

‘What would become of many a miserable woman’ if it were not for baby!

How Grace had ever left her own, Hannah could not imagine; but found afterwards it was the hard necessity of earning money, the grandmother being very poor, and Jim Dixon having gone off in search of work, and left the whole combined families on the old woman’s hands. Now he reclaimed his three eldest; but disowned Grace’s unfortunate babe.

“My boy—remember my boy!” implored she, as in the dim dawn of the morning her mistress left her, hoping her utter exhaustion would incline her to sleep. “Promise me that you will speak to the master, if only for the sake of my poor boy.”

Hannah promised; but when she went back to her room and thought it all over—for she could not sleep—she was sorely perplexed. There might be some mistake, even though Mr. Rivers, who was a magistrate as well as a clergyman, spoke so decidedly. Grace’s arguments were strong; and the case of Mr. Melville, whom she had herself met at the Moat-House, was, to say the least, curious. She herself knew nothing of the law. If she could only speak to anybody who did know, instead of to her brother-in-law! Once she thought of writing to Lady Dunsmore; but, then, what would the Countess imagine? No doubt, that she wanted the information for herself. And Hannah grew hot all over with shame and pain, and another feeling which was neither the one nor the other, and which she did not stay to analyse, except that it made her feel more reluctant than ever to name the subject again to Mr. Rivers.

Still, Grace was so unfortunate; so innocently wicked—if wickedness there was. And the projected marriage of Dixon seemed much more so.

“Mr. Rivers will never allow it in his church. He surely would not sanction such a cruel thing, even if it be legal. And there is no time to lose. Whatever it costs me, I must speak to him at once.”

With this resolution, and deadening her mind to any other thoughts, Hannah lay down, and tried to sleep, but in vain. After an hour or two of restless tossing, she dressed herself, and descended to the breakfast-room.

There she found Mr. Rivers playing with little Rossie—contrary to his habit; for he seldom saw her of mornings. He looked a little confounded at being discovered.

“I sent for the child,” said he. “Don’t you think, Aunt Hannah, she is old enough to come down to breakfast with us?”

“Not quite,” said Hannah, smiling; “but she can stay and play about on the floor. I daresay she will be good—won’t she, auntie’s darling?”

And auntie clasped fondly the little thing, who had tottered up to her and hid the pretty fair head in her gown-skirt. Mr. Rivers looked at them, and turned suddenly away—as he often did now.

Rosie behaved beautifully—for about five minutes!—and then began to perpetrate a few ignorant naughtinesses; such as pulling down a silver fork, and a butter knife, with a great clatter; then creeping beneath the table, and trying to stand upright there, which naturally caused a bump on the head and a scream so violent, that Aunt Han-