

it would stand between him and love of mine for ever and ever, did we two live till the world was old.

"I had sickened over my promise by that time, and wanted to draw back—but he would not let me. I do think he must have loved me, Letty, else my bitter stinging words would have driven him away from me for ever. They, however, did not, and I really think hethen loved me in his own peculiar way."

She seemed to take a strange sort of pleasure in remembering that, and in trying to convince herself or me (which was it?) that it was true. Looking at her as she lay back in her easy chair, I too, believed that he must have loved her then. She was not a "fine woman," as the phrase goes,—far from it. She was little, and slender, and fragile-looking as a bent lily. Her grave, fathomless eyes, usually so cool and still, were flashing and restless to-night, under the lash of these old memories; and her mouth, with its sensitive scarlet lips, fresh and tender as a child's, had a grieved quiver round it as she lay there, thinking. She had a low, full brow—the brow of a poet and a dreamer, and thick, heavy lashes, dark and long, that swept her cheeks when the eyelids drooped, as they were doing now, so wearily. Her hair, a deep bronzed brown, was pushed off from her face, and over her little ears, as though its rippling wealth oppressed her; and, sitting looking at her, with the violet velvet cushion of her lounging chair for a back-ground, the blackness of the early night framing her in, as it were, I thought no earthly eyes had ever seen a more exquisite picture.

I heard the clocks in the house chime nine, and then a quarter-past, and she still sat silent. I was very still too. I sat, staring blankly into the gloom that filled the rest of the room like a presence, trying to realize the time, so near, it might be, when this fair face and sunny hair would be gathered away from my sight for ever.

It seemed, as I had cried out in my first sharp pain, that this could not be true. She was so fresh, so fair, so free from any outward token of decay, that death, as applied to her, seemed only a terrible, ghastly word that had no meaning. If she was dying slowly but surely, as the physician had said, I could not see it. All I knew was, that my darling was young, and exceedingly beautiful, and that to see her slipping, fading from me, was more than I could bear.

"There" she said, abruptly, just as I had begun to think she slept, "you are crying again. Child, child! you will break my heart with your tears. Why will you?"

"I cannot help it," I said, when I could speak. "Oh, Ruth, I feel as if my heart must break!"

"Ah, but it won't, Letty. Sorrow rarely breaks the heart at one sharp wrench, or I should have been sleeping under the grass long ago. I am not the one to cry for, Letty. If I were a loved wife and mother you might weep then; but to me death will be a blessing, and life is a weariness too great to bear."

I knew she had grieved sorely when her baby had been carried out in its tiny coffin; but I never dreamed that the wound was so deep and new, as her bitter, fast-falling tears showed me it must be.

"When my boy lay dying," she said, "I prayed for his life as only those can pray who feel they are losing all they have to love and cling to in the wide, desolate earth. My prayer was not granted—my darling was taken. The night he lay in my arms, stiff and white, with the awful beauty that comes only after death, on his baby face, I felt