

making all right and comfortable! For they're not comfortable—I wasn't. And they're not real brother and sister, whatever master says. And I'm sure they can be married: for there was our old squire, he married two sisters and had two families—one all girls, the other boys. And the eldest son by the second marriage—young Mr. Melville,—came in for the property, and is the squire now. And nobody ever said his mother wasn't lawfully married, no more than, when I came home from London, the neighbours said I wasn't married to Jim. Married in church, too,—though we were Methodists both; and neither the parson nor our own minister ever said a word against it."

Though the poor girl talked in a wild, rambling, excited fashion, still there was some sense in her arguments; and when she implored Miss Thelluson to speak to Mr. Rivers again, and repeat all she said, and ask if there was not a chance of his having been mistaken, or if he could not, at least, prevent the marriage with Mary Bridges, Hannah scarcely knew what to say. At last, just to soothe her—for, out of consideration to her mistress, Grace had kept her misery to herself for a day and a half, till it had almost driven her frantic—she promised to do her best in the matter.

"And you'll do it at once, miss; and tell master that whatever is done should be done at once, or Jim will get married, and then what is to become of me and my poor child? It isn't myself that I care for. I didn't do wrong—God knows I didn't! And I don't mind what folk say of me; but it's my poor boy. And it's Jim, too, a little; I don't want Jim to do wrong either."

And she shed a few tears, over even the bad fellow, who, she confessed, had in his drunken fits beaten her many a time.

"But I forgive him; for he was drunk," said she, using that too common, but mistaken excuse. "And, then, I had the children to comfort me. Such dear little things they were, and so fond of me! And he'll go and bring that woman Bridges to be step-mother over them, and she is a bad temper, and she's sure to ill-treat them, poor lambs! Jenny's poor little motherless lambs! I must go back to them directly." And she sat up in bed, in an agony of distress. "Oh, miss, please give me my clothes, and I'll get up and dress, and be off by daylight."

This bitter grief, not over her own boy—who, she said, was safe with his grandmother—but over her dead sister's children, touched Hannah to the quick. She could understand it so well.

"You must lie quiet," said she; "or rather you must go back to your own bed beside Rosie. You have quite forgotten Rossie."

The right chord was struck. The young woman had, evidently, a strong sense of duty, besides being excessively fond of her charge; for Rosie was a little creature that won everybody. So she sat up, fastened back her dishevelled hair, and with her mistresses help tottered back to the nursery. Soon she settled herself in her customary corner, stretching out a caressing hand to the crib beside her bed, where, sleeping quite alone, but as sweetly as if all the angels of heaven were watching over her, little Rosie lay.

"Ah, baby, baby," Grace sobbed, "what would have become of me all these months without you, baby!