

living spirit, when all to him was dark, dark, dark!

She raised herself upon her pillow, and wound her weak arm about his neck, and listened to the expressions of ineffable love, and faith, and consolation, which her son found strength to utter, to sustain her soul. Yes, in that hour her recompense had begun; in loneliness, in secret tears, with Christian patience and endeavor, with an exalted and faithful spirit had she sown; and in death she reaped her high reward.

They had been silent some minutes, and she lay back exhausted, but composed, while he sat beside her, holding her hand in his, fancying she slept, and anxiously to her breathing which seemed more than usually oppressed. A rustling was heard amid the flowers at the window, and a bright young face looked in.

"Hush!" said Edward, recognizing the step, "Hush, Mary, she is asleep."

The color and smiles alike passed from Mary's face, when she glided into the room. "Oh Edward, Edward, she is not asleep, she is very, very ill!"

"Mary! darling Mary!" said the dying lady, with difficulty rousing herself; "I have had such a pleasant dream; but I have slept too long. It is night, yet they bring candles. Edward, I cannot see you now."

Night, and the sun so brightly shining! The shadows of the grave were stealing fast upon her.

Clattering steps now sounded in the room, and many faces gathered round the couch; but the blind man heard nothing—was conscious of nothing, save the laboured respiration, the tremulous hand that fluttered in his own, the broken sentences,

"Edward, my dearest, take comfort. I have hope. God is indeed merciful."

"Oh Edward, do not grieve so sadly! It breaks my heart, to see you cry. For her sake be calm—for my sake, too!" Mary beside knee'd him, and endeavored to soothe the voiceless anguish which it terrified her to witness.

Another interval, when no sound broke the stillness that prevailed; and again Mrs. Owen opened her eyes, and saw Mary kneeling by Edward's side. They were as soothed with the previous current of her thoughts, and a smile lighted up her face.

"As I wished, as I prayed, to die! My children both. Kiss me, Mary, my blessing, my consoler! Edward, nearer, nearer! Child of many hopes and prayers—all answered now!" And with her bright vision unalloyed, her rejoicing soul took wing, and knew sorrow and tears no more.

Four months had passed since Mrs. Owen's death, and her son was still staying at Woodlands, the residence of Mary's father, Colonel Parker, at about two miles distance from Edward Owen's solitary home; hither had he been prevailed upon to remove, after the first shock of his grief had subsided.

Colonel and Mrs. Parker were kind-hearted people, and the peculiar situation of Edward Owen appealed to their best feelings, so they made no opposition to their children devoting themselves unceasingly to him, and striving by every innocent device, to render his affliction less poignant and oppressive. But kind as all the family were, still all the family were as nothing compared to Mary, who was always anxious to accompany him in his walks, seemed jealous of her privilege as favorite reader, and claimed to be his silent watchful companion, when, too sad even to take an interest in what she read, he leaned back

wearily in his chair, and felt the soothing influence of her presence. As time wore on, and some of his old pursuits resumed their attractions for him, she used to listen for hours as he played upon the piano. She would sit near him with her work, propose subjects for his skill, as her old custom had been; or she would beg him to give her a lesson in executing a difficult passage, and rendering it with due feeling and expression. In the same way in their readings, which gradually were carried on with more regularity and interest, she appeared to look upon herself as the person obliged, appealed to his judgement, and deferred to his opinion, without any consciousness of the fatigue she underwent, or the service she was rendering.

One day, as they were sitting in the library, after she had been for some time pursuing her self-imposed task, and Edward, fearing she would be tired, had repeatedly entreated her to desist, she answered gaily:

"Let me alone, Edward! It is so pleasant to go through a book with you; you make such nice reflections, and point out all the finest passages, and explain the difficult parts so clearly, that it does me more good than a dozen readings by myself. I shall grow quite clever now we have begun our literary studies."

"Dear Mary, say rather, *prided*; for you know this cannot always go on so. I must return to my own house next week; I have trespassed on your father's hospitality, indulgence, and forbearance too long."

"Leave us, Edward!" and the color deepened in her cheeks, and tears stood in her bright eyes. "Not yet!"

"Not yet? The day would still come, dearest, delay as I might, and is it manifold to shrink thus from what must and ought to be? I have to begin life in earnest, and if I falter at the onset, what will be the result? I have arranged everything; Mr. Glen, our clergyman, has a cousin, an usher in a school, who wishes for retirement and country air. I have engaged him to live with me as a companion and reader. Next week he comes; and then, Mary, farewell to Woodlands!"

"No, not farewell, for you must come here very often; and I must read to you still, and you must teach me still, and tell me in your own noble thoughts and beautiful language of better and higher things than I once used to care for. And then our walks—oh Edward, we must continue to see the sunset from the cliffs, sometimes, together. You first taught me how beautiful it was. I told you of the tints upon the sky and upon the sea, and upon the boats with their glistening sails, and you set the view before me in all its harmony and loveliness, brought it home to my heart, and made me feel how cold and insensible I had been before."

"Ah, Mary," said Edward, mournfully, "near you, I am no longer blind!"

The book which she had been reading fell unheeded on the ground, she trembled, her color went and came, as she laid her hand timidly on his arm: indescribable tenderness, reverence and compassion were busy within her soul.

"Edward, you will not change in anything towards us; this new companion need not estrange you from your oldest and dearest friends! Let me always be your pupil, your friend, your—sister!"

"Sustainer, consoler, guide! Sister above all, oh, yes, my sister! Best and sweetest title—say it again, Mary, say it again!" and seizing her hand he kissed it passionately, and held it for a moment with-

in his own. Then as suddenly relinquishing it, he continued in an altered tone, "My sister and my friend, until another comes to claim a higher privilege, and Mary shall be for ever lost to me!"

She drew back, and a few inaudible words died away upon her lips; he could not see her appealing tearful eyes. Mistaking the cause of her reserve, he made a strong effort to regain composure.

"Do you remember, when you were a child, Mary, how ambitious, how romantic you used to be, and how you were determined to become a duchess at least?"

"And how you used to tease me, by saying you would only come to my castle disguised as a wandering minstrel, and would never sit at the board between me and the duke, Edward? Yes, I remember it all very well, foolish children that we were! But I at least, know better now; I am not ambitious in that way any longer."

"In that way? In what direction, then, do your aspirations tend?"

"To be loved," said Mary fervently; "to be loved, Edward, with all the trust and devotedness of which a noble nature is susceptible—to know that the heart on which I lean has no thought save for me—to be certain that, with all my faults and waywardness, I am loved for myself alone, and not for—for any little charm of face which people may attribute to me."

Edward rose abruptly and walked up and down the room, which from his long stay in the house had become familiar to him.

"Mary," he resumed, stopping as he drew near her, "you do yourself injustice. The face, you set so little store by, *must* be beautiful, as the index of your soul; I have pictured you so often to myself; I have coveted the blessing of sight, were it only for an instant, that I might gaze upon you! The dim form of my mother, as I last beheld her in my infancy, floats before me when I think of you, encircled with a halo of heavenly light, which I fancy to be your attribute, and a radiance hovers round your golden tresses such as gladdens our hearts in smushing."

"Ah, Edward, it is better you cannot see me as I am! You would not love—I mean you would not think of me—so much!"

"If I could but see you for a moment as you will look at the ball to-night, I fancy I would never repine again."

"The ball to-night! I had quite forgotten it; I wish mamma would not insist upon my going. I do not care for these things any longer—you will be left alone, Edward, and that seems so heartless and unkind!"

"Mary," said one of her sisters, opening the library door, "look at these beautiful hot-house flowers which have arrived here for us. Come Edward, come and see them too."

They were so accustomed to treat him as one of themselves, and were so used to his aptitude in many ways, that they often did not appear to remember he was blind.

The flowers were rare and beautiful, and yet no donor's name accompanied the gift. Suddenly one of the girls cried out laughingly, "I have guessed, I have guessed. It is Edward! He has heard us talking about this ball, and must have ordered them on purpose for us. Kind, good Edward!" and they were loud in their expressions of delight; all except Mary, who kept silently aloof.

"Mary does not like her flowers?" said Edward inquiringly, turning in the direction where she stood.

"No," she replied, sorrowfully "it is the ball that I do not like, nor your thinking