

The Old Mill at Somerville

Charles Skinner

North American

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The “old powder-house,” as the round stone tower is called that stands on a gravel ridge in Somerville, Massachusetts, is so named because at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War it was used temporarily as a magazine; but long before that it was a wind-mill. Here in the old days two lovers held their tryst: a sturdy and honest young farmer of the neighborhood and the daughter of a man whose wealth puffed him with purse-pride. It was the plebeian state of the farmer that made him look at him with an unfavorable countenance, and when it was whispered to him that the young people were meeting each other almost every evening at the mill, he resolved to surprise them there and humiliate, if he did not punish them. From the shadow of the door they saw his approach, and, yielding to the girl’s imploring, the lover secreted himself while she climbed to the loft. The flutter of her dress caught the old man’s eye and he hastened, panting, into the mill. For some moments he groped about, for his eyes had not grown used to the darkness of the place, and hearing his muttered oaths, the girl crept backward from the stair.

She was beginning to hope that she had not been seen, when her foot caught in a loose board and she stumbled, but in her fall she threw out her hand to save herself and found a rope within her grasp. Directly that her weight had been applied to it there was a whirl and a clank. The cord had set the great fans in motion. At the same moment a fall was heard, then a cry, passing from anger into anguish. She rushed down the stair, the lover appeared from his hiding-place at the same moment, and together they dragged the old man to his feet.

At the moment when the wind had started the sails he had been standing on one of the mill-stones and the

sudden jerk had thrown him down. His arm caught between the grinding surfaces and had been crushed to pulp. He was carried home and tenderly nursed, but he did not live long; yet before he died he was made to see the folly of his course, and he consented to the marriage that it had cost him so dear to try to prevent. Before she could summon heart to fix the wedding-day the girl passed many months of grief and repentance, and for the rest of her life she avoided the old mill. There was good reason for doing so, people said, for on windy nights the spirit of the old man used to haunt the place, using such profanity that it became visible in the form of blue lights, dancing and exploding about the building.

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