



THE LOVE OF THE POOR

PERSONAGES.

THE OLD MAN.

THE OLD WOMAN.

THE SOUL OF THEIR DEAD CHILD.

SCENE.—*The interior of a small cottage, almost devoid of furniture. Two chairs drawn up to a fireless grate. Time: twilight.*

THE OLD WOMAN enters, walking feebly, carrying a few twigs.

The Old Woman.

A R, far have I wandered in my search for wood.
My arms are stiff, my eyes are dim
From cold and want of food.
But soon dear God will give us help,
I know that God is good.

The Soul of the Dead Child. Yes, God is good.

The Old Woman. My foolish brain seems all to reel,



And voices murmur in my head ;
 I could have sworn to baby's voice,
 And yet I know our babe is dead.

The Soul. Yes, mother, she is dead.

The Old Woman. 'Tis strange how lately when my heart has failed,
 When life has seemed too hard for folks like me,
 A little voice has murmured in my ear,
 And whispered comfort for the days to be.

The Soul. Yes, comfort for the days to be ;
 Such joys as you have never known,
 The songs of all the angel choir,
 The sight of God upon His throne.

The Old Woman. I know we must not hope for joys in heaven,
 To whom on earth no room to live is given.
 If God will grant me but His leave to rest.

The Soul. God will bestow whatever He thinks best.

THE OLD MAN totters into the room.

The Old Man. My dear, they mocked me in the village street,
 The little boys threw stones and dogged my feet,
 The baker laughed, and turned me from his door.

The Soul. So shall God turn Him from his cry for grace.

The Old Man. There was no soul would give me resting-place.

The Old Woman. Then we must die, dear heart,
 And hand in hand
 Seek out the passage to the pleasant land.
 As we have lived and toiled, so let us die.
 I could not close my weary eyes,
 Unless I knew you by.

The Old Man. [Sits down, and supporting his head with both hands, speaks in a shrill, weak voice, smiling.] I mind me, wife, when we were young
 And green and fresh as yonder hills,
 The fields and woods we strolled among
 Knew more of grief and human ills
 Than we poor children dreamed or knew,
 When you loved me and I loved you.

The Old Woman. [Sitting likewise, and smiling to herself.] Do you mind,
 James, of one brave day you kissed me in the wheat ?

I was afraid the folks would guess, as I walked up the street.
I felt a trembling in my voice, a glistening in my eyes.

The Old Man. I never yet had kissed a maid who showed such sweet surprise.

And do you mind this little house, when I brought you home that day
They made us one within the church, and sent us on our way?

The Old Woman. The honeysuckle was in bloom about the cottage door.
Ah! it was fine to be in love, we cared not we were poor.

The Old Man. I bring to mind we knelt that night, and prayed dear God to bless;

And as we knelt and prayed to Him, we wept for happiness.

The Old Woman. Ah! husband mine, we were so young, how could such children tell

God has no time to save the rich and love the poor as well?
Such sinful, humble folk as we, and of such little store,
It were but vain and proud to think God could recall us more.

The Soul. As lilies shining in the woods at night,
As diamonds glittering in a crown,
More radiant and more full of light,
When God shall bring the mighty down,
And set the humble in their place,
The suffering poor shall know His grace.

The Old Man. [Passing his hands over his eyes, and staring doubtfully about the room.] I hear a voice that thrills with love,
A voice like the voice of a child——

The Old Woman. A voice like the voice of our child.
But she is an angel singing above——

[Bursting into tears.

My arms that ache with longing,
My eyes that are lost in tears.
Oh! child, my child, come back to me,
Give me the love you loved with me,
Give back the happy years.

The Old Man. Hush, hush, my wife, we must obey God's will.
We know our little child is happier on His breast.
Think, think, my dear, if she were with us still,
She would be hungry, too. Yes, wife, God's ways are best.
He knows that we can bear the hunger and the cold;

For patience comes with poverty, as comfort to the old.

The Old Woman. [Still weeping softly.] The days were never long to me, when she played at my feet;

The food was never poor to me, while I could see her eat;

The pains seemed never hard to me that brought her from the womb;

But life is long and poor and hard since she is in the tomb.

The Soul. Courage, mother, courage, father, God is on your side: Seek for help, and seek it bravely, He shall be your guide.

The Old Man. A voice within me whispers, "Courage, try again." The world is cruel, but not so cruel as to delight in pain.

I will tell of our hunger, our age, our empty grate,

Wife, the world shall bring you help before it is too late.

[He gets up, lays his hand comfortingly on her shoulder, and goes out.

The room slowly darkens. The old woman remains sitting motionless, sometimes stretching out her hands towards the grate, as though to warm them.

The Old Woman. My head swims, my heart pants, my hands are cramped with cold.

Will one be warm and young in heaven, or always poor and old?

I am tired, tired of life, and the misery that remains;

Tired of the many struggles, tired of the many pains.

[Her head falls forward on her breast, and she seems to sleep. The SOUL OF THE DEAD CHILD comes forward, a shadowy figure swathed in gray, and kisses her on the forehead. Then there passes slowly through the room the vision of a woman holding to her breast a young child. The child claps its hands, and laughs.

The Old Woman. [Holding out her arms.] Baby, dear, I see you, baby, come to me.

Baby, mother calls you, calls you to her knee.

[The vision passes slowly towards her. The OLD WOMAN laughs, and clasping her arms to her breast, rocks backwards and forwards, and sings in a quavering voice.

Down a down, down a down,

Sleep, sleepy head.

White satin gown

For baby's warm bed.

Down a down, down a down,

Wake sleepy eyes,
Red satin gown
For baby's surprise.

[*The vision passes slowly away. The SOUL OF THE DEAD CHILD once more appears, and kisses the OLD WOMAN on the forehead.*]

The Old Woman. [Raising her head with a start.] Oh ! how happily I dreamed.

Baby nestled to my breast ;
All my pain and weakness seemed
Turned to happiness and rest.

The OLD MAN comes in very slowly, and going up to the OLD WOMAN takes her hand in his.

The Old Man. My dear, I cast aside our pride, my pride and the pride of my wife,

The pride of honest workers, honest workers all our life.
I went to the workhouse master, and I stood before his door,
I said to him, I am old and ill, my wife and I are poor,
We have toiled and saved for many years, and saved and toiled again,
But cruel times and want of work have made our toil in vain.
We have no fire within our grate, no food within our door,
And I have come to beg the last sad refuge of the poor.

[*He pauses, and covers his face with his hands.*

But he said, I cannot take you both, together you cannot be,
She must go to the women's ward, and you must remain with me.

[*He throws his arms round her, and breaks into weak, tremulous sobs.*

And I must leave you, oh, my wife !
Through all this weary, toiling life,
By night and day, and day and night,
You were my joy, my one delight.
As children, hid among the wheat,
We kissed, and whispered, love was sweet ;
As bride and bridegroom in our bed,
We thanked our God that we were wed :
We heard our little girl's first cry,
And in my arms you watched her die :

We wept together by her tomb,
 And turned to our childless home.
 Our heads have whitened on our way,
 Our joys are gone, our sorrows stay.
 But now our time is nearly spent,
 We may not sit in quiet content,
 Breathe out in peace our feeble breath,
 Beneath the kindly hand of Death,
 And so, together, hand in hand,
 Journey towards the happy land.

[*He sinks down feebly at her feet.*

The Old Woman. Nay, do not grieve, my dear, we will not part :
 No stranger's hand shall close our tired eyes ;
 Together we will wait Death's hand upon our heart,
 Together we will wake to heaven's glad surprise.

The Old Man. [*In a weak voice.*] Kiss me, sweetheart, the blades of corn
 are high,
 And not a soul can see of all the passers by.

[*He stretches out his arms to her, and she, leaning forward, kisses him.*

A long silence. Their breathing gets shorter and shorter, and finally ceases. The SOUL OF THE DEAD CHILD, coming forward, closes their eyes gently, and kisses them on the forehead.

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