

THE  
BLIND BEAUTY OF THE MOOR.

A FRAGMENT.

To thee—O palest Phantom—clothed in white raiment, not like unto a ghost risen with its grave-clothes to appeal, but like a seraph descending from the skies to bless—unto thee will we dare to speak, as through the mist of years back comes thy yet unfaded beauty—charming us, while we cannot choose but weep, with the self-same vision that often glided before us long long ago in the wilderness, and at the sound of our voice would pause for a little while, and then pass by, like a white bird from the sea, floating unscared close by the shepherd's head, or alighting to trim its plumes on a knoll far up an inland glen! Death seems not to have touched that face, pale though it be—life-like is the waving of those gentle hands—and the soft, sweet, low music which now we hear, steals not sure from lips hushed by the burial-mould! Restored by the power of love, she stands before us as she stood of yore. Not one of all the hairs of her golden head was singed by the lightning that shivered the tree under which the child had run for shelter from the flashing sky. But in a moment the blue light in her dewy eyes was dimmed—and never again did she behold either flower or star. Yet all the images of all the things she had loved remained in her memory, clear and distinct as the things themselves before the unextinguished eyes—and ere three summers had flown over her head, which, like the blossom of some fair perennial flower, in heaven's gracious dew and sunshine, each season lifted its loveliness higher and higher in the light,—she could trip her singing way through the wide wilderness, all by her joyful self, led, as all believed, nor erred they in so believing, by an angel's hand! When the primroses peeped through the reviving grass upon the vernal braes, they seemed to give themselves into her hand; and 'twas thought they hung longer unfaded round her neck or forehead than if they had been left to drink the dew on their native bed. The linnets ceased not their lays, though her garment touched the broom-stalk on which they sung. The cushat, as she threaded her way through the wood, continued to croon in her darksome tree—and the lark, although just dropped from the cloud, was cheered by her presence into a new passion of song, and mounted over her head, as if it were his first matin hymn. All the creatures of earth and air manifestly loved the Wanderer of the Wilderness—and as for human beings, she was named, in their pity, their wonder, and their delight, the Blind Beauty of the Moor!

She was an only child, and her mother had died in giving her birth. And now her father, stricken by one of the many cruel diseases that shorten the lives of the shepherds on the hills, was bed-ridden—and he was poor. Of all words ever syllabled by human lips, the most blessed is—charity. No manna now in the wilderness is rained from heaven—for the mouths of the hungry need it not in this our Christian land. A few goats, feeding among the rocks, gave them milk; and there was bread for them in each neighbor's house—neighbor though miles afar—as the sacred duty came round—and the unrepining poor sent the grateful child away with their prayers.

One evening, returning to the hut with her usual song, she danced up to her father's face on his rushy bed, and it was cold in death. If she shrieked—if she fainted—there was but one Ear that heard, one Eye that saw her in her swoon. Not now floating light like a small moving cloud unwilling to leave the flowery braes, though it be to melt in heaven, but driven along like a shroud of flying mist before the tempest, she came upon us in the midst of that dreary moss; and at the sound of our quaking voice, fell down with clasped hands at our feet—"My father's dead!" Had the hut put on already the strange, dim, desolate look of mortality? For people came walking fast down the braes; and in a little while there was a group round us, and we bore her back again to her dwelling in our arms. How could she have lived—an utter orphan—in such a world! The holy power that is in innocence would forever have remained with her; but innocence longs to be away, when her sister, joy, has departed; and 'tis sorrowful to see the one on earth, when the other has gone to heaven! This sorrow none of us had long to see; for, though a flower, when withered at the root, and doomed ere eve to perish, may yet look to the careless eye the same as when it blossomed in its pride,—its leaves, still green, are not as once they were,—its bloom, though fair, is faded—and at set of sun, the dews shall find it in decay, and fall unfelt on all its petals. Ere Sabbath came, the orphan child was dead. Methinks we see now her little funeral. Her birth had been the humblest of the humble; and though all in life had loved her, it was thought best that none should be asked to the funeral of her and her father, but two or three friends; the old clergyman himself walked at the head of the father's coffin—we at the head of the daughter's—for this was granted unto our exceeding love;—and thus passed away for ever the Blind Beauty of the Moor!