

indescribable agitation which had been upon him all the evening, some feminine instinct told her that, under other circumstances, he might have become her lover. Her husband he could never be; and yet she had to go on living with him in an anomalous relationship, which was a compound of all these three ties, with the difficulties of all and the comfort of none. Her friend he was; that bond seemed clear and plain; but then is it customary for a lady to go and keep the house of a male "friend," be he ever so tried and trusted? Society, to say nothing of her own feelings, would never allow it; and for once society is in the right.

Hannah felt it so—felt that, stripping off the imaginary brother-and-sister bond, Bernard and she were exactly in the position of a lady and gentleman living together in those Platonic relations, which are possible certainly, but which the wicked world never believes to be possible, and which Nature herself rejects as being out of the ordinary course of things, and therefore very unadvisable. A life difficult enough to carry on even if the parties were calmly indifferent to one another; but what if they were not indifferent? Though he had never "made love" to her in the smallest degree, never caressed her, even in the harmless salutations which brothers and sisters-in-law so commonly indulge in, still Hannah must have been dull indeed not to have long since found out that in some way or other Bernard was very fond of her; and a young man is not usually "very fond" of a woman, not his own born sister, without, sooner or later, wishing to monopolize her, to have her all to himself—in plain terms, to marry her. And though women have much less of this exclusive feeling—though many a woman will go on innocently adoring a man for years without the slightest wish of personal appropriation—still, when somebody else appropriates him—marries him in short—and the relations are changed, and she drops into a common friend, or less than a friend, then even the noblest and most unselfish woman living will feel, for a time, a slight pang, a blank in her life, a soreness at her heart. It is Nature's revenge upon all shams, however innocent those shams may be.

And poor Hannah was reaping Nature's revenge now. Whether he did or did not love her in a brotherly way, she was cruelly conscious that to go on living with her brother-in-law as heretofore would be a very severe trial. Should she fly from it? The way was open. She could write to Lady Dunsmore, who she knew was again in search of a governess, and would gladly welcome her back. Two days, or one day even, and she might resume her old life, her old duties, and forget this year and a half at Easterham as if it had never been.

For a moment the temptation was strong. She felt hunted down; like the Israelites, with the Egyptians behind and the red sea before, the dreadful surging sea of the future, over which there seemed no pathway, no possible way of crossing it to any safe shore. If she could but escape, with her reputation clear, out of her brother-in-law's house!—that House on the Hill which had been so pleasant, which she had tried to make a sort of home-beacon to all the parish; and now all the parish levelled at it their cruel stares, their malignant comments, for it was exposed to all. For Bernard's sake, as well as her own, she