the fire of life was nearly extinguished. Not a tinge of blood was in his cheeks, and he seemed a dead though breathing man.

"Gracious Heaven!" I exclaimed, "what is the matter? are you ill?"

"Very—I am very ill," he replied.

In a moment I assisted him to a couch, and was about hurrying away for assistance when he motioned me to stay.

"Do not leave me," he whispered, "do not leave me; I have something to say to you, and but a short time to say it in."

"Let me at least send for medical aid," I rejoined.

He smiled faintly, and said, "I'm not in want of it. Listen, I have seen her and learned that which I believed before—that you did not wrong me intentionally. But what will you think when I tell you that she was betrothed to me by her own consent, freely given, as she is now to you?"

"What!" exclaimed I, astonishment thrilling through my frame, "betrothed to you!"

"Aye, solemnly betrothed to me!" returned he, in a tone not to be doubted, "so help me Heaven!"

In broken sentences, and occasionally gasping for breath, Maurice recounted to me the particulars of his last meeting with Lizzy, and that during his absence he had sent several letters to her; but, with the exception of the first, he had received no answers; and although this neglect occasioned some surprise, he supposed indisposition, or some such cause, had prevented replies to his communications.



"But," continued he, "I now know too well the reason, and may God forgive her broken vow, as I do!"

"If I had been acquainted with this," returned I, "believe me, Maurice, neither for her, nor any other woman breathing, would I have been the instrument of injury to a friend, or the cause of a solemn plighted word being disregarded, as though 'twas less material than the air which gave it birth: I tremble to think of it."

"From my soul I believe you," replied he. "But think no more of it, that which is one man's loss is another's gain. Take her—and may Heaven bless you both! Fielding," continued he, raising himself on his elbow, and looking earnestly in my face; "it is a dying man's blessing, and one which emanates from a heart bearing no malice nor hatred toward any living creature."

"Dying!" repeated I; "surely it is but the temporary effects of excitement and distress of mind."

"Ah! my friend!" added he, sorrowfully, and an expression of pain convulsed his features, "both mind and body are poisoned."

"What!" I exclaimed, "poisoned!" and I clutched a bell-rope.

"Hush! hush! Fielding" he returned, "be not alarmed on my account. Bring no one here on my account. Bring no one here, for heaven's sake!"

"Say!" added I, "are you a——"

"Suicide!" replied he, "certain and and irremediable!"

As quick as thought, with terror to urge me, I flew for assistance. In a few minutes a crowd of friends and attendants rushed into the apartment, and as I returned, I saw in the middle of the throng the doctor on his knees pressing a hand on Maurice's heart. By his side were various instruments, and his fingers held a vial marked "deadly poison."

"Tis useless," said he rising, "the quantity would have killed a dozen men."

"And is he dead?" inquired I, pressing forward.

"Quite, sir!" was the reply, and I felt my heart withered with it.

There he lay, a few hours before in the exuberance of youth, strength and manhood, now a scathed and unsightly mass. His limbs were drawn up and cramped in the agonies of death, and his face told how hard the struggle had been in the forcible separation between soul and body.

With surprise, horror, and the deepest sorrow, I was followed from the apartment by our mutual friends, and all I remembered after-

ward on this dreadful night, was finding myself waking as if from a deep sleep, and the blood trickling from an opened vein in my arm.

Confused as if some terrible dream had been racking my brain through the long and tedious night, I awoke early the following morning, weak and feverish. I can scarcely describe my feelings faithfully, as the incidents of the preceding day flashed with all their cruel truth on my memory. I began to suspect that Lizzy might be part the slave of passion, and a thousand revolting images reared themselves in my mind. With distrust, sorrow, anger, and a mingling of sensations impossible for words to represent, but leaving a most disordered frame of mind, I proceeded to her residence.

Lizzy, in anticipation of my visit, was sauntering in the avenue some distance from the house, and, seeing my approach, hastened toward me. Never did she look more beautiful. Her long black tresses were sweeping down her shoulders, as carelessly and unconfined as the tendrils of some wild vine. Her slight, but beautifully moulded figure was robed in a simple white morning dress, and around her waist was tied a string of large jet beads, which hung to the ground. On the inside of a close cottage-bonnet a fresh picked rose was placed, but it would be difficult to say which looked the freshest—the flower, or the cheek on which it rested.

With a light step she bounded to my side; and as she came, a ringing laugh of joy and of love burst from her lips as my welcome. But, when she arrived close to me, and saw my pale and haggard face, the color forsook her cheek, like transient breath from a mirror. Mutely she gazed at me as I dismounted from my horse, and, staggering to a neighboring bench, almost fell as I reached it.

"Tell me," she said, clinging to me, and with deep emotion, "are you ill? has anything happened? Speak in the name of Heaven!"

"Oh, Lizzy!" I exclaimed, unable to conceal my mental anguish an instant longer, "why did you conceal from me the—the—" I could say no more. My gorge rose, and threatened to choke me with grief.

"I know what you would say," she returned, "but upbraid me not. He was here yesterday, and performed that part to perfection."

"But surely, you must have thought," continued I, "how wrong, how unjustifiable it was for you to admit of my advances; and then not to acquaint me with the secret, but let it reveal itself in all its

bear reality. Indeed, Lizzy, there is too much cause to upbraid you, for me to pass it over in silence."

"If the truth be no justification," replied she, "I have no other advocate. Give me your patience for a few moments. From the hour I first saw you, the germs of as true and warm affection were planted in my bosom as ever sprung from the heart of woman. Your apparent want of sympathy and coldness of conduct were constant sources of torment to me, and my pride was daily and hourly wounded by the general indifference of your demeanour. I confess, admitting occasionally of Mr. Maurice's addresses, solely in the hope of creating a feeling in you which I trusted might be raised from the spirit of rivalry. In this I was disappointed. Nothing could fan the spark I so longed to see reared into a flame and at length tired with the ceaseless attentions of the one, and indignant at the want of them from the other, I, in a moment of mortification, reluctantly permitted my tongue to consent to that which my heart denied. Soon after this I discovered my error, and God is my witness how I at once rejoiced and sorrowed at the discovery!—rejoiced for the consummation of my heart's only desire, and sorrowed for the hasty barrier I had raised against the possession of it. Still this was but a feather in the scale against the attainment of my wish, and I determined to defy all censure, all reproach, to become your own. In the conviction that your stern sense of duty, and observance of the conventional, automaton rules of society would at once decide your resolution in the event of learning my engagement with your friend, I was resolved, if possible, not to let you know it until——"

She paused and hesitated to proceed.

"Until no choice was left me, you would say," returned I.

"Until you were equally disposed to set aside such a cold, calculating code," added she, regarding me with a lowering brow and fiery glance.

"Then learn," replied I, "that I am as much disposed now to obey the edict to which you refer as I should have been in the first instance, had I known what I now do. You have deceived me, you have deceived yourself, and one who is now oblivious of your wrong and cruelty. Yes, Lizzy," continued I, "he who loved you as well as I, and who was far more worthy of a pure requital, is now a corpse—a suicide!"

"Heaven have mercy on me!" she ejaculated. "Heaven have mercy on me!"

And, falling on her knees, she clasped her hands and poured forth a prayer in agony of supplication for forgiveness.

I watched her with less emotion as I heard the choking sobs heaving from her bosom, and saw the tears streaming down her cheeks. I forgot the wrong, and saw only the penitent.

"Evil recoils upon itself," she murmured, as I proceeded to raise her; but, as my hand was extended, and ere it touched her, she sprang to her feet, and retreating from me said,—*"it shall never touch me more. No!"* and throwing her hands wildly out, she muttered a vow so solemn and irrevocable, that I was silenced by its awful affirmation, never to become my wife.

"Your words were," she said, bitterly, while her eyes glared with passion like an infuriated tigress,—*"that I am as much disposed now to obey the edict to which you refer, as I should have been in the first instance, had I known what I now do!"* Then, in the name of heaven, obey it!" she exclaimed, "I'll be no obstacle to its fulfilment!"

I endeavored to soothe the ungovernable passion which possessed her, but my words fell like drops of water into a sea of fire.

"Away!" she said. "Begone! and let us never see each other more."

"Let me entreat," said I.

"Not if angels knelt and backed the petition with their tears," interrupted she;—"not if torments everlasting were threatened, thicker than the gentle drops of rain from heaven!"

"Then, must we really part?" asked I.

"Ay, and forever," she replied deliberately,—*"forever!"*

"Can you make no allowances for my hasty observation?" said I,—*"think of my deep, deep sorrow for my friend's lamentable fate."*

"Is it possible I should forget it for a single moment of my future life?" rejoined she, pressing her hands upon her forehead. "Is it not forever branded here, stamped with torture?" added she, between her clenched teeth, "dissolving of all superficial thought, and leaving nothing but the bare truth, a hideous skeleton, yes," continued she. "I see in myself a guilty wretch, and in you—" she paused, and, coming near me, she shook her head reproachfully, less in anger than in sorrow.

The words found an echo in my heart. I could make no reply. Instead of the accuser, I felt the accused.

"Farewell!" she added. "Farewell, and as we were, so let us henceforth be—strangers."

I sprang forward to catch her in my embrace, impelled by uncontrollable impulse.

"No, no, no! remember," said she, pointing to the clear, cloudless sky, I have that registered there, which truth shall seal. Once more, farewell!" and, turning, she left me, with one long, sad look.

* * * * *

Years and years flew past without my hearing anything of Lizzy Masters, for soon after this sad event I left the University, and sought a forgetfulness of it in other and distant lands, where I resided amid extravagant and dissolute scenes for many years. I returned to my native land at the request of a favorite uncle, who promised me fortune and fame, would I but embark with him in mercantile pursuits.

I now remembered the painful events which occurred on my quitting the University, only as a dream, and I had not the least desire to visit the scene of them. It happened, however, that my business called me to Columbia, South Carolina. It was just after the new State Asylum had been put in operation, and when passing to that town, I was persuaded by a friend to visit this institution for lunatics. I had scarcely entered the building, when, good heavens! could it be possible? my eye caught the form and features of the once lovely Miss Masters. There, indeed she stood, twining her long and wasted fingers, within those of a sickly-looking child, whose constant, unmeaning smile and vacant stare told the brain's disease. She was so changed that I even hesitated to believe, it was once the young, the beautiful, the gay Lizzy. But it was too true. There she was, the demented mother of an idiot child, old, wrinkled and withered—the wreck of passion, and the ruin of beauty.

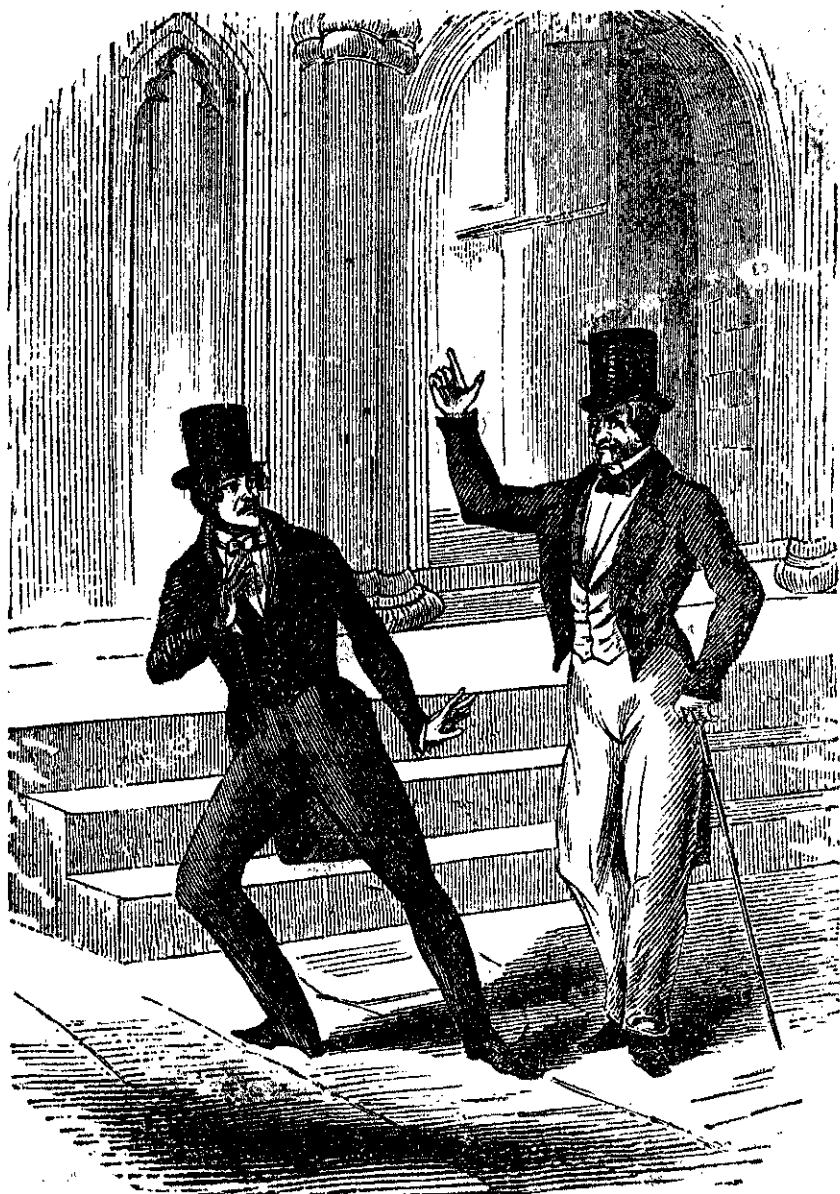
I turned away, horror-stricken, and from that hour to this have sought to know nothing more of her fate.

JAMES E. FIELDING.

NATCHEZ, MISS., Feb. 28, 1859.

The above narrative was found in the trunk of James E. Fielding, who was unfortunately stabbed in a fight, in a coffee-house, on the Levee, on Wednesday evening of last week, from the effects of which injury he died the following morning. It is made public, in accordance with his dying request.

MILLER TOWNSEND,
CORONER.



I was totally unprepared for the expression of intense and indescribable horror and surprise, which was displayed in his features when I informed him of becoming his successful rival. "I have heard of such things before," said he bitterly, "but, my God! my God! they're monstrous and incredible!"—Page 30

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