

it—gives a thrill of ecstasy as keen as any love dreams. This, whether or not they have children of their own; often, poor women! when they are lonely old maids. And such an one was Hannah Thelluson.

As she entered the house (I feel the confession is more pathetic than ridiculous) she actually trembled with the delight of thinking that in a minute more she would have her little niece in her arms; and her first question was, "Where is the baby?"

Apparently a question quite unexpected from any visitor in this house; for the footman, much surprised, passed it to the butler, and the butler circulated it somewhere in the inferior regions: whence presently there appeared a slatternly female servant.

"I am Miss Thelluson, baby's aunt. I want to see my little niece."

Upon this the slatternly girl led the way up a steep stair to the nursery. It was a long, low, gloomy room, which struck chilly on entering, even in full summer, for its only window looked north-east, and was shaded by an over-hanging tree. It had in perfection the close nursery atmosphere of the old school, whose chiefest horror seemed to be fresh air. Sunless, smothery, dull, and cold, it was the last place in the world for any young life to grow up in. It cast a weight even upon the grown woman, who loved light and air, and would never, either physically or mentally, willingly walk in gloom.

Miss Thelluson contemplated sadly that small pale effigy of a child, which lay in the little crib, with the last evening light slanting across it through a carelessly-drawn curtain. It lay, not in the lovely attitudes that sleeping children often assume, but flat upon its back, its arms stretched out cruciform, and its tiny feet extended straight out, almost like a dead child. There was neither roundness nor colouring in the face, and very little beauty. Only a certain pathetic peace, not unlike the peace of death.

"Don't touch her," whispered Miss Thelluson, as the nurse was proceeding roughly to take up her charge. "Never disturb a sleeping child. I will wait till to-morrow."

And she stood and looked at it—this sole relic of poor Rosa; this tiny creature, which was all that was left of the Thelluson race, notable and honourable in its day, though long dwindled down into poverty and obscurity.

As she looked, there came into Hannah's heart that something—mothers say they feel it at the instant when God makes them living mothers of a living babe; and perhaps He puts it into the hearts of other women, not mothers at all, in solemn, exceptional cases, and for holy ends—that passionate instinct of protection, tenderness, patience, self-denial; of giving everything and expecting nothing back, which constitutes the true ideal of maternity. She did not lift the child; she would not allow herself even to kiss its little curled-up fingers, for fear of waking it, but she consecrated herself to it from that moment,—as only women and mothers can, and do.

Nurse, who disliked her authority being set aside, approached again. "Never mind touching it, miss; we often do. It only cries a bit, and goes off to sleep again."