

it, even then the last, the dearest is stolen away, and by my best friend—too! Child of my love, I would almost as soon see you in your shroud, as under a bridal veil, for you will love your husband best, and oh! I want all of your dear heart for my own. How can I ever give you away, my one star-eyed angel of comfort!"

Her white hand caressed the head upon her bosom, and clasping her mother's waist, the girl said distinctly:

"Let it be as you wish. My mother's happiness is far dearer to me than my own."

"Oh my darling! Do you mean it? Would you give up your lover for the sake of your poor desolate mother?"

She bent back the fair face and gazed eagerly into the girl's eyes.

"Mother, I should never cease to love him. Life would not be so sweet as it looked this morning, when I first learned he had given me his heart; but duty is better than joy, and I owe more to my suffering mother than to him, or to myself. If it adds to the cup of your many sorrows to give me even to him, I will try to take the bitter for my portion, and then sweeten as best I may the life that hitherto you have devoted to me. Mother, do with your child, as seems best to your dear heart."

She was very white, but her voice was firm, and the fidelity of her purpose was printed in her sad eyes.

"God bless my sweet, faithful, trusting child!"

Mrs. Laurance could not restrain her tears, and Mr. Palma shaded his eyes with his hand.

"My little girl, make your choice. Decide between us."

She moved a few steps, as if to free herself, but in vain; Regina's arms tightened around her.

"Between you? Oh no! I cannot. Both are too dear."

"To whom does your heart cling most closely?"

"Mother ask me no more. There is my hand. If you can consent to give it to him, I shall be—oh! how happy! If it would grieve you too much, then, mother hold it, keep it. I will never murmur, or complain, for now, knowing that he loves me, I can bear almost anything."

Tears were streaming down the mother's cheeks, and pressing her lips to the white mournful face of her daughter, she beckoned Mr. Palma to her side. For a moment she hesitated, held up the fair fingers and kissed them, then as if distrusting herself, quickly laid the little hand in his.