

A soldier, who had won imperishable fame on the battlefields of his country, was confronted by a gaunt stranger, clad all in black and wearing an impenetrable mask. And the soldier's thoughts sped back over the years, and his whole life came to him like a lightning flash--the companionship and smiles of kings, the glories of government and political power, the honors of peace, the joys of conquest, the din of battle, the sweets of a quiet home life upon a western prairie, the gentle devotion of a wife, the clamor of noisy boys, and the face of a little girl--ah, there his thoughts lingered and clung. It having been noised about that the soldier was dying and that Nellie had been sent for across the sea, all the people vied with each other in soothing the last moments of the famous man, for he was beloved by all and all were bound to him by bonds of patriotic gratitude, since he had been so brave a soldier upon the battlefields of his country. And with these words Death seized upon the soldier and strove to bear him hence, but the soldier struggled so desperately that he prevailed against Death, and the strange phantom departed alone. But the soldier did not heed their words of sympathy; the voice of fame, which, in the past, had stirred a fever in his blood and fallen most pleasantly upon his ears, awakened no emotion in his bosom now. Give me a lease of life till I have held her in these arms, and then come for me and I will go!" Then Death's hideous aspect was changed; his stern features relaxed and a look of pity came upon them. And Death said, "It shall be so," and saying this he went his way. And nothing could wash away the marks--nay, not all the skill in the world could wash them away, for they were disease, lingering, agonizing, fatal disease. But with quiet valor the soldier returned to his histories, and for many days thereafter he toiled upon them as the last and best work of his noble life. But the soldier's ears were deaf to the cries of Ambition; they heard another voice--the voice of the soldier's heart--and the voice whispered: "Nellie--Nellie--Nellie." She was a wife and a mother; yet even in her womanhood she was to the soldier's heart the same little girl the soldier had held upon his knee many and many a time while his rough hands weaved prairie flowers in her soft, fair curls. The gulls flew far out from land and told the winds, and the winds flew further still and said to the ship: "Speed on, O ship! speed on in thy swift, straight course, for you are bearing a treasure to a father's heart!" "I have ridden by your side day and night," said Death; "I have hovered about you on a hundred battlefields, but no sight of me could chill your heart till now, and now I hold you in my power." "My poison is in your veins, and, see, my dew is on your brow. But you are a brave man, and I will not bear you with me till you have asked one favor, which I will grant." "Time to complete our work--our books--our histories," counselled Ambition. And the soldier called her Nellie now, just as he did then, when she sat on his knee and prattled of her dolls. An old comrade came and pressed his hand, and talked of the times when they went to the wars together; and the old comrade told of this battle and of that, and how such a victory was won and such a city taken. So the people came and spoke words of veneration and love and hope, and so with quiet fortitude, but with a hungry heart, the soldier waited for Nellie, his little girl. But Death held out his bony hand and beckoned to the soldier. Then when he had gone the soldier found upon his throat the imprint of Death's cruel fingers--so fierce had been the struggle. And as Death tarried, the soldier communed with himself. That was all--no other words but those, and the soldier struggled to his feet and stretched forth his hands and called to Death; and, hearing him calling, Death came and stood before him. Now the soldier's child was far away--many, many leagues from where the soldier lived, beyond a broad, tempestuous ocean. The soldier thought

only of Nellie, and he awaited her coming. demanded the soldier. "No," cried the soldier, resolutely; "my time is not come. See, here are the histories I am writing--no hand but mine can finish them--I will not go till they are done!" Come!" "How pale and thin the soldier is getting," said the people. "It would be vain of you to struggle with me now," said Death. "There are so many things--my histories and all--give me an hour that I may decide what I shall ask." Before he closed his eyes forever, what boon should he ask of Death? "Ask Death for time to do this last and crowning act of our great life." asked Death, with a scornful smile. "No, not them," said the soldier, "but my little girl--my Nellie! But the soldier's ears heard no sound of battle now, and his eyes could see no flash of sabre nor smoke of war. She came across the broad, tempestuous ocean. "Who are you that you dare to block my way?" "Have you come for me?" asked the soldier. "The books?"