

Alice May; or the Lost of Mount Auburn

J. H. Ingraham

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PART FIRST.

One cheerful autumnal morning, three years ago, a group of lovely girls was assembled in a window of a fashionable boarding school in one of the handsome streets crossing Mount Vernon. One or two of them were seated with embroidery in their hands, but the rest were standing and talking, and amusing themselves by watching the passers by; for there was yet an idle quarter of an hour to recitations.

‘Do you see that poor old man! how white his hair is, and how he bends beneath his years, while that empty bag he carries seems a load for him!’ said a pretty blue eyed girl, in a tone of deep sympathy, with which the expression of her face sweetly harmonized. ‘Open the window, Ann, and let me throw to him a quarter of a dollar! I never see an old silver-haired man, but what I think of my dear grandfather, and for his sake love and pity him.’

‘I can never see any thing romantic in an old ragged beggar,’ said a tall, grey-eyed girl, with a very high forehead, and a look like one of Mrs. Radcliffe’s heroines; ‘If he was an aged minstrel, with a robe and staff, and flowing locks of silver, and had a harp in his hand, and sandals on his feet, how delighted it would be! I wish I had lived in days of chivalry, these modern times are too common place.’

‘I am content to live when and where my life will be most a blessing to those around me,’ said the first speaker, with animation. ‘Do open the window, Aunt, as you are near the spring, and let me throw him the money. See, he has stopped, and lifts up his aged eyes! Did you ever behold a look of such eloquent pleading!’

‘How much enthusiasm for a mere every day pauper!’ said Miss Letticia, the romantic girl, with a toss of her head.

The window was thrown up; and the example set by the benevolent girl being followed by the others, the old man received on his torn hat a shower of silver pieces. How lovely is charity in the young and beautiful!

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The aged beggar lifted up his venerable countenance with a grateful look, bowed his bared and hoary head low to the pavement, and saying in a trembling voice, 'God bless you, young ladies!' went on his way.

While the window was still up, and they were looking after his feeble steps for we all feel an interest in the objects of our charity a young gentleman, well mounted upon a dark bay horse, came dashing along. He was handsome, of a manly figure, and dressed and rode well.

'Do shut the window down, girls,' said one of the young ladies, laughing and retreating; 'he will certainly think we have opened it on purpose to look at him; and I don't choose to let any young gentleman have such vain thoughts of himself for they are all vain enough now. See, he is looking this way!'

The young horseman seeing a bevy of pretty girls at an open window could not well help looking at them very earnestly. Suddenly he half reined up, his features became animated with a look of surprise and happy recognition, and bowing with the deepest reverence while his face crimsoned with embarrassment and joy, he continued on at the same pace he had been before going.

'He bowed to some one of us! who knows him?' said they all.

'Not a soul I believe he thought we were foolishly admiring him, and so impudently acknowledged it,' said another.

'No, he looked as if he recognised one of us! Let us see who looks conscious, as no one will speak,' said Anna Linton; 'look at Alice May's face! See her blushes and confusion. She is *the one!*'

Instantly every eye was fixed upon a young dark-eyed brunette not more than seventeen years of age, whose delicately olive shaded complexion was incardined with the richest blood; her long-fringed eyelids were cast to the floor, and she stood silent, beautiful, conscious her pretty fingers picking in pieces a rose bud. Never was a maiden of seventeen lovelier than she who now stood confessed before them, the shrine of the handsome horseman's adoring reverence. The raven hair which the womanly comb had never desecrated, flowed darkly beautiful in glossy waves about her finely shaped head and throat. Her form was singularly graceful, every motion yielding to the eye a new shape of beauty. The exquisite finish of her arm and hand, would have made Canova an idolater. Her features were faultless. Her low, gentle brow, with its dark-arching eyebrows, 'like two delicate feathers plucked from the black breast of the singing ummill,' was a throne of serenity and beauty. Never were such eyes as beamed beneath! large, languid, gentle and, but for the purity of the soul within, voluptuous! Passion was there, but in the shape of love yet vestal and unawakened. The young and happy heart with all its guileless emotions unveiled and open, was ever drawing in them, to gladden and win the hearts of all around her. None beheld her but they loved her. She was the idol of the school, and the friend of all.

All conscious the lovely girl stood before them, and her downcast eyes and attitude told a tale each was dying to get at the mystery of.

'Oh, where did you see him?'

'Where did you know him, Alice?'

'Is he from the south an old lover?'

'Don't stand there blushing and making yourself look so wickedly lovely! Do tell us!' were the questions with which she was overwhelmed.

Alice, however, laughed and blushed only the deeper, and breaking away from them fled to her room.

II.

Perhaps the curiosity, raillery, and playful interference of others often induces a young girl to think seriously of the individual about whom she is teased, and to believe she is in love with him, whom perchance she has met but once; when, in reality, if he had not been named to her again after the first accidental meeting, she would never have given him place in her thoughts. This was not, however, the case with lovely Alice May! While she is confidentially confessing her meeting with him to her young friend, Anna Linton, who had followed her to her chamber and playfully teased her secret out of her, we will give it to the reader in language of her own.

About a month previous to the period on which our briefly sketched story is opened, a young gentleman of fortune, recently a graduate of Harvard, whose name was Edward Orr, and who was a native of Boston, was one morning riding on horseback, as was his favorite custom in the direction of Mount Auburn, when seeing a funeral train coming out of the arched gateway, he was prompted by the momentary impulse to alight and enter. Without any definite object in view, save to enjoy in the quiet of his soul the solemn repose of the place, he wandered on from tomb to tomb, through dell and winding walk, enjoying the romantic seclusion and experiencing that calm and intellectual delight, (in which the more hallowed feelings always might,) which the solemn loveliness of the place inspires in every properly cultivated mind.

Suddenly he emerged from a narrow path, thickly shaded by larch trees, upon a secluded spot in the most lovely and quiet portion of the cemetery. Before him, within a few paces, was a young girl arranged in simple white, her straw hat fallen back from her head, her hands folded before her, and her eyes directed towards a name upon a small, exquisitely sculptured monument of white marble. The grace of her fingers, the gentle earnestness of her bending attitude, the rich beauty of her face, on which rested an expression of intellectual admiration in which much of the heart was visible, charmed, surprised, enraptured him! The dark trees were bending over the spot: the white marble rose from the verdant sward in strange beauty amid the dark shades cast by them; and she, in her white robe bending over it, seemed like an angel watching the tomb to receive and bear heavenward the `arisen,' when at length the trump of Gabriel should rend it open!

He feared to advance lest he should intrude upon hallowed ground. His eye fell upon the inscription upon which her soft dark gaze was bent so thoughtfully. It was simply

To my wife, Mary.

20.

`What beautiful and touching eloquence in those few simple words!' she said, in a low sweet voice that came from her heart, while he saw that a tear glistened down her cheek. `There is a sad story of love and hope, and joy and woe and death, couched beneath them! How perfect the taste of the husband who in one simple line records the volumes of his love! Thus would I be buried. My memory graven in the hearts of those I love, my name simply carved on my tomb!'

At this moment her eyes were uplifted with the consciousness of being intently observed, and they met those of the young man, whose earnest admiring gaze, was not difficult to be translated by any maiden. She slightly blushed, and instead of flying or betraying any foolish weakness, smiled with great sweetness, and with a just propriety that charmed him.

`I fear, sir, you have heard some pretty nonsense! But I was not aware I had an auditor! Yet what can be conceived more touching than what has called forth my soliloquy,' and casting her eyes upon the inscription, she replaced her bonnet and was retiring.

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'It is indeed beautiful and touching,' said Edward lifting his hat as he stood by the monument. 'Will you have the kindness to tell me what young bride lies buried here?'

The question was put so respectfully, his manner was so pleasing, his face so intelligently handsome, his voice so rich and low, his eyes so reverential yet so brilliant, that she could not resist a reply:

'I am ignorant sir.' She then added apologetically, 'I have strayed here away from my party, who calling me till they were tired left me to myself. I must hasten to find them.'

'I fear you will not find them easy in this labyrinth of walks,' said Edward, seeing her retire. 'Allow me to escort you,'

'No,' she answered playfully, yet blushing; 'I think I shall not get lost;' and bounding away he lost sight of her in a bend in the avenue.

For some moments he stood gazing where she had disappeared, and then with a deep drawn sigh, and with a sensation of gentle melancholy stealing over him, the first dawning of love, he slowly resumed his ramble. Deep was the impression she made upon his heart, and as he walked he was lost in a brown-study, of which she was the mystic volume.

He wandered how far and how long, whether five minutes or an hour, he did not know, when he was aroused by the side of 'the terrace of tombs,' by a figure crossing his path. He looked up and saw it was the maiden of the monument, whose image love was then busily gravating upon his heart. She was approaching him, and he saw that she looked warm, hurried and a little alarmed.

'I am overjoyed to meet you, sir,' she said coming near with a hurried step. 'You will think me a very strange person! but I have as you predicted, really lost myself! I have been wandering the last half hour through a hundred paths, and this is the third time I have re-appeared before these tombs.'

'Will you do me the honor to accept my guidance,' said Edward.

'You will think me a very foolish girl. I certainly have been very imprudent. As I cannot hope to find my party in this wilderness, you will oblige me by conducting me to the entrance where I will wait for them in the carriage.'

The young man never felt so happy in his life, as at the moment the lovely wanderer frankly placed her hand on his arm, and walked by his side.

Edward was not familiar with the avenues, but listening and hearing the distant roll of wheels along the turnpike, he carefully noted the direction of the sound, and struck into the paths that he believed would lead them towards the highway.

The birds that twittered and chirped in the branches that overhung their way have not betrayed to us their conversation as they walked; and we leave our readers to imagine what two young, ardent, intellectual, enthusiastic persons, thus romantically cast upon each others companionship, discoursed about at such a season.

'There is Spurzheim's tomb, and not far distant and visible from it is the gateway,' said Edward as they emerged from a shaded avenue which they had been slowly traversing. 'I must now part from you; but to bear with me the recollection of this hour as the happiest of my life?'

His eyes sought hers, but they were downcast, and her blushing face was averted. She suddenly withdrew her hand from his arm, for footsteps and voices were heard? The next moment several young girls preceded by two

elderly ladies appeared conducted by one of the party.

They were all looking earnest, anxious and hurried.

`Your friends?' asked Edward.

`Yes.'

At the same moment she was discovered; and they all came flying towards her.

Amid the exclamations, embracings, chidings, wanderings, and joy at recovering her. Alice, after being told a hundred times by half a dozen dear voices, how much she had been sought for, how much they believed she had been drowned in `the lake,' or had been spirited away, or eloped with some lover, was triumphantly escorted along the turnpike towards the city.

PART SECOND.

I.

A year elapsed and Alice May left the boarding school to return to Louisiana for she was a dark-eyed child of the sunny south. She returned home with her father a betrothed bride! During the year that ensued her first interview with Edward Orr, in Mount Auburn, and the bow she had from him at the window, he had sought her acquaintance, and intimacy grew to love. They parted in the drawing-room of the Tremont, when he had called to bid her good bye the evening preceding her departure. He promised in the spring to come out and be married for till then he would not come into the possession of his estate. Their engagement was known to and approved of by her father, a tall, handsome man, with a haughty air, and manners something cold and unprepossessing. Edward did not like him from the first; perhaps because his arrival in Boston was the signal of his departure from Alice. He was, however, tender and affectionate to his child, who seemed to be devotedly attached to him. Of him, Edward had learned that he was a wealthy planter who resided near Lauvidais in the vicinity of New Orleans, that he was a widower, and that Alice was his only child.

The parting between the lovers was favored by the voluntary and judicious absence of Colonel May from the room, and with the usual protestations of love, in this case, painfully sincere, and a promise mutually drawn from each other to write once a week. Alice at length received the last lingering kiss and the next moment was left weeping, *alone*.

II.

It was the evening of the 22d of February. It was to be celebrated by one of the most magnificent assemblies that had ever been in the gay capital of Louisiana. In a planters' villa a few miles from the city was one fair inmate preparing for the brilliant scene. It was Alice May. Four months had elapsed since she had left Edward, and her love burned clear and pure and steady. He was her idol her heart of hearts! She wrote to him oftener than he had stipulated, and was thinking of him daily, hourly. Her life was wrapped up in his, and she knew from his letters that he loved her with the same unwavering devotion.

She had been much courted, caressed and flattered since her return home. In every place she was the star of all eyes. But her love for Edward Orr was the polar star of all her regard, and the compliments, the flattery and homage she received, made no impression upon her. If she had her own will she would have withdrawn from society; for she cared for no pleasure that he did not share with her. But her father, proud of her extraordinary beauty, and flattered by the attention paid her, carried her, to every public place of amusement, with which the

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city was then rife. On the present occasion she had entreated to remain at home, as she had felt all day unusually depressed. But he had a motive in urging her compliance with his wishes, and she consented to prepare and accompany him to town in the carriage,

She was seated at her window which looked out upon a spacious lawn, ornamented with noble elms and sycamores. with a glimpse of the river beyond. The moon was filling her shield with light as the twilight deepened, and shone broadly down between the light trellised columns of the piazza. A mocking bird near by was making the air musical with a hundred stolen songs, and at intervals from the *quartier* of the slaves, came the low chaunt of some Africen air.

Behind Alice was kneeling a young female slave braiding her long, raven hair; for she had for some months ceased to let it have its freedom. Reclining on a couch beside her, lay a still beautiful quadroone about thirty eight years of age. She was an invalid, and her large black eyes seemed to beam with unearthly beauty. Her hand was thin and transparent, and a deep rose seemed opening beneath the olive delicacy of her cheek. She was consumptive, and lay there like a child unconscious of her danger, and as interested in the trifles about her, as if Death had not lifted his finger and beckoned her away. Her name was Desiree, and she was a slave. Many years before, struck with her beauty, while she was yet a child, Colonel May had purchased her for his wife's attendant. The lady educated her, and made her rather a friend and companion than a slave. When the handsome Desiree had reached her twentieth year her mistress died, since which period she had been a housekeeper and overseer of the other female domestics. To her Alice was greatly attached, and the affection of the quadroone for her young mistress was like that of a mother towards her own child.

'Ah, Miss Alice, your hair is already as long as mine,' she said, after admiring for some time the raven tresses of the maiden; 'and I have been said to have the most beautiful hair in Louisiana.'

'Was my mother's hair like mine, Desiree?'

'Mistress' hair was fair brown,' answered the slave, with a hesitation in her manner, and looking as if she would have avoided replying to the question.

'I wish I could have seen to recollect my mother. She died, alas, when I was born! Motherless I have been from my birth, and oh, how have I sighed to lean on a dear mother's bosom.'

The quadroone sighed; then her eyes suddenly sparkled with animation; she half rose from the couch, and with parted lips eagerly bent towards her young mistress as if she would speak! but the words died in her heart as she sank back upon her couch and hid her face in her hands.

During the remainder of the toilet she remained silent; and at length Alice, being richly yet tastefully dressed, drove off with her father.

III.

The loud, crashing music of the orchestra, pealed through the gorgeous halls of the St. Louis, and sounds of mirth and festivity reached their ears as they alighted at the thronged door. As they reached the hall the floor was already occupied by the dancers, and the noise, and glare of chandeliers and the motion of the restless crowd was bewildering.

'Come this way, Alice,' said her father, 'I wish to introduce you to the Count Bondier, who has expressed a desire to become acquainted with you. He is of a distinguished French family, and I wish you to be civil to him. Perhaps I may as well tell you that I wish him to make your alliance, and that for so good a match your Boston lover, had

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best be no more thought of.' This was whispered in her ear as they crossed the hall to an alcove where Colonel May had discovered the foreigner.

If Alice had not been a girl of a strong mind and independent native character, she would have sunk through the floor at this announcement. As it was she trembled like an aspen leaf, and internally resolved to hate him. He was presented to her and coldly yet politely received. He was a good looking Frenchman about thirty with an air of high fashion. He was at once struck with the charms of which he had heard so much; and Colonel May taking an opportunity to desert his daughter, left her dependent on the Count for a protector in the throng. He offered his arm, which she knew not how to decline in her unprotected state, and accepted. He found her disinclined to converse, and proof against his compliments. After trying his best for half an hour to entertain her and get into her good graces for the Count's estates were under mortgage, and the young Louisiana belle was an heiress he began to despair. At length her father reappeared, and she flew to his arm in a way that convinced him of the difficulty of getting a titled son-in-law. In her presence he invited the Count to dine with them the next day; an invitation which he accepted, it seemed to her, with great pleasure.

The event so embittered the hours of the assembly that Alice at length prevailed on her father, on the plea of ill-health, to retire with her. The ensuing day the Count came, and Colonel May studied to leave him alone with her. But coldness and distance alone characterised her manner in his presence.

Day after day he was a visiter to Lauvidais, and daily pressing his suit by every attention and every gentle device in love's armory. But in vain. At length he made a bold strike and addressed her. She refused him civilly but firmly. This enraged her father, who threatened, unless she gave her consent to marry him within three months he would deprive her of her inheritance, and shut her up in a convent.

'Give me half that time to decide!' said she with firmness.

'I grant it, Alice! and expect at the end of the period that you will be prepared to comply with my wishes, and those of M. Bondier, who is devoted to you! Your alliance with him will place you in the best society in Paris.'

On her father's departure, Alice fastened her chamber door, and setting down wrote the following letter:

Letter `Lauvidais, – *March 20*. Dearest Edward,

I write to avail myself of my privilege and duty, as your betrothed wife, to throw myself, at a crisis which has just occurred in my life, upon your love! A certain Count Bondier is persecuting me with his attentions, and although I have in every way, not absolutely to insult him, shown him my repugnance to his suit, and also distinctly and firmly declined his addresses, yet he pursues them encouraged by my father who is warmly in favor of an alliance with his powerful family through me. My father has just left me with a menace that unless I will consent to marry him at the end of three months, that he will immure me in a convent, which God knows is to be preferred. I have asked and obtained six weeks to decide. This letter will reach you in two. It will take three weeks for you to reach here. I need not ask you to fly for my love tells me you will soon be here to claim your lover as your *bride!*

Alice.'

Section

This letter was received by Edward Orr, in less than two weeks after it was penned, and its perusal gave him intense agony. He made instant preparations to proceed south to rescue her from her fate; but before his departure he received another letter it was but a single line.

Letter `Lauvidais, – *March 21*.

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I have just heard something that has frozen my blood! I write, I know not what! Do not come! I am lost to you *forever!*

Alice May.'

Section

Edward gazed at the words with a glazed eye! What fearful mystery was this! What has happened? I will know the worst. Lost to me forever! No! she cannot be false! I will fly to her for assuredly some dreadful evil hath befallen her! How wild and large the writing! so unlike her usual hand yet it is her's! Alice, I heed not your command! I fly to you!

With this determination, the almost frenzied lover sprang into the carriage and drove to the depot, his mind tortured with the mystery, his heart bleeding with the agony of suspense.

PART THIRD.

I.

The fifteenth day after entering the cars at Boston, Edward Orr was landed from the Pontchartrain line at the New Orleans depot. During the whole journey he was in the greatest fever of excitement and suspense. That some fearful evil hung over Alice he knew; and he feared that he might hear on his arrival the most fearful results. Driving to the St. Charles the most magnificent hotel in the world he alighted, and, after taking a room, sent for the gentlemanly proprietor, Mr. Mudge, whom, very fortunately, he had known in the north. To him he communicated only so much of his urgent business there as was necessary; and what he most wished, learned from him the direction to Colonel May's plantation, and obtained from him fleet horses! Mr. M. had heard nothing of his daughter, though he had seen Col. May in the hotel only a week before in company with a Count Bondier, who had lately lodged there.

At this name Edward started to his feet.

'Is he here now?'

'Yes.'

'He is he is that is, is he *married?*'

'No,' answered the proprietor, witnessing his agitation with surprise. 'He had bachelor rooms. He has left for New York.'

'Alone?'

'Yes.'

This reply was a great relief to the agitated lover. As soon as the horses were at the door, he sprang into the carriage, and soon left the city behind him. His horses flew as if winged along the level causeway by the river side. The scenery of villas, gardens and lawns was beautiful and novel; but buried in his own thoughts, he heeded nothing. At length, after they had been driving about an hour, the coachman drew up at a spacious gateway, and said,

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‘This is the gate to Colonel May’s villa, sir!’

Aroused by his voice, Edward looked around him. It was already sunset, yet a soft twilight made every object beautiful and distinct. Through the avenue he caught a glimpse of the dwelling. His heart wildly palpitated, with the consciousness of being near Alice. He waited a moment to collect his thoughts and deliberate on what course to take. He had left the St. Charles hotel without any decided plan, and driven forward without reflection. As the coachman was about to drive into the grounds, he bade him stop.

‘I will walk to the house. Remain in the highway ready to receive me at a moment’s warning. Possibly I shall bring a lady with me!’

Thus speaking he entered the avenue, and took his way by a cross path to the house. All was calm and serene. The birds that had sought their boughs, twittered as he disturbed their repose, and hopped higher in the tree; a nightingale, startled by his step, would utter a shrill note of alarm, and fly away into the depths of the grove. The heavens were of a mellow roseate hue, and the golden atmosphere, fused by the lingering sun-glow, was like transparent amethyst. He rapidly walked forward until he came out of the gate near the southern wing of the mansion. He surveyed the piazza and portico, but no one was visible but an old African smoking his pipe beneath a pomegranate tree that grew before a Venetian window. All around wore the air of luxury, taste and wealth. It was the beau ideal of the villas and grounds of a Louisiana planter. He could not help being attracted by the beauty of all that met his eye. But he was too intent upon his object to heed any thing that had not a direct bearing upon that.

He now reflected that it would be fatal to his hopes if he should meet Colonel May. Yet how he should avoid him and see Alice he could not tell. It became him to be secret, cautious and bold.

He therefore remained sometime in the covert of the path until the shades of evening deepened, and then stole across the lawn to a ground window which was open. The negro was asleep beneath it, his pipe gone out and still held in his lips. All was still. Encouraged by the silence he looked into the drawing room, through the opposite door a faint light glimmered. He stepped into the room and traversed the gorgeous carpet with a noiseless step. He crossed another apartment and came to the door which led into the lighter room. As he came near he heard a faint moaning, and looking in he beheld lying upon a low French couch, Colonel May. His face was distorted with mental, rather than physical suffering; and he was turning from side to side, restless and betraying great agony of spirit. A high fever burned his cheek. He looked also haggard and worn, and at once excited Edward’s pity. By his side knelt two slaves, one of whom, an old man, was soothing him with kind words, and the other was bathing his hands.

‘Where could Alice be?’ was Edward’s mental inquiry. That she was in some way the cause of this mental suffering, he was assured. But how in what way? What should keep her from her father’s bedside if she were ’

He dared not carry out his fearful and agonizing foreboding. His first impulse was to enter the chamber and demand of the prostrate father his daughter his betrothed bride! But the majesty of the poor man’s suffering awed him; and he remained gazing upon him uncertain how to proceed. Suddenly Colonel May sprang from the couch to his feet.

‘It is no use struggling with this feeling!’ he said in tones of deepest human emotion. ‘It is hell here it can be no worse! I will end it! Alec bring me my pistols!’

‘Massa oh good massa!’ implored the slave casting himself at his feet, and clinging to his knees.

‘Slave! obey me!’ he cried in a voice that made the poor African release his hold and rise to his feet.

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The pistols were brought and placed on a table by his hand. He opened the case and took one out and examined it.

‘Yes, it is in order. Alec, my faithful servant, see me decently buried; and I know you will shed a tear for your poor master when he is gone. I am weary of the madness in my brain, and must end it. My Alice! thus will I atone to thee for the wrong I have done thee!’

The slaves cast themselves on their knees by him and covered their faces. He raised his hand, cocked the pistol and presented it to his heart, when his hand was caught by Edward Orr.

‘Hold, take not the life that is not thine own!’

‘Ha, ha, ha! Thou art come too late for thy bride, sir,’ said the suicide; and forcibly disengaging his arm, he placed the muzzle of the pistol against his temples, and discharged its contents into his brain. He fell instantly dead at Edward’s feet.!

After the horror and intense excitement of the moment was past, and his slaves had lain him, by Edward’s order, upon the couch, he inquired of Alec the cause of the dreadful scene he had witnessed.

‘It is Miss Alice, massa!’ said the sobbing African.

‘And she oh, tell me where she is?’ he asked with eagerness; for in his horror at the deed he had witnessed, he forgot the object which had brought him there.

‘Miss Alice went off to some conven’, massa, and left behind a letter dat make massa crazy when he read it, and he never had his sense since, but keep all de time walk up and down de house, or lay down groaning and takin’ on most pitiful.’

‘Alice fled to a convent! Where? What convent?’ he asked, feeling relieved; for he had rather a convent’s walls should hold her than the chateau of Count Bondier.

Finding that nothing more was known either by the African, or any of the other slaves who now flocked into the room, save that ‘Mis Alice had fled to a convent,’ he shortly after left and reaching his carriage drove to town. He was now in a state of the most intense solicitude. All was mystery inscrutable! She had not been united to Count Bondier, this at least was a relief. But why should she have fled to a convent, when three weeks yet remained for her to make up her decision? What could have led her to pen such a letter to him? What could have been the nature of that addressed to her father? The more he reflected upon the affair, the more perplexing it became. His determination, however, was to ascertain what convent had become her asylum.

He learned on reaching his hotel that the only two convents in the state, was the one a league from the city, called the convent d’Ursuline, and another in the interior, on Red River, known as the convent of del Sacre Coeur.

By means not necessary to detail here, he learned that she was not at the former convent; and while the whole capital was astir with the news of Colonel May’s suicide and his daughter’s disappearance, he proceeded to the latter with a letter of introduction he had obtained to the superior of the convent. On reaching Alexandria, he secured a guide and galloped across the nine leagues of beautiful prairie to the convent. It stood in the bosom of a lovely country, and with natural woodland, copse, and lawn. Its walls rose to the eye above a group of majestic oaks and were reflected in a lake. Herds of wild cattle were grazing on the plain, and squadrons of horses of the prairie, startled by his approach, lifted their proud heads, shook their arched manes, and with a cry like the clanging of the bugles of an armed host, galloped thundering across the plain.

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The sun was an hour high when he reached the convent gate, and rung for admittance, An aged portress open a lattice in the gate and gravely inquired his business.

'I bear a letter to the superior, and desire to present it in person.'

She retired and in a few moments returned, unbarred the gate, and admitted him into the outer corridor of the convent. A tall and majestic female approached him, and announced herself as the lady superior.

'I am the bearer of a letter to you from the Rev. Pierre Du , a Roman Catholic priest of New Orleans, and have visited the convent of the Sacred Heart, to learn if a certain young lady, named Alice May, had sought asylum there. Edward watched the grave countenance of the lady superior, as her cold eye moved along the lines; but her features, schooled to conceal expression, betrayed nothing upon which he could base hope or fears.

'Follow me, young man!' she said in a low, deep voice, that he thought trembled with emotion. She led the way along the corridor, and as he walked the solemn sound of a dirge, fell fitfully upon his ear and sunk to his heart. He followed her across the court to a door that opened into the vestibule of the convent chapel. As he approached, the deep, solemn strain rose and swelled now loud and startling like a human wail, now low and painfully plaintive. With a full heart, and his spirits weighed down by a gloom that he could not throw aside, he entered the vestibule.

The superior now stopped, threw open the door of the chapel, and placing one hand upon her bosom with a look of woe and pity, pointed in silence with the other towards a bier which stood before the altar!

'What means this? speak?' he cried, half the truth rushing upon his brain.

'There lies the sister Martha, she whom you named Alice May!'

'He rushed past her broke from her heedless of her warning, that no man ever entered there save God's priests, and making his way through the group of nuns that surrounded the snowy bier, stood before it. The face of the dead was uncovered, and a single look told him that it was Alice May's. Calm, peaceful, lovely still in death she lay there, while he who loved her dearer than life, was kneeling in agony unsupportable under her.

II.

She was borne to her grave in a beautiful and secluded cemetery of the convent. The lover was permitted to follow her remains for by all he was regarded as a brother. There was a mystery to all the sisterhood about the dead, and they knew not her living ties.

The grave was closed over her remains the funeral procession returned to the convent, and Edward kneeled beside the fresh sod, which enclosed all he loved. Night at length came on in her solemn silence and starry beauty. Its influence calmed his troubled spirit, and he arose and slowly left the spot. He sought the convent, and solicited audience of the lady superior. To her he revealed his passion all her history as interwoven with his own and then besought her to tell him what had brought her to that sudden death.

The lady superior was deeply affected by his narrative and his intense grief; but she replied that she would give him no information. That two weeks before, she had arrived at the convent with only a single black servant, who had instantly turned from the gate and returned to Alexandria. That she applied for admission in the name of charity, and the portress opened to her.

'When I beheld her,' said the superior, 'as she was conducted before me, I was struck with her beauty, and also

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with a look of intense suffering. She simply asked me to give her asylum from the world and to conceal from it her refuge. She said she wished to take the veil and never more to be seen, but pass her life in prayer and preparation for heaven. She then placed jewels in my hands to a large amount, which she said had been hers, but which she now gave to the church. We received her as sister Martha; and from that day I became deeply interested in her. But she communicated to me nothing of her history save her name. I watched her closely, for I feared, so deep and silent was her secret sorrow, that she might lose her reason and take her life. She spent nearly all her time in the chapel before the altar, and was always seen in tears. Day after day I observed her wilt and fade like a flower, till at length a fever seized her, and three days since she died, like an infant falling asleep, in my arms. Earth has lost a child but heaven has gained an angel.

The feelings with which poor Edward listened to this simple narrative cannot be described. After he had become somewhat composed, he asked if she had left nothing to lead to the cause which drove her to the convent. The superior said that she had not, and that all to her was wrapped in mystery.

'All is indeed mystery inscrutable,' said Edward, as he mentally recurred to the dreadful end of her father, of her strange letter to him, of her extraordinary flight and sudden death.

There was, however, a solution to the mystery, which, on his return to New Orleans, Edward Orr afterwards discovered, which, while it inspired him with wonder and grief, elevated her, if anything could have done so, infinitely higher in his affection and esteem. If the reader has the curiosity to know the solution, he will have it gratified in a subsequent number.

THE SEQUEL TO ALICE MAY.

PART FOURTH.

The mystery that involved the death of Alice May seemed to Edward impenetrable. He could obtain no clue to the motives which led to her strange flight from her father's roof, or her seclusion in the remote convent of Sacre Coeur. The cause of her father's suicidal end was equally inscrutable. Lost in mystery and burdened with grief, he left New Orleans, and after traversing the rivers and lakes of the west, at length reached Boston. A settled gloom was upon my mind, and with his clouded brow and grave and sad countenance he seemed ten years older than when he left three months before. The mystery in which Alice's fate remained wrapped had preyed deeply upon him, and kept him in a state of feverish anxiety and nervous expectation. His health was suffering, and his mind wandering and unsettled: for night nor day did it rest; but was ever active, ever seeking some clue to unfold her destiny.

It was night when he reached his native city. The carriage which bore him to his lodgings was whirled rapidly along through lighted and thronged streets, and at length drew up at his door. He alighted, and scarce returning the congratulations of his family, he hastened to his rooms. Every thing seemed as he had left it. He cast himself into a chair, and for a few moments remained with his head buried in his hands. Suddenly he recovered himself as his servant entered with his baggage.

'Thomas!'

'Sir.'

'Has any letter: has any package arrived for me since I left!'

'Yes, sir, a dozen nearly. I have kept them locked up here.' As the servant spoke, he deposited his master's valise upon the floor, and unlocking a draw in his secretary, handed him several letters and parcels. With a trembling,

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hurried hand, Edward turned them over, glancing at their addresses, and throwing each successively aside with a gesture of impatience. He looked at the last, and then with a look of painful disappointment, cried,

'What did I hope for? She wrote me no more after that letter which led me to fly to her. Why should I hope to find another from her? No, no. The causes which led to her flight and death must forever remain in mystery; a mystery that like an internal fire, will feed upon my brain till reason perish. It will make me go mad. I have had since the hour of her death but one thought: one burning, overwhelming thought: and that is to find the key to these fearful events.'

'Here, sir,' exclaimed Thomas, who had returned to close the drawer, 'here, I have found another letter; perhaps it is the one you want. It was edge-wise up, and I did not discover it before.'

Edward sprang to snatch it from him; and the instant his eye rested upon the superscription, he uttered a cry of mingled joy and anguish, and sunk almost insensible into his chair. Thomas flew to assist him.

'No: I need it not. Go: go, Thomas; I am better now. Leave me, I wish to be alone; all alone; with my heart and *her!*' He waved his hand faintly yet resolutely, and his servant, after casting upon him a look of pity and wonder, quitted the chamber.

For several minutes the lover remained seated with the sealed letter grasped in his hand. He seemed to want energy to break it open. At length he raised it to his eyes, and read the address with evident anguish.

'Yes, dear Alice those grateful characters were traced by thine own fair fingers. And you did not forget me at the last moment of your flight! How shall I read this?' he cried, starting up!

'Here is evidently the key of all that I would learn of all that ignorance of which has been driving me melancholy mad! And yet my hand trembles to open it and read! my heart shrinks! I feel I have not the courage to come to the knowledge of all I would most learn! It is a double sheet, and perhaps contains a narrative of all, to read which may fire my brain with I know not what terrible passions! I will put an end to this suspense, and thus relieve my mind from the load of uncertainty which has so long borne it down!'

As he spoke he tore the seal and unfolded the letter. A lock of dark hair fell from it, which he caught and pressed to his lips and heart with passionate exclamation. He again seated himself, but again and again he had pressed the dear signature of 'Alice May' to his lips, and many were the hot tears that fell upon it, ere he commenced reading; and often did he interrupt himself, and rise and pace the room now in tears now in resentment, before he came to the close.

In the three preceding *parts* to this story, the reader has seen Alice May the loveliest among the beautiful of her school companions, and winning all hearts equally by the attractions of her person and the excellencies of her heart and mind. He has seen her the betrothed of a young gentleman worthy of her, and beheld her on her return to the 'sunny south,' the idol of a doating father, and surrounded with every luxury that wealth and taste could contribute. He has seen her there, in the midst of those means of enjoyment happy only in the love of her betrothed; living only in him; and looking forward to the spring when he was to come and claim her as his bride. The reader has also seen how happy Edward was in correspondence, and how hopefully he looked forward to his meeting and union with the lovely Louisianian. He has witnessed the sudden termination of this happiness by his reception of her two letters filled with mysterious words and imploring him to forget her 'that she was unworthy of his love or of his thoughts.' He has seen that, tortured by suspense and apprehending every evil, he had immediately started south, and after finding her father's house deserted, Colonel May dead by his own hand upon the floor, and Alice flown, he at length discovered her in a convent laid upon a bier, and ready to be borne by virgins to her grave; that to this moment all concerning her from the time he had got her letter was wrapt in the most impenetrable mystery. To find therefore a letter, dated, as he now saw it was, on the day of her flight, which

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promised to unravel these strange things, was an event calculated to rouse the most painful curiosity in Edward's mind. The letter was as follows:

'I know not how to address you! 'Dear Edward' was flowing from my pen but I am unworthy to give you any endearing title. In my last letter it was a wild strange one but I was nearly mad when I wrote it I told you that events had transpired that rendered it necessary for your honor and happiness that you should forget me! I left all in mystery! But reflection has come to my aid reason has returned, and after hours of terrible insanity, I can think and write calmly. I did intend, Edward, to keep the dreadful secret forever locked up in my own bosom. But this is pride; and with pride I have no more to do. It would be cruel to you, whom my soul loves! Oh, if I could forget but no! I must live and remember. How shall I relate my shame. I have sat down to do it that I might relieve your mind from the suspense and show you that I have not lightly trifled with your love for me; for too well I know how fondly you love me.

'Alas, that your noble heart had not been bestowed upon a worthier object. But I will no longer avoid the painful subject. In three hours to-night at midnight, I fly from my home leaving no trace of my flight. Before I take this step I wish YOU, Edward, to do me justice. Therefore do I now write to you. You saw me first at the boarding school, and knew me as the daughter of an opulent southern planter. You offered me your noble love, and in return I gave you my heart. Oh, the happiness of that hour when I first learned that you regarded me with favor that you loved me! But I cannot dwell upon these days of happiness fled forever! Alas, why has Heaven made me to be accursed! Let me speak of more recent events. Let me explain to you the meaning of the dark language of my last letter. I told you that the only alternative of my union with the Count was to be immured in a convent for life. I entreated you to fly to my rescue ere the time given me by my father for deciding between the two, elapsed. This letter was followed in two days by another recalling my request and telling you an event had occurred which rendered it necessary that we should meet no more, that I was going to fly and hide from the world, for I was unworthy your love or slightest regard. It is this letter, which now I am on the eve of flight, I feel it my duty to explain; then farewell forever, and forget that I have ever lived. Oh, how can I relate my shame to him whose approbation and love I regard next to Heaven's? But I must to my painful duty.

'The evening of the day on which I wrote you that if you wished to save me from the persecuting attentions of the Count you must fly to me, Desiree, the beautiful and affectionate Quadroom nurse, of whom I have spoken to you as being with my mother when she died, and who had been my nurse through childhood, had been taken suddenly ill. I flew to her with affectionate anxiety, for I had loved her as a mother, and she had always shown me the most affectionate attachment. I found her suffering under a severe attack of typhus fever; and as my father was absent with the Count in town, I prescribed what I thought would relieve, and was about sending for the family physician, when she called me to the side of her couch, and said,

'No, Alice, 'its no use! I feel that I am death-struck. I am dying Come near, I have something to say to you.'

I threw myself upon my knees by her bed side in tears, and kissing her hands bade her live for my sake.

'You are the only mother I have ever known! If you die I shall be wretched indeed!' I cried and bathed her burning hands with tears.

'Miss Alice,' she said, placing her hand upon my forehead, and putting back my hair, while she looked into my eyes with the fondest affection, 'I have but a short time to live! Yet before I die, I would give utterance to the tide of maternal affection which for years has been pent up in my breast. Yes, Alice, for seventeen years I have kept locked in my breast the secret which is a mother's life and joy to utter in each hour in kisses and caresses upon her child. But I have been denied this! Fear and love fear of your father and love for you, for I knew it would make you unhappy, has kept me from it. But death has now come, and is stronger than your father's threats and stronger than death is a mother's love! Alice, you are my own child! Bend over me and let me fold you to a mother's heart, that for years has yearned to empty itself upon your bosom! You are my child, my long cherished,

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fondly loved child!

I listened to her without power to stir. I did not doubt for a hundred things of the past, never understood before, now rushed upon my mind to corroborate her assertion! and while I listened I BELIEVED. She ended and would have clasped me to her heart. I shrunk from her with a cry of mingled loathing and anguish, and should have fallen but for the support of the couch by which I knelt. I remained for several minutes in a state of stupor, with only one sensation, and that one of misery unutterable and scare comprehended.

‘You refuse to embrace me!’ said Desiree nay I will call her what she was my mother ‘I knew this would be so and therefore that I might not have your hate has been one of my motives in keeping so secretly your birth from you. But it matters little now, Alice, whether you hate or detest me! I have relieved my heart; I have eased my conscience; and death will come less heavily upon my soul! Will you kiss me but once, my child?’

‘Oh, tell me tell me, I cried, shrinking from her embrace, and burying my face in the curtain, ‘tell me the whole fearful tale! Who was she then whose memory I have been taught to reverence as my mother’s?’

‘She was the lawful wife of your father. When she was a bride, I was purchased to be her attendant But I have few words to give to the story, Alice!’ she said, suppressing a cry which her physical suffering wrung from her; ‘A year after your father’s marriage with her she gave birth to a daughter, and in giving it life gave up her own. The infant lived but a week, and the morning of its death I gave birth to a daughter. The two children, I need not say, had but one father.’

‘And I was that child?’ I asked eagerly.

‘Yes, you were a lovely babe, and your father proposed to me to let the dead babe pass as mine, and to raise you as his own. Tempted by the offer he made me, and ambitious to have you placed in such a position in society as would be the lot of a daughter of Colonel May, I promised it. Seventeen years have I kept the secret, daily yearning to give you a mother’s love. Death has now approached, and my breast would hold the secret no longer. The mother’s love would find its channel ere the fountain of her heart dried up forever. You will hate me you will curse my memory. But we are alone: no ear but thine has heard, and beyond this death—bed the secret never need reach! My desire is gratified in acknowledging you as my child, and my conscience lightened of a load it has too long borne. Nay, will you not give the mother one of the kisses you were ever ready to bestow upon the supposed nurse Desiree?’

I remained motionless. My bosom was agitated by a hundred conflicting emotions. That all she said was true I believed. I did not for an instant doubt that I was her child. I felt the most intense resentment towards my father, which then was transferring to her, for suffering me so long to remain ignorant of my degraded birth. For I was not only a Quadroone but a slave for such Desiree still was to my father. Horror filled my mind and rendered me almost insensible. For an instant only an instant and once, the idea of concealing my birth as she had suggested, occurred to me; but I immediately banished the temptation. Your love was to me at that moment the anchor of my integrity. I could not deceive you, Edward! Under other circumstances that is, if I had not loved and been loved by you that instinctive fear of the world, that innate love of the world’s good and honorable opinion, might have made me hesitate. But I rejected the suggestion! I resolved that, however great the sacrifice, I would willingly be the victim rather than you should be deceived. My mother seemed to be reading my thoughts as she fixed her large, lustrous dying eye upon me.

‘Alice, breathe not the secret, or you will perish! Live and be happy! Only by secrecy can you hold your present position.’

‘I will perish, then,’ I said firmly. ‘Mother, if such I must now call you you have poisoned my existence! Nay, I do not blame you! I loved you as my nurse I love you as my mother! I will embrace you! There I acknowledge

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you to be my mother! I will acknowledge it to the world!

She seized my hand and weeping implored me to preserve the fatal secret.— At length I promised to conceal it from all but my father and you, and then fly to a convent. She spent her last breath in endeavoring to prevail upon me to lock it in my own breast: and finding all her entreaties ineffectual, began bitterly to reflect upon herself for making the disclosure. But these regrets were now unavailing either for herself or me, and she shortly after expired, imploring in her last appealing look my forgiveness. I could only cast myself upon her body and weep.

It was near sunset she died, and an hour after my father came home! I heard his step on the portico! He was alone, and seemed from the tone in which he spoke to his servant, to be in a cheerful mood. I was kneeling weeping by my mother's couch, but instantly rose on his entrance, as some one told him that Desiree was dead!

He merely glanced at me, and approaching the bedside gazed a few moments upon the face of the once beautiful, and then sinking upon his knees bent over it, laid his head upon the pillow and wept. The sound of his manly sobs in an instant suppressed the fierce purpose in my breast with which on hearing his step I had impulsively determined to meet him, charging him with my shame. I stood by in silence till he rose up, kissed the lips of the dead, and walked to the window. I knew then he had loved her loved her more (as she had told me) than his wife. Yes, or he would never have taken her child and thus assumed her as her own. At length he approached me and asked me why I wept? Instantly my spirit awoke within me, and I answered,

'I weep my mother's death. Doth it not become a daughter to show respect for a mother dead.'

He started, less I suppose at the unusual tones of my voice, than at the expression of my face. He gazed on me an instant with a look of suspicion, and then said fiercely, while he pointed sternly towards the body,

'How has she dared to confess '

'Nay, father! words and rage are useless,' I said in as firm a tone as I could command. 'I know the whole truth! It is graven with a pen of fire upon my soul. I am the daughter of that woman and my father's slave.'

He cast himself at my feet and implored my forgiveness implored me to keep the secret and save him and myself from ignominy and contempt. I was resolute to divulge it, and that I would do so to the Count and to you! He menaced and entreated me by turns, when finding me determined he said in a low deep voice that sunk to my soul.'

'Then since you will be my slave, you shall know the power of a master!'

He took me by the arm. I followed him unresisting; and he locked me up in a strong room, and there left me. The next morning he came to me early, and entering, cast himself on his knees, and asking me to forgive him, imploring me to regard my own happiness and keep the dreadful secret of my birth. At length I told him that I would not divulge it (which he most feared) to the Count nor but to one person in the world. Who that person was (yourself) I declined telling him. With this he was better satisfied, and releasing me desired me to breakfast with him. After breakfast he wrote two notes and despatched them hurriedly by two slaves in opposite directions. While he was at the door sending off the servants, I secretly despatched an intelligent slave on foot to meet them at the gate of the avenue, and learn where they were going. He returned and said one was to Father De L the priest, the other to Count . I suspected this, and knew my father's object to be to unite me to the Count at once. I pleaded illness, and shortly retired to my chamber. In a few minutes afterwards I had packed up all my jewels and secreted them about my person, and escaping from my window upon the gallery, gained the stables and saddled my own riding horse. I mounted; several paths led in various directions from the stables, and taking one of them that led by the river, I galloped along its banks until I came to a woodman's cabin, where I often had been before. I knew steamboats almost daily stopped there for wood, and I intended to go on board the first. One was in sight

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as I came near the hut, and soon approached. I told the woodman I wished to go on board, and that he must accompany me and take my passage. The boat was bound I may not say in what direction lest you will hope to discover my retreat! In two hours after leaving my father's roof I was on board and in the state-room from which I now write you! This letter will be mailed to you from the first town.

I have not written you all dear Edward. I feel you will, while you acquit me of rudely trifling with your honorable affection, do me the justice my painful position challenges. In sacrificing your love, I have sacrificed myself. Do not hope to find my retreat. I am going to bury myself in a convent where I shall at least have serenity of mind. Happy I never expect to be in this world. Farewell, der Edward. We shall meet again in Heaven.

Alice May.

The subsequent destiny of the unhappy Alice is already known to the readers of the preceding Parts of this tale. Singular and unusual as the incidents seem, they are taken from the life of one, who, not less hapless than she was lovely, now rests in a flower-adorned grave in the little cemetery of the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

THE END.