

"SPEAK GENTLY TO THE ERRING ONE."

I was a strange girl always. Strange was my talisman, ever clinging to me like a darkening spirit, until I learned to hate, oh, how bitterly, that one word—strange.

"Strange," people would say, as they looked into my great large eyes—much too large for my thin, pinched face—shining with a wild, unsteady light. "A strange, strange girl," murmured my mother in an unloving tone, as I still persisted in some stubborn will—for my willfulness did not make me a favorite, and I was generally unloved, especially by my mother. "Strange! strange!"—I heard it in every motion, in every word I uttered, until I felt that "strange" was a part of myself—a part which I loathed as my evil genius. Yes, ever since the death of my father, I felt that I was loved by none, and the very knowledge of it made my willful nature more hardened and stern.

Oh, how I loved my father! A love almost like adoration—and now that he was dead, I worshiped his spirit, which seemed to hover over me in the floating clouds—his fond voice speaking to me in the winds and zephyrs. I say that I loved my father, perhaps it was because I knew that he loved me, although he never spoke or told me so. He was always very still and stern, at home and abroad—no one knew him intimately—and I often wondered why he never spoke or seemed to care for my mother; then, again, I wondered why he ever married her, for, instinctively, I seemed to know there was no unison of taste or mind. These were my thoughts, many times as I sat in my father's lap, neither of us speaking.—These were the happiest hours of my life, for my father died when I was very young—young in years, but old in heart. I did not weep when he died—no, I did not shed one tear when I stood by his grave and heard the cold, cold earth falling on his coffin. My mother said that I was a "strange child—nothing could touch my heart." Oh, she could not know there was a grief within, deeper than all others in its silent anguish, for I felt I was losing my only friend.

For a year or two after his death, my life was almost a blank page; only a few words upon its surface, and these were—sorrow, sorrow. I had no friends or playmates as other children have; I shunned all those who dared approach me. I did not attend school—my mother's attempts to make me go were all in vain. I feared to sit all day, with so many strange eyes peering at me in the school-room, and my mother, at last, left me to my own will. She did not love me, and it was to my stubborn heart almost a pleasure and triumph to disobey her commands.

They buried my father near the house, in the shade of a few old pines. Most of my leisure time was spent by his grave, and many summer nights I have sat there until long past midnight, looking up at the vapory clouds, hoping and believing it was the spirit of my dead father, watching over his lonely, sinful child.—Yes, I knew that I was very, very sinful, but there was no tender, gentle hand to

guide my wandering footsteps, no mother's loving smile to cheer me on the path of duty.

I had one sister, younger than myself—my mother's favorite, loved by all. I did not wonder that one so beautiful in form and spirit should be so beloved.—Her eyes were brown and softened in their light, and the loudest tone of her sweet voice seemed but an echo to my heart.—Some voices are as songs—they quell the troubled spirit, so would her voice, yet I did not dare to love her. I only worshiped her as a summer flower, too beautiful to love. I did not think that one so pure and good could have one thought of love for me—I only thought, as I sometimes found her mild eyes resting on me, that she pitied her poor, willful sister.

One day, for some stubbornness of mine, my mother told me, in her usual cold, unfeeling tones, that "she did not love me—no one loved me, or ever would—I was such an ugly girl." Oh, she did not know that even then my heart was yearning—craving love. She did not know that her cold reproofs were leading me further from the way in which I was to gain the love I so much sought. Oh, how I longed for some arm to clasp tenderly around me, as my father's had clasped me—some hand to rest soothingly upon my aching brow, as his had done—and, more than this, to feel that some one cared for me, though, like my father, they spoke it not. It was then that I thought of my sister—thought of the mild eyes resting pityingly upon me—then, again, I thought of my willful self, and I shuddered as I seemed to hear the words, "No one loves you," and a moan was wailing in my heart, though my eyes looked coldly and defiantly at my mother. That night, when all was still, and the moon was drifting brightly through the silver clouds, I stole out to my father's grave. As I neared the spot, I did not expect to see what I beheld—my little sister, her mild eyes raised to heaven, her little hands clasped in simple, earnest prayer. I had expected to breathe out alone, on my father's grave, my heart's deep anguish, but no. I was listening to my sister's voice, breathing my name in her earnest, child-prayer—speaking of me—she, my pure and angel-sister. Her soft voice ceased, and in the agony of my heart, breaking through the coldness of my outer self, I knelt by her side, crying with the earnest wailings of my heart—"Love me, love me!" I felt the tears falling fast on my burning forehead, and a soft voice answered—"I do love you, my sister—my sister Hagar." That night, when we went to our chamber, my heart beat freer, happier than it had done since I sat on my father's knee—his arms around me. I could not sleep, but my arms twined jealously around my sister—almost fearing that I would lose my "new found treasure." The moon climbed up in the sky, till its light came round in my chamber window. As it shed its full beams into our quiet room, it revealed to my restless gaze the placid features of my little sister, sleeping peacefully, calmly—yes, slumbering in the arms of Death. I saw this with a glance at her pale, fixed features—and the knowledge came to me stunning,—driving back all my new

found happiness. Did I deserve this new sorrow? Perhaps so. I did not weep, nor utter one moan. In the morning they found me lying calmly by her side. "Strange I was so unfeeling," they said, but God and myself only know I had been praying that "I, too, might die—might be called to dwell with my father and sister in the azure sky." There was no one now to love me—no one to "speak kindly to the erring one," and my heart cried out in its silent bitterness—"Oh, how long must this weary spirit wait!"

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