

tion as well as if she had told it. Also that she would keep the discovery herself, and aid in defending it from the outside world, as sacredly as if she had been pledged to inviolable secrecy, and bound by the honor of all the Dacres and Dunsmores.

With a sense of self-respect, and self-contentedness, greater than she had known for some time, Hannah dressed for dinner. Carefully too; for Bernard's sake;—since if the Countess guessed anything, she would have liked her to feel that it was not so unnatural, Bernard's loving her. On his account she was glad to be held an honored guest; glad to be met cordially, and talked to with courteous attention at dinner-time by a man like the Earl of Dunsmore. Who, though rumour said his wife had made him all that he was—had roused him from the *dolce far niente* life of an idle young nobleman into a hard working man, was a person who in any rank of life would have been useful and esteemed. And he spoke of Bernard—whom he said he had met several times when in London—with warm regard.

This was sweet to her; and equally sweet was the unconscious contrast of coming back to her old haunts under new conditions and circumstances. Often, during some pause of silence, she secretly counted up her blessings—how rich she was who had once been so poor. And when, at dessert, there stole in, hand-in-hand with little Lady Isabel, who had grown from a baby into a big girl since Miss Thelluson left, a certain white fairy in blue ribbons, who, looking round the dazzling room with a pretty bewilderedness, caught sight of one known face, and ran and hid her own lovingly in Tannie's lap,—Tannie's heart leaped with joy. The child—her own child!—nothing and nobody could take that treasure from her. She and Bernard might never be married; weary of long waiting, he might give up loving her, and marry some one else; but he was a man of honor—he would always leave her the child.

“Roso does you the greatest credit,” said Lord Dunsmore, smiling at the little woman, and trying to win her—but vainly—from Tannie's arms. “She is a charming child.”

Hannah laughed. “Then you will endorse the proverb about old maids' children?” said she.

Was it because he looked at her, or because of her own conscious heart, that one of those horrible sudden blushes came, and with it the sense of hypocrisy—of always bearing about with her a secret, which sinless as she felt it was, everybody might not consider so. For even, this night, though the dinner circle was small—Lord Dunsmore's known advocacy of the Bill, caused it to be discussed on all sides—argued *pro* and *con* by friends and enemies, in a way that neither host nor hostess could repress without attracting attention. At length, perhaps out of wise kindness, they ceased trying to repress it, and Hannah heard the whole question of whether a man might or might not marry his deceased wife's sister argued out logically and theologically, as she had never heard it before, together with all the legal chances for and against the Bill. She could not shut her ears—she dared not; for what to all these others was a mere question of social or political opinion, was to her a matter of life and death. So she sat quiet, keeping, by a strong effort, her countenance as still as a stone,