

there she was a stranger; this was home. She glanced through the house in passing, and tried to admire it, for it was her brother-in-law's own property, only lately bought. Not that he liked it—he had told her mournfully, that he neither liked nor disliked anything much now—but it was the most suitable house he could find.

She went out into the garden, and wept out a heartful of tears in the last gleam of the twilight, then she came back and dressed for the seven o'clock dinner, for which the maid—who appeared at the door, saying she had been specially ordered to attend on Miss Thelluson—told her Mr. Rivers was sure to return.

"The first time master ever has returned, miss, to a regular late dinner, since the poor mistress died."

This, too, was a trial. As Hannah descended, attired with her usual neatness, but in the thorough middle-aged costume that she had already assumed, there flashed across her a vision of poor Rosa, the last time, though they little knew it was the last, that she ran into her sister's room just before dinner; all in white, her round rosy arms and neck gleaming under the thin muslin, so happy herself, and brightening all around her with her loving, lovesome ways. And now, a mile distant, Rosa slept under the daisies. How did her husband endure the thought!

With one great sob Hannah smothered down these remembrances. They would make the approaching meeting more than painful—intolerable. She felt as if the first minute she looked into her brother-in-law's face and grasped his hand, both would assuredly break down, although over both had grown the outside composure of a six-months' old sorrow.

He himself seemed in dread of a "scene," and watchful to avoid it, for instead of meeting her in the drawing-room, she found him waiting for her at the stair-foot, under the safe shelter of all the servants' eyes.

"I am late," he said; "I must apologise."

Then they shook hands. Mr. Rivers's hand was trembling, and very cold, but that was all. He said nothing more, and led her at once into the dining-room.

In such circumstances, how dreadful sometimes are little things—the little things that unconsciously crop up, stinging like poisoned arrows. There was one—Hannah recalled it long afterwards, and so did others—dwelling malignly upon the innocent, publicly-uttered kindly words.

The table had been laid for two persons, master and mistress, and the butler held for Miss Thelluson the mistress's chair. Struck with a sudden pang, she hesitated—glanced towards Mr. Rivers.

"Take it," he said, in a smothered kind of voice; "it is your place now. I hope you will keep it always."

So she sat down, in Rosa's seat; with Rosa's husband opposite. How terrible for him to see another face in the room of that dear, lovely one, over which the coffin-lid had closed! it was her duty, and she went through it; but she felt all dinner-time as if sitting upon thorns.

During the safe formalities of the meal, she had leisure to take some observation of her brother-in-law. He was greatly altered.