

"No," returned Hannah shortly, and then was vexed at herself for being so foolishly sensitive. What possible impression could Rosa's sad story have made, beyond the passing moment, on this beautiful and brilliant woman, whose interests were so wide, who had such myriads of acquaintances and friends? To expect from her more than mere kindness, the polite kindness which her manner showed, as evidently annoyed at her own mistake, she cudgelled her memory to recall the circumstances, was exacting from Lady Dunsmore too much, more than human nature was capable of. Hannah recognised this, and saved herself and the countess by plunging at once *in medias res*. "No; the baby happily did not die. It is alive still, and my brother-in-law wishes me to come and take charge of it, and of his household."

"Permanently?"

"I hope so."

"Then you come to tell me that you wish to relinquish your position here. Oh, Miss Thelluson, I am so sorry! At the commencement of the season, too. How shall I ever find time to get a new governess?"

The countess's regret was unmistakable, though it took the personal tone which perhaps was not unnatural in one for whom the wheels of life had always turned so smoothly, that when there was the least jar she looked quite surprised.

"I am very sorry, too, on many accounts," said Miss Thelluson. "I love my pupils dearly. I should liked to have remained until they grew up, to have dressed Lady Mary for her first drawing-room, as she always said I must, and watched how people admired Lady Blanche's beauty and Lady Georgina's magnificent voice. They are three dear little girls," continued the governess, not unmoved, for she loved and was proud of her pupils. "My heart is sore to leave them. But this baby, my poor little niece, is my own flesh and blood."

"Of course! Pray do not imagine I blame you, or think you have used me ill," said the countess gently. "You are only doing what is natural under the circumstances, and I shall easily replace you—I mean I shall easily find another governess; it will be more difficult to get a second Miss Thelluson."

"Miss Thelluson acknowledged, but did not attempt to deny, the delicate compliment. She knew she had done her duty, and that under many difficulties—far more than the countess suspected. For hapless countesses, who are the centre of brilliant societies, have only too few hours to spend in their nurseries and school-rooms; and these three little ladies owed much, more than their mother guessed, to their governess. It had sometimes been a comfort to Miss Thelluson in her dull life to hope that the seed she sowed might spring up again years hence in the hearts of these young aristocrats, who would have so much in their power for good or for evil. She had tried her best to make them really "noble" women, and it was pleasant to have her labour appreciated.

"And how soon do you wish to go?" asked Lady Dunsmore, rather lugubriously, for she had had endless changes of governesses