

All is beauty, grace, youth, life and happiness, joy and enjoyment. With a scene like this, care and gloom have nothing in common. Here nothing but what is gay has any place. It is a supreme moment, plucked from life's rose-bush; a flowery spray without thorns.

A galloping polka is racing over the strings of the fiddles. The mirth waxes fast and furious. From where I stand I see the crowd gradually fall back and give place to a young lady, who advances alone down the whole length of the rink. She is tall and beautifully formed; but a shock thrills through the frame as one looks at her. She is dressed in the deepest mourning, not a particle of anything but what is black finds place about her. She comes slowly forward, while all, on either side, pause in silence and stillness with a hushed solemnity. The music as though struck with the same instantaneous inaction, whether played out or not, comes to an end. A dead silence drops upon the spell-bound assembly. The originator of this extraordinary change skates on listlessly, languidly, carelessly. I can see that she stretches forth her arm, and that her fingers twitch convulsively, as if endeavouring to grasp some imaginary hand. As she approaches nearer, I discover that great beauty is fading away and leaving a sculptured face, paler than the palest marble, upon whose either cheek there glows one bright, burning, hectic spot, a round spot like the red sun showing through a white mist. She looks at nobody, seems to see nobody, and alas! alas! when my eyes seek to meet hers, they encounter only the stony glare of orbs from which the light of reason has been darkened and shut out. Her dress, too, betokens insanity. It hangs loosely upon her, manifestly uncared for—always a sad sight in woman—and is tagged over with shreds of crape, meaninglessly stuck on in one place and another, intermixed with bugles and other shabby scraps of ghastly ornament. Oh, what a melancholy spectacle was there! Young—she looked no more than seventeen or eighteen—lovely, innocent, and brought to so pitiable a pass! And what a frightful contrast to the boisterous gaiety upon which she had intruded, and upon which she had stricken a chill, well-nigh as icy, cold and joyless as herself. It was a lesson too harshly administered. It was like the warning corpse set up at an Egyptian feast.

Reaching the door at the lower end of the rink, near which, having succeeded in making one circuit of the building, I was again standing, the poor creature (having entered, I suppose, at the upper door), without taking the slightest notice of anybody or anything, nor speaking a word that I could hear, except muttering in a hushed, plaintive monotone, "All wet and cold! all wet and cold! all wet and cold!" sat down on the edge of the platform, took off her skates, hung them over her wrist with such an orderliness as if she did it daily, and slowly passed out like a phantom.

Do we not visit lunatic asylums and return to our dinner with undiminished appetite? Was there not a time when fashionable parties were made up to Bedlam, to mock the wretched, ill-treated creatures there? Do not very many more than a thousand persons die weekly in London? Is there not ceaselessly