

"Motherdy," she sobbed. "My own little mother! How can I think of love when you are going to leave me?"

The mother laid a tender hand on the girl's bowed head, as she whispered, "He will care for you. I feel that you will be safe in his keeping, and so, my dearest, I will die in peace."

The sobs ceased. The girl rose from her knees as calm as if no sudden storm had swept through her inmost soul. With down drooping head she laid her cold, trembling hand in his. "God bless you, love," he said, and Bessie, turning, saw a smile of satisfaction and relief flit over her dying mother's face.

Just then a light rap upon the floor was heard. Opening it Lindley saw his friend, Dr. Heyward. "You have come quickly, Heyward," he said. "I am thankful." Half an hour later the two men left the room together.

"A short time—a very short time," answered his friend.

"Then, Lindley," he said, "who are these refined people? What are these two lovely women doing in this hole of a tenement? Man, what does it mean?"

"I will tell you," was the reply. In a few hurried words the story was told.

"But this girl, so soon to be motherless," said Dr. Heyward. "Has she no one to look to?"

"Yes," replied Lindley with fervor. "I will take care of her as long as God lends me breath. My beautiful darling! To think she has been living here so many months, and I have never known it," and the strong man shook with emotion.

"Lindley, what will your mother, your sister, say to this?" asked his friend.

"You well know that my truest friends have always been uncongenial to them," was the quiet reply.

"True," said the doctor. "And now I must go. I will be back some time to-night. Send for me any time you want me, Lindley."

For two hours or more after he returned to the room the sick mother slept. Then suddenly she opened her eyes, and in a voice of rapture exclaimed, "Soon—I'm coming."

Bessie tightened her hold on the dear thin hand.

"I am not afraid, darling. Why, I am almost there. Oh! the glory of the vision!" And the cold death waves swept over her feet, crept slowly higher and higher, but ere they reached her heart the face grew radiant with some ray of light divine, and stretching forth her arms, without a struggle, without a fear, she entered her "desired Heaven."

Lindley closed the eyelids gently—gently drew the girl's hand from the hand now cold in death. Putting his strong arms about her, he drew her close to his heart.

"My darling, my poor, stricken darling, what can I say to comfort thee?"

"I feel so strange. I think perhaps I am going," she said faintly, and she swooned in his arms. Agonized he bore her to the window, flung it open wide and let the cold night wind blow on the still white face. By the light of the flickering candle it seemed to him as deathlike as the still face against the pillow. In his agony he cried aloud.

The girl's eyes opened. Looking wonderingly at him, she said, "Where am I? I thought I died."

"No, no, beloved, it breaks my heart to hear you talk so," he said, brokenly.

She leaned heavily against his shoulder and was silent. Footsteps sounded in the hall, the door opened quietly, and Dr. Heyward entered followed by his sweet-faced little mother and by a kindly countenanced mulatto girl. A feeling of utter relief came to Lindley when he saw Mrs. Heyward. "She can persuade Bessie to rest," he thought. But no persuasion seemed of any use. The heart-stricken girl seemed determined not to leave her mother's side.

"Lindley," whispered the Doctor, "I'll not answer for the consequences if that girl is allowed to have her own way."

"What can I do?" he asked, sadly perplexed. "Oh, if I had only known a little sooner she would have been my very own! Heyward, I cannot certainly command her to leave her dead mother; tell me, man, can I?"

"If there is any commanding to be done, of a surety you are the responsible one," was the sturdy reply. "And, see here, Lindley, if I had half your authority, she would most certainly not remain here another half hour."

Mrs. Heyward had been trying in every way to coax the motherless girl to go home with her. At length she gave it up in despair. "I can do nothing with her," she whispered.

John Lindley looked thoughtfully at the bowed figure a moment, then knelt beside her. "My darling," he said softly, "once when I was in distress you sang a beautiful hymn to me. I can do nothing for you, it seems to me. Let me remind you of the words you sang.

The clouds hang heavy round my way,  
I cannot see:  
But through the darkness I believe  
God leadeth me."

A burst of tears relieved the tense grief, and Lindley knew the comfort had begun. He let her cry as long as she would, then lifting her to her feet, said, "Mrs. Heyward, will you kindly give me a wrap for this child?" Closely he folded the warm shawl about her, he led her from the room, Mrs. Heyward following. A moment or two later they were being driven to Mrs. Heyward's hospitable home. There, after a little, Lindley left Bessie to that lady's kindly care. Three days later her mother was laid in her last resting place.

Six sad and dreary weeks passed by, the motherless girl refusing to be comforted. All this time Lindley had refrained from distressing her with the thought of a speedy marriage. At last his patience gave out. He determined to speak to her plainly, even though his words hurt a little. That very evening he said to her, "My darling, you will come to me now, will you not? I feel that I have the right to claim you." Then, as she turned away her head, he continued reproachfully, "Have I not a greater claim upon you than any one in the world? And would you prefer living with these friends than with your husband, my love?"

Bessie sat silent for a while, nervously twining and untwining her slender fingers; her lover looked at her anxiously; she lifted her eyes a moment to his, which met her gaze with a depth of tender love.

"You are right," she said softly. "You have a greater claim upon me than all the world beside, because I know you love me—as I love you."

Lindley listened to the sweet, timid confession with happy, beating heart. Drawing her close to his side, he said,

"When will you marry me, dear?"

"To-morrow, if you wish it," she said. "But oh! John, I fear I will be but a sad-hearted bride. Will you bear with me? Will you remember that I am heavy hearted?"

"I will remember, dear; and my one hope is to help you through this sad time of mourning," he said tenderly.

The next day at noon the two were wed in Mrs. Heyward's parlor, she and her son being the only witnesses.

Long afterward Mrs. Heyward said, "It was the saddest, strangest, sweetest wedding I ever beheld, and it has turned out to be a most joyous affair for them both."

Immediately after the ceremony John Lindley and his bride started south. A few days later found them happily ensconced in the "land of orange blossoms," where, for a time, they spent long, restful days, learning to love and learn each other better day by day.

One morning, leaning over her husband's shoulder as he read the paper, "Why," said Bessie, "I never saw such a paper. There is nothing in it but advertisements."

Lindley dropped the newspaper, drew the dear curly head down to him and said, "Sweetheart, please never speak disrespectfully of advertisements. The memory of one not very long ago read to me throws a halo over all the pitiful rest."

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