

"Give it to me."

And she swallowed it without a murmur, yes, with thankfulness.

I wheeled her chair up nearer to the fire; stirred the coals to a more brilliant glow, hoping that the potion would quiet her excitement, wake the chilled blood to a warmer, swifter flow, and that sleep would follow. And, for a moment, I fancied I was right. The little hands dropped nervelessly into her lap; the softly-veiled lids dropped over the blue eyes; the head fell forward upon the breast. But alas! it was only a momentary delusion. In another instant she sprang to her feet again, pressed her hands upon her temples, as if to still their throbbings, and looked wildly around.

"O God!" she exclaimed; "I here, amid warmth and comfort, and—and"

Convulsive sobs checked any further utterance.

"Sit down and tell me the reason of your coming here," I almost commanded, as I placed her in the chair.

"Ah! I remember now. Remember! Is there any such thing as forgetfulness? Yes, I remember all. I came here to—to."

"Be calm. I understand you are in need, and came for my assistance."

"I came," she replied, and looked upon me with such utter despair, and spoke so calmly that it made my blood run cold; "I came, Doctor, to sell you my body."

Was I talking to a sane woman or a maniac? The latter was certainly my thought, but I could detect nothing in the clear blue eyes of the wanderings of insanity. "Sell her body." She spoke of it as an every-day transaction.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed, laying my fingers upon her pulse with the expectation of finding it bounding with race horse rapidity, but, on the contrary, finding it more calm than my own. "Great Heaven! You cannot be in earnest?"

"I am in earnest. God alone knows how much in earnest. It was my last resort. Will you buy it?"

And she reached out her hands towards me as a miser would have done who heard the dear sound of jingling gold.

"How can I purchase it? You are yet alive."

"But I will soon die, and then—then you can claim it. For the love of Heaven give me a little—just a little money."—And the hitherto dry eyes were flooded with tears.

"Why do you wish to sell it? You cannot but understand that it is an unheard-of proceeding. Our profession never purchase bodies (how I shuddered as I gazed into her face, while I was forcing myself to calmly utter these words,) before death, no matter what we may do after."

"I know it—I know it, but I must have money, and there is no other means left me to get it. I must have it,—now—instantly."

And she would have arisen again, but I resolutely held her down.

"For what purpose do you wish it?"

"To purchase food, fire, medicine."

"For yourself?"

"Ah! no. Had that been the case I would never have come hither. I would have laid down in the gutter and died—God knows how willingly. But tell me," she continued, almost fiercely, "will you give me some money? I must have it—must have it."

"If not for yourself, in the name of Heaven, for whom would you make such a fearful sacrifice? Is it one who is very near and dear to you?"

"It is—is—my little sister."

The words dropped from her tongue as they might have done from that of an angel, and her face wore as holy a light as if she had been already star-crowned.

"Then she is sick?"

"Dying! dying! and I am sitting idly here."

"Why did you not tell me of this before?"

"Because I had begged so long in vain. I had no money to pay the doctor, and who would go forth upon such a night as this without it?"