

away they have left all small jealousies behind them, and remember only the good of their beloved, not themselves at all.

"Oh, Rosa, Rosa!" Hannah thought to herself, "surely you are not angry with me, not even now? I am not stepping into your place and stealing away your joys; I have only tried to fulfil your duties towards this little one and towards him. You know how helpless he is alone! And his pretty lamb—I have to take care of them both. Rosie, my darling, who could ever love you like Tannie? Yet they say it is all unnatural and wrong—that any strange woman would be a better mother to you than I! But that is false, altogether false. When your own mother comes to look at you, as she may do every night,—I would, if I were a happy ghost and God would let me, Rosie, look at her and tell her so!"

These wild and wandering thoughts, the last of which had been said out loud, must have brought a corresponding expression to Hannah's face, for the child caught it, and fixing on her aunt that deep, wise, almost supernatural gaze she sometimes had, answered deliberately, "Yes." For "No"—given with a sweet decisiveness as if she already knew her own mind—the baby! and a gentle satisfied "Yes" were among the earliest accomplishments of that two-year-old darling.

But when Rosie was put to bed, and left wide awake in her little crib, fearless of darkness or anything under Tannie's "lots of tisses," left to curl round and fall asleep in the blessed peace of infancy, innocent of all earthly cares—then this world's bitterness darkened down again upon poor Aunt Hannah. She went to dress for the Moat House dinner, and prepare to join the family circle, where she, always an uncomfortable excrescence, was now regarded—how and in what light did they regard her? Hannah could not tell; she was going there in order to find out.

Of one thing she was sure, the invitation was not given out of pure kindness. Kindness was not the habit of the Rivers family; they generally had a purpose in all they did. More than once lately, Lady Rivers had told her, in as plain terms as so polite a person could, that she—Hannah—stood in the way of her brother-in-law's marriage; that his family wished him married, and she ought to aid them in every possible way towards that desirable end. Could there be a plan formed for lecturing her on this point?

But no. Bernard would never have allowed it. And if he had, Hannah would not have turned back; she had always faced her fate, this solitary woman, and as she now walked alone in the early winter darkness through Easterham village, she braced up her courage and faced it still.

Externally, there seemed nothing to face; only a bright, pleasant drawing-room, and a circle of charming, well-dressed women; whose conversation suddenly paused at her entrance, as if they had been talking her over, feminine fashion, which no doubt they had. Hannah was sure of it. She knew the way they used to talk over other people—the Melville family above all, till Adeline belonged to it—with that sweet acerbity and smooth maliciousness which only women understand. A man's weapons smite keen, but they generally smite straight