

“ For Ever and Ever ”

By C. S.

IN the cold grey dawn I sit up and look at the woman by my side. One soft little white hand peeps out from the dainty lace, and on one finger is a gold ring. There is just such another upon my own finger ; and these two rings bind us to one another for ever and ever. And I am tired already.

She moves in her sleep, and buries her face deeper in the heavy folds of the bed-clothes. The little hand is still out, and lies so near me (so temptingly near, as I should have thought only a little while ago) that I can trace the faint blue lines in it as I have done many a time before. But now . . . how horrible it all seems !

She stirs again, and draws the hand into the lace so that it is almost hidden. How pretty she looks ! . . . with her silky brown hair. Ah, why do I find it so difficult to think of her, even when she is before my eyes thus ? Why do I never think of her when she is absent ? Why do great masses of tumbling black hair come into my mind, while I watch this soft brown tangle on the pillow before me ? I have tried to beat down these thoughts—but they will come . . . and how can I help myself ?

Look at her neck—how white it is ! And yet—and yet, why does a warm brown something continually haunt me ? A living something which brings with it the sun, the sky, and the sea ?

Our

Our boy sleeps in a little room adjoining. I creep in and look at him. He is asleep, and has curled himself up almost into a ball, with one tiny fist in his mouth. I dare not move it to give him more air, lest he should wake and cry out. As I look a horrible feeling of loneliness comes over me. . . . He is *her* child . . . *our* child . . . I creep back to bed. Thank Heaven her eyes are shut ! . . . Those eyes so solemn and blue.

And in the morning she tells me a curious dream she had last night. And this is it :

“I dreamed that a dark woman with wonderful black hair came and stood by our bed ; and stooping, put her arms about you and kissed you passionately many times, smoothing your forehead with her hand. And I tried to cry out, but could not from fear. And suddenly looking up, she saw me watching her ; and her face grew hard and cruel. And she came round, and stood and looked at me ; and I trembled. And presently taking hold of me, she tried to pull me out of bed, but something held me down : and she gave up, and went and sat by the dull cold grate, and wept bitterly. And I felt sorry for her in spite of all, because she had no one to comfort her as I have : and I got up to go to her. But the cruel hard look crept back into her face—and then I woke, and saw you, and the empty chair, and the bright sunlight darting round the edges of the blinds, and found it was only a dream.”

And what can I say ? . . . What can I do ? . . . How can I help myself ? . . .