

All the way home he kept whispering to himself; "One month, possibly two,"—as if it were a lesson on the getting by heart of which his life depended. He heard the conductor call out Montclair at last, and got out of the cars mechanically. His wife stood there waiting for him. She had been anxious about him all day.

"O William!" she cried and then she saw his face and stopped. There was a look on it of one over whom some awful doom is pending; a white, fixed look, that chilled her. She took his arm, and they walked on silently through the summer afternoon. When they reached home, and she had taken off her bonnet, he spoke at last.

"Mary, come come here and let me look at you, I want to learn your face by heart."

She came and knelt by him, while he took her cheeks between his hands, and studied every lineament.

"Are you going away?" she asked, after a while, for his fixed silent mysterious gaze began to torture her.

"Yes, dear, I am going; going into the dark."

"To die?" she gasped.

"Yes, to die to everybody that makes up a man's life in this world," he answered, bitterly.

"Mary, I am going blind. Think what that means. After a few more weeks I shall never see you again, or our children, or this dear, beautiful world, where we have lived and loved each other. The whole creation is only an empty sound forever more! O God! how can I bear it?"

"Is there no hope?" she asked with curious calmness, at which she herself was amazed.

"None. It was my errand to town to-day to find out. I have felt it coming on for months, but I hoped against hope, and now I know. O, Mary, to sit in darkness until my death day, striving for a sight of your dear face! It is too bitter; and yet what am I saying? Shall my Father not choose His own way to bring me to the light of Heaven? I must say, I will say, His will be done."

Just then the children came running in—boyish, romping Will; shy, yet merry, little May.

"Hush, dears," the mother said softly, "papa is tired. You had better run out again."

"No, Mary, let them stay," he interrupted, and then he said, so low that his wife's ears just caught the whisper, "I cannot see them too much in this little while."

O, how the days went on after that! Every day the world looked dimmer to the minister's darkened eyes. He spent almost all his time trying to fix things he loved in his memory.

It was pitiful to see him going round over each well-known well-loved scene, noting anxiously just how those tree-boughs stood out against the sky, or the hill climbed toward the sunset. He studied every little flower, every fern the children gathered; for all creation seemed to take for him a new beauty and worth. Most of all he studied their dear home faces. His wife grew used to the dim, wistful eyes following her so constantly; but the children wondered why papa liked so well to keep them in sight; why did he not read or study any more?

There came a time at last, one Sunday morning, when the brilliant summer sunshine dawned for him in vain.

"Is it a bright day dear?" he asked, hearing his wife moving about the room.