

Mrs. Weldon's lips quivered with emotion—emotion which she sedulously strove to repress. She knew how Alice, with all the hopefulness of youth, clung to the belief that she would yet recover, and it seemed hard, it seemed cruel, to crush that trusting, loving heart, by imparting fully the fatal knowledge, which faithful physicians had long since revealed to herself; so she only placed her wasted hands lovingly on her daughter's head, and, smoothing with a mother's tenderness, the glossy dark hair, for Alice had taken her favorite seat at her mother's knee, contented herself with saying—

"My times are in the hands of a tender Father, my dear child. If it be his will to lengthen out the brittle thread of life, all things are possible with Him; if not, let us pray that He will enable us both to say, 'Thy will be done.'"

Neither spoke for a few minutes, but at length the mother said in a tone of assumed playfulness, not unobservant of her daughter's dejection,

"But come, Alice, you must not cheat me out of the promised particulars of your walk."

Thus appealed to, Alice checked the flood of sorrow that seemed ready to overwhelm her, and began giving a detailed account of the morning's engagement.

"And I too," said Mrs. Weldon at its conclusion, "have had company in your absence; one visitor came; see if you can guess who?"

Alice named several of their friends, but failed in telling the right one.