

some tall women—not all—possess. And her smile was very winning, though slightly sad, as if fate had meant her to be a bright-natured woman, but had changed its mind, and left her so long without happiness that she had at last learnt to do without it. In this, as in most other things—external as well as internal—she was utterly unlike her sister Rosa. A certain family tone in their voices was the only resemblance that was likely in any way to give the widower pain.

It was strange to write to him,—“My dear brother,”—she who never had a brother—but she thought she ought to do it, and so she did it; trying hard to feel as an affectionate sister should towards a sorely-afflicted brother, unto whom she was bound to show every possible tenderness. Yet it was difficult, for she was a reserved woman, who took a long time to know anybody.

“And I really know almost nothing of him,” she thought. “No blood relationship—no tie of old association; and yet one is expected to treat a strange man as one’s brother, just because one’s sister has gone through the marriage ceremony with him. If I had seen more of Mr. Rivers,—if I had lived actually in the house with him—— But, no; that would not have done it; nothing would have produced what did not really exist. I can only hope the right sisterly feeling will come in time, and I must get on as well as I can till it does come.”

So she pondered, and wrote a letter; short, indeed, but as affectionate as she could conscientiously make it; suggesting plainly that one of his own sisters would be a much better house-keeper for him than herself; but that, if he really wished for her, she would come. And she signed herself, after a considerable struggle,—for the word, which she had thought she should never say or write more, cost her a gush of tears,—“Your faithful sister, Hannah Thelluson.”

It was fully one in the morning before the letter was done, and she had to be up at six, as usual. But she slept between whiles soundly, not perplexing herself about the future. Hers was an essentially peaceful nature when she had done a thing, and done it for the best, she usually let it alone, and did not “worry” about it any more. That weak, restless disposition, which, the moment a thing is done begins to wish it undone, was happily not hers. It had been Rosa’s, even in the midst of her bright, pleasant, loved and loving life; which, perhaps, accounted for the elder sister’s habits being markedly the contrary.

Yet, when her mind was made up, and she put her letter into the post-bag, it was not without a certain doubt, almost a fear, whether she had done rightly—no, rightly she had little doubt of,—but wisely, as regarded herself. Then came her usual consolatory thought—“It can only harm myself.” Still she felt it was a serious change, and many times during the day her thoughts wandered painfully from her duties in the school-room to her brother-in-law and his child.

Nobody noticed her preoccupation, for it was one of the essential and familiar facts of the governess’s life that she might be sick or sorry, troubled or glad, without anybody’s observing it.