

## CHAPTER LVIII.

Among many vain hopes, one hope had been realised: they had met again.

In the darkened room, her weary eyes could hardly have seen the betrayal of what he suffered--even if she had looked up in his face. She was content to rest her head on his breast, and to feel his arm round her. "I am glad, dear," she said, "to have lived long enough for this."

Those were her first words--after the first kiss. She had trembled and sighed, when he ran to her and bent over her: it was the one expression left of all her joy and all her love. But it passed away as other lesser agitations had passed away. One last reserve of energy obeyed the gentle persuasion of love. Silent towards all other friends, she was able to speak to Ovid.

"You used to breathe so lightly," she said. "How is it that I hear you now. Oh, Ovid, don't cry! I couldn't bear that."

He answered her quietly. "Don't be afraid, darling; I won't distress you."

"And you will let me say, what I want to say?"

"Oh, yes!"

This satisfied her. "I may rest a little now," she said.

He too was silent; held down by the heavy hand of despair.

The time had been, in the days of his failing health, when the solemn shadows of evening falling over the fields--the soaring song of the lark in the bright heights of the midday sky--the dear lost remembrances that the divine touch of music finds again--brought tears into his eyes. They were dry eyes now! Those once tremulous nerves had gathered steady strength, on the broad prairies and in the roving life. Could trembling sorrow, seeking its way to the sources of tears, overbear the robust vitality that rioted in his blood, whether she lived or whether she died? In those deep breathings that had alarmed her, she had indeed heard the struggle of grief, vainly urging its way to expression against the masterful health and strength that set moral weakness at defiance. Nature had remade this man--and Nature never pities.

It was an effort to her to collect her thoughts--but she did collect them. She was able to tell him what was in her mind.

"Do you think, Ovid, your mother will care much what becomes of me, when I die?"

He started at those dreadful words--so softly, so patiently spoken. "You will live," he said. "My Carmina, what am I here for but to bring you back to life?"

She made no attempt to dispute with him. Quietly, persistently, she returned to the thought that was in her.

"Say that I forgive your mother, Ovid--and that I only ask one thing in return. I ask her to leave me to you, when the end has come. My dear, there is a feeling in me that I can't get over. Don't let me be buried in a great place all crowded with the dead! I once saw a picture--it was at home in Italy, I think--an English picture of a quiet little churchyard in the country. The shadows of the trees rested on the lonely graves. And some great poet had written--oh, such beautiful words about it. The red-breast loves to build and warble there, And little footsteps lightly print the ground. Promise, Ovid, you will take me to some place, far from crowds and noise--where children may gather the flowers on my grave."

He promised--and she thanked him, and rested again.

"There was something else," she said, when the interval had passed. "My head is so sleepy. I wonder whether I can think of it?"

After a while, she did think of it.

"I want to make you a little farewell present. Will you undo my gold chain? Don't cry, Ovid! oh, don't cry!"

He obeyed her. The gold chain held the two locket--the treasured portraits of her father and her mother. "Wear them for my sake," she murmured. "Lift me up; I want to put them round your neck myself." She tried, vainly tried, to clasp the chain. Her head fell back on his breast. "Too sleepy," she said; "always too sleepy now! Say you love me, Ovid."

He said it.

"Kiss me, dear."

He kissed her.

"Now lay me down on the pillow. I'm not eighteen yet--and I feel as old as eighty! Rest; all I want is rest." Looking at him fondly, her eyes closed little by little--then softly opened again. "Don't wait in this dull room, darling; I will send for you, if I wake."

It was the only wish of hers that he disobeyed. From time to time, his fingers touched her pulse, and felt its feeble beat. From time to time, he stooped and let the faint coming and going of her breath flutter on his cheek. The twilight fell, and darkness began to gather over the room. Still, he kept his place by her, like a man entranced.