

She made him swallow some wine, and then bathed his hands and temples with eau-de-cologne, till gradually the spasm of terror passed from his blanched face, and, falling back in his chair, he gave a heavy sigh, half of relief and half of remembered agony.

"Then it is still to come?" he murmured. "Almost I could wish that first bitterness of death at least were past; yet no," he continued, his features contracting with pain, "anything—anything rather than that; better life, though it be torture, than the blackness of eternal night."

It was on Ernestine's lips to ask why death was so dreadful to him. It was not so to her, though the love that brightened earth for her might make her sad to leave it yet awhile; and why should this boy, who once had loved to lose himself in glowing dreams of the consummation of bliss, now so shrink from that which was but the gate of immortality? But she remembered her promise to ask no questions, and, besides, he was still too much agitated to risk further disturbance, so she soothed him gently for a time, talking to him on in different subjects, till gradually he became calm, and his eyes brightened as he turned them on her sweet face.

"You are a good nurse, my darling Ernie," he said. "I feel now as if I could almost enjoy this night, with you sitting at my side. Your voice is just like music."

"I am so glad you are more comfortable," she said, laying her head on the pillow beside him. "We shall have such a nice quiet time. Now, you must tell me what you would like to talk about."

"Shall I really?" he said carressingly. "May I choose the subject?"

"Of course. What am I here for but to be your slave?"

"Well, you remember how you used to tell me stories long ago, when we were children, though I used to consider you almost a grown up lady, because you were four years older. I want you to do the same for me to-night. I want you to tell me all the histories you can remember of those who have gone to death calmly and fearlessly, though they had been compelled to face it in all its horrible certainty for some time previously."

"What! beginning with Socrates and his poison cup?"

"If you will; and tell me about that criminal, I forget his name, who, on the scaffold, thought neither of the shame nor the agony, but said only, 'Now I shall learn the great secret.'"

"And Julian the Apostate, who died saying, 'O Gallien, Thou hast conquered!'" said Ernestine, lifting her head that she might look into her brother's eyes as she spoke.

A sudden flush dyed his pale face. "As you please," he answered shortly, and then went on: "Who was it that said, 'Death cannot be an evil, because it is universal'?"

"That was Goethe. But, darling," said Ernestine softly, "would it not be happiest of all to speak of the only true Conqueror over death—the One who took its sting away, and made the grave no strange place for any one of us since He has lain in it?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Reginald, starting up, with a vehemence which seemed greater than his feeble frame could bear; "Ernie, do not speak to me of Him. I cannot bear it—I cannot. I tell you I will not. You will kill me if you speak of Him; rather go and leave me quiet alone."

"My dearest Reggie, I will not touch on any subject you do not like. Lie down again, and, trust me, I will only tell you what you ask,—the histories, so far as I remember them, of brave men dying calmly and without fear." And in a low gentle tone, as she would have soothed a wearied child, she spoke to him of those who have been seen to go down with fearless steps into the valley of the shadow of death; and of others, who being rescued from it, had spoken of a lovely pure light into

which they seemed to sink, with echoes of softest music in their ears; and Reginald listened with her hand clasped in his, and grew very calm and still; and so the night wore peacefully on for both, till the faint glimmer of the far-off dawn stole into the sky, and the cool breath of the morning passed lightly over the wearied eyelids of the dying man, while, half-sleeping, half-waking, he lay gazing dreamily out upon the shifting shadows of the heavens. Then Ernestine relapsed into silence, and with her head still laid beside her brother's, followed unconsciously the train of thought, which that strange unearthly night suggested to her. The actual life of the present seemed so intangible, so fleeting, with all its briefness and uncertainty, that she felt as if no soul could ever seek in it to slake its thirst for joy and for existence, and in spirit she passed over the dark valley of which she had been speaking into the realms of changeless light, where there is no shadow, no perplexity, no fear; and she thought what glorious bliss, what sweetest rest, it would be to dwell in that deathless land with him, her dearest loved,—with this poor wayward brother also, and with that other one for whom her heart still yearned,—gathered altogether at the feet of Infinite Compassion. And so she lost herself in those sweet visions, till, with a smile, she woke to see that what appeared to her but the baseless fancies of her own deep longing was, after all, the very reality which God has prepared for those that love Him.

At last the first sunbeam smote on the wan face of Reginald, and an other day had begun for him who had so few to number now, and soon all unearthly thoughts were put to flight for both of them by the arrival of Nurse Berry, with all her homely arrangements for their comfort. She insisted especially that Ernestine should now go to the hotel to take a few hours' rest, and Reginald urged her to do so, with many loving thanks for the comfort she had been to him that night; so that she agreed to their wishes, promising to return in the course of the afternoon.

When Ernestine woke up later in the day from her needful rest, she found Mrs. Craven in a state of considerable excitement. Dr. and Mrs. Granby had come to call on Miss Courtenay, and, finding that she could not be disturbed, had paid their visit to the chaperon. In the course of it they dropped various mysterious hints, that they feared Miss Courtenay's charitable zeal was carrying her beyond the *convenances* of society, and that they wished much she would place herself under their protection and guidance during her stay in a place where reticence of all sorts was so much required as in Greyburgh. These remarks Mrs. Craven repeated with much unction, beseeching Ernestine to take them into serious consideration; but she, inwardly shuddering at the thought of placing herself under Dr. Granby's care, and of the aristocratic uselessness which would be the result, assured Mrs. Craven she was quite satisfied with her chaperonage; and added that in Reginald's precarious state she did not intend to see the Granbys, or any other acquaintance at all. She begged her chaperon, however, to accept all Mrs. Granby's invitations to dinner, etc., for herself; and finally reminding her that there was only one person to whom she owed any account of her actions, she pointed to the letter ready sealed for the post, which lay on the table, addressed to Mr. Lingard, and assured her it contained a detail of all her proceedings since she left him. With this Mrs. Craven was fain to be content, and Ernestine hurried back as soon as she could to Reginald, for her uneasiness with regard to his mental condition increased every hour, and her great fear now was lest he should die with this dark burden, whatever it might be, unrevealed and unrelieved.

She had not long been in her place by his side when the nurse came to tell her that Mr. Thorold was waiting for her in the next room. She went in, and found him walking up and down, somewhat after the fashion of a wild beast in a cage, but he turned to meet Ernestine with a frankness and simplicity which set her at ease at once.