

"I am sure of it," said Miss Thelluson.

She was a little paler than usual, but that was all; and when she had parted, quite affectionately, from her pupils' mother, she went and sat in her own little room as quiet as ever, except that she once or twice turned round on her third finger its familiar ring, the great red carbuncle, like a drop of blood, which had belonged to her cousin Arthur.

"What a fancy of the countess's, to call me 'young,' and suggest my marrying!" thought she, with a faint, sad smile. "No, I shall never marry anybody; and therefore it is kind of Heaven thus to make a home for me, and, above all, to send me a child. A child of my very own almost; for she will never remember any mother but me. How I wish she might call me mother! However, that would not do, perhaps. I must be content with 'auntie.' But I shall have her all to myself, nevertheless, and perhaps Mr. Rivers may marry again, and then I would ask him to give her up wholly to me. Only to think, me with a child!—a little thing trotting after me and laughing in my face—a big girl growing up beside me, a grown-up daughter to comfort my old age—oh, what a happy woman I should be!"

So pondered she—this lonely governess, this "old maid," whose love dreams were long ago vanished; and began unawares to let the fact slip behind her and look forward to the future; to build and freight with new hopes that tiny ship—she that had never thought to put to sea again—to set her empty heart, with all its capacity of loving, upon what? A baby six months old!

CHAPTER II.

A house on a hill. It has its advantages and its disadvantages. It is hard to climb to, and harder to descend from. Everywhere round about you may see from it; but then everybody round about can see you. It is like the city set on a hill, it cannot be hid. Its light shines far: but then the blacker is its darkness. However, one need not carry out the metaphor, which speaks for itself.

Hannah Thelluson's ideal of a house had always been a house on a hill. She had a curious dislike to living, either physically or morally upon low ground. She wanted plenty of breathing-room: space around her and over her: freedom to look abroad on the earth and up to the sky. And, though her nature was neither ambitious nor overbearing, she experienced even yet a childish delight in getting to the top of things, in surmounting and looking down upon difficulties, and in feeling that there was nothing beyond her,—nothing unconquered between herself and the sky. At least, that is the nearest description of a sentiment that was quite indescribable, and yet as real as intangible fancies often are.

Therefore it had given her a certain sensation of pleasure to hear that Mr. Rivers had removed from his house in the village, the associations of which he found it impossible to bear, to another, on the top of Easterham Hill, or Down, as it was generally called,