

"Where shall I find Death," she cried "he has carried away my little child."

"He has not yet arrived," answered an old grey-headed woman who lived in Death's conservatory, and tended his plants: "How have you found out this place, and who has helped you?"

"The Blessed God helped me," replied the Mother: "He is merciful, and you I am sure will be so too. Where shall I find my child?"

"I know not," said the old woman, "for you cannot see it, and many trees and flowers have withered this night. Death will soon be here to root them up. You must know that every one has his tree or flower of life arranged as in nature, they appear like other plants, but with this difference, they have hearts beating within them,—children's hearts beat also—judge by that and perhaps you might recognize the heart's beating of your own child. But what will you give me if I help you?"

"I have nothing to give," said the sorrowing Mother, "but I will go for you to the end of the world if you desire it."

"I have nothing there to look after," replied the old woman, "but you can give me your long black tresses, you know well they are very beautiful, they please me, and you can have my white hair instead."

"Do you require nothing more," said the Mother. "I will give you that with joy," and she gave the old woman her beautiful black hair, and received her snow white locks in place of it. She then entered the great conservatory of Death where trees and flowers grew so wonderfully together. There stood beautiful Hyacinths under glass bells, and great Easter Roses as strong as trees, and there were large aquatic plants, some quite green, others half dead and withering, and water snakes lay upon them, and black beetles crawled up their stalks. Here were also splendid palm trees, oaks, and plane trees, and there too was sage, and blooming thyme, and every tree and every flower had its name, they were each of them a man's life, some of whom lived in China, others in Greenland, and in every part of the world. There were besides great flowers in very small pots, so close and pressed together that many of them burst their pots for want of room. There were also small weak flowers growing in rich ground, kept up and sheltered with soft mosses, and the afflicted Mother bowed herself down over the smallest plants she could find, and she heard a human heart beat in each, but out of millions she recognized that of her child.

"There it is," she cried at length, and she stretched out her hand over a small crocus blossom which hung its head quite faintly.

"Do not touch that flower," said the old woman, "but place yourself here, and when Death comes—I expect him every moment,—do not let him pull it up, but threaten him that if he does you will tear up every other plant there. He will be obliged to give way, for he must answer for each plant and flower to the Blessed God; not one must be taken up before he gives him leave. Then all at

once a wild sigh was heard through the hall and the blind Mother knew that it was Death."

"How have you found your way hither?" said he: "How have you reached this sooner than myself?"

"I am a mother," was her answer.

And Death stretched out his gaunt and fleshless hand towards the little flower, but she held her's closely over it, so close, yet so full of anxious carefulness that she touched not a leaf. Then Death breathed on her hands, and she felt his breath colder than the coldest ice wind, and her hands sunk down powerless.

"You can do nothing against me," said Death.

"But the Blessed God can," said the Mother.

"I only do what He wills," replied Death "I am His gardener, I pull up His trees and flowers, and plant them in the great garden of Paradise in the Unknown Land. How they pass their time there and what kind of a place it is I dare not tell."

"Give me back my child," said the Mother, who while she wept and entreated, seized fast hold of two beautiful flowers, and cried:

"I will tear up all thy flowers for I am in despair."

"Do not touch them," said Death. "You say that you are unhappy and would you make another mother as miserable as yourself?"

"Another mother," said she, and she let go both flowers.

"There are your eyes," said Death, "I took them from the Sea, they shone so bright and beautiful, but I did not know they were yours, they are still more bright and far clearer than they were before—look down there into that deep brook, and I will tell you the names of the two flowers which you would have torn up, and you will see their whole future—their human life in its waters—you will then see what you would have destroyed."

She looked into the brook, and it was delightful to behold how one was a blessing to the world—diffusing joy and happiness around, but she saw the life of the other, one of care, want, sorrow and misery.

"Both are the will of God," said Death.

"Which of them is the flower of the happy one, and which the unhappy," asked the Mother.

"That I may not tell you," answered Death, "but this much you shall know from me, one of them is your own child whose future you behold."

Then the Mother cried aloud with terror, "which of them is my child—tell me, oh! tell me, free the innocent, free my child from misery, and take it away into God's Kingdom,—forget my tears—forget my weeping, and all that I have done."

"I do not understand you," replied Death, "will you have your child back, or shall I take it to that place you know nothing of."

Then the Mother wrung her hands, fell on her knees and prayed to the Blessed God:

"Oh hear me not," she said, "hear me not when I pray for what is contrary to thy will, which is always the best. Hear me not,—Heed me not. And she let her head sink on her breast, —and Death went with her child to the Unknown Land.