

'Don' say dat, honey,' she begged; 'don' say dat; de good Lord gaved yo' baby an' now He's jes called him home agin. He's happy yander!'

'He was happy here. He loved everything—the birds, the flowers, the sunlight through the trees. Do you remember how he liked to run in the wind with the breeze blowing through his curls? He didn't want to die; he tried to live; he ought to have lived, but God was cruel. He would not let him stay.'

'Hit was meant ter be, honey,' soothed the nurse tenderly. 'He's better off dere dan we is hyar—'tain't nothin' but sorrow an' sickness on dis hyar yuth.'

'It was meant to be.' And why was it meant to be? Why should I suffer like I am suffering now? Why should I lose my all—my little precious child? Is it for this—this maddening torture that women suffer and endure what only a woman could suffer and live through? It is not right; it is not just; God is cruel!

The nurse worked on in silence; her thin hands trembled as they tied gathering strings and fastened slippery buttons, but the mother's hands were firm; the bitterness of her anguish gave her an unnatural composure. When the tiny figure, fair as any flower, lay dressed on his nurse's knee, Mrs. Greyson stooped and lifted him in her arms.

'Let me take him to his own room,' she said, and with his cold cheeks against her own she carried him to the sunshiny nursery where his short life had been spent.

She laid him down with his head slightly turned, his cheek upon his hand, as she had so often seen him lie in healthy, happy sleep; then, motioning the nurse away, crept up on to the bed beside him. Her husband, when he came in, found her thus, lying beside the child, smoothing his hair and whispering tender words into his dead ear.

One after another the many who loved her and whose hearts bled for her in her bereavement came and went away sore at heart; girl companions of her own, awed and frightened by her tearless grief, friends of her mother's, men comrades of her husband—all who had loved the little lad. The room filled with flowers; one of her girl friends laid a bunch of violets on the baby's pillow; the old nurse lighted a lamp in a far corner. Her husband leaned over her tenderly; then someone came in—a man she had never seen before—who approached her reverently, asking permission to measure the tiny form.

At midnight her mother arrived (summoned by telegram). They had hoped much from her mother's presence, but nothing she said could pierce the icy sheath in which her daughter had folded herself. 'My child,' cried the older woman, 'I know what your suffering is; I have lost a child of my own. I mourned him just as you are mourning now, yet I know to-night that he is better off; that God's chosen ones are those who go early. Time and God will help you, my darling.'

'God cannot help me, mother; it is God's cruelty that has brought this trouble to me.'

Her mother leaned and stroked the baby's cheek. 'He will never suffer any more, Constance; he is spared life's bitterness and disappointments.'

'He loved life; he would not have been disappointed; he was meant to live. We must have done something very wrong—his father and I—to provoke God's wrath upon us. Mother's boy, mother's little brown-eyed man!'

The morning after the baby's death Miss Allen, one of the nurses who had cared for him was called to the telephone by the doctor.

'I suspect you are tired,' he said, 'and I would like you to rest, but old Mrs. Marsham needs you. I don't think she will be a very great strain on your strength.'

'Mrs. Marsham?'

'Yes, the mother of Marsham, the defaulter. She has been failing ever since his indictment, and his conviction last Friday was, I suppose, the last straw. She is not in bed, not actually ill, but weak, nervous, not quite herself.'

'I will go around at once, doctor.'

'I wish you would; she is very much alone, and it is not good for her. Try her; talk to her about outside things—cheer her if you can.'

Mrs. Marsham received Miss Allen kindly; she was a handsome old lady with snow white hair and the saddest eyes the nurse thought she had ever seen. She had been the great lady of the town, the generous dispenser of boundless hospitality, and so well was she beloved that the righteous wrath of the community against her son did not touch her. The very poor people whom he had robbed and ruined pitied the poor stricken mother, who had idolised him.

Her anguish of mind was written on her lined face; her spirit's misery looked from her weary eyes. There was nothing in her manner, however, to indicate a disordered mind beyond an unquenchable melancholy.

When the nurse returned, after removing her hat, she said gently: 'You do not look very strong; have you been ill?'

'No, but I have been nursing a very sick patient.'

'Who recovered?'

'Unfortunately, no.'

'Why "unfortunately"?''

'He was an only child. I daresay you know his people, the Archibald Greysons?'

'Yes, yes; so the little fellow died? I remember his mother worshipped him.'

'Oh, she did, Mrs. Marsham, she did; and we tried so hard to save him. We thought we could save him. It was a great shock to us when he failed so suddenly. And his mother, poor woman, my heart aches at the thought of her.'

'You are too sympathetic for a nurse.'

'I am not usually so much affected, but Mrs. Greyson got on to my nerves.'

'She is resigned to her loss?'

'Resigned! I have never seen any one less so; it was as though the heart had been torn from her body.'

'There are worse sorrows than death,' said old Mrs. Marsham.

Miss Allen flushed. 'No one can help her,' she hurried on; 'her husband, her friends, no one! Nothing they say does any good. "God is cruel," she cries continually. "If He loved me, He would not have taken my baby from me!"'

'There are crueller losses than death,' said old Mrs. Marsham, and as the nurse did not reply she gazed thoughtfully out of the open window. It was not the green sward that she saw, however, nor the square of shimmering sky, but a boy's face, white and still against the pillow. She heard herself praying wildly: 'Spare him to me, oh, Father; spare him to me who loves him. Only spare him, and I will ask no more!' and her prayer, unlike Constance Greyson's, had been answered.

'Miss Allen,' she said, after an interval of deep thought, 'will you ring for my carriage? I should like to go and see Mrs. Greyson.'

Mrs. Marsham had not left the house for weeks, and the nurse heard her with alarm.

'But, Mrs. Marsham,' she exclaimed, 'are you strong enough? Do you feel equal to the strain?'

'Quite strong, my dear; but you shall go with me if you like.'

'Mrs. Greyson is in terrible sorrow,' pursued the nurse. 'She cannot fail to distress you.'

'I may help her,' said the other woman. 'There are crueller bereavements than death.'

To Constance Greyson brooding beside her child—who in a few hours now would be taken from her for ever—there came the sound of a dragging step; she looked up wearily. Why should they not let her be, these well-meaning friends with their futile words of sympathy?

'Constance,' said old Mrs. Marsham, 'I heard of your great loss, and I have come to help you.'

A faint gleam came into Mrs. Greyson's eyes. She remembered dimly that Mrs. Marsham had known sorrow herself recently.

'Thank you,' she said coldly, 'but sympathy does me no good.'

'I have not come to sympathise.'

Mrs. Greyson frowned.

'Then perhaps you have come to remind me that God is good; that He does not willingly afflict; that in all things He is ever merciful and loving?' The mockery of her tone was indescribable.

Mrs. Marsham walked to the foot of the bed. She stood looking down at the little flower-wreathed figure.

'Years ago,' she began in a passionless voice, 'my only son lay dying. He was a mere child, beautiful, happy—in love with life. The doctors had given up; they told me he could not recover; that it was only a question of a few hours. When I heard the verdict I knelt down and prayed:

"Spare him to me, O Lord; spare my only son!"'

Over and over again I entreated, not for strength, not for moral force, not for will to resist evil and turn away from sin—only that his life might be spared to me.'

Mrs. Greyson was listening; the monotonous low-toned voice had caught her attention.

'As you know, Constance, God granted my prayer. He did what I had besought Him to do—spared my son's life, spared him that he might dishonor his father's name, ruin those who had trusted him and bring my grey hair in shame to the grave.'

'And he was once as pure as your little one yonder, as fair, as sweet. O woman!' trembling with passion, 'you know not what you do when you rebel against God's will; you know not from what awful anguish He has saved your child. He has been good to you. He has taken your boy away from earth's dangers—its bitter temptations—taken him to Himself—stainless, holy, free from sin. He is safe for all time—safe in God's tender arms. Down on your