

friend here shall feel as much at home as if she were in her own house."

"Certainly, my lady, and the wise old woman slipped quietly behind her back the hand she was extending to Miss Thelluson, till Miss Thelluson took and shook it cordially, then curtseying, Mrs. Rhodes followed her respectfully to the blue rooms, which, as everybody knew, being in communication with the countess's, were never assigned but to her favorite guests.

Thus, domestically, the critical point was settled at once. Socially, too, with equal decision.

"My friend, Miss Thelluson," said Lady Dunsmore, introducing her at once to two ladies, aunts of Lord Dunsmore, who were in the drawing-room, and whom Hannah knew well enough, as they met, by sight. "We are so glad to have her back among us, with her little niece. She will be such a welcome visitor, and my little girls will perfectly spoil the child, if only for her sake; they were so fond of Miss Thelluson."

And when, to prove this, Lady Blanche and Lady Mary came in leading little Rosie between them, and clung lovingly round their old governess's neck, Hannah felt perfectly happy—ay, even though Bernard was far away; and the remembrance of him striding forlornly to his deserted home, came across her like a painful, reproachful vision. And yet it was not unnatural. The transition from perplexity to peace, from suspicion to tender respect, from indifference or coldness to warm, welcoming love, was very sweet. Not until the strain was taken off her, did Hannah feel how terrible it had been.

When Lady Dunsmore, as if to prove decisively the future relation in which they were to stand, came into her room before dinner, and sitting down in her white dressing gown before the hearth—where aunt and niece were arranging together a beautiful Noah's ark—put her hand on Miss Thelluson's shoulder, saying, "My dear, I hope you will make yourself quite happy with us,"—Hannah very nearly broke down.

The countess stooped and began caressing the child, making solemn inquiries of her as to Noah and Mrs. Noah, their sons and sons' wives, and arranging them in a dignified procession across the rug.

"What a happy-looking little woman she is—this Rosie! And I hope her auntie is happy too? As happy as she expected to be?"

Hannah's self-control was sorely tested. This year past she had lived in an atmosphere of mingled bliss and torment, of passionate love and equally passionate coldness: been exposed to alternations of calm civility and rudeness almost approaching unkindness: but it was long since any one—any woman—had spoken to her in that frank, affectionate tone. She felt that Lady Dunsmore understood her; and when two good women do this, they have a key to one another's hearts, such as no man, be he ever so dear, can quite get hold of.

As Hannah laid her cheek against the pretty soft hand—none the less soft that its grasp was firm, and none the less pretty that it sparkled with diamonds—the tears came stealing down, and with them was near stealing out that secret which all the taunts in the world would never have forced from her.

But it must not be. It would compromise not herself alone. She