

THE SURGEON'S STORY.

"Will you buy my body, sir?" I, Charles Markham, a young physician, was sitting alone in the dusky little room that the sign without dignified with the title of "Office," when the words fell upon my ears. I had just returned from visiting the few patients I could boast of, thoroughly heartsick at the want of humanity in the world, wet to the skin, and more than half frozen.

I never remember a worse night in all respects. It was cold as the Arctic; blustering; and the sleet that rattled upon the windows soon covered me with a coat of ice. It had stormed heavily all day, the stores were closed, and the side-walk vendors driven to shelter.

"God help any one who is forced to be abroad to-night," had been my thought, as I hurried along after finishing my professional duties, and breasted my way homeward.

But scarcely had I reached it, changed my saturated garments, coaxed the sparkling anthracite into a cheerful glow, made myself comfortable, and begun building castles in Spain of the time when I should have a lucrative practice, ride in my carriage, and own a brown stone front, when the strange and heart-chilling words fell upon my ears, causing all my pleasant fancies to drift away in an instant.

"Will you buy my body, sir?"

I sprang from my easy chair, dropping my well-colored meerschaum in my astonishment, and turned to see who it was, like Poe's raven, had uttered the terrible words—

"Will you buy my body, sir?"

The question was repeated for a second time before I had sufficiently recovered myself—before I was convinced that it was no ill-omened bird, but one of human resemblance at least. Yet the request was so utterly unusual, so much at variance with all preconceived notions of barter and sale, that all I could do was to push a chair towards the intruder, and stand in silent wonderment.

In a few moments the self-command I had learned during hospital practice came to my aid; and I saw that my visitor was a woman—girl, rather, for she could not have been more than nineteen or twenty at the utmost; and, that is, if it had not been for the extreme pallor of the face, the pinched-up look about the mouth, and the sad, sunken eyes, she would have possessed, far more than is ordinarily the case, the rare gift of beauty.

The flickering light of the fire flashed upon the soft brown hair, giving it a more golden color, and dissolving the snow-flakes that had lodged there, made them glitter like liquid pearls. This much, and that the dress and shawl were of the cheapest material, and but a poor defence against the howling storm and pitiless cold, and the strange request darted again with lightning rapidity through my brain.

"Draw nearer to the fire," I said—"You are numbed. Warm yourself, and—"

"I have no time—must not stay," she answered with a sigh, though she dropped heavily into a chair, and brushed away the snow-drops from her face with her hands.

Without waiting for further remonstrance, I hastened to get some reviving medicine, of which I saw she stood so much in need, and with gentle force, held it to her lips.

"I cannot—cannot," she gasped, half pushing it away.

"You must," I insisted. "Remember I am a physician, that this is a prescription, that your life may depend upon it."

"Life! O God! How long and sad! Will it give me strength?"

"That certainly is the object I have in urging you to take it. What else should it be?"