

and no pulse or stir spoke of life in the world, a sudden fear fell on my heart, and I looked silently with blanched face at the quiet mute figure keeping watch, and it seemed to me that Ruth was dying in her sleep, slipping from us in that awful silence without sign or token. He read my look, or else his own heart felt the fear, for he bent above her, trembling. I put my hands to my lips to force back my terrified cries, yet neither spoke; no speech was needed; we understood each other all too well. The shaded lamp threw a dull, gray light on her quiet face and the heavy shadows of pain lay thick upon it. So we stood, breathlessly watching, very cowards in our love and fear.

Slowly, as it seemed with the growing day, the ashen hue left her face, and its rigid lines softened. My heart leaped gladly up.

"She is not worse," I said, and for that I was thankful.

Her husband stole back to his place, looking old and haggard, I could not but see, with his long night vigil. She had been ordered rest and quiet, so he watched patiently on. Suddenly, with a convulsive start, when we least expected it, her large eyes opened.

"Where is my husband?" she asked.

He came forward at the unlooked-for call, and bent over her; then, with one glance at his face, changed and marked through strong emotion, she stretched out her feeble hands to meet his, yearningly, whispering softly to him in her low, faint voice.

"At last, Ruth!—my own love—my wife!" he cried; and the sudden flush of joy, breaking like a blessed light over his stern face as his soul went out in that passionate cry, I saw my cousin Rupert in a new character, and knew how cruelly I had misjudged him.

I stole softly out, leaving them alone with their new-found joy, my heart throbbing with thanks all too deep for words, for this great good, which I looked upon already almost as a granted blessing.

"She will not die—she will not die!" so I told myself over and over again in my overwhelming joy and gratitude, as I stood by my window and watched the pale pink and opal dyes deepening in the gray sky, till at last, as I stood there, all the east grew aflame with crimson.

And I was right—the Angel of Death had turned aside from our darling, called back, ere his work was done, by that same tender, all-pitying, all powerful voice, that of old bade the dead arise.

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Once more I was at home. It was Spring again, and the gardener was busy among the flowers, as he was on that past Spring morning, when I had stood looking out at him, so weary and listless. But this Spring all was different. I was weary and listless no longer, nor was I alone, as before; Cousin Ruth was with me,—Ruth our darling, our household treasure, whom we had been so tenderly and carefully nursing back to life during the past three months; and not Ruth only, but cousin Rupert also. He had left his counting house and warehouse to the care of others, and came down to our quiet house, to keep his young wife company. He no longer urged that business must be attended to; and Ruth, a very tyrant in her new-found power, would not have listened to him if he had.

Standing there in the sunshine, with the breeze from the hills coming to us, and the sweet, subtle scent of the honey-suckle and jasmine stealing up from their nooks by the brook-side, we two, Ruth and I, stood and talked of the day her letter of invitation came to me; and after a while we talked, too, of events which had followed it.