

strings. The bitterness of the pain was changing me from a restless girl into a quiet woman as I sat there.

"She may live a year," Dr. Baylis had said, in his melodious professional voice, that was harsher in my ears than the clang of iron, "or she may die before morning. Her life has been wasting away for some considerable time—I could almost think for years. Now it has come to be the matter of a short space, more or less, and then——"

He did not speak out the harsh truth again. Perhaps he thought the grave-faced man before him might not be able to bear its repetition. I however thought him capable of bearing anything that touched not himself too closely.

The evening shadows gathered round us, wrapped us in and about, till the little spot on which we sat was the only patch of light in the mass of surrounding blackness—heavy November darkness, that brought no stars. Ruth, rousing from her reverie, was the first to break the silence.

"How dark the room is, Letty! Surely it cannot be night already!"

I rose hastily, and stirred the fire into a blaze, making the flames leap up. Then I felt my way slowly through the darkness, to draw the curtain across the windows before lighting the gas. I did not care to ring for it to be lit, as usual. I felt it were both better to be undisturbed. Ruth stayed me.

"There is something I should like to tell you to-night, Letty, and I can talk best in the dark."

Then I sat down again on the rug at her feet, and prepared to listen. When she spoke I knew her thoughts were in the past, and a memory thrilled me of how the soul, when it nears its journey's end, often travels back to that journey's beginning. I had heard more than one person say this, and I thought of it now with a pang.

"You never knew my father, Letty; but your Aunt Janet could tell you that he was one of the kindest men that ever lived, and one of the most generous, I think. I was not his only child, but I was his darling. He had one other, a son, but he scarce knew where he was, whose conduct was the trouble of his life, and whom I had never seen since I was a little baby. He never came home, but he wrote often, and every letter had the one burden—money. Though I was little more than a girl, I grew to shudder at the postman's knock, and dread the sight of my brother's writing more than I dreaded anything else.

"One morning my father came out into the garden to me, carrying one of these ill-fated letters open in his hand. His face was very pale and gray—ashen gray—and his lips trembled. It seemed as much as he could do to speak, and his voice sounded strangely harsh and husky.

"The money your mother left you, the few hundreds I relied on to keep want from you when I shall be gone, could you give them up to me to-day, Ruth, if I were to ask you for them?"

"I could give up my life to-day, father, if it would save you pain," I said.

"He laid his hand—an old man's hand it was that day—on my head, and blessed me softly, looking at me with eyes dim with tears.

"I would never touch one penny of your little all, child, but to save our name from disgrace."

"He spoke sternly, and I saw something terrible had happened, but I asked no questions, and he told me little more.

"My money was drawn out from the funds, and sent to my brother.