

## The Fourth Story

THIS is the last of my angel stories for two reasons. One is that I know that I am not much longer for this life on earth, because all the heavenly things have been growing so clear to me that earth and earth's charms are rapidly falling away from me. The other reason is the word of my angelic guide who long ago took me round the garden of the children, for he has been with me and told me of things that are only told to those who are nearing the land of angels and souls. But on his last visit I begged, if it might be, to let me have some little thing more to tell to those whom I shall soon leave behind on earth, something that should be to them a comfort and an inspiration. So of his kindness he said to me, "I will show you some of the duties and labours of the angels." Therefore, in the first place he took me to a lone and desolate place, where was nothing but sand and rocks that spread away to the horizon as far as one could see, and only in the foreground there was a man. How can one in words describe him! At first sight he seemed so ordinary, that one would have passed him by in a crowd without notice. He was evidently poor for he wore such clothes as in the east mark those of the lower class. That he was an Easterner I knew partly by his dress, partly by the natural surroundings, but chiefly by the heat that smote one back from the sand, just as when one opens the door of a furnace. For some time I gazed at him because my angel guide did the same, and did not make any appearance of going further. The longer I looked the deeper grew the attraction, and I began to realize the hectic flush upon his face, the drawn lines of pain round his mouth and forehead, and above all the passion of patient endurance that looked forth from his eyes. It was, I think, the plainest face that I have ever seen, and yet the appealing power of it, and the soul that was so thinly veiled behind it have haunted me ever since. He sat there unmoved and motionless, the while the figure conveyed to one the idea of a persistent and restless identity, as of one to whom life was a passionate storm of labour and emotion, but yet controlled by a powerful will and intellect. Then as we watched there grew out of the atmosphere the outlines of one standing beside him—one who was evidently an angel. No words passed between them, but the angel seemed to impart a tranquillity and a peace by his mere presence. Long time we watched and the man's face grew both stronger and calmer as the lines of distress and mental energy were smoothed away—and the scene faded and was gone. I looked at my angel guide, but hardly knew what to say, or what to ask.