

LOVE IN DEATH (Dora Greenwell, *Good Words*, 1862)

On the death-darkened air,
Through the wild storm, amid the drifting snows,
A voice of murmured soothing blent with prayer,
Solemn in trustful tenderness, arose.
A mother's spirit in its parting clung
Unto her child – a mother's soul was stirred
Through all its depths – a mother's fondness hung,
And trembled on each faint and faltering word
Of blessing and of farewell; and, as the bird
Plucks the soft plumage from its downy breast
To shield its young, and cowers with quivering wing
More closely o'er them, to her side she prest
Her babe, and strove, with warmth and sheltering
To frame within her clasping arms a nest:
"Sleep! oh, my baby, sleep! the night draws on.
Sleep once again on thy poor mother's breast;
Ere yet the morning dawns I shall be gone,
And though no more wilt know such place of rest;
Colder and yet more cold,
Dark with the storm the wild winds round us
sweep,
Yet still above thy slumber, as of old,
Thy mother watches. Sleep, though dear one, sleep!
Closer and closer still
Nestle unto me, darling, safe from harm;
Cold, cold, is all without, and deathly chill,
Only the heart – thy mother's heart – is warm.

"Yet there will be cold, –
Yes, even there, my child! and, oh, how soon.
The snow drifts thickly round us – fold by fold
Around the sinking form, the weary feet
That may no longer bear us o'er the wild,
Silent and swift, a wreathed winding-sheet
Is closely drawn; but not for thee, my child!
No, not for thee! my parting soul hath striven
With Him, the merciful – unto this hour,
Unto its love, its anguish, hath been given
A spirit of prevailing and of power; –
And I have borne it from thee! To his breast
Death folds me close as I fold thee to mine;
Cold kisses are upon my cheek – to rest,
To sleep they woo me, soft and deep as thine:
A heavy mist steals on – I feel my breath
Drawn slowly from me; yet my love shall keep
Its watch above thee still, and though shalt sleep,
Sleep safely, sweetly, in the arms of DEATH,
And wake to life once more! Kind eyes shall weep,
And kindly hearts be troubled, when they see
The sweet unconscious smiling of thy face;
For thou wilt smile, and bear no thought of me.
Too young art thou for grief
Too young for Love, my child, for Memory!
Yet not less fond the last, the lingering kiss,
Yet not less fervent from the heart the prayer;

Because I know thou wilt not, darling, miss
Thy mother in her fondness, in her care!

"But he will think of me –
Thy Father. Thou wilt grow up by his side,
And ever bring the thought of her that died
Lonely, but loving, blessing him and thee.
The flower, the flower may fall
When it hath shielded in its folded breast
The bud of promise, loveliest,
Most dear of all.
And he will not be lone
In sorrow or in joy. *Thy* voice shall fill
The silence of his soul with many a tone
That once was mine, and whisper to him still
Of things long past, and I shall look at him
Through thy sweet eyes – young, loving eyes, that
shine
In light and tenderness when these are dim,
Shall answer his with smiles that once were mine.
Sleep, dearest! in the night
Of death thy mother's arms around thee twine
More closely, that her spirit in its flight,
May send a message of its love on thine.

"The snows will melt away,
And green leaves rustle light o'er hill and plain;
Through the sweet scent of hidden waters stirred,
And the clear shining after summer rain,
The blade will spring; then on strong wing the
bird
Will rise to the blue heaven, ascending slow;
The fisher will go forth upon the lake,
The hunter to the forest with his bow;
But far beyond the flight
Of Indian arrow, far beyond the ken
Of mountain eagle in his soaring might,
Shall flee, and leave where they have been no trace,
May I arise. O Saviour! earth and heaven
Shall pass, but Though endurest. Unto Thee
I yield my spirit; Father, bless thou me!
Bless with Thy love the child that Thou hast
given!"
I shall have passed, returning not again:
These ancient Hills shall wake
Like giants from their slumber at the breath
Of Spring, and from their lofty summits shake
The icy chains of stillness and of death;
But not till they shall hear
A sound, and move in trembling from their place,
Not till the mountains and the rocks in fear
And in that prayer her fervent spirit pass'd.
The deep night fell, the keen and hurrying blast
Sang her wild dirge; the straining clasp grew cold,
Yet pressed the little one with rigid hold
Still to her heart; when morning came the child
Woke peaceful in its mother's arms and smiled.