

But Hannah held her arm. "No, no!" she said, rather sharply; "I will not have the child disturbed. I can wait. It is *my* child."

And she sat down on the rocking-chair by the crib-side with the air of one who knew her own rights, and was determined to have them. All her nervous doubt of herself, her hesitation and timidity, vanished together; the sight before her seemed to make her strong;—strong as the weakest creatures are when the maternal instinct comes into them. At the moment, and for ever henceforth, Hannah felt that she could have fought like any wild beast for the sake of that little helpless babe.

She sat a long while beside it; long enough to take in pretty clearly the aspect of things around her. Though she was an old maid, or considered herself so, she had had a good deal of experience of family life in the various nurseries of friends and employers; upon which her strong common sense and quick observation had made many internal comments. She detected at once here that mournful lack of the mother's eye and hand; the mother's care and delight in making all things orderly and beautiful for the opening intelligence of her darling. It was quite enough to look around the room to feel sure that the little sleeper before her was nobody's darling. Cared for, of course, up to a certain extent, in a stupid, mechanical way; but there was nobody to take up, with full heart, the burthen of motherhood, and do the utmost for the little human being, who, physiologists say, bears in body and soul, the impress of its first two years of life with it to the grave.

"And this duty falls to me; God has given it to me," said Hannah Thelluson to herself. And without a moment's questioning, or considering how far the labour might outweigh the reward, or inquiring whether the reward would ever come at all, she added, so, softly, "Thank God!"

"I shall be here again before bed-time," said she aloud to the nurse, as she rose.

"You can't miss," returned the woman, evidently bent on resistance: "I always goes to bed early, and I locks my nursery-door after I've gone to bed."

"That will not do," said Miss Thelluson. "I am baby's aunt, as you know, and her father has given her into my charge. The nursery must never be locked against me, day or night. Where is the key?" She took it out of the door and put it into her pocket, the nurse looking too utterly astonished to say a word. "I shall be back here again punctually at half-past nine."

"My first battle!" she thought, sighing, as she went away to her own room. She was not fond of battles; still, she could fight—when there was something worth fighting for; and even her first half-hour in the widower's household was sufficient to show her that the mistress of it would require to have eyes like Argus, and a heart as firm as a rock. This was natural; like everything else, quite natural: but it was not the less hard, and it did not make her home-coming to the house on the hill more cheerful.

It was a new house comparatively, and everything about it was new. Nothing could be more different from the old-fashioned stateliness in which she had lived at Lord Dunsmore's. But then