

at my appearance, and stops short. As I close the door a pained expression crosses his face, and he speaks with an effort.

"Viewing the family mansion?" he says a little bitterly. "Well, it would be hard no doubt to go back to your friends and be unable to relate its glories."

I murmur that I have no friends to whom they might be related. I was dull and sought amusement; I am sorry if he is displeased at what I have done.

"Poor child!" he says, softening. "No wonder you are dull here; it is no place for the young. Have you no friends, child, with whom you could make a happier home during your husband's absence?"

I shake my head.

"Your parents?"

"I don't remember them. Only their grave was shown me at Farmcroft once."

"Farmcroft!" he exclaims, seeming struck by the name. "Did you live there?"

"Oh, no!" I explain. "My aunt took me once to see the place because they died there."

"And your name?"

"My aunt was Mrs. Brand. She adopted me, and I was called by her name; but I believe my father's was different. It was not upon the headstone—only the date."

"And that?"

I repeat it, puzzled by his eagerness; I am still more puzzled when without another word, he turns back into his room and shuts the door. Perplexed, and fearing he is for some cause displeased, I return to my own apartments. Heartily do I wish that my curiosity had never led me to pry into that old room and vex my host as I seem to have done.

The days pass on, and now I feel no more the dulness of my late quiet life. Oh, why did I murmur against it? Willingly would I endure an existence even more monotonous could I enjoy the peace of mind which has hitherto been mine. I bewailed my anxiety for my husband while I received his letters regularly. Ungrateful that I was! Now I have my punishment—they have ceased altogether!

The days have become weeks. I have given up reckoning time. It seems months to me since I heard from him. Hitherto I have not felt the want of newspapers in this out-of-the-way country place. Frank's letters told me all the war-news I cared to know; but since they have ceased I have chafed and yearned for intelligence.

Some time ago I subscribed to a newspaper on my own account, but Frank's name has never been in its columns. Mrs. Norris has promised to try in the village if the blacksmith or the doctor—the two literary characters—have back numbers of any journal of about the date when Frank's letters ceased to reach me. She has as yet been unsuccessful in her quest; all she can obtain are of a more recent date. I skim their pages, pore over the lists of the killed and wounded, and feel relieved not to meet Frank's name—at least the uncertainty leaves me hope.

Yet the suspense is more than I can well endure, I become thin, white and nervous. Yes; I who scarcely knew the meaning of the word "nerves" have come to start at the least sound, to find a presentiment in every trivial mood, a warning in the smallest daily accident. My night are sleepless, spent in conjuring up a thousand frightful visions of my darling—dying alone in an enemy's land, wounded on some battle-field, amid ghastly heaps of slain, or dead in some rude hospital, with none to close his eyes tenderly or kiss his brow. I am ready to start off to Zululand to seek my husband or learn his fate, but a helpless clinging to the one thing I have left forbids me to leave my child.

Old Mr. Eyreton has changed wonderfully towards me since the day on which he found me quitting the deserted room. He seems to have compassion on my loneliness and anxiety, talks kindly when we meet, and more than one evening he has made himself my companion in the nursery, speaking such kind words of consolation and hope that, though I cannot always comprehend his strange speeches and sharp curious glances, I am quite ashamed ever to have suspected this kind old man of insanity.

Mrs. Norris is much struck with the change in her master, and likes me and my boy all the better for it: but even all their kindness can but ease my burden in very slight degree. My anxiety becomes more unendurable day by day.

At last certainty comes. One evening Mrs. Norris brings me a newspaper containing an account of a great battle fought on the very day I received Frank's last letter. I seize it eagerly, and turn to the list of names. I look first at the killed. Thank Heaven, not there! Then I glance at the wounded. I stare stupidly at the page for a moment, then slip off my chair on to the floor, and burst into such tears as I have never shed before or since. Yes; his name is there, and among the first.

The night falls. I have not moved from my place. Mrs. Norris, entering with little Frank, finds me still crouched by the window, staring at that one line in the newspaper.

My tears are stayed; I think I must have cried them all away. Frank tumbles over my feet while seeking to know what is the matter. I rouse myself to soothe him, and find my own first ray of hope in the repetition that "papa is only ill—yes, only wounded." Sickness and death are but

words as yet to my little boy. As soon as I move and speak to him he is consoled, and is speedily asleep in his crib. Mrs. Norris tries vainly to persuade me to follow his example.

"The master knows, ma'am; and he sends his love, and he will not come to see you till the morning; but you are to keep up your heart and sleep, now you know the worst. He's very down-to-night, poor gentleman, or he'd have come to you before; but he's always had this day, though 'tis one-and-twenty years gone now—dear, dear!"

"What is one-and-twenty years gone now?" I ask, with languid interest, repeating her words, not caring for the reply.

"His poor son, ma'am. Oh, 'tis a very bad thing giving way! You should take heed," she continues in a warning voice. "Just think how much better it would have been for the poor master if he'd but kept up—not but what his was a real sorrow too."

"How was it?" I cry eagerly, with a sudden sense of sympathy for my strange old host. "How did he lose his Frank? Tell me. Can there be a curse on all the heirs of this dreadful place? Mr. Eyreton's son is gone, and Frank's father and brother; and now my Frank perhaps—" But the sentence ends in sobs. I cannot finish it.

"Hush, hush!" says the old woman soothingly. "Don't take up such silly notions. If our poor Master Frank died by any curse, 'twas the one that falls on disobedient children. Stay crying, my poor dear, and I'll tell you."

She seats herself, after lighting the candle and drawing the curtains close. I nestle down beside the lilac print gown which clothes the first woman who has given me a word of motherly tenderness; and, moved, I fancy, by the sight of my trouble and excitement, and desiring to calm and divert my mind, she breaks the silence she has hitherto observed concerning the family misfortunes, and begins her story.

"Master Frank," she commences—"my Master Frank, you know—was as fine-looking a young man as you'd see anywhere, and the master's darling. Maybe he spoilt him; but 'twas all the child he had, and the mistress died when he was born. Anyway, Master Frank grew up wild, though good-hearted he always was; and he got into debt and gave the master a deal of trouble, and the master was hard upon him then, all the more perhaps because he loved him so. At last, when things seemed to be at the worst, they mended. Master Frank turned over a new leaf, and promised to settle down steady. Poor young lad! He wasn't one-and-twenty then, but his birthday was coming on, and there was to be a fine fuss when he came of age—addresses and speeches, and a dinner to the tenants, and a ball for the gentry in the evening."

"That was in the big drawing room," I interrupt, remembering the faded decorations.

"Ay—have you found your way in there?" says Mrs. Norris. "That's where his picture is; but it won't tell you how handsome my Master Frank looked, for that picture was done after his bad illness—a year before the time I'm talking of. But about the ball. It was to be a real grand affair, and there was a fortnight's notice given; but some time before, I noticed as the old master and his son weren't getting on as well as they had been doing lately; and one day Master Frank told me—for, you see, having been his nurse, he'd a way of talking to me—as how it was about a Miss Denison the master wanted him to marry. She was a very nice young lady, with a bit of money—as wouldn't have come in badly just then, for Master Frank's debts were heavy—and they had known each other from children; so I says, 'And why not?' And Master Frank only laughs and says, 'Oh, there's plenty of 'why nots'!'"

"Well, a week before the ball, he and the master had a dreadful falling out, and Master Frank went off with himself, no one knew where. We heard afterwards as he had told the master he couldn't marry Miss Denison, being engaged to another young lady, which, it seems, had no grand family and no money, like the match his father would have him make. So the master was furious, and said he should give her up. He said he would not, and they had hard words; and Master Frank went off. But old Mr. Eyreton and all of us felt sure he'd think better of it and come back for his birthday, seeing it was his coming of age. So the preparations went on; and we did up the dancing-room with colored calicoes and green boughs—you wouldn't wish to see anything prettier; and day by day the poor master watched for his son. But he never came.

"On the morning of the birthday the dog-cart was sent to the station to meet the earliest train; and, if the young gentleman wasn't in that, the groom was to wait till he did come. But the hours passed, and the company arrived, and poor Mr. Eyreton had to go out and make excuses to the neighbors and tenants, and hear the speeches. Still Master Frank didn't come; and I could hear the people saying how odd it was; and the master got right down angered. However, we servants hoped as he would come in time for the ball and make things right; but he never came.

"Well, bit by bit the evening wore through and the dancing gave over. The company left, and, when all was gone, I went into the ball-room to shut it up, and see as all was safe and the lights out. I had it all done, and just my own candle in my hand, when it came to my mind as the shutters of the middle window weren't barred, and I turned back to go to it. Just then there was a noise as of some one outside it, and I says to myself, 'There's Mr. Frank!' I can't tell how I knew; but I did know. For one thing, he often came in that way, the window being low and opening to the ground. So I went forward just as he threw