

of a near and dear relative. For he addressed her as "my dear sister;" and in his letter, which was impulsive, fragmentary, and evidently in earnest, he seemed to fling himself upon her pity and help, as if he had no one else to appeal to.

"I have been reading over again the letters you used to send weekly to my poor Rosa," he wrote; "it is these which have induced me to make this request: for they convince me that you must be a good woman—a woman fitted to give help and consolation to such a forlorn creature as I am. How forlorn you little know! A man who has had a wife and lost her, is the wretchedest creature on earth—infinately more wretched than one who has never known that blessing. Every day, ever hour, I miss my darling. Continually I hear, in a sort of ghostly way, her step about the house, her voice outside in the garden; till sometimes, in the excessive loneliness, I am actually frightened—not of her, but of myself—lest I should be going mad. Men do go mad with grief sometimes, especially husbands who have lost their wives. I have read several such cases in the newspapers lately: my eye seems to light upon them, and my mind to retain them, with a horrible pertinacity. But why trouble you with these personalities? No more."

And then he began to describe his baby; saying she was a dear little thing, but that he did not understand her. She seemed to be always crying, and nobody could manage her, though he saw a different woman almost every time he came into the nursery.

When she first read this passage Hannah had started up, her always pale face hot and warm. The weak point in her nature—rather a pathetic weakness in one whom some people called, and she herself firmly believed to be, a born old maid—was her love of children. Her heart had yearned oftentimes over Rosa's motherless babe, but she felt that she could not interfere with the grandmother and father. Now the picture of it—transferred from nurse to nurse, neglected or ignored—smote her with a sort of self-reproach, as if her pride or her shyness, or both, had led her weakly to desert her own flesh and blood—her sister's child.

"I ought to have gone and seen it—seen what they were doing with it. I have as much right to it as any one of them all. Poor little baby! Rosa's very own baby!"

The tears which came so rarely and painfully to her eyes, came now; and they did her good. It seemed to open and warm her heart even to think of that little baby.

Gradually her thoughts took shape and purpose. Though she seldom meditated much upon herself, still Miss Thelluson had not lived thirty years in this troublesome world without knowing her own character pretty well. She was quite aware of one great want in her nature—the need to be a mother to somebody or something. It came out even towards the large white cat that lived in the school-room, and loved the governess better than any creature in the house. It had helped her to manage many a difficult pupil, and stood her in good stead with her little Lilies Dacre, who, before she came, had been rather disagreeable and unmanageable children. Now they were very good, and loved her with all their aris-