

kiss upon her mouth ; and when, solemnly and tenderly rather than passionately, she thought of this—in the very house and among the very people where she had once been so lonely, yet not unblest or discontented in her loneliness—it seemed as if she could never be lonely any more.

When she quitted the drawing-room—coming out of the glitter and the show, yet not unreal or painful show ; for there was heart-warmth beneath it all—and went back into her own room, Hannah was happy too.

For there, from a crib in the corner, came the soft-breathing of “auntie’s darling,” who always slept beside her now. She had taken her during some slight illness of Grace’s, and could not again relinquish the fond charge. It gave her such a sense of rest, and peace, and content—the mere consciousness of little Rosie asleep beside her—it seemed to drive away all the evil angels that sometimes haunted her, the regrets and despondencies over a lot that such a little more would have made quite perfect ; and yet that little could not be. Regrets, all the sharper that they were not altogether for herself. For she had Rosie ; and she was secretly, almost contritely, aware that Rosie was almost enough to make her happy. Not so with Bernard. As she sat over her pleasant fire, she could have blamed herself for that peace of heart in which he could not share.

He had begged her to write to him regularly, and she had agreed ; for she saw no reason why both should not take every comfort that fate allowed them. Yet when she sat down she knew not what to say. How was she to write to him—as her brother, her friend, her betrothed ? He was all there, and yet neither ; and he might never be anything else.

She dropped her pen, and fell into deep thought. Putting herself entirely aside, was it right to allow Bernard, a young man in the prime of his days, to bind himself by an uncertain bond, which debarred him from the natural joys of life, and exposed him to the continual torment of hope deferred, which to a woman would be hard enough, but to a man was all but unendurable.

Now that she was away from Easterham—escaped from the nightmare-like influence of the life, half bliss, half torture, which she had led there—she tried to feel in this new place like a new person, and to judge her own position calmly, as if it had been that of some one else. She thought over, deliberately, every word she had heard from Lord Dunsmore and others that night, and tried to count what reasonable chances there were of the only thing which could ever make her Bernard’s wife—the passing of the Bill they had talked about. Vain speculation—as hundreds in this land know only too well. The result was, that instead of the letter she had meant to write, she sat down and wrote another. Such an one as many a woman has written, too, with with bleeding heart and streaming eyes, though the words may have been calm and cold. She implored him for his own sake to consider whether he could not conquer his ill-fated love for herself, and find among the many charming girls he was always meeting, some one whom he could love and marry, and be happy.

“I only want you to be happy,” she wrote. “I shall never blame you—never tell any human being you once cared for me. And you