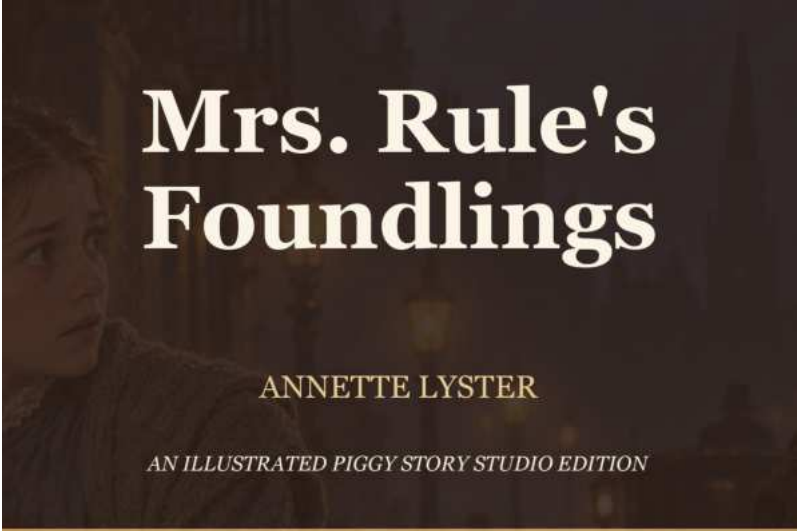




Mrs. Rule's Foundlings

ANNETTE LYSTER

AN ILLUSTRATED PIGGY STORY STUDIO EDITION



Edition Notice

This Piggy Story Studio illustrated edition reproduces the complete public-domain story text from Project Gutenberg eBook 79549. The story has not been abridged or modernised. Eleven new full-colour illustrations were created for this 2026 edition as fresh compositions.

Original text: public domain. Edition design and new illustrations © 2026 Piggy Story Studio.

Contents

Chapter I: Questions
Chapter II: Practical Answers
Chapter III: Armine'S Trust
Chapter IV: Making A Choice
Chapter V: The First Month
Chapter VI: Mrs. Anstruther'S Advice
Chapter VII: How It Was Followed
Chapter VIII: The Baby
Chapter IX: Mrs. Anstruther
Chapter X: Fanny
Chapter XI: Owen Morgan'S Visit
Chapter XII: Master Hastings

Chapter I

Questions

SOME years ago there lived in a part of Clapham where the houses are small, but the neighbourhood respectable, a solitary woman whose name was Hannah Rule. She was no longer young; she had no relations living, to the best of her knowledge, and almost no friends—none in her own rank of life. All this sounds rather melancholy, yet Hannah was by no means a melancholy person. She was a Devonshire woman, and had been a servant in very good places. She was a first-rate cook, and so good a laundress that the most delicate and priceless lace was often confided to her, either by ladies who knew something of her, or by ladies' maids who did not care to wash it themselves, and who heard of Mrs. Rule, as she called herself, that she could both mend and wash it, and in some cunning way give it the yellowish tinge which old lace ought to display.

Mrs. Rule had saved money while in service, and had laid out part of her earnings in furnishing her small house in Wellington Row, of which she let the first floor. But she never would let her lodgings to a lady, or to any gentleman who did not engage to dine out every week-day. Ladies, Mrs. Rule said she could not put up with; they were always wanting tea at odd times, and were mostly at home all day under your feet. And if she had to cook a dinner every day for her lodger, how could she be free to go out to cook for people giving dinner-parties, by which she made a pretty penny?

Moreover, to be always at home, cooking chops and potatoes, would soon be the death of her with dullness! On Sunday she did not mind—one wanted the rest; but on other days, she was always open to an engagement, and was known far and near as a splendid cook, who sent up a really good dinner for about half the outlay caused by an incompetent cook. The five shillings which she charged for the day's work was saved over and over again. Experienced matrons would aver, "and then the style of the dinner, my dear! You might fancy you had spent 'pounds' upon it!"

"But," said young Mrs. Atkins, whose husband had decreed that a dinner-party they must give, as they had dined out so frequently since he had brought home his bride—"but she will want me to buy stew-pans and

bain-maries, and ever so many things that I could do just as well without for the present."

"No, my dear child," replied the portly lady to whom she had applied for advice, "I don't think Mrs. Rule ever asks for anything of the kind. She brings things with her sometimes; but she takes quite a pride in showing what she can do with an ordinary kitchen range, and such pots and pans as your servant uses."

"Well," said Mrs. Atkins, preparing to depart, "I never could trust poor Mary Jane to cook for eight people—it is hard enough to get a dinner decently cooked for two! So, thank you, very much. I shall take your advice, and go round to Wellington Row to secure Mrs. Rule before I send out our invitations. Perhaps Mary Jane and I may learn something from her—which would be a blessing!" she added, with a laugh.

"Now, my dear, don't expect that. Mary Jane will be turned out of her kitchen for that afternoon; and if you go in to see what is going on, you will see nothing. Mrs. Rule once told a friend of mine that she was there to cook a dinner, not to give cooking lessons. She is perfectly honest, and will do her very best for you, but she is not obliging."

No, she was not obliging; about that there was no doubt. She thoroughly enjoyed contending with difficulties, and saying to herself that when she was cook at Sir Barton Yeo's, she had had a very different kitchen at her command. But she seldom exchanged a word with the servant whose kitchen she occupied for the time being, and no amount of hints ever coaxed her into telling how one of her dainty dishes was prepared. One lady thought she had hit on quite a clever plan. She asked casually—

"Oh, Mrs. Rule, what do you call that 'pretty' dish with the white thing piled up on it? I want to look it up in my cookery-book."

"I don't hold by cookery-books, ma'am," was all the answer she received.

Her neighbours of her own rank in life had the same story to tell. Mrs. Rule would scarcely go to the trouble of knowing them. Fine ladies' maids would come to No. 3, and sit talking for an hour or so to Mrs. Rule. Mrs. Rule would take delicate lace or fine muslin embroidery home to grand houses in town, where she was a welcome visitor, and would be asked to tea in the housekeeper's room, and must then hear news that her less-favoured neighbours would have greatly rejoiced to hear from her. But not a syllable did she ever tell to any one, even to old Mrs. Collins, who truthfully averred that it was not for want of being asked! Mrs. Collins lived at No. 6, and she also let

lodgings, which she thought ought to evoke a fellow-feeling in Mrs. Rule, but this fellow-feeling did not make Mrs. Rule "wondrous kind," and poor Mrs. Collins fished for gossip all in vain.

"And she knows what I want, well enough," Mrs. Collins mournfully declared; "but not a word nor a syllabub does she ever say. I doubt she's a selfish piece. And never goes to church—nor even prayer-meeting, if her lodger won't permit of church. Ah, well! Though I am 'not' a first-rate cook, nor yet can darn lace so that you'd never see it, nor wash it to look as good as new, yet I'm a better Christian than Hannah Rule!" Then she wagged her ancient head, and added, "That's my consolation."

For several years Mrs. Rule led this life; people had given up expecting anything more of her. Mrs. Collins had had misfortunes, and been obliged to part with some of her furniture, when she had had her first floor vacant for months together because her lodger had inconsiderately died of an infectious fever. She had been ill herself too, and, not having saved money, was really feeling the pinch of poverty, but she would as soon have thought of going to Windsor Castle and asking the Queen to sympathize with her woes, as of knocking at the door of No. 3 and confiding them to Hannah Rule.

"Not but she knows all about it, and looks down on me now I'm in trouble; for it's my belief she knows everything! I know it by her eye."

It was rather clever of Mrs. Collins to find this out by Mrs. Rule's eye (to guard against mistakes let me state that she had two), but, however Mrs. Collins found it out, it was true. Mrs. Rule had a singular gift, which she called "putting that and that together," and, without asking questions, she generally knew all about her neighbours. She knew most things, too, about the families she worked for. She made no bad use of her knowledge, and never even talked of it; but it afforded her great satisfaction, and constituted at once her study and her recreation.

When Mrs. Collins made that remark about her neighbour's eye, she was sitting dejectedly in the window of her parlour, whence her last lodger had departed a few days previously, and she saw Mrs. Rule in the window of her parlour, which was a bay window, and in which there was a flower-stand, full of geraniums in beautiful bloom. Mrs. Rule watered these carefully, and then stood looking out for a minute or so.

"You and your geraniums," muttered poor Mrs. Collins, "and not a bit do you care that I had no tea for breakfast, very little but dry bread for dinner, and here's six o'clock coming near and I don't see what to have for supper!"

And the poor old soul began to cry; for of late things had gone very badly with her. But now she saw something that made her dry her eyes hastily in order to stare hard. Mrs. Rule's hall door, with the aggressively bright knocker and knob, opened, and out came Mrs. Rule herself, without shawl or bonnet, a sight not previously seen by any one in the row.

"Where on earth—? Goodness! She's coming here! Well, to be sure!"

Mrs. Rule knocked at the door. Mrs. Collins went into the hall and opened it.

"Good afternoon," said Mrs. Rule, in her soft Devonshire drawl. "Will you come to my house and take tea with me?"

"Will I—what did you say?" inquired Mrs. Collins, blinking at her.

Hannah reddened a little; she had a fresh pink and white complexion, even yet; and an altogether comely and pleasant face when she spoke or smiled.

"Will you come to tea with me? I thought, as your rooms are empty, that you could spare the time."

"Empty! So they are, indeed; but I've a lady coming to the parlour to-morrow, and I was thinking of dusting, and settling the fire. But I'll come, with pleasure. Just let me wash my hands."

"Well, I'll run back, and do you come when you are ready; I've something baking," answered Mrs. Rule, as she walked briskly home.

"You might knock me down with a feather," remarked Mrs. Collins to an imaginary listener; "but a cup of tea won't hurt me, anyhow."

In five minutes she had put on a fresh cap and apron, and washed her hands, which would have looked cleaner had she washed them oftener. Ten times, at least, she declared aloud that wonders would never cease, and that you might knock her down with a feather, but she lost no time; for, between hunger and curiosity, she was in a hurry for the promised tea.

Mrs. Rule opened the door, and, with something of an effort, said—

"You're kindly welcome, Mrs. Collins. Just sit here while I go to the kitchen for the tea."

And she led the way into her tidy little parlour, where a small round table was neatly set forth with cups and saucers, and, moreover, as hungry Mrs. Collins did not fail to perceive, with knives, forks, and salt. And there was a very savoury smell. The kitchen was not far off, and in a trice Mrs. Rule returned with a tray. She set on the table a teapot, milk, sugar, bread and butter—finally, a smoking dish.

"I hope you like a relish with your tea," she said, still with that odd air of making an effort: "I do."

"There's nothing I enjoy more," replied Mrs. Collins, trying not to look as hungry as she felt. "What lovely flowers you have in the window! I had some—but they died."

"You forgot to water them," Mrs. Rule said—not offering this as a possible explanation, but mentioning it as an undoubted fact; for she had noticed those poor geraniums.

The tea was good; the mutton pie—Mrs. Rule said it was a mutton pie, but it was like no other of its kind that Mrs. Collins had ever tasted—was excellent. Mrs. Rule ate a little, but helped her guest generously; and though Mrs. Collins would have given a good deal to leave some on her plate, human nature was too strong for her, and she finished the pie. Also, she did well by the bread and butter.

"Take another cup of tea—'tis good still, Mrs. Collins," said Hannah, rousing herself from a brown study into which she had fallen.

"Tea is what I never can refuse," replied Mrs. Collins.

Hannah poured it out, and was silent again until it had disappeared. Then she looked over at her guest, and said quickly—

"I'm wondering can you tell me something?"

"I will tell you anything I have knowledge of," was the genial reply. Mrs. Collins felt very comfortable, and inclined for a chat.

"You're a woman that goes to church and to prayer-meetings. Do you find them do you any good?"

"Why, laws! Mrs. Rule, of course they do. I always did hold by being a good Christian. Besides, it's respectable."

"Well, but 'I'm' respectable, though I don't go, not very often. You see, Mrs. Collins, I'm in a maze. I didn't mean to speak of it, but I can't get away from it, and so I began without thinking. It's along of a book that Mrs. Anstruther gave me. I was in her dressing-room, waiting for her, and it lay on her table, you know; I knew she wouldn't mind, so I took it up, idle-like—though I'm no reader. But the first words I read seemed to give me a slap in the face. 'Twas 'What do you live for?' and it went on to say that no one can live—Stay! Here's the book; I'd better read the bit, or I could not make you understand.

"'Tis called 'Questions that ought to be answered.' Miss Geraldine—that's Mrs. Anstruther, I mean—came back and found me reading, and says she, 'You may have that book if you like, Hannah—I'll give it to you; I never saw

you reading before.' Said I, 'Tis full of questions, seemingly—and I should like to see the answers, so if you don't want it, ma'am, I'll take it, and thank you;' so I fetched it home. But the queer thing is, it asks questions, but it don't answer them!"

"You don't say so?" replied Mrs. Collins, comfortably. "But, after all, it's no matter, if they're all like that one. We've 'got' to live, that's certain—and hard work some of us find it."

"Well, but listen now:

"My friend, what do you live for? I take it for granted that you are decent and respectable, and hardworking; this book is meant for such as you. I want a little talk with you. We all live for something or for some one—some for their children, some for wife or husband, mother, father, sister, or brother. That is all well, to a certain extent. Those whom we love are given us by God, and it is our duty to love and care for them. And this love softens our hearts and makes us more likely to love God. But some live for themselves alone. They work hard, they pay their way honestly, they lay by money,—all for themselves. The Son of God made Himself poor for their sakes, but they never think of Him. They never give a penny to His poor, or to spread the knowledge of His grace. They live altogether for themselves. If this meets the eye of any such person, I ask him or her to consider—"Is this right? How will it look when I come to die?""

"Them are heart-searching words," said Mrs. Collins, in a still more comfortable—in fact, a drowsy tone, if the truth must be told. "Ah, we're all miserable sinners, the best of us."

"I never did anything very bad that I know of," answered the other woman, too much in earnest to perceive that she failed to interest her visitor, "but I certainly have done just that—lived, since mother died, and I lost Fanny, for myself alone. And, come to think of it, it can't be right. Another question is, 'Whom do you love?' and I'm not sure I love any one but Miss Geraldine."

"Well, now, you're like myself, I take it; you've none to care for but yourself. I'm a lone widow. My fine boys that might be keeping me in comfort are both dead; but I don't murmur, Mrs. Rule. They were both very wild, and maybe would have brought me to the poorhouse by this."

"And I never married, and am alone now. I always gave mother all I could spare; then when she died, I thought I'd lay by against I was old, as it was plain I had none but myself to look to."

"And I'll be bound you've laid by a nice little sum; for everything seems to prosper with you. 'Tis so, sometimes, with them that are not Christians, just to try them that are! Now, look at me. Scrape as I would, I never could save money beyond a pound or so; and it just melted away when I was ill, and I had to pawn some of my best furniture to get nourishing food that the doctor said I must have, and so I can't let my first floor now, till I can release it. And I must have parted with more to-day, only when the lady came and took my parlours—for 'T never could afford to live in my parlours—I said to myself,—

"No, Sally Collins, not if you starve for it shall you part with another stick; and once Miss Hallam is in, she's to pay in advance, and then you'll have enough to get along with.'

"But tight and pinching work 'twill be to live on my parlours, and save enough to keep my good furniture from being sold. See, now, the difference there is between us! But there, the Christian must have trials; while them that live for this world have all they want."

Mrs. Collins was wide awake now, and spoke with much energy. Her inclination for a quiet nap had quite deserted her.

Mrs. Rule looked thoughtful.

"I don't know much about such things, 'tis true," she said presently, "but it seems to me that if you worked as hard, and spent as little as I do, you'd be as well off as I am. I don't see how being a Christian would prevent that. Besides, I am a Christian—at least, I'm nothing else."

"Ah, my dear soul, you're in darkness!" remarked Mrs. Collins, with a long-suffering wag of her head.

"Yes, somehow I feel that; but I need not be always so, I hope."

She turned over the leaves of the little book, and presently began to read again.

"My friend, have you ever done anything to help or comfort others, just for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done so much for you? You have worked for your parents, your children, or others to whom you owed that duty so plainly that you could not help seeing it. But have you ever done anything for the simple love of God? If not, may it not be that you do not love Him at all? Yet He loves you. Consider well. Is this right? How will it look when you come to die?"

Mrs. Rule sat silent, evidently in deep thought.



Mrs. Collins, who, being now wide awake, had heard more of this quotation than of the last, remarked tartly that it seemed to her that the book was "most discouraging;" for, after all, what could the like of them do for others? Hadn't they hard work to do for themselves?

Mrs. Rule was so deep in thought that she did not hear this, or several self-righteous platitudes that followed. She presently broke in upon her guest's remarks by saying—

"I'll do it. It's best to make a beginning. I can leave off any time. Mrs. Collins, how much would take your furniture out of pawn? If you have the tickets handy, just show them to me, and I'll add them up. I'll lend you the money, and then you can let your first at once, and pay me when you're all right again. 'Tis a pity you should have the rooms empty."

Mrs. Collins stared, and her eyes grew rounder and rounder, and her mouth opened more and more widely, while she almost thought she was taking leave of her senses, or that Mrs. Rule had taken leave of hers. At last she stammered out—

"Mrs. Rule, do you mean it? Do you know what you're saying?"

"I do. You see, you've heard only a word here and there, but there's a deal more in the book that seems worth minding, and the fact is, if God really loves the like of me, and asks me to love Him, and to act like Him, it's a shame not

to try. I know all that is in the Bible, for I used to read it to my mother long ago, but it had clean slipped out of my memory. But I have mother's Bible, and I have been looking at it.

"But I'm always for beginning at once. If it's a room to be washed, or a dinner to be cooked, there's no use in talking—just begin at once. So I began by having you up to tea. I didn't mean to talk about the book, but I am just that full of it that I began. However, I'll lend you this money. Have you the tickets here?"

Mrs. Collins belonged to the order of Christians who talk much, and do not get any further. She had many cut-and-dry remarks that would have been much in their right place now, she thought, but perhaps if she convinced Mrs. Rule that her ideas were sadly mistaken ones, that loan might not be forthcoming! So she swallowed her wisdom, and produced the pawn tickets, which of course she had in her pocket; for did any one ever know a woman, who had some of her possessions in pawn, who did not carry the tickets about with her, and frequently look them over in a melancholy manner? The sum she had received amounted to a few pence over four pounds, and Hannah lent her five pounds, saying it was well to have a little in hand.

Then Mrs. Collins said good night, with many expressions of gratitude, which made Hannah get crimson in the face, and in a hurry to be rid of her. So she trotted home with a cheerful countenance, locked up her house, and repaired to her own little attic, where she tied up the money in a piece of calico, hid that in an old shoe, and put the shoe under her pillow. As she completed this arrangement, which she considered an excellent precaution in case of burglars, she said to herself—

"I was in luck for once in my life; for 'tis not to be expected that she'll be in the same mind long. Books are all very well—but, dear me, she's in great darkness, with her beginnings, and her 'doing' something at once! It isn't that sort of thing that makes a Christian."

And she sighed in a superior way. But had any one asked her what "did" make a Christian, she could have given no distinct answer. Only she was sure that lending money to a neighbour in distress had nothing to say to it.

"That's' not religion; besides, I'll pay her honest, and she knows it. But I 'was' in luck. To think of any one being so excited about a book of questions! It would be long before you'd 'question' five pounds out of 'my' pocket!"

Chapter II

Practical Answers

MRS. COLLINS got her furniture home next day at such an early hour that the first floor rooms were arranged before Miss Hallam arrived to take possession of the parlours. As the old woman stuck a bill "Apartments" in the window, she remarked aloud—

"I'm sure I hope no one will hear about poor Mr. Taylor's fever, or whatever 'twas he died of. I've had trouble enough about it, and in six months, and them sanitary men coming and making their own of my house, disinfecting and all, there can't be a sign of fever left now. Lodgers are mighty inconsiderate—one would think his first thought would have been to go to an hospital. Ah, well, better luck next time. Dear me, I wonder how Hannah Rule's getting on with her questions!" And she chuckled heartily, for Hannah's practical answer to one question struck her as very absurd, however convenient for her.

Meantime, Hannah read her little book again and again. There were several questions, all treated in something of the same way as the two I have copied; it was a small book, and each question, with the remarks upon it, occupied two of the little pages. Some Hannah understood at once, or thought she did; some she did not understand till long afterwards. One or two she, at first sight, pronounced to be rather silly, if the truth must be told.

For instance, she "could not see the sense," as she expressed it, of one on self-denial. King David's words to Araunah the Jebusite were quoted. "I will not offer unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." And the remarks were to the effect that if one gave only what one would never miss, and did for others only what would give one no trouble, one was doing, in the full light of the Gospel what King David had disdained to do in the dim twilight of the Law. But though at first she could not see the sense of it, she kept turning it over and over in her mind.

Since she had helped Mrs. Collins, and told her all about the book, she had sometimes gone to see her, and give her an hour's help in her work. Mrs. Collins kept no servant, and had now two lodgers, and was really hardly able to get through the work. Besides, she was a very bad cook, and Hannah felt quite sad to see how she spoiled her lodgers' dinners. I regret to say that Mrs.

Collins was privately convinced that her neighbour came to see what chance there was of her money being repaid, but as the help was very welcome, she kept this suspicion to herself.

She found Mrs. Rule's rigid notions about cleanliness very trying. That a saucepan must be clean before anything is boiled in it; that the paste-board must be scraped and scrubbed before paste can be made on it; that a damp and dirty rag will not polish plates nicely,—these rules vexed Mrs. Collins greatly, and, in fact, led to a quarrel between the oddly-assorted pair.

"Really, Mrs. Rule, you're ridiculous pertickler! I don't hold by such niceties, nor my lodgers don't expect 'em. And I can't help thinking how 'twas the wicked Pharisees that made so much of washing cups and pots and such. I don't want to be like them! This saucepan will do right well to bile the apple dumpling."

"Yes, if Miss Hallam likes her dumpling with a flavour of cabbage in it!" said Hannah, who was making the dumpling in question. "Come, now, Mrs. Collins,—a bit of soda and a quick boil, and there's your saucepan, ready as soon as your dumpling."

And with one of her rapid movements, Hannah stretched her hand across to where stood a jam-pot with washing-soda, and chucked a good bit into the greenish water in the saucepan. The lazy old mortal, taking the saucepan by the handle "as if it was red hot," to quote Mrs. Rule, smelt at it exhaustively, and said—

"There's not a whiff of cabbage about it."

"There's a deal more than a whiff! Come, now, put it on the fire."

"Well, the Pharisees—" began Mrs. Collins.

"Bother the Pharisees, and the Sadducees too!" said Mrs. Rule, losing her temper all in a moment. "I don't know much about them, but I do know this—I won't help you to cook if you won't make the things clean; they're fit to poison any one."

"Mrs. Rule, I owe you money—which I'll repay, never fear—but that don't oblige me to be insulted! I'm an old woman, and a little help, easy to you to give, is much to me, but the mention of poison I will not stand. I would have you to know that I never poisoned a lodger yet. And, although you are in darkness, I will not allow any one to 'bother the Pharisees' in my kitchen. I mostly expect the roof to fly off."

"Why, you said yourself they were wicked, you know."

"They were wicked, but they're in the Bible, ma'am, and no one has a right to 'bother' them."

"Just as you like, Mrs. Collins," said Hannah, hastily rubbing the paste off her hands; "say no more. I meant kindly. I've taken trouble for you, and I've listened to your talk—that's like the clack of a mill wheel—and tried to talk to you, though I never cared for many words. And I'm not going to turn a dirty slattern at this time of day. So, good afternoon, and boil your dumpling in the dust-pan if you like!"

She pulled down her sleeves, and departed, even banging the hall door.

"See that, now! There's a temper for you!" said Mrs. Collins. "But poor Hannah Rule being so very dark, one can expect no better from her. I only hope she'll see she's in the wrong, for to lose the little bit of help she gives me would be hard on me; but I'm used to hardness." She shook her head and sniffed.

Then she finished the making of the apple dumpling, which was indeed nearly done to her hand. She tied it up in its cloth, and trotted over to the fire, where the saucepan was now boiling away, never remembering the good-sized bit of washing-soda that Mrs. Rule had flung in, she remarked—

"Goodness knows, 'I' can't be expected to be for ever scrubbing and rubbing at my time of life." And then she tumbled the dumpling into the saucepan, and put on the lid.

When the expectant lady in the parlour beheld her dumpling, she said—

"How curiously yellow it is, Mrs. Collins. And it has a queer smell, too! Do you think the suet was quite fresh?"

"Quite fresh, ma'am," said Mrs. Collins, bristling a little.

Miss Hallam, having dined on a tiny scrap of cold beef, was really hungry; so she helped herself, and began to eat. But she could not go on. She ate some bread and cheese instead, and then rang the bell.

"Mrs. Collins, there really 'is' something wrong with the dumpling; even the apples have a strange taste. And see, here's a green thing on the outside. You must really be more careful; I cannot afford to have things spoiled. You are a most uncertain cook—sometimes 'so' good."

"I assure you, ma'am," said Mrs. Collins, smoothly, "there's nothing at all wrong with the dumpling. It must be that you're a little out of order yourself, ma'am."

"Oh no; I am quite well. It really is very nasty. Throw it away. I am sure it is not wholesome."

"Throw it away, ma'am? It seems to me that would be just a sin!"

"Well, do as you like, but certainly I shall eat no more of it."

And Miss Hallam, who was a visiting governess, put on her bonnet and mantle and left the house. Mrs. Collins took her tray down to the kitchen, sat down, and inspected the despised dainty.

"A bit of cabbage never hurt any one, and, as to yellow, why shouldn't it be yellow as well as white? If Miss Hallam's going to quarrel with good victuals, 'I' won't."

And she began to eat.

"Eh?—Ah, I dare say there was salt in the water," she muttered.

And more from obstinacy than from inclination—for the thing was exceedingly nasty—she stolidly ate every morsel of it. Afterwards, she felt a little uncomfortable.

"I don't think much of Hannah Rule's cooking," said she, in a disparaging tone, and even at that moment her eye alighted on the cracked jam-pot which contained her washing-soda. Instantly the quick gesture with which Hannah had flung a lump of soda into the saucepan came back to her memory, and she now began to feel very wretched.

"It ain't poison," she told herself valiantly. "Many a time I've used a pinch when the bread-soda fell short, bilin' cabbage, and so on, but maybe if one took a whole lot of it, it may disagree. Certainly I do feel—very queer."

She began to "wash up," but could not forget the soda. Presently she sat down and groaned. She was very uncomfortable, but she had only discomfort to fear, had she known it. But she did not feel sure of this, and in a few minutes she was shuffling along, as fast as her slipshod old feet could go, from her own door to that of Mrs. Rule. Here she knocked loudly. The door was soon opened.

"Why, whatever's the matter with you, Mrs. Collins?"

"I'm not very well, and there's no one in the house but myself, so I thought I'd just—Oh, Mrs. Rule, for pity's sake, tell me is washing-soda poison?"

"Well, one wouldn't call it exactly poison, nor it's not exactly wholesome neither. You've been using it instead of bread-soda, I suppose? One would say 'twas as easy to use the right thing."

By this time Mrs. Collins was sitting in the parlour, rocking herself to and fro, and comporting herself as one in great suffering.

"If you took a whole lot—a big lump like that you put into my saucepan—perhaps it might go near killing you," she moaned.

Mrs. Rule knew better, but she rather wished to know exactly what had happened, so she heartlessly replied, "Perhaps it might."

Then out came the whole truth—it was "all along of the apple dumpling."

Hannah burst into a hearty laugh, and Mrs. Collins, simultaneously, into tears.

"Well, you were rightly served, Mrs. Collins, as I think even you might allow. Miss Hallam did well to refuse the mess. But you won't be a bit the worse in an hour or so. You didn't drink the water, I suppose, as well as boil the dumpling in it? It has just sickened you for a bit, but you'll be all right in no time."

Mrs. Collins began to perk up a bit, and, as usual, she had an eye on her own interests.

"I dare say, dear. Yes, I believe it would not have overcome me like this, only for being fretted. I was afraid I'd been a bit tart with you—at least, you must have misunderstood me, for you were a bit tart with me. But now I see you did not mean it, and I'm ready to forget and forgive. Neighbours ought to be neighbourly. I'm glad our little difference is over, and we friends again. Shake hands—I never bear malice. I hope I know my duty too well for that."

"And what about the Pharisees?" inquired Hannah, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Ah, you'll always have your joke," Mrs. Collins replied, forbearingly.

She really did not see that she was bound to lose the help of a most convenient neighbour for the sake of the Pharisees. She went home and felt able to wash up her various cooking utensils, lest Hannah should come in next day, but it was not for some time that she could quite forget the apple dumpling, or enjoy her food as usual. Still, it was worth a little discomfort to have made friends again with Mrs. Rule.

But imagine Mrs. Collins's disgust when she accidentally found out that Hannah had heard of a neighbour who wanted help far more than she did—the poor young wife of a cabinet-maker, who lodged just opposite No. 3, and who had met with an accident just after her confinement, and was almost helpless. The poor girl was in such miserable health that she found it difficult to eat anything that she could procure for herself. Mrs. Rule found her far more interesting than Mrs. Collins, and far more grateful for help. So, in spite of many remonstrances, she threw Mrs. Collins over, and left her to cook for her lodgers as best she could.

"No," she said, when the old woman came to ask her to cook a brace of partridges which some one had sent to her "first floor"—"no, I'll tell you how to do them, and how to make bread sauce. But that poor girl over the way hasn't a soul to do a thing for her, and can hardly drag herself across the room. If I help her, it's enough for me; if I did more, I'd never have a moment to myself. And besides, you and I don't agree in our ways. Now, Mary Graham is a very tidy, clean girl, and there's a pleasure in helping her to keep things going and her man from the public."

Mrs. Collins was very angry, and said that if one only did what gave one pleasure, she, for one, did not see a bit of goodness in it. But she did not quarrel with her heartless friend, first on account of her debt, which was not entirely paid off, and, secondly, because there was such a chance that Mary Graham might die, and then Hannah might return to her allegiance.

Poor Hannah! She began by intending to do for her young neighbour only so much as gave her no great trouble. But as she was a kind-hearted creature, though she had been so long trying to turn herself into a selfish one, she could not help getting fond of the pretty, patient creature who bore great suffering without a murmur, and who only mourned that "Luke was so disappointed," the baby being but a sickly little thing, and Luke without the comforts he had a right to expect, getting such good wages.

However, in less than six months, Mary and her poor baby, its lifelong wail hushed at last, were buried in the same grave. And Hannah, who had spent years in trying to care for no one, cried her eyes out over Mary, and felt exceedingly lonely and sad.

Luke Graham left England soon after his wife's death. He came to say good-bye to Mrs. Rule, and told her he was going to New York; he could not "take hold" in the old place any more. He had promised Mary to keep from drinking, and his best plan was to "make a change;" for he had got into bad ways while poor Mary was so ill.

"And Mary was a Christian girl, Mrs. Rule—as good a girl as ever lived. I'd like to live so as to have a chance of going where she's gone—she and the young un; and, you know, I'd have no chance if I took to drink."

"I suppose not, Luke."

"Oh, the Bible says so quite plain, ma'am. Mary would not marry me till I took the pledge, and it nearly broke her dear heart when she found I'd broken it. I've taken it again, but, you see, I can't be sure of myself, and I'll get away from London and the old set, and see if that will help me."

"Very like it will, too. I'm sure I hope so."

"You were a kind friend to poor Mary, Mrs. Rule, and I've brought you a keepsake—something she valued, and wished you to have, only she never spoke of it because she said maybe it was not her place. I have one that she gave me when we were first engaged. You'll like to have it, for Mary's sake, even if, like myself, you're not as fond of reading it as she was."

And he handed her Mary's well-used, but well-kept Bible—a prize in the Sunday school of her native village, far away.

"I'm glad to have it, Luke, if 'twas only that I've seen it in her hands so often. Come, now," said Hannah, moved by some feeling that she hardly understood, "let you and me agree to read Mary's Book; maybe it will help us to be like her. It may help you as much as the pledge, or the change either. Is it a bargain, Luke?"

"Well—yes! I'll give it a fair try. Good-bye, Mrs. Rule, and God bless you. You're a kind woman, and Mary was real fond of you."

Luke departed, and Hannah felt lonelier than ever.

Now was the time for which Mrs. Collins had waited and watched. Surely now Mrs. Rule would come to see her, and they would fall into their pleasant neighbourly ways again! But days passed, and Mrs. Rule did not come.

"She's taken up with some one else," muttered Mrs. Collins. "I always hated fickle folk; I doubt that's what Hannah Rule is."

And she watched the door of No. 3 with such intense interest that her lodgers could get nothing done, and the "first floor," being selfish, spoke of giving notice. But Mrs. Rule did not, so far as could be discovered, go to see any one in the neighbourhood. She went out for the day often, and she washed a great deal of lace, which she dried in her sunny parlour window; but she neither returned to her expectant Collins, nor sought a successor to Mary Graham.

Pride made Mrs. Collins wait for many days; curiosity and self-interest made her seek an interview with Mrs. Rule at last. She had an excellent excuse for her visit, and she went at about six o'clock in the evening, with a loving remembrance of the fragrant tea and savoury pie of which she had partaken on her first visit at that hour.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Rule, my dear; I have an hour to spare, as my 'first floor' dines in town to-day, so I thought I'd come and see how you are, for I doubt you're fretting after that poor girl and the baby, and neighbours should be neighbourly. Besides, I have a little bit of business to settle with you."

This speech was skilfully devised to secure an entrance, either as a sympathizing friend or as a matter of business. Hannah was really feeling lonely enough to make a visitor welcome. She thought it curious that she, who for years had lived quite alone, should now feel more lonely than she ever did before.

"'Twas kind of you to come," she said. "Yes, I'm lonely, but I don't mean to be so long. I've just about made up my mind. Come in; I was thinking of having my tea, and maybe you will take a cup too."

With alacrity did Mrs. Collins enter the parlour, to wait while Hannah went to the kitchen for the tea.

"Don't tell me she's going to be married!" murmured Mrs. Collins, with a chuckle. "There's no fool like an old fool, if so."

Here she sniffed inquiringly, and added, "No pie! But there's sure to be something tasty. She lives very well, and I'm just longing to hear who she's going to marry."

Chapter III

Armine'S Trust

A FEW minutes passed before Mrs. Rule came back with her tray.

"I stopped to boil a couple of eggs for you, Mrs. Collins; for I know you take more of a meal at this hour than I felt inclined for to-day, so I had nothing but a bit of cheese, and that's not very tempting."

"How do you manage to get such fresh eggs, Mrs. Rule? Them French eggs seem never fresh, and the others are so dear."

"Well, I have two little hens that live out in that scrap of a yard, and eat just whatever I give them—crumbs and scraps—and they really lay very constantly."

"Ah, they must be a great worry, though! I never could manage that. Well, now, Mrs. Rule, you did take me by surprise just now; you really might have knocked me down with a feather. I'd have thought you the last person in the world to run such a risk."

"Indeed, and so would I; that's nothing but the truth. But you see how it is. I know the little book says no more than the truth, and that one ought to do something for some one. And it will be easier and pleasanter to me, having a child in the house—for you'll maybe hardly believe me, but I'm very fond of children by nature—pleasanter, and more to my taste than going out looking for some one to help a bit. You see, I didn't get on with you, and poor Mary Graham's gone. I began as nursery maid, and, dear me! I was fond of the children, especially Miss Geraldine."

Mrs. Collins felt very thankful that she had not more plainly mentioned her idea that Mrs. Rule meant to take a husband, as she felt that it would have given great offence. She looked wise, and remarked—

"Indeed, I think you're wise; though, as to not getting on with me, what's a cross word between friends? And I've forgiven and forgotten long ago. But, of course, you are well able to give a child every comfort, and you can make her useful by-and-by. Moreover, I'm told the pay is very good; so in all ways you're the gainer."

"It's not a matter of pay at all. I don't want any. I'm to take the child altogether, to be like my own child. It was Mrs. Anstruther told me of this place."

"What place? You've told me nothing of it as yet."

"Didn't I? I thought you spoke as if you knew."

"Oh no; you were under a mistake."

"It is an orphanage. Many of them are foundlings."

"But, gracious, Hannah Rule, you're never going to adopt a foundling!"

"Or an orphan that has no relations! Yes, I am. You see, I've no relations, so far as I know, and I've saved a pretty penny, and since I lost poor Mary Graham, I do feel lonely. I mean to bring her up, and teach her all I know, so that when I'm gone, she'll be able to do well for herself."

"Hannah Rule, it is not often I interfere by giving advice and experience, but you were kind to me once, and kindness is what I never forgive—forget, I mean. You'll live to repent if you do this thing. Once I myself took a poorhouse girl to teach to be a servant. I just thought every day a week till I was rid of her, and I trundled her back at the month's end. The dirtiest, idlest, most untruthfulest young baggage! As mischievous as a monkey, and as stupid as an owl! Once I let her wash my good tea-set, and she broke more than half of it—there was hardly a handle left to a cup. I did think to get a little rest when I took her, but she couldn't and wouldn't do a thing. And the language that awful child made use of! I truly thought my roof would fly off."

"What! Was she as bad as me about the Pharisees?" inquired Hannah, dryly. "But, at all events, poorhouse children and these children are not quite the same; these girls are better cared for."

Mrs. Collins would not hear of this. No care would make a bit of difference; girls were girls, and charity girls the worst of all—except, indeed, foundlings. She uttered such dark hints of "things I know if I was free to mention 'em," and found herself free to tell such terrible tales of the experience of deluded people who "took in" charity girls, that poor Hannah, a truthful woman, and therefore not apt to suspect another of fiction, began to get alarmed.

"I'll do nothing in a hurry," she said at last.

"Nor without hurry either, if you'll take 'my' advice. But time is going, and Miss Hallam will be home and wanting her tea, and mighty cranky if kept waiting; so I must get my bit of business done. 'Tis to pay you the rest of the five pounds you lent me, Mrs. Rule, that time when I was so poorly, and I'm for ever obliged to you. Just count it over; thirty-five shillings it ought to be, but I'm not good at counting. I hope it's all there."

She emptied a small bag, cunningly contrived out of the toe of a stocking, displaying a miscellaneous heap of small coin and many pence. Hannah counted it, and handed back three-and-sixpence, saying—



"You're 'more' than honest this time."

"Well, that's clear gain, at all events!" said the old woman, gleefully. "I thought I had too much, but I never could get it quite right. Well, now, good-bye, Mrs. Rule; I must really be going."

Next day Hannah was going out to a day's work in the cooking line, when the door of No. 6 was opened, and Mrs. Collins appeared.

"I saw you coming. Well, have you made up your mind about that charity foundling yet?"

"I'm not going after her now, at all events. General St. John's giving a big dinner, and his cook's ill, and the Frenchman he employs won't do a thing unless he has skilled help. I could do as well without him! But some people don't believe in what they can get cheap."

"Indeed, then, they'll not get anything better, Frenchman or no Frenchman, than your mutton pie, Mrs. Rule."

Hannah laughed till her eyes were full of tears at the idea of her little mutton pie appearing at General St. John's dinner; and Mrs. Collins, who did not see the joke, was rather inclined to be offended.

"Well," said she, "to-morrow, if you're inclined for anything but laughing, there's a thing come into my mind that I'd like to talk over with you. I'll come round if I don't see you go out."

She accordingly came round, as she termed it, though she had but a few steps in a straight line to take. And, as she came "just in my morning-dress and in the middle of my work," she looked so very dirty and grimy that Hannah hastily said—

"You won't mind coming into the kitchen? I'm baking, and the oven ought to be watched."

But she did not take Mrs. Collins in! And the dear old lady would fain have told her so, with comments, but she checked herself, and only bridled a little.

Such a kitchen! Such a tidy, black and white little place! Such shining tin and brass! Such a polished range! What a waste of time, thought Mrs. Collins, slaving to do all this for no one so much as to see but herself! For never before had a neighbour beheld Mrs. Rule's kitchen. But she held her tongue, for she could do so when she felt she ought—that is, when she thought it for her own interest to do so.

"Baking bread," she remarked presently, when Hannah opened the oven door; "beautiful light bread it looks too!"

"It's for Mr. Holcroft, my lodger. He likes my bread for breakfast."

"He may well! Well, Mrs. Rule, a notion took hold of me yesterday evening—" then, as Hannah looked up, she corrected herself—"no, no, the evening before, it was. Here are you and me, lone women. I'm good for plenty of hard work still, but I feel lonely; and so, as you told me, do you. Why not come together for our mutual help? The house next door to you is to let. If you and me had these two houses between us, and lived, together, I know the landlord would open a door between the two for us, for he did it for Nos. 12 and 13, and we'd have four or five sets of rooms to let, and, between us, the work would be nothing."

She held forth for some time on the advantages of her scheme—advantages to Hannah; for all "she" wanted was not to be alone. If any one could have seen Hannah's face as she listened, it would have proved worth while. Half angry, half amused, she kept it resolutely turned towards her oven, and let the old woman talk away. At last Mrs. Collins ceased.

"Now," thought Hannah,—"only my book says it can't be right to say hurting words—only for that, I'd let her know that I see through her. So this is why she had such tales about charity girls!"

"You're thinking, Mrs. Rule, that I'm hardly able for a fair half of the work, but—"

"No, I'm not thinking about that at all," said Hannah, bluntly. "I'm trying to find a civil way of saying that I couldn't hear of such a thing."

"Well, now, but if you'd consider my reasons—"

"Oh, I do consider them, and know them better than you think for. There's no use talking, Mrs. Collins, I believe you take me for a fool."

Which was very near the truth, though of course Mrs. Collins denied it. "But really," she continued, after an ample protest, "I do 'not' see why you won't think of it. You talk of wanting to help some one, and sure I am no poor widow would be gladder of help and kind company than myself."

"I dare say. But you just look round, and compare my kitchen with yours; and remember how I used to fight you over everything I used when I was trying to teach you to cook. Why, I'd be out of my mind in a month, if I had to live in such dirt and messiness! No, don't say another word about it. I'm trying hard not to say anything of a rude hard sort, but I really find it hard to keep in."

"Well, well! Your temper 'does' amaze me! Ah, dear! If I gave way like that, there'd be a reg'lar quarrel in no time, but I'm not going to quarrel, Mrs. Rule, though 'tis news to me that you were trying to teach me to cook—a thing I've been doing longer than you have, though maybe not quite in the same way. Good day to you, ma'am, and I hope you may not repent, too late, of saying 'No,' none too civilly, to a kind offer. You'll be in a scrape yet with your queer notions, and I thought to help you to keep straight."

"Keep straight, indeed!" said Hannah, when she had shut the door after her retiring visitor. "A strait waistcoat would soon do that for me if I had that poor dirty old soul always about under my eyes, to say nothing of her shiftless, untidy ways. And the cunning of her! Putting me off with stories of charity girls because she wanted to make her own of me! Much work she'd have done! Well, I'll just tidy up and go 'at once' to Armine's Trust: my mind's made up this time."

And in less than an hour Mrs. Collins saw her go. She thought sadly—

"Some folks never know what is good for them." "She" knew what was good for her, beyond a doubt, but the selfishness of human nature pained her.

"Going searching for an orphan or a foundling to adopt, with me at hand that's both an orphan and a widow—and childless too! But then I'm 'not' a foundling. No, I really 'cannot' go so far as that."

The Armine Trust Refuge for Destitute Children was an old City charity, which, if it had not quite advanced with the times, had at least not fallen into bad ways like some of the old foundations. The money had not been misappropriated, and the Refuge was still used as the founder had wished. There was a house for boys as well as one for girls, but they were quite distinct and at some distance from each other.

The house to which Mrs. Rule was now on her way was in Orfers Lane, which was not a lane at all, but a broad street, paved with small stones which still presented a smooth surface, so well had the work been done. Probably "Orfer" may be traced to the French "orfèvre," as Sir Paul Armine, who founded the Trust, was a wealthy goldsmith in days long gone by. He was nearly forgotten now. There was a tradition that he lost a large family by the Plague, on one of the many occasions when it visited London, before that terrible scavenger, the Great Fire, drove it away, let us hope, for ever.

Sir Paul comforted his sad heart by saving the many destitute children who had survived their parents, from beggary and starvation. The children originally numbered fifty-six, because he was fifty-six when he lost his children. There was a housekeeper and a chaplain, and there had been a small chapel in which the souls of the Armine family had been duly prayed for. But the chapel was now the schoolroom, and there was no chaplain, the children going to the nearest place of worship. There was now a matron and a servant, and a schoolmaster who attended daily. And there were only twenty girls, as the funds did not suffice for more in these days.

Mrs. Rule reached the place at about twelve o'clock, when the children were in what was known as the playground, having an hour to play before dinner. It was a fine day, even in the City the air feels fresh in April sometimes; but the children were not playing heartily, like the children in the country schools that Hannah remembered. They were sitting in forlorn little groups, gazing through the heavy old iron railings into the street, the elder ones keeping behind the others, evidently to conceal the shortness of their skimpy red cotton frocks. They all wore little black poke bonnets over hair cut close to their heads, long white stockings and strong hob-nailed shoes, fit for a day labourer on a farm, completed a singularly ugly costume. There were girls of every age, from sixteen down to a baby carried by one of the elders, who,

having something to do, looked less discontented than the rest. They all looked clean and well fed, but dull; indeed, that was not wonderful, for life in this establishment was terribly dull.

The salaries given to matron and schoolmaster were too low to secure good service. The present matron had been a domestic servant in her day—and her day was long gone by; she had no idea of taking unnecessary trouble with the girls, though she saw after them fairly well, and was never unkind. The master taught them to read and write, and to do sums; more than this he could not teach, for the best reason in the world—he knew no more. He kept order by using a cane rather freely. The dress made going to church a misery, and going out for a walk impossible, even if the matron could have walked with them.

The poor things were kept in school for several hours daily, and when out of school were made to consider "keeping quiet" the whole duty of girls! The elder ones did some of the housework, and minded the babies. But for the girls of from ten years old to fourteen (when they had generally learned all that the master could teach them) there was literally nothing to do.

Hannah Rule drew near the gate, looking sometimes at the apathetic faces, and wondering "what ailed the girls." But when she rang the bell, a ray of intelligence lighted up one or two of them, and all looked as if a breath of fresh air had passed over them.

"Maybe she wants one of us," they whispered. And one tall girl stepped forward and said, "I will go for Mrs. Marner, ma'am."

So many were passing along the footpath that it was not pleasant waiting, and Hannah said—

"Couldn't you open the door for me?"

The girls answered in chorus, "No, ma'am, 'tis locked."

And one added, "Here's Mrs. Marner."

A decent looking old woman, with a portentous bunch of keys in her hand, came forward and unlocked the gate. Hannah entered, and gave her a card which she had brought from Mrs. Anstruther.

"A card! Oh dear! Alice Hawthorne, is the master in the schoolroom?"

"No, ma'am, he's out."

"Then, Alice, read this card for me. My eyes, ma'am, are not what they used to be."

This was true, but at no time had written character been easy reading to Mrs. Marner. Alice bent her brows over the card, another tall girl came to help her, and between them they made it out.

"Mrs. Hannah Rule, who is well-known to the writer, wishes to adopt a girl from Armine's Trust. Mrs. Marner will kindly let her see the girls, and give her every facility" (which was read "felicity") "to make her choice. Mrs. John Anstruther will arrange for the girl selected to be sent home next board day."

"Oh! Mrs. Anstruther! Yes, she's one of the ladies put on the board lately, and I'm of opinion we did as well—But that's not my business. Is it for a servant, ma'am, or just to adopt like, that you want her?"

"I'd like a child of about ten, or maybe a little more," said Hannah.

"Oh, we have 'em of all ages. Come into the schoolroom, ma'am, and you shall see 'em all. One of you call the three girls that are in the kitchen."

In a few minutes, twenty girls were ranged in a row, beginning with a tall, rather pretty girl, who looked lamentably awkward and shy in her queer short-waisted frock. And poor Hannah looked hardly less shy as she turned her good-looking, fresh-coloured face from one to another.

Chapter IV

Making A Choice

MRS. RULE remarked that some of the girls looked very dull; all looked depressed and weary, but some looked also as if they had never smiled in all their young lives. She drew Mrs. Marner aside and asked in a whisper—

"Is there anything wrong with the three or four girls that look so heavy and low? Are they in disgrace, ma'am? One or two are about the size that would please me."

"Heavy and low? Well, now, I've remarked that myself. Them are foundlings—the rest are orphans. I have remarked that the foundlings are mostly very stupid. But, getting 'em as babies, you see, one brings 'em into order at once, and there's far less trouble with 'em than with the orphans, that very likely have been spoilt by their fathers and mothers."

Mrs. Marner did not imitate Hannah, and whisper, but spoke in her ordinary rather cracked and high voice. One little girl began to cry.

"Come, come, Annie Bell, you stop that! You're here three months now, and 'tis time for you to leave off beginning to cry like a baby at every chance word. I can't have any noise. Oh, here's the master."

An old man, with a bent form, and a very sharp, almost angry expression of countenance, came in, and the faces of the girls betrayed that they were sorry to see him.

"Eh, what's going on Mrs. Marner, why didn't you send for me, eh?"

"I could do as well without you, Mr. Peters. Here has Mrs. Anstruther sent this lady for a child to adopt, and I was just letting her see them."

"I'm not a lady, Mrs. Marner, but just a working woman. I make my living by letting lodgings and cooking for people giving parties—for I'm a fine cook. The girl I take will have a quiet home, and I'll be as kind to her as I know how. I'll teach her all I know, if she'll learn. I'd like her to be about ten years old."

"Very good. Then you five—no, six—big girls may go about your business. Go up yonder to your class. And you little ones, clear out—quick now! Now, ma'am, here's eight girls about the age you want. Nothing like a little method; I suppose the business would have lasted all day, if I hadn't come in!"

"Well, I'm in no hurry," Hannah answered; for she felt that matters had been on a pleasanter footing before the good gentleman appeared. Then she added slowly, "I want a good girl."

"Then you'll have to go elsewhere, ma'am. All my teaching is just wasted on them, they're never a bit the better for it. There's Annie Bell, she has a temper fit to frighten you. Sally Jones can't speak the truth, not if she tried, and she don't try. Maggie Waters—"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Peters," the matron said. "You're too bad. If your words came to the ears of the Board now—"

"I don't care! For all their new members and their ladies and their new plans, they can't dismiss me. Mine's a vested interest, mine is, and so's yours, Mrs. Marner; we've no call to abase ourselves before the Board."

"We've no call to be spiteful, and stand between one of these children and a good home. Now, there's Ellen August; you can't say she has a bad temper, and I never knew her to tell a lie."

The little girl thus named proved to be one of the foundlings. She was a child with a pale, sallow complexion, her eyes were blue, and rather vacant looking, and her hair was cropped so short that one could only guess at the colour. She started when named, and looked up for the first time.

"Oh, if the good lady wants a fool, let her have Ellen August," said the crabbed old man—"the stupidest, silentest, sulkiest girl in the Trust."

Little Ellen looked at him and then at Hannah. "I don't want to go," she said in a very shy, low voice.

"She's only nine," Mrs. Marner said, "but she's a quiet, biddable child, and very truthful, which I'm sorry to say is not the case with all. They do things on the sly and deny them, but Ellen tells the truth."

"Why don't you want to come, child?" asked Hannah, taking the child's hand.

"I don't know, ma'am."

"She knows no place but this, ma'am," said Mrs. Marner; "that's it, Ellen, ain't it?"

"I'd be frightened," Ellen whispered.

"Well, I'll see Mrs. Anstruther in the evening," said Hannah, who was every moment getting less inclined to take this or any other child; "and I'll wish you a good morning now, ma'am."

"Girls, go into the hall; your dinner must be ready," said the matron. "You just wait a moment, ma'am, and I'll open the gate for you."

The girls went out very quietly, two and two.

"She won't take any of us," one whispered to another.

"I'm glad she won't have me," was the reply. "I'd rather be 'prenticed."

The last girl picked up the baby, and in a minute, they were all gone.

"They're like machines, more than children," said Hannah, looking after them.

"That's what the new Board says. But, ma'am, if one old woman has twenty girls to keep in order, she must break 'em in and make 'em quiet."

"They're mischievous enough in their sly way," said old Peters; "a bad lot. But what could you expect of them, specially the foundlings?"

"Now, ma'am," said Mrs. Marner, when the two women had reached the gate, "don't you mind old Peters. The new ladies and gentlemen on the Board have offended him. They say he teaches the girls nothing, or next to that; and they spoke of dismissing him, and then found they could not unless they pensioned him, and the money won't run to that; and he's a cross-grained old fellow, and will do anything he can to spite and hinder them. They want to thin the house, and do more for those they keep, and he'll do all he can to prevent one single child being taken out till it can be 'prenticed. He bangs the girls about enough to make 'em stupid, and he's always at them, so bitter. He really seems to hate the poor things, and Ellen August he never has a good word for, though she's a most inoffensive child. He makes her dull. I sometimes think the poor thing will go silly before she gets apprenticed."

Hannah went home. She cooked and ate her dinner, telling herself all the time that she must find some other plan, for that to have one of those girls always under her feet would be dreadful. Some looked sly and some looked sulky, yet that little Ellen August had a look of her sister Fanny, of whom Hannah had been very fond. Yes, she really was like poor Fanny, though "she" had been a pretty child, which Ellen certainly was not. Yet, for all that, she had a look in her eyes that was like Fanny.

Poor Fanny! She had gone to a situation in Wales, and had married a groom in the same service. But after a few years he lost his place, and they had gone away. And after a time Fanny had ceased to write, and Hannah had never been able to find out what became of her. But she felt sure that Fanny was dead; she had been a loving little soul, and would surely have written. Yes, that child had a look of her.

Then she thought of Fanny in her childish days: her pink cheeks, her merry eyes, her pretty, fair hair, her sweet laugh and coaxing ways. What a

happy child she was! And yet she could not have been a happy woman, for there had certainly been some story about her husband at the time he was dismissed—and now she was dead.

Think of this poor child: her half-awake, half-frightened face, her slow unwilling movements, her indistinct voice. Well, now, it would be hard to grow up with nothing happier than this to look back to. One cannot make a woman's life happy—Hannah would have made her sister happy if she could—but one "could" make a child happy, at least, happier than little Ellen seemed.

But it would be a deal of trouble, more than Hannah wished for or felt necessary.

Not so very long ago, Hannah would have contented herself by finding some less troublesome way of showing kindness to some one. But, curious to say, the habit of showing kindness had so softened and awakened her heart that it ached for all these joyless children, and for little Ellen in particular.

There was some beautiful lace waiting to be washed, but in her troubled thoughts the lace was forgotten, and Hannah actually sat in her favourite seat by the window, screened by her geraniums, doing nothing!—That, at least, would have been her account of it, for she had not an idea that thinking may be work; yet, as a matter of fact, she was finding it very hard work.

Perhaps not even Ellen August, whose heart and mind had never been awakened, was in a less lively condition, as regards both feeling and intellect, than that to which Hannah Rule had attained by long years of making it her sole object in life to work hard and to save money for herself alone. "No man liveth to himself," we are told; many men and many women have tried it, but the life is not really life. The best, the highest part, of those who so live, dies out of them.

We are made in the likeness of God, and the likeness is ours yet, fallen and defaced as it may be. Other things have forced their way into the once high nature, things low and earthly usurp the throne in our heart. For that lower, more earthly nature, Hannah, like many another, had been living for many a day.

But I am sure of one thing, no one who has fallen into such a way of living is ever left without a call to awake. Ay, and many calls. Happy are they who hear, and rouse themselves. To Hannah a call came, through the apparent chance which made her read "Questions which Ought to be Answered." Perhaps she had begun to weary a little of her narrow life before she read the

book, but she was not aware of it—her hands and her thoughts were full, and she asked no more.

She opened the book now, and read the last little chapter.

"My friend, have you asked yourself all these questions? and are you wondering why I have asked so many questions, without trying to give you a plain answer to any of them? This question I will answer, in part. "If you are a servant, you know what your master means when he rings the bell. You go to him, and he gives you his orders. I have only rung the bell. I do not ring it for myself, but for the Master. If I have made you hear and think, you will not rest content with what I say. Go to the Master. Learn of Him. Learn to be like Him. All my questions may be summed up in this one, 'Will you serve the Lord Christ?' If you will, He will not leave you without guidance and help. He will neither forget nor forsake you; He will fill your heart with peace and joy, and will welcome you to the many mansions of His Father's house when you come to die."

"Learn to be like Him!" said Hannah to herself. "I'm afraid I shall never be like Him. I remember many things He did and said, though for years I never opened the Bible. But I 'do' mean to serve Him now, if I can. I'll take this child—I remember He was good to children—and I'll do the best I can for her. Maybe that will be serving Him. I do declare, 'tis half-past five, and I may miss Mrs. Anstruther, after all! I must go at once!"

Mrs. Anstruther lived in Kensington, or near it, and Hannah was late for her appointment. But the lady was so pleased that the child was to be taken, that she would willingly have forgiven a greater fault.

"You see, Hannah, I am one of a few ladies and gentlemen who have contrived to get made members of the managing Board of the Trust, because it seems that the girls are getting no real education. And they really are not in the least like what one cares to see children."

"No, indeed, ma'am; they seem just half alive."

"Yes, old Peters is a wretch, and bullies them; moreover, he is an ignorant old donkey, and not fit to be a schoolmaster at all. At the same time, unless we can decrease the expenses, we cannot pension him, which is what we want to do. There are five girls of an age to be apprenticed now, according to the terms of the 'Trust.' But even keeping the number down to fifteen won't enable us to pension old Peters—if we could bring them down to ten we could manage. Then we could improve matters—put in a bright, well-educated young woman to manage and teach the girls, and let old Marner be merely housekeeper."

"The big girls would be as well out of the way, ma'am. I don't like the look of them."

"No, and so many of the girls have turned out troublesome and idle that we find it hard to dispose of these. In fact, we mean to subscribe among ourselves to increase the premiums. Well, Ellen August—so called because she was brought there in August—is a lucky child. I know you will be kind to her, Hannah. I remember our nursery days, and how we loved you."

"I've changed since then, Miss Geraldine, and not for the better. But, God helping me, I mean to be different now."

"And was it really all the work of that queer little book, Hannah?"

"Well, I don't say that, ma'am. It seems to me there's more than that in it."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not good at explaining, but if you poke the fire, ma'am, you don't say the poker did all the work."

"I see. Well, good-bye, Hannah, for I must dress now to go out. I have to see two people, and dine with the Stanleys. This is the fifteenth, and the twentieth is the Armine Board day. Shall I bring Ellen to you, or will you come for her?"

"If you don't mind bringing her, ma'am, it will be better. If I bring her, every one in the row will be staring at the poor thing in her queer frock—such guys as the children are—just like a baby's frock made big."

"Oh, we mean to modernize the fashions a little, though I'm told we must stick to the colours! Yes, I will bring her; another reason is, that she will not know her way back if she runs away. One or two have gone back, and made quite a piece of work at the gate—they get so frightened. Shall I take a frock for her with me?"

"No, thank you, ma'am. I'll have some stuff ready; and she'll feel more at home when we talk it over."

"Well, good-bye, Hannah; you will see Armine's Trust a very different place one of these days. We mean by degrees to make a thorough reformation."



Hannah went home, and only when she had had her tea did she remember the lace, which was promised for the next day. Tired as she was, she set to work at once.

"For it would never do to begin being careless and disappointing 'now,' would it?" thought she.

And the priceless flounce was ironed before she went to bed.

Next day, when returning from leaving the lace at home, she indulged herself with some shopping. She bought a new iron bedstead with bright brass knobs, and a mattress for it. She bought some pretty calico to make a couple of frocks, and half a dozen neat pinafores, also a straw hat, and a blue ribbon wherewith to trim it.

"What more she wants, we can get by-and-by," said she to herself. "And I wonder what she'll say to that pretty print with the little blue flowers instead of that hideous turkey red? But, maybe, she'll be too stupid at first to notice anything. I must have patience."

To see Hannah go home laden with parcels was enough to set Mrs. Collins on the watch. And when a van drove up to No. 3 and left what looked like the various parts of an iron bedstead and a new mattress, curiosity became unmanageable. And leaving her lodger's roast mutton to take care of itself, Mrs. Collins trotted off to inquire. She was in a hurry, and far too intent to

find out something to go to work in her usual roundabout style; so, when Hannah opened the door, she cried—

"I've not a moment to stay; let me stand in the passage. Oh, Hannah Rule, can I believe my eyes, that this is a bedstead for the child? You've gone and agreed to take one!"

"You can see, 'tis a bedstead," replied Hannah.

"For the child?"

"Well, since you must know, yes."

"Mrs. Rule, I thought better of you. I thought better of your sense. I thought better of your neighbourly feeling, after what I offered to do for you. I shall live to hear you say you're sorry. 'Tis a mad thing to do. What's her name?"

"Ellen."

"Well, what more?"

"I mean to call her by my own name," said Hannah, after a moment's thought.

"She's a foundling, then!" screamed Mrs. Collins. "Well, that caps all! And my mutton will be burnt. But if 'twas my last word, I'm sorry for you, Hannah Rule."

"I'm' sorry for whoever has to eat that mutton," replied Hannah.

"Yes," she thought, "I won't have the child go through the world labelled 'foundling,' by being called August. I'd have found a name for her if I had thought of it in time, but old Collins took me by surprise. Well, whatever poor little Ellen may turn out, she can't be worse than Mrs. Collins for a neighbour. And yet I don't feel free to pick a quarrel with her, and bid her leave off trotting here, knocking and chattering fit to drive one dazy. I 'do' mean to try to serve—but there's inconveniences about it, no doubt. However, He bore with me longer than I'll have to bear with Mrs. Collins."

Chapter V

The First Month

FOR the first time for many a year, Hannah refused an engagement to cook for a grand dinner-party on the 20th, without the excuse of being pre-engaged. She simply said that she had business at home, and could not be absent on that day. And the lady who wanted her, being a hot-tempered dame, said that she would never employ her again. However, after an experience of a man-cook sent from a pastry-cook's shop, she found it convenient to forgive Mrs. Rule. Not that Hannah cared, for she had as much work as she could do.

It was about four o'clock when Wellington Row beheld a handsome brougham, drawn by a pair of spanking bays, with a coachman and a footman in correct attire—grand creatures, who looked too fine for the street and too big for the small houses. It is a fact that the footman looked tall enough to look in at the first floor windows when he alighted to perform a tremendous knock at No. 3.

"A carriage and pair!" cried Mrs. Collins, and stared as if bereft of her senses. "And two servants—they look well fed, too. Ah, why did I marry young instead of going to service!" (It did not occur to her that a small woman could hardly develop into a six-foot footman.) "At Hannah Rule's! What's the man lifting out of the carriage? A bundle?—No, a child wrapped in a shawl. A lady, too! Oh, me, what a silk! She's in black. She's going in. No doubt it's the foundling she has brought with her. Oh, Hannah Rule! But you 'are' deep. The child that's brought in a carriage and pair by a lady in silks and laces, and looking like a queen—that child's well paid for, or I'm an idiot. Some old servant's child, I suppose. Dear, dear, some folks has all the luck."

And the worthy soul stood gazing at the carriage and the two men, wondering if she dare go to No. 3 to ask if she could be of any use. But she did not dare, which vexed her to the heart.

"What a nice, sunny room, Hannah," said Mrs. Anstruther. "Ah! Little Ellen, you're a lucky child. Yes, the shawl is mine—dear me, the child is half dead with fright. I do hope, Hannah—I cannot stop a moment, just step outside. I want a word with you. That stupid coachman took me miles out of the way, I suspect, and I have an engagement this afternoon. Good-bye, Ellen;

be a good child, for you have to thank Mrs. Rule for great kindness, you know, and—"

"Well, now, Mrs. Anstruther, she has to get the kindness yet. All I've done, so far, is to take her away from the place she knows, and she told me she didn't want to come. But you'll see, ma'am, she'll change her mind."

Mrs. Anstruther stood on the pavement, and Hannah on her snow-white door-step, holding the door nearly shut.

"Change her 'mind,' Hannah! The question is, has she a mind to change? We took a long time to drive here, and she never moved nor opened her lips from the moment I wrapped the shawl round her to hide the terrible red frock. I begin to fear she is deficient. If so, you must come to me. I can get her admitted into the Willoughby Home, or somewhere. You must not be burdened with a fool, my good Hannah. Good-bye. I do feel that you've been so kind."

And under the very eyes of the watchful and envious Collins, Mrs. Anstruther shook hands with Hannah, got into her carriage, and was whirled away.

And the carriage had not turned the corner, when Mrs. Collins knocked at No. 3. The door opened before she had let go the knocker. Hannah had seen her at her own door, and had waited.

"You lost no time, Mrs. Collins. I can't ask you to come in, because I'm going to be busy."

And, if it can be believed, she shut the door, though Mrs. Collins was so full of questions that she had asked one before she realized that she was alone.

"Who was that lady?" she said. And then, after a pause of disgust, set off towards her own door.

But when there, she turned back again, saying—

"There's no law against me passing the house, I presume!"

And she did pass it; but, alas! those admired geraniums prevented her seeing into the parlour. She caught a glimpse of something red, and that was all. Returning, sadly, she became aware that Hannah had perceived her manœuvre, for she stood behind the flowers, laughing. I think Mrs. Collins ought to be pitied: curiosity as acute as hers really amounts to a pain.

"Well, she's gone now, it may be hoped," said Hannah, turning to the child, who sat just where she had been set down by the tall footman, huddled up in an armchair near the fireplace.

"Why, you poor little soul, you're as cold as if 'twas midwinter, instead of June weather! Come with me, honey, to the kitchen, and we'll make some tea, and you shall see what's in the oven—just wait till you see. Come, dear; I dare say you're hungry."

Ellen tumbled herself off the chair. But she was really so frightened and so wretched that, when her feet touched the floor, they refused to do their work, and she would have fallen but that Hannah caught her.

"You're dizzy with driving in the carriage, not being used to it. See, now; I'll help you."

And she carried the child into the kitchen. Here she bustled about, making tea and getting ready a very tempting meal. She considered it better to stay in the kitchen, lest Mrs. Collins, or any other inquiring neighbour, should look in at the parlour window, and also for the sake of getting the child warm.

Out of the oven came a little round cake, with "Ellen" in coloured comfits on the top of it.

"See, now, child, that cake was made for you, on purpose. And, though I say it that ought not, you never ate a better seed bun in your life."

But poor Ellen was quite innocent of having eaten seed bun of any kind, and she was afraid to touch this one. Hannah cut it in two, and took some herself. That was a wise move—Ellen soon ventured on a nibble.

"Drink some tea while it is hot, dear. Were you much afraid when Mrs. Anstruther took you away?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ah, I dare say. But you're not afraid of me, are you?"

"Ye—yes, ma'am."

"Of me, that made a cake on purpose for you? To welcome you? Why, that's foolish, now. Finish up your cake, and have some bread and butter. And another cup of tea? Come, you'll feel better now. I'll get the frock I'm making for you, and we'll see if it is a right length. Not a moment longer than we can help shall you keep on that ugly red thing. See, now—isn't that pretty? I have the skirt made, and the body all tacked. Shall we see how it fits?"

The rest of the day was spent by Hannah in finishing the calico frock. Ellen made no resistance when it was tried on, but seemed to take no interest in it. In fact, she did not understand that it was meant for her. The poor child felt as if she understood nothing, but that she was in a new world. Hannah put her to bed at last, and felt as tired as if she had done a hard day's work. She sat down to rest, and muttered—

"If I have to do all the talking for long, it will be the death of me. Poor little lamb! She's like one only half-awake. Well, now, I had better go and tell Mrs. Collins all I mean to tell her, or no one knows what stories she'll have all over the place. Besides, she might die of curiosity, and I don't want to have her death at my door."

She was so tired that she actually felt glad when a well-known "rap-tap" at her door announced that she need not go in search of Mrs. Collins, who was soon seated in the parlour, sending searching glances round in search of the child in the red frock, but suppressing with care and success all traces of annoyance at the way in which she had been treated earlier in the day.

"You can't see Ellen to-day, for she's in bed, fair tired out. You see, she never was half a mile away from Armine's Trust, where she was brought up from a baby, and she's not used to strangers, and so everything is very trying."

"All, well, I'll see her some other time. Who was the lady that brought her here?"

"Mrs. Anstruther. She was Miss Geraldine Bulteel, and it was in her mother's nursery that I first went to service. She's a widow now, and very rich. And she's been made one of the Board, as they call it, for managing Armine's Trust. A while ago I was mending lace for her, and I mentioned that if I could get a child that had no better friends, I would be glad to see to it. She's full of kind plans, and does a deal of good. And so she said that I should do her a favour by taking a child from Armine's Trust, as they want to have fewer there, money being short. So I said I'd try, and went to see the children, and the one I liked best was this little Ellen, who will be ten in August. And the child is very timid and backward, and younger than I wished, but I don't mind that. I must see what to do with her when I'm out for the day."

"Nearly ten, is she? Well, that's too old to be wanting regular care, like a little one. If you like to leave her with me when you are out, I'll give her house-room. You won't mind her running an errand for me now and then, of course? 'Tis good for children to be kept active."

Mrs. Rule laughed a little. "No doubt," said she, "you'd be the one to keep her active. Thank you, Mrs. Collins, but I must put her to school for the mornings, and I must arrange for her to stay there till I go for her. She's a mere baby, as far as taking care of herself goes. I must say, as far as I see of it, I don't like the way children are brought up in such places—in the lump, as I may say. Do you know of any small school where I could put her?"

"The parish school would be good enough for a charity foundling, to 'my' mind," replied Mrs. Collins, with a sniff.

"Quite good enough if she were strong. But she'll want care, and people must be patient with her. She'd die of fright the first time she heard the noise those young rogues make when school's over. And I've had to get on a door-step myself not to be knocked down with the rush."

"Mrs. Rule, is the child silly, that she needs such cossetting?"

"I don't think she is. But she's one that has never had a soft word said to her, nor any word more than was needful. And I'm determined that she shall have a fair chance and time to get that frightened look out of her poor little face, if possible. Now, Mrs. Collins, I've told you everything; so, if any one is curious about the matter, you know what to tell them."

Mrs. Collins did not wait for any one to be curious, and what she told every one was this. Some grand lady had persuaded Mrs. Rule to take charge of this child who was too troublesome to be kept in some asylum with a queer name, being half witted, and, Mrs. Collins hoped, not subject to fits. No doubt the lady paid well, but Mrs. Rule would never own to that. But she did no great harm, for nobody believed more than half she said, and Hannah never found out what a report she had given of her investigations. Before long, people got used to see Ellen with Mrs. Rule, and forgot all about her arrival.

Next day the nice calico frock and white pinafore made a great improvement in Ellen's look. Hannah smiled secretly to see the child turning her little cropped head about till she nearly broke her neck, to see the frock all round. As to the hat with the blue ribbon, Ellen sat gazing at it with awe. The first shy little dawn of a smile came when that hat was tied under her own small chin. Breakfast was over then, and Mrs. Rule put on her own bonnet, took her basket, and invited Ellen to come with her, which Ellen consented to, because she was afraid of being left alone even for a short time.

"I have to market for my lodger as well as for myself, Ellen, and to see about a school for you. I dare say Mrs. Green, at the baker's shop, may know of some nice quiet place."

She looked at Ellen, but the child looked quite vacant—a look which soon gave place to one of alarm when they got into the busy crowded street. Hannah took her hand, saying—

"Never fear, Pussie, I'll take care of you;" and led her along, but found she must walk slowly, as the child was unable to get on fast.

Mrs. Green, the baker's wife, said that her own little girls went to a very nice school, kept by a widowed lady—a Mrs. Cartwright—in a quiet street not far off. But she did not know if she would take a child for extra hours.

"But she may, Mrs. Rule, for she's as poor as poor can be. Is the child a relation of yours?"

"She's my adopted child, ma'am, and I'm willing to pay for her schooling and anything else in reason. Come, Ellen, we'll go and see Mrs. Cartwright at once. And thank you, Mrs. Green."

Ellen shuffled along, looking as tired as if she had walked miles. But they had not very far to go, and Mrs. Cartwright was in the schoolroom.

Her little daughter said, "And won't you come in, ma'am?"

So Hannah entered.

The schoolroom was only the drawing-room of a very tiny house, and there were about ten little girls all diligently writing copies.

"Mamma, this lady wishes to speak to you."

"Could I see you alone, ma'am? I will not keep you long."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Cartwright, pleasantly; and, turning to her daughter, she added, "Mildred, do you keep order and call me if you want me."

She then led the way into another room. Hannah had intended to leave Ellen in the schoolroom, but the poor child clung to her and looked so terrified that she had not the heart to insist.

"Wait for me here, Ellen," she said; "you can sit on the stairs. No one will touch you, child."

"Is she ill?" Mrs. Cartwright said anxiously.

"No, ma'am. If you'll let me tell you all about her, you'll be able to give me an answer at once."

Very quietly and plainly the story was told. Mrs. Cartwright knew all about Armine's Trust, as it happened, and had often heard, she said, of Mrs. Anstruther, who had been very kind to her when she lost her husband. She was not much inclined to take charge of Ellen, but she felt ashamed to refuse. Hannah had no idea of setting an example, but there was something in her simple, straightforward way of trying to do the best for the child that made Mrs. Cartwright determine to help in the good work, if possible.

"But you must not blame me, Mrs. Rule, if the parents of my pupils object, and I have to let her go. I dare not lose my pupils. However, as Mrs. Green sent you here, I almost think we are safe enough."

"And you'll keep the child till I come for her? When she's a bit older and—wiser, she can come home alone, but for the present I shall bring her here and take her home. And you must tell me, ma'am, what I'm to pay for her being kept all day when I'm at work at a distance. I'll call for her on my way home."

All was duly arranged. But when they went out to the stairs for Ellen to tell her about it, Ellen was not there! Hannah remembered what Mrs. Anstruther had said about some of the girls trying to return to the Trust, and, thinking of Ellen's timidity and helplessness, she was quite frightened. The hall door was open; Hannah went quickly out, and looked up and down the street. She soon espied a little figure sitting on a door-step, the hands up to the eyes and the cropped head hatless.

"I see her," said Hannah. "Never mind, ma'am, I shall fetch her to-morrow."

And she hurried on to where Ellen's short career as a runaway had come to an abrupt end.

"Why, Ellen, what made you leave the house? That wasn't right of you—and where's your hat?"

Ellen looked up, at first more frightened than ever. But when she recognized her kind friend, the poor little face brightened.

"It is you!" she said. "Yes, ma'am, I was bad." And she held out her small hand, palm uppermost, and shut her eyes tight, that she might not see the slap coming.

"I'm not going to slap you, child. Where did you want to go?"

"I don't know. A girl opened the door and looked at me, and then more came and looked, too. And, when they shut the door again, I went away. I think I wanted to go back to the Trust. But a big boy got hold of my hat and said 'twas his, and asked who cropped my head so pretty? So I sat down and cried."

"Ellen, listen to me. Promise me you'll stay with me and do as I tell you for one month, and then, if you want to go back to Armine's Trust, I'll speak to Mrs. Anstruther about it. I know that, if you say you will, you will keep your word—that is why I chose you, because you speak the truth."

Ellen promised. Another hat was then bought, but no blue ribbon. Hannah thought that a silent lesson might, perhaps, be learned by the absence of the admired ribbon.

Hannah had no engagement for that day, so she employed herself in washing her own aprons and in making up a couple of tidy caps, also in making bread, and soup, and various other small cookeries. Ellen followed her about from room to room, but always retired to a corner and sat watching her. Upstairs, to dust and arrange the first floor rooms; higher still, to the attic where that new bedstead stood beside Hannah's own; out into the yard to feed the two respectable hens, and to look in the nest for an egg—a great puzzle to poor Ellen, who had never before connected eggs with feathered fowl; in and out, up and down, the silent, unsmiling child followed Hannah all that day, until, thanks to the unusual exertion and excitement, she got so tired that she fell fast asleep in her corner, and Hannah carried her off to bed.

Every day that Hannah spent at home, Ellen went about after her in the same way, as soon as she got home from school. Hannah was a sensible woman, and possessed of much quiet patience, and she just let the child alone, talking to her a little, but not unless she seemed to listen willingly.

At school Ellen wept one whole day—plentifully, but silently. After that, she seemed assured that no bodily harm was intended her by the other children, and so was more at rest. It was discovered that she could read very correctly, in a sing-song voice, and without any stops, except one now and then where it was not wanted, unless to allow her to draw breath. Also she could write really beautiful copies, but whether she knew that the letters she formed so carefully meant anything more than so many curves and loops, was a very doubtful matter. She could say the multiplication table without being troubled with any consideration as to its meaning, just as a parrot might; and she could do small sums in simple addition, but they were always wrong. Mrs. Cartwright was not surprised at this result, when she observed that the child dabbed her slate-pencil at each figure in the row, and then wrote a figure below, without any mental process whatever.

Poor Mrs. Cartwright! She was an exceedingly conscientious woman, and her endeavours to arouse Ellen's dormant faculties were constant, but she never succeeded until a bright idea struck little Mildred, who had taken Ellen under her protection. Mildred bought twopennyworth of marbles, and, by their help, convinced Ellen that when you add two to two you have four, and if you take one away you will have but three. Ellen gravely said it made the sums harder, but more sense in them. This happy event took place before the month during which she had promised to remain in her new home had expired.

That promise had been made on the 28th of June, and, although she rather dreaded the child's answer, Hannah would not cheat her about the time. On the 28th of July, when she had brought her home from school, she said—

"Well, Ellen, the month is up to-day. Am I to ask Mrs. Anstruther to get you back into the Trust, and give me another girl instead of you?"

Ellen started and grew pale. "That was long ago—'very' long ago," she said.

"No—it seems long to you, maybe," said Hannah, quite disappointed, "but it is just a month since you made me that promise, and you've kept it very honestly. And I was in hopes you were getting contented, but—"

She turned away, and looked out over the geraniums with a very real feeling of sorrow. She had tried very hard.

Then she felt a little rough head being pushed under her hand—just as a dog might have done it—two thin arms were flung round her. With a great sob, Ellen said—

"You won't send me away! I'll be good. I'll do anything—anything. You—you're so kind. I want to stay. No one is like you."

Hannah was so moved that, for a moment, she could not speak. Then she took the child in her arms.

"Then you're my own little girl," she said; "and you and me will part no more till it is God's will."

"But ask Him to let me stay!" Ellen said, as she flung her arms round Hannah's neck. "Do—please do—give me a kiss."

From that time Hannah took the child to her heart. And, as to Ellen, she really thought as she said, that there was no one like Hannah. But it cannot be said that Hannah's troubles with her were quite over. Her utter want of any notion of taking care of herself, her helplessness, and want of handiness, made her a trying child. Indeed, she was so awkward that Hannah began to wonder if she would ever be fit for any work but the very roughest.

Thinking it over, she determined to let her look on for a good long time, hoping that she might learn something in that way without being vexed by perpetual failures. Mrs. Collins thought this very foolish indeed.

"I'd make her learn," said she, eyeing poor quaking Ellen in a very severe way; "and you'll wish yet that you'd been advised, Mrs. Rule—but well I know you'll never own to it."

"Well, she's not strong; and I don't want help as yet. She's but a child. But she's coming on in her schooling nicely. Ellen, could you read a chapter just to

show how you've come on? She reads the Bible to me every evening. You'd rather not? Well, well, some other time you will."

"Mrs. Rule," said Mrs. Collins, "you're weaker than I thought possible, and you'll be the ruin of that child."

Chapter VI

Mrs. Anstruther'S Advice

A YEAR slipped quickly away, as years do when one is happy and healthy. Hannah had not been so happy for a long time, for though she had taught herself to be content to live without any one or anything to love, it was an unnatural life, and she had been growing harsh and bitter of spirit without knowing it.



Ellen was as happy as a creature so timid and repressed could be, and even came out of her shell sometimes as the peaceful months went by, and was sometimes seen to smile. Once she was actually heard to laugh at the pranks of a kitten which had strayed into the yard, and which, finding himself a welcome guest, condescended to remain with his hosts.

Poor Hannah, who hated cats, welcomed the little wretch because Ellen took so kindly to it, and that first good hearty laugh was occasioned by kit's persevering attempts to make Hannah notice him. She was working, and he jumped on her lap; she pushed him off. He mounted the table and sat before

her, purring loudly. She drove him away. He got into her work-basket unperceived, so that when she put in her hand for her scissors, she encountered the warm soft thing, and exclaimed—

"Bother the kitten, he's everywhere at once!" as she tumbled him out on the floor.

Finally, having sulked in a corner for some little time, kit rushed out, tail erect, eyes shining and ears laid back, scrambled up Hannah's back and held on by her shoulders, looking as wild and saucy as only a spoilt pet kitten can look. Hannah tried in vain to dislodge him, and at last called to Ellen—

"Do take him away, Ellen! I declare I think he's possessed."

And Ellen laughed till she cried, and had not strength enough to seize master kit.

As the time passed, Hannah sometimes felt that she ought to begin teaching Ellen something. But, like many other active-minded women, she much preferred doing the work of her house with her own capable hands to seeing it less well done by a beginner. Moreover, she disliked the trouble of teaching—things were very pleasant as they were, and Ellen needed a pleasant time in which to forget the sadness of her childhood. So she let things go on, turning a deaf ear to Mrs. Collins, who really could not understand how any one, having at hand a child bound to obey, should go on trotting up and down, doing every little thing herself, and spoiling that charity foundling, who would certainly forget herself and set up for a lady.

Of this last misfortune there was as yet no outward sign. Poor Ellen! She basked in the unwonted sunshine of kindness, and loved Hannah heartily.

One change only did Hannah make, when August came round for the second time, since Ellen left Armine's Trust. She decided that the girl should go and come alone to and from her daily school. It was not far, and she could go the whole way by very quiet streets. Ellen was taller, and walked with a firmer step. She had quite lost the terrified, wide-eyed gaze with which she had at first regarded her fellow mortals, and there was no danger of any evil-disposed urchin grabbing her hat.

For all her improvement, Ellen did not like the change at all. But Mrs. Cartwright laughed at her, and encouraged Hannah to persist. And no harm happened to her, so she became reconciled to her lonely walks, after a time.

How long Hannah would have gone on thus letting the child amuse herself all day while she worked hard I do not know. But early in October Mrs.

Anstruther, whom she had not seen since that June day, now a year and a half ago, wrote to her.

"6, — Square, Kensington. "DEAR HANNAH, "I am at home again at last; come and tell me about the child. Bring her with you, if possible. I want you about my lace. "Yours, "G. ANSTRUTHER. "P.S.—Wednesday, at one o'clock."

"Here's a treat for you, Ellen Mrs. Anstruther—you remember her, don't you? She says she has just come home, and wants me about her lace, and I am to bring you. You never saw such a beautiful house as that! Just wait till you see the white figures in the hall, statues they call them; there's a boy taking a thorn out of his foot, and two boys wrestling, and a boy with wings and a bow and arrow. And then the carpets! You sink in them like moss. It will be quite a sight for you."

"But you know I shall be at school, Mrs. Rule dear."

Hannah had at one time thought of telling the child to call her Aunt Hannah.

"But, after all, I'm not her aunt," she thought, so she never told her to call her that, or anything else. And Ellen picked up "Mrs. Rule" from the neighbours, and added "dear" on her own account.

"As to school, that's very easily managed. Just you run to Mrs. Cartwright and tell her you won't be with her to-morrow—this is Tuesday, and Mrs. Anstruther names Wednesday."

"But I had rather go to school."

"You're afraid of Mrs. Anstruther? Indeed, Ellen, you're afraid of most things. But you must get over that some time, and Mrs. Anstruther's just the kindest lady I know, and I knew her when she was younger than you are, Ellen. Oh, we'll all have to go when 'she' tells us. Put on your hat and cape now, and go to Mrs. Cartwright."

Ellen sighed, but obeyed, presently coming back with her hat crooked and her cape wrong side out.

"I'm going now, Mrs. Rule dear," said she, in a melancholy tone.

Hannah laid hold of her and gave her a tender little shake.

"And a pretty figure you are to go anywhere. Oh, Ellen, Ellen, when will you use your eyes?"

She straightened the hat and turned the cape, and then gave the child a hearty kiss.

Ellen looked up, with her eyes full of tears.

"She 'won't' want to send me back to Armine's Trust? You won't let her?"

"She has no notion of such a thing—and you're my child, you know."

"Your very own, just as kit is mine?"

"Well, no, not quite like that. Kit is a beast, and you're a child—you have a soul, you know, and kit hasn't. You belong to God, as kit belongs to you, and so do I. But He gives you to me to take care of."

"Just like Moses, that Pharaoh's daughter gave to his mother to bring up for her. But when I'm brought up, I'll be yours still—there's no one like you."

"If you don't go now, it will be dark, and you won't like that, my brave young woman. Away with you—I'll have tea ready when you come home."

When the time came to set out next day, Hannah took special pains to make Ellen look her very best. Her hair was now a nice length, and was of a really pretty reddish-brown colour and very thick. Her face had lost the pasty, sallow look it used to have, she had a white skin and a pink pair of cheeks, and held herself erect. The expression of her face, and indeed of her whole person, was so changed that no one would have known her for the same child. She looked alive, and she looked happy. The miserable, shrinking, shuffling little creature, Ellen August, was quite lost in this nicely-dressed, pleasant-looking girl, Ellen Rule.

"There's Mrs. Collins tapping on the window to you, Mrs. Rule dear."

"She may tap, then. She only wants to know where we're going; and we've no time to waste. We'll tell her in the evening. Poor soul! Curiosity's like a disease with her. Why, here she comes after us! What is it, Mrs. Collins? I'm in haste."

"Are you going—"

"I haven't time to tell you where I'm going. You come to tea to-night, and I'll tell you all about it."

Mrs. Collins smiled indulgently, saying, "You're always in a hurry, Mrs. Rule! But I'll come round if possible." And she retreated, well pleased.

"Why does she say 'if possible,' when she's certain to come?" inquired Ellen, who was beginning to make up for lost time by asking perpetual questions.

"Well, if she falls downstairs and breaks her leg in the mean time, she won't come, you know."

"No—that's true! Do you like Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Rule dear? 'I don't!'"

"To my shame I say it, I don't like her as well as I ought."

"Why ought you? She isn't really a nice woman, I think."

"She's our neighbour, though."

Ellen meditated, and then said, "Is that why you're always kind to her?"

"That's why I always 'ought' to be. As you know, I give her a snappy word many a time. Here comes the 'bus—it's too far to walk the whole way."

"Are we really to go in the 'bus?" said Ellen, in great glee. It was quite an event to her, and she felt as important as if entering her own carriage.

In due time they arrived at Mrs. Anstruther's fine house, and were admitted. The servant asked Hannah to wait a moment till he found out if his mistress were ready, and Hannah took the opportunity to point out the boy with the thorn in his foot to Ellen. But, to her amusement, Ellen looked shocked.

"Why has he no clothes on?" she said.

"Oh, he's only stone, you see! Stone statues never do, or but seldom, have clothes."

"Then I don't like stone statues," was Ellen's decided reply.

"My mistress is in the morning-room, Mrs. Rule. You can go up now."

So up they went, and found the lady sitting before her davenport, on which lay piles of envelopes, and heaps of circulars, which she was folding and popping into the envelopes with wonderful quickness. But she got up and came to meet them.

"So here you are, Hannah! I am glad to see your good old face again. Have you wondered what had become of me? I've been to America—sit down, will you not?—But do you mean to tell me that this is the child I brought you?—Mary—Mary, was it not?"

"Ellen, ma'am; and we call her Ellen Rule."

"Ellen—yes, to be sure—Ellen August. Well, I should not have known her. You have worked wonders, Hannah."

"Indeed, then, ma'am, I've only left her in peace."

Ellen looked up and smiled.

"She and I are very fond of each other," Hannah went on.

"Does she go to school?"

"Yes, ma'am, and is coming on very well. Mrs. Cartwright—that's her teacher—says that you were very kind to her once."

"Cartwright? I remember the name, I think, but one meets with so many. All these societies work away, but there never seem to be fewer who are in need of help. It would depress me dreadfully, if I had time to think of it. And things go so wrong! I belong to a society for sending children to America—orphans, of course—and soon after I last saw you, we heard that

some of these children were not being kindly used, and some of us went out to see. Such a quantity of trouble as we had, you would not believe! And now we must keep a person out there, for nothing but to see that the children get fair play. Oh, Hannah, you are the very person we want—should you not like to go?"

Ellen clasped her hands in mute dismay, but Hannah's answer relieved her.

"No, ma'am; I'm too old to take to new ways. And I'm too ignorant for such work as that. You need not look at me, Ellen; I'm not thinking of it."

"Oh, you could take Ellen with you! However, if you do not like the idea, never mind. Come to my dressing-room, Hannah; I want to show you my unfortunate flounce. I wore it several times in New York—the point flounce, you know—and a big stupid man put his foot through it. And what do you think he said?—

"I'm afraid I've torn your trimmings, miss!"

"Think of my point being called trimmings? I am afraid part of it is past even your mending, Hannah. You stay here, little Ellen; here is a book with pictures to amuse you."

"But—but—" cried Ellen, miserably.

"I'll come back very soon," said Hannah. "Don't you frighten yourself, now."

"Is she as nervous as ever, Hannah?" Mrs. Anstruther asked, as she shut the door of her dressing-room.

"Oh, not at all, ma'am! At first, the poor child was afraid of everything, and most, of me. One day I said, 'Make haste, child!' rather sharp, and down she fell on the floor, all in a quake. I thought she'd faint. Indeed, it's been a great help to me to learn to speak gently, but she's not a bit afraid of me now."

"I never saw such an improvement! You must have a genius for being nice with children. Hannah, you would be such a 'splendid' matron for Armine's Trust. That tiresome Mrs. Marner is to retire soon on a pension, and I could have you appointed. Old Peters—if that was his name—died lately, so now we can get rid of her."

"Ah, Miss Geraldine, you're just your old self, the same as when you were no bigger than my little Ellen! You were never without a plan for everybody."

"If all my plans turned out as well as that of getting you to take poor little Ellen, I should be a very successful person! But I must confess that some of them turn out great failures. But we can only try!"

"Yes, ma'am. But you're a great lady, and both rich and clever. Now, if I were to try these things that you speak of, I would most likely be one of your failures, ma'am. I have my own place, and a neighbour or two that would miss me, and Ellen to care for. And if I left it to go to America, or to Armine's Trust, 'that' little place would be empty, and maybe I couldn't fill the big place. For it don't follow, because I can do pretty well for little Ellen, that I can manage a whole school-ful of girls."

"Hannah, you're a rock of sense! Now, shall you be offended if I offer you some help for Ellen's dress?"

"Yes, I will, ma'am. I have all I need."

"Oh, you proud woman! Well, if ever you want help, you know where to come for it. Do you mean to bring her up to be a teacher?"

"No, ma'am; I think she'll be happier just to learn all that I know, of work, and cooking, and washing—by-and-by. She has no turn for book-learning, beyond just the common."

"Then you have begun, I suppose, to teach her at home? She ought to be a great help to you."

"Well, indeed, ma'am, I have taught her nothing yet. Somehow, I let her look on—she is very young still."

Mrs. Collins would have been highly pleased could she have heard the lecture Mrs. Anstruther gave her old servant. That Ellen would grow up idle, selfish, and good for nothing; that she would never be a really handy woman unless she began young; that Hannah was much to blame, and must at once follow Mrs. Anstruther's advice. To all this Hannah listened with respectful attention, and quietly promised to think of it.

"Now, you had better do more than think, Hannah, for I shall keep my eye upon you. I shall come sometimes to see how you are getting on. I have no 'idea' of letting my good Hannah bring up this girl to be a heart-break to her by-and-by. Well, here is the lace; you had better take it all, for it wants a looking over. Now I must run, Hannah, for I am to lunch with a friend, and go with her to a committee—The Seamstress Aid Society—so good-bye. But I shall come and see that you are doing right about Ellen."

"Please, ma'am, how many committees do you belong to?"

"I really—do not exactly know. Ah I see! You think I shall never have time to pay you that visit. But I shall! You know I always get my own way."

"Mostly, indeed, ma'am; and, indeed, 'tis a kind way, so there's no harm done if you do get it. Come, Ellen, let us get home, and see what's the matter with this beautiful lace."

They were soon walking along the broad pavement of the square.

"Well, Ellen, did you enjoy your visit?"

"I don't think I did," Ellen replied. "Mrs. Anstruther's voice made me remember that day when they took me to the board-room, and then she bundled me up in a big shawl and carried me off. Ah, it was a good day for me really, but I nearly died of the fright. And when she looked at me, I felt so like that old time again that I looked down for the red frock."

"You'll come to be fond of her yet. No one could help it. She was one of the three little ladies in Mrs. Bulteel's nursery, and always the brightest little soul, with a great mind to have her own way, but so coaxing in getting it, that one came to think it was the best."

"What's become of the other two, Mrs. Rule, dear?"

"Miss Erminia married a lord—Lord Cannock—and she's out in India with him. Miss Phyllis is dead; she was the prettiest of them, but she never had good health."

"Why did you leave them, when you were so fond of them?"

"I didn't leave them, but I got too old for nurserymaid. You see, there was a grand nurse, and I was under her, but it was only a place for a girl. My poor Fanny had it after me. Then I went into the kitchen, as I wished to learn cooking. And afterwards the mistress got me a fine place as cook. But I never was so happy as in the nursery. I did well enough until mother died, and Fanny—if poor Fanny 'is' dead. Ellen, never you forget what I say to you, don't lead a selfish life. You see, you have no one but me, and maybe some day you'll be left alone as I was. But mind you try to be kind and helpful; it's miserable, besides being wrong, to live all for one's self. Why, what's the matter?"

For Ellen was stumbling along as if she did not see where she was going, which was the exact truth, as one does not see well when tears are running down one's cheeks, and one cannot find one's pocket-handkerchief.

"What is it, Ellen? Are you feeling sick, dear?"

"Oh, I hope—I hope I may die before you! I never had any one to love me before, and 'tis only your goodness makes you love me—no one ever will again. To be left alone! Oh, I—"

"Come, now, my child! Here's my handkerchief, dry your eyes; I can't have people staring at us. When we get home, we'll talk it over; but you must not behave like this in the street."

Ellen, rather quenched by this address, dried her eyes and succeeded in quieting herself. She was soon safe in the 'bus, where she entirely recovered her self-control. They reached home, and Hannah set things going for the kind of "tea" that worthy Mrs. Collins delighted in. All being in a fair state of progress, Hannah sat down and looked at Ellen, who stood in the window fondling Kit.

"Ellen, child, come here."

"Are you angry with me?" Ellen said, creeping towards her.

"No, dear, no. You'll soon learn more sense than to stop and cry in the public streets, which is a thing respectable folk, like you and me, must not do. But what we were talking of that set you crying—about being selfish, you know—that's what I want to speak about again. You didn't mean it so, Ellen, but what you said sounded to me a bit selfish."

"It's because I love you so, that I would rather die before you do," said Ellen, slowly.

"I'm sure that's how you see it, dear; but really, you know, 'tis more like loving yourself. I shall be an old woman, when you are still young and strong, and you would care for me as I do for you now. Don't you see, honey, that I would be less able to do alone then, than you would? I'm very bad at talking, but you think it over, and you'll see. Moreover, 'tis all in God's hands, and it seems to me it may be wrong to be wishing about it, one way or the other. But, indeed, I'm very ignorant."

Soon afterwards Mrs. Collins arrived, and proceeded to cross-question Hannah about her excursion that day. Ellen seldom talked much when Mrs. Collins was present, but on this occasion she was more silent than ever, for her mind was quite full of the thoughts that Hannah had set before it. She heard the two voices without hearing what they said, till roused by Mrs. Collins raising hers to a complaining cry, while Hannah's sounded less soft and purring than usual.

"And I will say, Mrs. Rule, that me, that has been your neighbour all these years, has a right to take it very ill to have my honesty called in question at this time of day."

"Nonsense and folly!" said Hannah. "I don't question your honesty at all. What I said was that it would not be honest of me. And no more it would."

"A body's eyes can't hurt a thing, Mrs. Rule. If you think your precious lace would be the worse for showing it to me, it must be that you think I'd harm it—steal a bit, maybe!"

"Nonsense!" said Hannah again.

"I'll leave it to the child here, if she has sense enough to take it in. Ellen, I asked her to show me the beautiful lace, and where 'tis torn—the lace she brought home to-day. By her account, pounds and pounds' worth of lace and fine 'broidery passes through her hands, and though I'm longing to see them, never once did she show me as much as a penny edging. And now she's boasting about this lace of Mrs. Anstruther's, and I mentioned that I'd like to see it, and says she, I make it a rule always, I never do that. I never showed things I had charge of to any one, and I never will; it wouldn't be honest! Did you ever hear anything more insulting?"

"What's the use of asking Ellen? She knows I never do show anything to any one. These things are very valuable and much thought of, and they don't belong to me; so I don't think that I've any right to make a show of them. Let that be an end of it, Mrs. Collins."



Mrs. Collins, who had very imprudently promised her next door neighbour a particular description of the "very next fine lace Mrs. Rule showed her,"—as

if she had seen other laces, but had not examined them closely enough to describe them—was exceedingly angry. To describe an imaginary lace would not do, as Mrs. Hall had been a lace-maker in her youth, and knew all about lace.

"An end let it be, Mrs. Rule!" she said, rising and shaking the crumbs off her apron. "Another bit would choke me, after the language I have received. I will wish you a good evening, ma'am."

Hannah laughed.

"Open the door for her, Ellen, child. Good evening, Mrs. Collins; you'll think better of me to-morrow, and it was a comfort that we didn't quarrel till you'd had your tea."

Ellen let the disgusted Mrs. Collins out, and shut the door, saying—

"You have 'my' leave to stay away. Isn't she cross, Mrs. Rule, dear?"

"Poor old soul!" said Hannah. "Next to a good tea I think she likes a quarrel."

Chapter VII

How It Was Followed

THINKING over what Mrs. Anstruther had said, Hannah came to the conclusion that she ought to begin to teach Ellen to be useful at once. But she disliked the idea very much. She loved the child, so that to work for her was a pleasure; moreover, Ellen was so awkward and timid, so certain that she would do everything badly and make mistakes, that Hannah rather dreaded making her less happy and contented than she had been hitherto. Besides, it would be dreadful if Ellen took it into her head that she had been adopted as a future servant or assistant, instead of loving Hannah for her kindness as she did now.

And Mrs. Collins, whose quarrel had completely disappeared in a couple of days—indeed, she came to tea again, "just to show that there was no ill-will"—would certainly give the child that idea, whether intentionally or not.

These considerations vexed Hannah a good deal, and made her put off beginning to instruct Ellen. And she might have put it off longer still, and had a scolding from Mrs. Anstruther, but that, to her great surprise and relief, Ellen herself asked to be taught.

"Mrs. Rule, dear, I've been thinking of what you said to me the other day, and I won't be selfish if I can help it. But if I wanted to help you ever so much, how could I, when I don't know how to do a single thing? I'm very stupid, too, and I'm afraid you'll find it very hard to teach me, but if you only try, I'll work very hard to learn."

Hannah's pleasant face fairly beamed with pleasure.

"Ellen, child, you don't know what a weight you've taken off my mind. I've been thinking you ought to begin, and was afraid you'd hate it. What will you begin with? Shall I teach you to wash lace, and—"

"No, no; let me begin with common things. I'm not clever like you. Maybe I never could learn to mend and wash lace as you do, but Mrs. Cartwright says any one can learn house work."

"And you've seen me do it so often that you must know a great deal. I'll tell you how we'll manage. You go now and brush and dust Mr. Holcroft's rooms, while I finish this piece of mending, and I'll come up when you're done and see if it is all right."

This pleased Ellen, who trotted off to the kitchen, where she tied on an apron of Hannah's, collected her implements—carpet-whisk, blacklead brushes, and duster—and carried them up to the first floor, whence the sound of diligent sweeping was soon heard.

When Hannah presently came up, she found the brushing and dusting well done, but the grate presented a curiously streaked and mottled appearance, and it is not too much to say that everything that could be crooked was as crooked as it could be. The worst of this was that Hannah, having naturally an eye for straightness, placed things straight by instinct, and found it very hard to give poor little Ellen any rules to help her to do the same.

For many a day did Ellen carry a long tape in her pocket, with various cabalistical ink-marks, which no one save herself could understand, but by the help of which she contrived to lay a table-cloth evenly, and to place the few chimney ornaments at even distances—which was Hannah's idea of the proper arrangement, but which is not every one's idea. Hannah never saw the litter and confusion of pretty things on Mrs. Anstruther's tables without longing to set them straight; yet, had she done it, Mrs. Anstruther would have been miserable until she had restored them to their first condition. However, to learn to set things straight was no doubt very good for Ellen, who took great pains to do so, and succeeded at last.

Then came a happy time. Ellen began to learn cooking, and proved to have a great taste for it.

"Now," said Hannah, "I'm easy in my mind. No matter what happens, you'll have a good business at your fingers' ends, Ellen. A woman that can cook as I'll teach you to cook, need never want while her health lasts, nor even after she gets beyond her work, if she'll just have a bit of sense while she's strong and active."

It was a proud day for Ellen when she was taken to the house of one of Hannah's employers, and introduced as "my apprentice, ma'am, who will help me, as it's a big dinner." That day, however, did not come for a year or two, for at first Ellen was timid and somewhat awkward, and I should be sorry to say how often she cut and burned her fingers before she learned to manage a knife or a frying-pan.

She also became a good laundress, but the lace-mending had to be left to Hannah, who, I suspect, had no idea how much her skill in that line owed to some lessons in lace-making on a cushion, given her when she was a child by an old woman who had begun life in a lace-making village.

Ellen grew to a fair height, and quite lost the odd look she had had. Time passed very happily with Hannah and her child; they worked hard, and Mrs. Collins often told herself that they must be "fairly coining money." Mrs. Collins grew quite respectful to Ellen, as the heiress of Hannah's savings; and no doubt Hannah did still save, but not as much as Mrs. Collins fancied.

Mrs. Collins, you see, seldom left her own house except to go to church or prayer-meetings, and to drink tea at No. 3. As to going about visiting neighbours less well off than herself, helping them both by the work of her hands, and by a loan or gift of small sums of money when needed, Mrs. Collins would have laughed at the notion, and had no idea that Hannah and Ellen did such things, though no one profited more by their kindness than she did. Such doings, she thought, were all very well for ladies who had more money than they knew what to do with. As to a hardworking woman like Hannah Rule, just a neighbourly bit of help to a respectable old woman like herself, who always paid back every penny she borrowed—and Hannah always took it, too!—this was as much as any one could expect of her.

As to the girl, it was all very well to talk; but even if Mrs. Anstruther did not pay for her keep, the girl did good work now, and Hannah Rule knew what she was about as well as any one, and didn't lose by Ellen, you may be sure. All that talk about wanting to be kind because it was right had come to an end long ago, and Hannah Rule, decent woman, wasn't a bit better than her neighbours!

But there were sick people, and helpless old people, within a short distance of Wellington Row, who could have told Mrs. Collins a different story. Hannah had indeed ceased to discuss these things with the poor old woman, partly because she was so very unsympathizing, and always seemed annoyed when any woes but her own were mentioned, but partly, also, because to do good and kind actions had ceased to be new to Hannah, but were part of her daily life. And there was nothing that she was more anxious to impress upon Ellen than the duty and privilege of doing good.

"You see, Ellen, if we that have to work hard don't keep our hearts open, we get as hard and selfish as—as possible."

"You were going to say as Mrs. Collins," put in Ellen.

"Then I was to blame, for I can find a better example of it nearer home. I was such myself for many a day, until I got that little book that 'you' turn up your nose at, Ellen."

"No, I don't, Mrs. Rule dear; I only say I like the Bible better."

"Well, so do I; but I'm very thankful to 'Questions' for all that. They waked 'me' up, I know. And, as I was going to say, talk is easy, but you've no way of proving that you belong to the Saviour but by trying in our poor way to be like Him. It is not 'very' like we shall ever be in this world. If I could keep my tongue in order, I'd have a better chance; but this very morning I told Mrs. Collins her steps are a disgrace, with milk stains all over them. She was very angry too."

"She'll have to come in to tea, just to make up," said Ellen, gravely. "But, Mrs. Rule dear, when you said 'chance' just now, what did you mean?"

"Chance of growing like Him, of course. I'm sure He never said useless, sharp things like that."

"Oh, I see! I thought you meant chance of going to heaven."

"No, no, child. If one's sorry and asks pardon, it's promised, you know. As to going to heaven, it is not anything we could do that would take us there. It was all done hundreds of years ago."

"That's well for poor stupid ones like me," said Ellen.

"Don't be a little humbug, honey. You're not a bit stupid now. You're as well able for most things as any girl of your age. What you've got to do is to hold fast by Him and put yourself to one side, acting as His servant, and not to please yourself. Though there's a pleasure in doing His work, too. I sometimes think—Well, Ellen, as sure as you're there, you were right about Mrs. Collins! Here she comes, in a clean cap and her face washed. She's just a caution. Let her in, dear."

"Good evening," began Mrs. Collins, as soon as the door was opened; "I just looked in because you'd been a bit sharpish with me, just waspy, you know, and I wanted to make sure that we were friends, as neighbours should be. And, just to please you, I washed the steps, using a bath-brick to them, though for the life of me I can't see why stone steps that you never touch but with the sole of your shoe must be as clean as a deal table."

"As 'whose' deal table?" said Hannah. Then hastily added, "Never mind whose. I know what you mean. Maybe you'll stay to tea? I have pancakes made, just ready for the pan; come with us to the kitchen and we'll soon have them fried."

And Mrs. Collins had a good tea. Poor Hannah's inability to govern her tongue was worth many "good teas" to Mrs. Collins.

In the course of the evening, when Mrs. Collins was in the happy, genial state which a good tea produced in her—Ellen once said that she expected her

to purr like kit, poor kit, who had long ago disappeared, as London cats so often do—the postman knocked at the door and left a letter, which Hannah pronounced to be from Mrs. Anstruther.

"Come to me to-morrow at about six in the evening. I have not been well, and am going abroad, but should like to see you before I go."

"Not well," said Hannah, thinking aloud; "that's something new for Miss Geraldine. She must be poorly indeed before she speaks of it. It's lucky I have no engagement for to-morrow."

"Is it Mrs. Anstruther that is poorly?" asked Ellen. "She always looks so bright that one would think she could not be ill if she tried."

"Yes, but Miss Phyllis died of consumption," Hannah said uneasily.

"And it is a fact," said Mrs. Collins, comfortably, "that if one of a family dies of consumption, the rest follow sooner or later. Is it the lady that brought Ellen here four or five years ago? She'll be a loss to you, Mrs. Rule. Do you think she'll secure your payments to you from her heirs, or give you a sum of money and be done with it?"

"Payments for what? She does not owe me anything."

"Payment for Ellen's keep," said Mrs. Collins, boldly, determined "to know the truth if a plain word would cause it to be revealed."

"I've told you often enough there is no question of payment in that matter. Is there any use in saying it again?"

Mrs. Collins ought to have been warned by the tone of Hannah's voice that she was annoyed; moreover, being frightened about Mrs. Anstruther, she was the more easily put out. But the stupid old body was so left to herself as to reply, with a look of great sagacity and a sidelong nod—

"It 'is' rather hard to believe, Mrs. Rule. But there—of course you must stand to it before Ellen."

Hannah's face crimsoned. "Then you think I'd tell a lie, either before Ellen or behind her? Oh, go home, Mrs. Collins, before I give you a piece of my mind! You can't be very truthful yourself when you're so ready to suspect others of telling lies."

Mrs. Collins stood up, full of wrath. "Many a time have you insulted me, Hannah Rule," said she, in trembling accents, "and I've always forgiven you. But this goes beyond me! After those words, ma'am, you and I are friends no more. I would not speak to you with a pair of tongs!"

At this extraordinary version of a well-known saying, both Hannah and Ellen began to laugh. This did not tend to soothe Mrs. Collins, who was not

aware of her mistake, and, with her nose in the air, she let herself out of the house and marched home.

"Ellen, did you ever hear the like? It was not very civil of us to laugh, but I know I couldn't help it, and no more, I'm sure, could you."

"I wonder how soon she'll forgive us," said Ellen, still laughing. "It will have to be mutton pie this time, Mrs. Rule dear! Less than that won't make it up altogether."

"Never mind her, poor old soul, but a person that's always suspecting you is very hard to put up with. I must go to Mrs. Anstruther to-morrow, Ellen, and you'll have to go to see poor Mrs. Cantrell alone. There's a drop of nice soup for her; not that all the soup in the world could do her much good. You warm it up for her, dear, and sit a bit with her."

"She likes me to read to her—I'll take my hymnbook," answered Ellen.

There were other visits for Ellen to pay, and lastly she was to go to Mrs. Cartwright's to inquire how she was, and to see if she could be of any use. For poor Mrs. Cartwright was very ill, and had been forced to close her school.

"I'm thinking Mrs. Cartwright must find it very hard to get along now the school is shut up," Hannah said; "and, you see, 'we' can't do anything more than help Miss Mildred with the work. I don't think the poor lady will last long, and what's to become of Miss Mildred? I'm going to mention them to Mrs. Anstruther. Ellen, I'm frightened about Mrs. Anstruther. I don't know how it is, her letter frightens me."

There was a good deal of washing to be got through before Hannah could leave home next day, and the consequence was that she was later than she had intended. Both she and Ellen got ready and left the house at the same time.

"You'll be home before me, Ellen, so here's the key. We'll be very late at tea; if Mrs. Collins should come in, I'd rather she didn't stay this evening."

"I'll tell her we're not ready to be forgiven yet," said Ellen, laughing. "Indeed, I doubt if she's ready to forgive us. Mrs. Rule dear, don't look so anxious; you'll find her better than you think."

"Oh, I hope so; give me a kiss, Ellen, before we go out, just for luck. Take care of yourself, dear, and don't be too late; it gets dark now pretty early."

When Hannah reached her destination, she was taken upstairs at once to Mrs. Anstruther's dressing-room. She found her lying on a low couch, and, though it had been quite a warm day, there was a bright fire burning in the grate, and she was covered with a warm shawl. But she rose quickly, with all

her usual eagerness of manner—she looked very lovely, yet Hannah's heart sank when she saw her.

"Oh, Hannah! My good old Hannah! I was really anxious to see you. Sit down; I think you look tired."

"I walked a good part of the way, ma'am," said Hannah. But it was not fatigue that had taken the wholesome red from her cheeks.

"Did you know that I was in London, Hannah?"

"No, ma'am; generally you go to Scotland or to France, or some such place, in September."

"Yes; I was in Scotland—I had the house full of people, too. But I have not been well all the summer, and I felt much worse there; and, as I have no faith in any doctor but my own old friend who has known me all my life, I left my sister-in-law to take my place, and came up."

"You did wisely, ma'am."

"So you won't ask me what the doctor says, Hannah? I know why, too. Yes; he has always been warning me that I was doing too much—working too hard."

Here she paused and laughed, but there was no mirth in her laugh.

"Worked too hard, you know, Hannah, at committees, and boards, and societies for this, that, and the other charitable object. 'Mrs. Anstruther is so charitable!'" And again she laughed.

"Miss Geraldine my dear, I don't understand you at all."

"No, Hannah? And yet I think it was you who made me begin to understand myself. For, you know, Hannah, there has been very little charity in my doings."

"Oh, now, Mrs. Anstruther, I don't see how you can say that?"

"Hannah, the day—more than five years ago now—that you came here to mend the lace 'portière' over that door, and told me that you wanted something to love, for that book I had given you said that charity meant love—do you remember? You said you had been trying to be charitable by helping people, but you did not feel sure that this was what was meant, and that you wanted to try to bear with a little trouble for some one whom you could love. I was rather struck by it—but I have lived in such a whirl. I liked to live so. It was to please myself."

"Now, I don't believe that, Miss Geraldine," said Hannah, quickly. "Before you were left a widow, you were used to a very different life. It was hard to get a word with you in those days, with balls and garden-parties, and going here

and there. And 'twasn't as if you'd got tired of them, nor as if you wouldn't have been admired as much as ever. And you give it all up, and go helping to manage all these ways of helping people. The many times I heard of you, ma'am, as helping this and that, and giving—"

"All quite true, Hannah. But I liked the activity and the influence and the fuss—and the admiration. I really enjoyed it more than the old days of gaiety, when I was a girl and a young wife."

"Because you have a kind heart, ma'am."

"Because I like getting my own way, Hannah, as you have sometimes told me. Well, I am done with it all now! For, if I live, it can only be to take care of myself. I must spend this winter abroad, and only come home to lead a quiet life. Indeed, I suspect—But now, to tell you why I sent for you, Hannah. Not to say all this—though when I saw your kind, familiar face, I began to talk—but to ask you a question or two. How does your child turn out? She must be fifteen now. Is she a good girl?"

"She is, ma'am; she has got on right well. She'll be as good a cook as I am myself. And a sensible girl!—Plenty of good sense she has. And 'twould do your heart good to hear her laugh. She and I are as happy together as possible."

"And are you quite happy about her future life? You have no fear that she may come to want, if outlives you? But you say she has good sense—you know I once thought she was rather deficient."

"There was nothing wrong with her, ma'am; but, being timid and gentle, she needed kindness, and didn't get it. She has as much sense as most, if not more; and yet, in some ways, she's a simpleminded creature—but she'll do very well. Most likely I'll live to see her grown up—and I've made my will, leaving her all my savings, and she'll be better able to do for herself than most. Maybe, I may see her married yet, though I don't fare to feel able to wish that."

"How much have you saved, Hannah?"

Hannah named the sum, with great pride and satisfaction.

"Only that!" said Mrs. Anstruther.

And Hannah opened her eyes wide.

"Why, it's a 'lot' of money, Mrs. Anstruther! Few girls begin life with as much as that. I mean, few girls like what I was, or Ellen is."

"I see," said Mrs. Anstruther; "and I know it is a good deal for you to have saved. Well, the other question I wish to ask you is—you'll be surprised at it, Hannah, I'm afraid, but I am ashamed to show myself such a coward to any

one but you, who knew me when I was a very naughty, troublesome child—Hannah, I am afraid. When you think of dying, are you afraid?"

Hannah looked distressed for a minute. Then she said slowly—

"Miss Geraldine, to tell the truth, I don't think about it. Nor I don't see much use in it—in thinking about it, I mean. What seems to me best, is this. We don't know for certain anything about it. But we 'do' know for certain that it is all in God's hands for us; and just to go on doing what seems right at the present moment, and leaving all the rest to Him, is the best. He'll take care of us all through. Ellen's very fond of hymns, and she read me one the other day. It began—

"While others ask for grace to die, O Lord, I ask for grace to live."

"And it went on to say 'tis harder to live than to die—and I do think it is, too."

"The uncertainty!" said Mrs. Anstruther.

"But 'tis only 'us' that's uncertain," said Hannah. "You don't think, child, that it takes Him by surprise? He knows, and His time is the best for us."

"But, if you knew that you 'must' die?"

"We all know that, and none of us know a bit more than that. My dear, I'm an ignorant woman, and you're a lady with learning and education, but there's just the same comfort and help for both of us. The dear Lord died for us. That's enough. You know it better than I do."

"That 'really' comforts you?"

"That makes me able to do the best I can see, and leave the rest to Him. Sometimes, indeed, I can't help thinking of all the time I wasted, never remembering Him. But then I think of His mercy that made Him wake me up at last."

"Hannah, you have done me good. It is getting dark. I suppose you ought to go home."

"Yes, ma'am, I must be going; but I want to tell you about Mrs. Cartwright—that's the lady Ellen was taught by. I mentioned her to you before. I'm afraid she's dying. Her school had to be closed three months ago. And, you see, she's a lady; the little help that I could give won't do, and I could hardly take such a liberty. So I thought I would tell you, ma'am; for I truly fear they're in actual want."

"I will see to it, Hannah. Write her address for me. Is she still in the house she had her school in, or did she move into lodgings?"

"She is too ill to be moved, ma'am. But Miss Mildred is the only creature with her, except for what Ellen and I and that kind body, Mrs. Green, can do for them. Such a pretty, nice young lady and she'll be left without a penny, I'm afraid."

"How old is she?"

"Seventeen, ma'am."

"Do you know, I want a young girl to sit with me, and read to me, and prevent me from feeling lonely. I get so low, Hannah—you did not think I was such a fool, did you? Would she do, I wonder? Of course, not while her poor mother lives."

"Ma'am, she's as nice a girl as ever I knew, a real little lady. Suppose you'd go and see her? You've no idea how you'd cheer Mrs. Cartwright by promising to be a friend to Miss Mildred."

"I am not allowed out just now, except for a drive in the middle of the day. But I will write at once. You have no idea what a trouble that seems, but for once in my life I will take trouble, 'not' because it pleases me. Come and see me again before I leave home. I will write and tell you when I am to go. Good-bye, Hannah. I shall not forget Mrs. Cartwright."



"May I mention it to her, ma'am? You see, she has Miss Mildred always on her mind."

"You may tell her that I will surely do what I can for her. I will, indeed; even if she does not suit me. Good-bye, again, Hannah."

As it was rather late, Hannah took her place in the first omnibus that was going her way, and was soon on her homeward road.

It is now time to see what Ellen had been about all this time. Hannah little knew what a surprise her adopted child had in store for her!

Chapter VIII

The Baby

ELLEN, with a carefully covered basket, which she carried warily, proceeded, after parting with Hannah, to pay a few visits to the old or ailing people whom Hannah and she were in the habit of helping in various ways. One sick man got a nice bowl of soup, and old Mrs. Cantrell not only got a bowl of soup, but had it nicely heated for her. Ellen read to her for half an hour, and chatted with her pleasantly, and left the old lady much refreshed.

Then she went on to a poor girl, who had long been confined to a bed of pain and unrest. She had the great refreshment of having her bed well made, while she sat by the one poor window of her attic, and looked at the sky. There was nothing else to look at, except the housetops, and she preferred the sky—though one could hardly call it blue. This poor soul had a small allowance from the family in whose service she had met with the accident which disabled her, so she was not actually in want, but it was a great thing to her to get her shopping done by a trusty friend, and a visit now and then shortened the long weary day. Moreover, Hannah had got her employment from a "ready-made" shop in the neighbourhood, and taking the parcels for her, made it possible for her to undertake it. What a relief to the long hours of weariness and pain the employment was!

The next visit was to an old woman who had "seen better days." Oh, pathetic words! She liked to hear a hymn read, though she never failed to tell Ellen that hymns sounded much more comforting when repeated, not read; and Ellen always had to tell her that she was quite unable to learn hymns off by heart. On this, the old lady always repeated poetry, and Ellen never knew what it was all about, and was glad when it came to an end, which it did not do till the old lady was tired, and felt comfortably convinced that she was far cleverer than Ellen Rule.

Then, with an empty basket, Ellen set off to inquire for Mrs. Cartwright.

You see, Hannah's "friends," as she always called them, had increased. Her idea that it would be a capital plan to adopt a child and think no more of her neighbours, had come to nothing—she had nearly forgotten that she had ever entertained it. In the mass of suffering that lay around her, a working woman could make but little difference. Yet she lightened some heavy burdens; she

cheered some sad hearts; she taught Ellen to love and help others, and she set a good example. Moreover, she did not think much of herself or her doings, only saying, that if you belong to the Lord Jesus, you must try to be like Him.

Ellen found that Mrs. Cartwright was much worse. Mrs. Green was there and told Ellen that she would stay there all night, as Miss Mildred could not be left alone. So, as it was late, Ellen set off for home.

It was pretty dark now, except for the gas lamps. Ellen always went by Princess Street, which was a quiet and perfectly respectable street, and, far from being crowded, was at this hour almost deserted. It was inhabited by the poorer classes of clerks and the better class of artisans, and they were probably having their tea.

There was a shorter way to Wellington Row, but it was by no means a pleasant street, and, as a child, Ellen had been told never to enter it. But she slackened her pace as she reached the turn, wondering if she might not go that way for once, as she was in a hurry. Looking down the alley—it was really no more than an alley—she saw an old woman standing near the corner with a red bundle in her arms. Further down, there were many people coming and going, or standing in groups, talking or quarrelling. Ellen determined to keep to her usual line of march, and was about to move on, when she found the old woman at her side, she seemed much bent and very feeble.

"Step this way, young lady," said the old woman. "Would you help a poor old body, whose strength is but small? Would you oblige me by holding the child for about five minutes? I want to go up yonder for a doctor, for I think the child's ill. Nothing infectious, miss, I assure you."

But the momentary shrinking which she had noticed in Ellen was not caused by any fear of infection, but by a feeling of dislike to this smooth-spoken old woman. Still, she did not like to refuse, and in another moment, the red bundle was in her arms, and the old woman was making her way up Princess Street as fast as she could get over the ground—and that was at no mean pace, considering how feeble she had seemed. Ellen had not seen her face, as it was muffled up in a thick veil, which did not suit the rest of her attire.

The woman looked back frequently, and nodded at Ellen, who was watching her. But Ellen looked down at the bundle for a few moments, and when she again looked up, she failed to see the shabby little figure; and I may as well add, she never saw it again.

She waited, and waited; and presently Princess Street seemed to wake up, and people came out of the houses and set off, probably for some place of amusement. Ellen was getting very anxious to go home, and was, moreover, frightened because the child, if there "was" a child in the bundle, lay so perfectly still.

When a clock somewhere struck eight, she got quite desperate. She had been more than half an hour standing there, and Mrs. Rule would reach home tired and hungry, and Ellen had the key. Very timidly she raised a fold of the dirty ragged, red shawl, and there lay a little waxen face. So there really "was" a baby—but was it breathing? Surely this was no healthy sleep!

A policeman was now in sight, and perhaps the sensible thing to do would be to tell him her story, and show him the child. What Ellen did, was to cover the little face again, saying, "Mrs. Rule will know what to do," and to set off for home as fast as possible, not by the short way, for she forgot all about it.

As she hurried along, she became more and more frightened every moment—the child was so unnaturally still. She increased her pace to a run, and soon reached her own door, where she found Hannah waiting, getting very uneasy, but not knowing what to do.

"Why, Ellen honey, is this you, running! And indeed you 'are' late, for I was late myself."

"Oh, Mrs. Rule dear, look! Is the little thing dead?"

"What little thing? Why, Ellen, you're half killed, running like that. Give me the key."

She opened the door, and hastily lighted the gas in the parlour. Ellen laid the red bundle on a chair and began to cry.

"Name of wonder, what have you here? A dirty rag of a shawl. Where did you get it?—What is in it, Ellen?"

"A baby! Oh, see if it is dead! It is so still! Oh, Mrs. Rule dear, I'm so frightened!"

Hannah put the girl into a chair, and began to unfold the bundle. Ellen's cries and sobs grew louder.

"Is it dead? I'm afraid it is. Oh, do tell me—is there any life in it?"

"A baby!" said Hannah. "And without a tack of clothing on it. Yes, 'tis breathing. I don't know what's the matter with it—there doesn't seem to be any injury. Ellen, stop crying at once, and be of some use. Run and get Mrs. Collins. She's reared a family, and may know what's the matter."

Ellen ceased to sob, but could not cease crying. However, she flew from the room, and out into the street, leaving the hall door open. Never before had the quiet girl been seen to rush along the pathway as she did, both when carrying the baby and now. And she had not got home unobserved. There was a gas lamp opposite No. 6, and Mrs. Collins was sitting in the parlour, with her venerable nose very near the glass of the window.

"A good thing Miss Hallam is out, for I do think it was that charity foundling that ran by; there's something wrong with her."

When quite sure that Hannah was out of hearing, she generally spoke of Ellen as "the charity foundling." It seemed to give her great comfort.

"Why, here she is again! Now, I wish we were made up again, for I want to know. Oh, she's coming here; so I shall know, after all! I dare say Hannah Rule's in a fit; she's a full complexioned woman, and 'such' a temper! Well, what do you want?"

For she had opened the door, at which Ellen was knocking loudly and persistently.

"Come to Mrs. Rule; there's a baby, and it's maybe dying. Come at once."

"A baby!" screamed Mrs. Collins. "But, upon my word, Ellen, this is cool! I'm turned out of the house, as one may say, yesterday, and to-day 'tis 'Come at once.' No, Ellen; I'm a forgiving woman, as you know, but—"

"But you 'must' come," said Ellen, breathlessly.

She well knew that Mrs. Collins was capable of arguing for half an hour, and time was precious—the baby might die. So, without a moment's hesitation, gentle, slow-moving Ellen caught her by the hand, and whisked her out of her own house and down to No. 3 in less time than I take to tell the tale.

Luckily, Miss Hallam came home in a few minutes and shut the door, which neither Mrs. Collins nor Ellen thought of doing.

No. 3's door was open too, so in they swept. A voice called—

"Come to the kitchen. I've brought it here for warmth. Shut the door, Ellen."

Mrs. Collins trotted into the kitchen, too full of curiosity to hesitate.

"A baby!" she cried again. "And a dead baby! No, it's not dead. Ah, I see how it is! I used to give my children a few drops sometimes, just to get a little peace, but some one's given this child too much. See its poor little eyes—they're set like. Ellen, run to Dr. Jephson's at the corner, and tell him there's a child here has had an overdose of something to make it sleep. I don't know what to do for it; and it's in a bad way, I know that much."

"Just hold the child for me, and I'll go for him myself—Ellen's half dead. Ellen, get a drink of water, and sit quiet a bit; I won't be long."

Dr. Jephson had plenty of experience of this kind of case. And he did the best he could for the poor baby, but he declared that it was in a very bad way, and that he hardly expected to bring it round. However, before morning the little thing was out of danger. Neither Hannah, nor Ellen, nor the good-natured doctor, even tried to sleep that night; nor were any questions asked as to how Ellen became possessed of the baby.

Where was Mrs. Collins, do you ask? When the good creature found that nothing could be thought of but the struggle for the little flickering spark of life, she said she was only in the way, and went home. But at about seven a.m. she returned, and said that she had not been able to sleep a wink for thinking of the child.

"Is it alive, Ellen?"

"Oh, yes; and doing well—it is fast asleep! Mrs. Rule has it in the kitchen. Will you come in?"

Mrs. Rule was sitting by the fire, with the child, now wrapped in a soft blanket, lying on her lap. It slept, but with occasional starts and moans, and it was necessary to keep it very warm.

"It is really better," said Mrs. Collins.

"Yes; it will do now, Dr. Jephson says. But it had enough of whatever the nasty stuff was to kill a weakly child. He says this must be a very strong, healthy baby."

"But the question is, how did you get it? Where did it come from?"

"The only question I've had time to ask Ellen was if she knew where to find its people, and she said no. The doctor's only just gone. Ellen, 'tis half-past seven; go and call Mr. Holcroft, and take up the hot water; I don't like to put the child out of my arms, for a chill now would about finish it. Come back as soon as you can, for breakfast must be thought of; you and I have had nothing since dinner yesterday; no wonder you look so white, child."

Ellen left the kitchen, and Mrs. Collins said impressively—

"I shall ask just one word, for I must go. How came she by the child?"

"I believe she found it. Come, now, Mrs. Collins, you make friends with me—you know you were in a great way the other night—and I'll come in and tell you all about the child as soon as ever I can."

"You can surely come if you feel inclined," Mrs. Collins remarked grandly. "Being myself a mother, I take an interest in the poor child. Oh, yes; come, by all means, if I'm not here in the meantime to ask how it is."

While Ellen was getting ready some much-needed breakfast, she told the story of her adventure.

"My belief is," she concluded, "that the old woman stole the child. You remember a story we had, that Mrs. Cartwright lent me, telling how a child was stolen just for its clothes. She never meant to come back; she just wanted to get rid of it."

"Well, dear, it will be a lesson to you not to be taken in again. The old wretch—a pretty peck of trouble we shall have."

"Oh, Mrs. Rule dear, it will be no trouble. It will be lovely to have it. I do love it already. It lay so quiet, pressed up to me. I just felt I could do anything for it. I will do all the nursing of it, if you like."

"Why, Ellen! You never think we're going to keep the child?"

It was a long time since Ellen had dropped or otherwise smashed anything from sudden nervousness, but at this moment crash went a very favourite brown teapot, which she was lifting off the stove.

"And we so thirsty," cried Hannah, gazing at the good tea running over the tiles of the kitchen floor. "Never mind, Ellen; any one may meet with an accident. Get the best teapot, and make tea again."

Ellen obeyed in silence. When breakfast was ready, a big wash-basket was made ready to serve as the baby's cradle, and, with pillows and blankets, made a very snug one. The little creature half awoke as Hannah laid it down, but soon slept peacefully again, well tucked up, and placed near the fire.

"It's the prettiest child I ever saw, now that it's a natural colour; it even has a bit of pink on its cheek. Look, Ellen."

Hannah stretched herself mightily, saying, "I'm so stiff, sitting with it on my lap all night; and I'm as hungry as ever I was in my life. As for you, Ellen, you look like a ghost, and as soon as you've had breakfast, off you go to bed. Young things can't stand losing their sleep."

They were both hungry, and no wonder, but Ellen did not seem to care what she ate, and was quite silent.

Presently Hannah said—

"Don't drop asleep there, Ellen; it won't rest you. Go and undress, and go to bed. Nothing like that for a real rest."

Ellen looked up. "Mrs. Rule dear, what did you mean about the baby? You know the policeman would take it to the poorhouse, or maybe Armine's Trust, and the poor, pretty darling would just be miserable. I would wish it had died last night rather than that. And you, that are so kind and so sorry for people, do you remember telling me that God gave me to you, to be your child? And has not God brought you this little thing? I never thought you'd let it go to the poorhouse."

"Ellen honey, you don't think what it means. It's one thing to take a girl to be a daughter to me, and learn what I can teach her, but to take a boy! A mere baby, too! And do you expect me to take every child that other people want to get rid of?"

Ellen began to cry. "The pretty baby," she sobbed; "I wish 'twas dead, because I love it so!"

"But, Ellen, listen to me, now. It may happen that the child may be claimed by its own people. Dr. Jephson says it is so well fed and cared for that it certainly did not belong to the kind of woman who would desert it, and he thinks it belongs to respectable people, and was stolen, maybe just for its good clothes. If this is so, it will soon be heard of, and I will tell you what I will do: To please you, child, I'll keep it till the police have tried all they can to find out who lost it. I will indeed, Ellen, though the neighbours will say I'm little wiser than yourself about it."

Ellen dried her eyes, and looked up at the speaker. After a moment's consideration she said—

"Will it take long to find out?"

"Oh, a week or more, I suppose."

"And if we hear nothing in that time, will you—but I know you will—you would keep it a bit longer? Ah! I might have known you, and not got into a fright. And, when the time comes—if it ever does come—that you give up trying to find its people, you'll send it to the poorhouse. Yes, and so you may, Mrs. Rule dear."

And Ellen laughed as she put her arms round Hannah's neck, and kissed her.

"Ellen, I believe you think I'm a fool," remarked Hannah.

"Indeed I do not, then. Ah, there's no one like you!"

And Ellen went off to bed, where she fell fast asleep in half a minute, and never heard the precious baby squalling—as squall he did on awaking, and finding himself hungry.

Hannah took a warm soft shawl of her own, in which she wrapped the baby, and, sitting by the fire, she attempted to feed it. With the result that the baby kicked vigorously, and shouted in a manner which left no doubt as to the healthy condition of its lungs.

"I do solemnly declare," said Hannah, addressing an imaginary hearer, "that this child hasn't learned to take the spoon; and there's a pretty kettle of fish."

After a pause of dismay, she got up, put the baby into the basket, and went to the hall door. She looked towards No. 6, but for once Mrs. Collins was not to be seen.

"Just because for once she was wanted," muttered poor Hannah. "Oh, Mr. Holcroft, you made me jump."

"Why, Mrs. Rule, you ought to know my hour for going out, by this time. But, for pity's sake, what 'is' the noise? It sounds like a child crying."

"So it is, sir! A child that some old woman put off on us last night—just handed it to Ellen to hold for a minute, and then made off. I was trying to feed it, and it won't take food from me, though I know it must be hungry, the poor little thing."

"Send it back to the old woman at once, I advise you."

"Very gladly, sir, if I knew where to find her, and that the child belongs to her, which I doubt, sir. You must pass Dr. Jephson's—would you oblige me so much as to let him know that I want a baby's bottle, ready for use?—Tell him to send at once. I can't leave the child, you see, and Ellen's asleep."

"Yes, I'll tell Jephson, but pray get that noisy child out of the house before I come home. I could not stand that."

He gave the message, though he grumbled at having to do it, being an old bachelor, and "cantankersome," as Hannah sometimes admitted.

Dr. Jephson came himself, bringing the bottle, for he wanted to see his little patient, whom he not only saw, but heard. The bottle was filled with milk and water. "Just warm, Mrs. Rule, 'just' warm, if you please," the doctor said impressively.

"I believe you think I never fed a baby before," said Hannah.

"Well, ma'am, you've not been too successful with this one yet," replied Dr. Jephson, who was a great admirer of Hannah's kindness to her neighbours, and I believe rather enjoyed her sharp sayings.

As the bottle was now full, Hannah made no verbal reply. Lifting the still screaming baby into her lap, she deftly tucked the little ivory mouthpiece into

its wide-open mouth, and with a start of pleased surprise, the little creature began sucking away, and its face soon expressed the most placid enjoyment.

"See that, doctor!" Hannah said triumphantly. "Ah, I wasn't some years in Mrs. Bulteel's nursery for nothing!"

"It is my belief you can do most things, Mrs. Rule. Well, good morning; I must go home, or that young idle-bones, Munro, will be poisoning some of my patients."

Chapter IX

Mrs. Anstruther

WHEN Ellen awoke, it was really one o'clock, but she fancied that she had dozed for about half an hour. So, getting up, she washed and dressed in a leisurely way, and went downstairs. In the kitchen she found Hannah, sitting near the fire in a most uncomfortable attitude, but fast asleep, while the baby was fast asleep in his basket, and a horrid smell as of burnt meat proceeded from the oven. Ellen ran to rescue the dinner; the noise of opening the oven roused Hannah, and it was really comical to see how heartily ashamed of herself she was.

"If you'll believe me, Ellen, I only sat down for five minutes, just to rest. When did I ever burn a roast to cinders before?"

"Oh, there's enough for dinner not burnt. But, Mrs. Rule dear, why do you want dinner so early?"

"Early, child? Why, 'tis two o'clock, or very near it. And I meant to call you at one, but, you see, I didn't."

"Two o'clock! Why, it really is, and I thought I had slept for perhaps half an hour. How's the baby?"

"As right as a trivet, the little beauty. Just look," tenderly lifting the blanket, "did you ever see a lovelier child?"

And the pair—true women both—went down on their knees, one on each side of the basket, to admire the baby, letting their burnt mutton cool for quite ten minutes. Then, as they dined, Ellen had to be told the story of the child's hunger, and the bottle, and Mr. Holcroft.

"But, oh, dear, what shall we do if he leaves you?" said Ellen.

"He won't do that; we'll take care the child doesn't annoy him. But if he must go, why, he must. He's not master here, to give his orders like that."

"Oh dear me, think of my forgetting all this time to tell you about Mrs. Cartwright. She was very bad when I was there."

"I knew it, child. I was there soon after you left, but I came home by Albany Street, because Miss Mildred wanted something from the shops. I went, because I had good news for them. Mrs. Anstruther promised to send a letter and help for the present, and to take care of Miss Mildred in the future. And glad I was that I went! It's my belief that Miss Mildred had spent nearly her

last penny. I coaxed her to let me order in some things, knowing that Mrs. Anstruther won't fail. Poor Mrs. Cartwright said that now she could die in peace, knowing that Miss Mildred has a friend."

"You would have taken care of her," said Ellen.

"And how many more do you want me to take care of, Ellen? But, indeed, I'd rather have to do with Miss Mildred than with that roaring lad in the basket; how you slept through the noise he made is to me a mystery. But, you know, Miss Mildred is a lady, and Mrs. Anstruther can give a home fit for her. Mrs. Cartwright was nearly gone. She's not alive now, I'm afraid. A good woman, if ever there was one."



"Let us go and see how things are," said Ellen. "Miss Mildred would be so lonely."

"Let us go? And please, ma'am, what about the baby? Now you see what nonsense it would be to keep him. The two of us could never be out together—and what would become of your going with me as my 'prentice?"

"Well, you go to Miss Mildred, you'll be of more use to her than I could. And I'll wash up and take care of the baby."

"I'll go, but first we must get him up and feed him. I must show you how to do that. But you must see, Ellen, that it would not do. It couldn't go on."

"It would be only for a little time," pleaded Ellen; "he won't be a baby always."

"But I hardly think people would let me bring 'two' apprentices, one to mind the other. However, I'm sure we shall find his father and mother. He's not a child to be lost without being searched for. I must see the police about him, and buy a newspaper in case there's an advertisement, and must get some tacks of clothes for him, for decency's sake. He can't live in the basket with only a shawl to wear. I need not get much, and his people will pay it back, no doubt."

Baby, being refreshed, was returned to his basket, and fell asleep with a delusive appearance of intending to sleep for hours. Yet Hannah was but just gone, when that deceitful infant woke up, and began to stretch his limbs and double up his tiny fists, and pummel his nose and eyes with them; finally, he whimpered.

Ellen knelt beside him, and patted him—he cooed in the most entrancing manner, but when she withdrew, he roared. Plainly, a baby who liked attention and expected it. Finally, he kicked about in a manner so lively and alarming that she every moment expected to see the basket upset, so she took him up, awkwardly enough, for she had been too young while in Armine's Trust to be given the care of a baby. However, he was pleased, and smiled all over his face, as babies do.

But as to washing up, or doing a single thing beyond amusing the child and trying to keep the shawl over the white skin, she found it quite impossible.

As Hannah expected, Mrs. Cartwright had died during the night. Mrs. Anstruther's letter had arrived, anxiety about money was over, and poor Mildred was asleep, quite worn out. Hannah and Mrs. Green made all the necessary arrangements for the funeral, and they also settled that when it was over, Mildred should go home with Hannah until Mrs. Anstruther decided as to what she was to do. Hannah wrote to Mrs. Anstruther, telling her how matters now stood.

Hannah then went to the police office to tell her story about the baby. She was assured that every effort should be made to trace the old woman, and that advertisements should be circulated. The police sergeant walked home with Hannah to see Ellen and question her; also to see the baby.

"Of course we can take the child to the workhouse if you can't keep it, ma'am, but, if you can put up with it for a bit, we may find out who owns it. You say you don't think it is a poor person's child?"

"I think not, and so does Dr. Jephson. Wait a moment here for me. I want to buy some clothes for it. Not a rag had it on, but a dirty old shawl, that I suppose belongs to the old woman."

Hannah made her purchases, and then went home, escorted by the tall sergeant, to Ellen's great dismay, for she concluded that he would at once take possession of the child. Hannah left the sergeant in the parlour, while she opened her parcel and hastily dressed the baby—who bore it better than babies often do. Then she gave it to Ellen to carry, while she took the red shawl, or its poor remains, out of the tub into which she had bundled it, wrung it out hastily, and carried it to the parlour.

"Here's the child, Sergeant Boxer; and you don't often see a finer one."

"How old should you say he is, ma'am?"

"About six months, I suppose. If he's less, he's a very big child." Then she produced the wet shawl. "Here's the red shawl," said she.

"Oh, ma'am, you shouldn't have washed it, ma'am. It's all we have to go on!"

"Indeed, then, you couldn't well have less. But I haven't torn it. As to keeping it in my kitchen, or even in my dustbin—no, thank you kindly."

"And this is the young lady who let the old woman make her a present!" said Sergeant Boxer, and proceeded to ask Ellen several questions civilly enough. Yet he was evidently much amused by her simplicity, and she was as red as the ragged shawl before he had done with her.

"Well, Mrs. Rule, we will do all that can be done. I'll take the—"

"Oh no, don't!" cried Ellen. "We'll take better care of him than you can."

"The shawl, I mean, miss. Some of our men may reckonize it."

"You'd have had a better chance of that if I'd left it dirty," said Hannah, proudly regarding her handy-work as she shook it out and folded it.

"No doubt of that, ma'am. We'll let you know if anything turns up; and you'll keep the child awhile on the chance?"

"Yes, for a week or two I will," said Hannah.

And the sergeant departed.

"Well, that matter's settled. I have bad news for you, Ellen. Mrs. Cartwright is gone, as I was afraid it would be. And Miss Mildred is in bed; she's half dead with nursing and sitting up. There's no use in your going to her just now, but you can go in the evening and stay with her. Mrs. Green can't be spared, and Miss Mildred would rather have you than me."

"Oh dear, I'm sorry for Mrs. Cartwright. She was so kind—and then she had such a sad life."

"That's a reason for 'not' being sorry, to my mind. She had the comfort of knowing that Miss Mildred would be cared for—she was ready to go, and glad, I think, too. It was a hard life for one like her. No, I couldn't really wish her back again. Bring the child to the kitchen, Ellen, and—Why, child, you've forgotten to wash up."

"I didn't forget, but I never had a moment to do it. Baby cried—roared! if I left him in the basket. And what with amusing him, and keeping him wrapped up when he kicked like anything, I never had the chance to do my work. Don't be angry with me, Mrs. Rule dear."

"I'm not to say angry—but 'tis new to me to have the dinner lying just as when we stood up at six o'clock in the evening. And the fire out—and no hot water! Well, 'tis only for a time. But you must see, Ellen, that it can only be for a time."

With that she tied herself up in a big holland apron, and set to work ardently. She rekindled the fire, with much banging of the stove-door and thumping about of kettles. She put away the remains of the mutton, shaking her head at its burnt appearance. When the water boiled, she began to wash the delf with a good deal of clatter; and all the time her mouth was tightly shut, which Ellen knew for a stormy sign.

Another time Ellen would have been remorseful and half-frightened, but the baby kept her so busy that she could hardly help being exceedingly happy! He watched Hannah's brisk movements with interest, and evidently thought that the clatter was made for his express delight; he cooed softly, kicked his feet and waved his arms. Finally, Hannah happening to look at him, he burst into a jolly baby chuckle—surely, surely, one of the most delicious sounds in the world. Ellen laughed because the baby laughed; and Hannah, her pleasant face quite restored to its usual expression, took the child out of the girl's arms, kissed his little face, and then danced him about, saying—

"Bless his little heart! Here we go—up, up, up! And here we come—down-a-downy. Listen to that shout, Ellen,—the darling! Eh, baby, there's no—there's no fool like an old fool."

"But 'tis only for a little time, Mrs. Rule dear," said Ellen, laughing.

"Just so. Come now, you young Turk, I'll spread the shawl on the floor, and you may just sprawl about. Put the pillow for his head, Ellen; there now, he's

as safe as a bird in a cage. Let's have tea, and then you must go to Miss Mildred."

"But how will you manage about baby all by yourself?" Ellen asked slowly.

"How does any woman manage that has a baby to see to? 'Tis only because you have no experience that you could do nothing but mind him. Why, Ellen, you seem quite unwilling to go! Surely you've too much sense to be afraid, because your kind school-mistress lies there dead?"

"Oh, it's not that! It's only—the baby."

"Indeed, then, Ellen, if the baby makes you think of nothing else, and forget Miss Mildred's grief and loneliness and all her kindness to you, the sooner we're rid of him the better."

Ellen hung her head, and made no further objection, but she looked what Hannah called "glum." However, Hannah took no notice, but when tea was over, packed her off, desiring her to look in at No. 6 and tell Mrs. Collins that she had not time to go to her that evening, as she had intended.

"Promise me one thing, Mrs. Rule dear,—that you won't let the baby be taken away while I'm away."

"Not unless his mother comes for him; you wouldn't have me keep him from her!"

"I—believe I would," said Ellen.

"Child, child, don't let such a selfish thought enter your head. Indeed, then, you're fair crazed about the boy. But you mustn't set your heart too much on him, nor give way to wrong feelings, Ellen. Good night, my dearie, good night."

Ellen had no difficulty in obtaining an interview with Mrs. Collins; the difficulty was to put an end to it. First she had to answer dozens of questions about the baby, and what the police said, and if they had caught the old woman in the red shawl.

"And they ought to know her by the shawl," Mrs. Collins remarked, with an appearance of great depth.

Seeing symptoms in her victim's movements of an inclination to make off, Mrs. Collins put forth her hand and took firm hold of Ellen's cloak. Then Ellen made a great mistake. She said—

"Do let me go, Mrs. Collins. Miss Mildred may be wanting me; she's alone."

This entailed, of course, another long cross-examination about the Cartwrights. And not until she had completely mastered that question, did Mrs. Collins set the girl free.

Altogether Ellen reached her destination in a rather cross mood. But when she saw her kind friend, who had taught her so much and been so good to her, everything else was forgotten, and the two girls cried together and comforted one another, as Hannah had hoped they would.

Ellen stayed with Miss Mildred until the day of the funeral: went with her to see the last of the good, brave, patient woman, who was at last resting from her labours, and then helped her to pack up such things as she wished to take with her. Mrs. Green was to dispose of the furniture. Mildred was to stay with Hannah for a couple of days.

"And you'll see baby," said Ellen, proudly; "he's such a beauty, Miss Mildred, I know you will like to see him."

Having no special turn for babies, and being sad at heart, and dreadfully afraid of her interview with Mrs. Anstruther, Miss Mildred rather disappointed Ellen, though she said at once that he was a beautiful child.

Next day, they were all sitting in the parlour, when once more Mrs. Anstruther's carriage rolled up to the door. The tall footman once more seemed determined to batter in the door if he failed to shake the house down, and Mrs. Collins stood at her door and saw the lady in the silk dress enter Hannah Rule's house.

"Some people has all the luck," was her comment; "that's a golden sovereign in her pocket, I'm very sure."

"This is Miss Cartwright, ma'am," said Hannah, when her visitor was in her parlour. "Ellen and I will leave you to settle things with her. You're looking a bit better, Mrs. Anstruther!"

"A very little bit, Hannah, I fear. Eh! A baby! Now, where did you pick up that baby, Hannah? You see, Miss Cartwright, I have to speak sharply to Hannah, because she might otherwise be persuaded to take care of every baby whose mother was too lazy to take care of it herself. But what a lovely child!"

"If you could find him his mother, ma'am, lazy or not lazy, you'd be doing what the police can't do, as yet. I only have him while they are seeing about it."

"Do not leave us, Hannah, till you have told me all about it. Did you find him yourself?"

Mrs. Anstruther made a sign to Ellen to put the baby upon her lap.

Instead of doing this, Ellen went quickly towards the door. Hannah, thinking that she had misunderstood the sign, intercepted her retreat, took the child, and gave him to Mrs. Anstruther, wondering why Ellen looked so piteous. As to Ellen, she was so taken up with the baby, that she thought every

one wanted him as much as she did, and fully expected Mrs. Anstruther to propose carrying him off, as well as Miss Mildred.

"And Mrs. Rule will never say no to her!" thought poor Ellen, and stood by in an agony while the lady looked at the child, and played with him.

For some unknown reason, the baby was highly delighted, showed his satisfaction by poking a fat finger into Mrs. Anstruther's eye, and perfectly bubbled over with shouts and laughter.

"Well, he 'is' a lovely child! One would think he knew me, Hannah. Tell me all about him, please."

The story was told, and by the time it was finished, Mrs. Anstruther's object in asking for it was gained, for Mildred Cartwright had recovered her self-possession.

"Here, Ellen, take him; he's very heavy." Then, as she kissed him, she whispered: "Ah, Baby, if I had—Good-bye, you dear little fellow."

Ellen seized her treasure and fled, and Hannah only waited to say—

"You'll let me give you a cup of tea before you go, ma'am." And then hastened to the kitchen, where she had all things in readiness to bake some very special tea-cakes to which "Miss Geraldine" had of old been fondly attached.

As soon as all was ready, Hannah said—

"You won't mind staying here with baby, Ellen? You see, Mrs. Anstruther lost a little boy of about that age, and I just saw she was thinking of it."

"Oh no; I don't mind at all. I had rather stay here. But, Mrs. Rule dear, you 'won't' give her the baby, even if she asks for him?"

Hannah laughed. "Ellen, if the Queen happened to pass up Wellington Row, which she has never done in my time, you'd think she was coming for the baby. As to refusing Mrs. Anstruther, it would not be easy to me to do that, I confess." And, lifting her tray, she went to the parlour.

"Oh, Hannah! Surely I see the very cakes you used to make for us, and bake on a flat pan over the nursery fire! Yes, I will have some certainly, and they will very likely disagree horribly with me, and Miss Cartwright will have to nurse me. All your fault, Hannah; for you know my weakness for these cakes, and should not tempt me. Miss Cartwright will come home with me now, Hannah. She will be such a comfort to me that I cannot wait. She can get what more she requires as easily with me as here. Hannah, what shall you do if the child remains unclaimed?"

"The police say they will take him to the workhouse, ma'am."

"He would be better off at Armine's Trust than there. It is really well managed now, and the boys get a very good plain education; of course he would be at the girls' house till he is four years old. I will manage all that for him—or, rather, for you. Why, Hannah! You never think of keeping him?"

"Oh no, ma'am. You see, either Ellen or I must stay at home to mind him, and 'twould prevent her getting on with the cooking. But it 'does' go to my heart, remembering Ellen, as she was when she came to me, to think of that baby at Armine's—though no doubt the workhouse is worse."

"Armine's is better managed now, really. I suspect you have let that baby creep into a soft corner in your heart, Hannah. Now mind, I will gladly help you about him."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I really could not do with a baby at all. Mrs. Anstruther, I am thinking you're a bit more like yourself than when I saw you the other day?"

"Yes, I am, indeed. In the first place, the perfect quiet has rested me; and in the second, that wicked old Dr. Hammond has confessed to me that he made the worst of my illness, because he knew that nothing but a good fright would make me give up all my engagements. I shall never be fit for a busy life again, but I shall most likely come back from the Engadine for the summer pretty well. I dare say Miss Cartwright and I shall find something to do in a quiet way."

She took Hannah's hand in hers, and whispered, "And I shall not forget what you said, Hannah; I will try to learn my lesson."

"Bless your sweet heart," said Hannah, with tears in her eyes. "And when do you go, ma'am?"

"On Monday next; so this is good-bye. But if that baby refuses to turn out, I am to pay his expenses. You will lose by having him, you see."

"That's true, ma'am; and I would not let pride stand in my way. But I don't mean to keep him."

Miss Mildred came back, having packed up her things, and said good-bye to Ellen. And soon the carriage rolled smoothly away, leaving foolish Ellen with the feeling that Baby had very nearly been reft from her by Mrs. Anstruther.

Chapter X

Fanny

A MONTH elapsed from the evening on which Ellen brought home the baby, and the police had failed to find out anything about it. And the baby had not been sent to the workhouse. During this month the tall sergeant had called once or twice to say that he was doing all he could, and at the end of the month he came again.

"This is a bad business," he said, looking at the pretty child in Ellen's arms. "You can't be expected to keep him for ever, ma'am."

Poor Ellen! Her heart sank terribly.

"I suppose I must take him to the workhouse," went on Sergeant Boxer.

And to Ellen's great relief Hannah replied—

"No, sergeant; I can do better for him than that. A lady has offered to place him in Armine's Trust, where he'll be well-educated. She's abroad at present, but I can write to her any day. However, we'll wait another month first, if you think there's any chance?"

"Well, not much, ma'am. I suppose that, after all, though he is such a fine child, he's no more than any other London waif. If he was the child of well-to-do folk, we should have heard of his parents by this time."

"He's not a common child," said Hannah; "at least, I feel sure of it, and so does Dr. Jephson."

"And so do I," said Ellen, gazing fondly at the child.

"Oh, but 'you' think he's an angel, Ellen! I believe you're expecting his wings to grow. But when we got him, he was so well fed, and so clean-looking—I mean so white and smooth, you know—that I'm sure he doesn't come of people like the old woman who left him with Ellen."

"No," said the sergeant, "better than that, I grant you. But he's as fat and as white now as he was then; and so he always would if he belonged to you."

"Yes; but 'tis not people like me that make a bundle of their baby and make a present of it to the first person that is innocent enough to take it."

"There's something in that, surely. Well, I'll keep you informed, ma'am."

"Then you'd better begin by getting some information, sergeant. Good-bye. Ellen, we'll keep the child till Mrs. Anstruther comes home. 'Tis no doubt a loss of time for you, but you're young, and you don't begrudge it."

"Oh no, the little darling! How he does grow! I wish we knew his name; we can't go on calling him Baby for ever."

"No, we must have a name for him. It was in Princess Street you found him; however, we can't call him Princess. No, but we'll call him Prince. Jack Prince—Jack's a fine name for a boy. There now, Baby, I've given you a name, and truly I hope you'll soon bear your own name again, you poor unfort'nate mite."

Ellen did not much admire the name, but she soon became quite fond of it. Privately, she called the child Prince Jack instead of Jack Prince, which gave her a good deal of satisfaction. And he was to go to Armine's Trust when Mrs. Anstruther could get him admitted—so Hannah told Mrs. Collins, who told every one else. But I am afraid that in her secret heart, Hannah knew by this time that he would never leave her care except to return to his real home, if that day ever came.

Reckoning that Jack was six months old when he first came to Wellington Row, he was a year old when the next remarkable event took place there. It was then April, and Mrs. Anstruther was on her way home. Miss Mildred, who had written several times to Hannah during the winter about Mrs. Anstruther's health, wrote now that they were to be in London for a few days, but that they would probably spend the summer quietly in the country. For, though really much better, Mrs. Anstruther was not equal to London during the season.

Ellen was out one day, and Hannah was in the parlour, busy with her needle, and watching Jack, who was crawling about on the floor, making the painful discovery that the legs of chairs and tables were hard compared with his head—a fact which everybody must discover for himself. He did not cry when he bumped himself—he sat up and scolded.

Presently there was a knock at the door, a very hesitating knock.

And Hannah remarked aloud, "A beggar, I expect," as she rose to open the door.

But she perceived at once that it was no beggar, though the woman who had knocked was shabbily, even insufficiently, dressed, considering that though the sun was warm, the wind was sharp enough. Poor as was her dress, she wore a thick new veil.

"Haven't you a little boy here, ma'am?" she said, and as she spoke she put out her hand and steadied herself against the door-post.

"I have. What do you want with me?" Hannah said shortly; for she thought the stranger was not quite sober.



"I'm told you have a child here, and I think I can tell you who he is."

But though Hannah heard this, she took no notice of the words, welcome as they ought to have been to her. Instead of that, she suddenly laid her hand on the woman's shoulder, saying—

"Surely I know your voice—let me see who you are," and she attempted to raise the thick veil.

The other resisted this, and in her agitation, she nearly fell.

Hannah caught her and drew her into the passage, where there was a narrow bench against the wall. On this bench the stranger sank down. The parlour door was open, and Jack was standing proudly by a chair—a new accomplishment, of which he justly thought a good deal.

"Yes, there he is; that's the child, I'd know him anywhere. Oh, thank God! I shall not die with that on my conscience."

"You're my sister Fanny!" cried Hannah, excitedly. "Baby or no baby, you're my little Fanny."

The woman rose hurriedly, pushing back her veil, and Hannah decided that she had made a great mistake—this was not her pretty blooming Fanny.

Yet it was Fanny, but sorely changed. She laid her cold, trembling hands in Hannah's, and said—

"It's Hannah! Oh, Hannah, then I'm not altogether deserted. You were always good to me, always kind; you'll take care of me, even if you blame me."

"Take care of you! Ay, will I, Fanny, blame or no blame. What is it? Fanny, what ails you?"

"I'm—I'm going to faint," the shadowy creature said brokenly. And she did faint, though Hannah held her and did not let her fall.

The little boy, much interested, lost his balance, and sat down with that disconcerting suddenness to which beginners in the art of walking are subject.

Hannah lifted her sister—far too easy to lift was poor Fanny—into the parlour, fanned her, got water for her, but could not recall her to consciousness.

Meantime, Jack perceived that the hall door was open, a precious opportunity for which the enterprising creature had been longing all day. He set off on hands and knees at a marvellous pace, and was soon out on the pavement, crawling away happily, with little gurgles and crows of pure delight.

Very fortunately, Ellen was coming home by this time, and espied him. Snatching him up in spite of kicks and struggles, she flew to the open door and rushed in, crying—

"Mrs. Rule dear, what do you think? I found Jack out in the street!"

"Oh, Ellen, I want you; come here. Set him down and run for Dr. Jephson; this is my sister Fanny, and I'm afraid she's very ill."

"Oh, is she dead? Yes, I'll run." And run she did, though, after Jack's late excursion, she judged it better to carry him with her.

Dr. Jephson was soon on the spot. He succeeded in reviving poor Fanny, but she did not seem quite herself. She moaned and clung to Hannah, taking no notice of anything, even of the child. They took her upstairs and laid her in Hannah's bed; Ellen brought up a cup of tea, and when she had taken it, she fell asleep.

"She's in a terribly exhausted state, Mrs. Rule, and I'm afraid she's very ill. Now, may I ask, how did you pick her up? And are you going to add her to your family, ma'am?"

"Why, doctor, she's my sister—my only sister," whispered Hannah. "She's a deal younger than me, and she was in service in Wales, and there she married: his name is Owen Morgan, and he was a groom in the same service. After a while, he left it and took Fanny away. Mother and I had our fears that he had

been behaving ill; for a time she wrote, and then she left off, and by the time I got frightened about her—you see, mother died just then—I could get no tidings of her. I never heard of her since, and was sure she was dead, and to-day she knocked at my door. She was not seeking me; she did not know me, but I knew her voice. Then she fainted."

"But if she did not know that you lived here, what brought her to your house?" asked the doctor, who all this time was watching the sleeping woman narrowly.

"Come downstairs, and I'll tell you."

"You will not awake her easily; you can tell us here."

"No, no, come down; I will come back to her soon. Dear heart, how thin she is."

"Go on, Mrs. Rule," said the doctor; "I'll follow in a moment."

When Ellen and Hannah had disappeared, he went close to the bed and bent down, laying his ear to poor Fanny's chest.

"Ah, I was thinking so," said he to himself; and he followed the others downstairs.

"Shut the door, Ellen. I wouldn't tell you up there for fear you'd cry out. For what do you think? It was about Jack she came. She said, before I knew her, that she can tell me who he is."

Ellen grew very pale.

"Did she tell you?" asked the doctor.

"No; I knew her voice, you see. But, when she saw Jack, she said, 'Yes, that's the child.'"

"Well, this is one of the strangest things I ever heard of! Now, ma'am, if your—when your sister wakes up, get her to tell you all without delay. It is my duty to tell you that she's very ill; so ill that I don't like to undertake her case myself. If you were willing, she'd be better in St. Anne's hospital; Dr. L'Estrange is very clever about—heart disease."

"My poor Fanny! But people often live for years with heart disease. I may keep her a bit—just to—"

But something in his face made her pause.

"It is not common heart disease, Mrs. Rule. I may be wrong, you know."

Hannah sat down, and absently took the child up in her arms.

"You're not often wrong, doctor, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I know Dr. L'Estrange a little, I've met him at Mrs. Cartwright's. He's one of the kindest

men you ever knew. I'll just go to St. Anne's this minute and ask him to come here to see Fanny. I'd like to feel I'd done all I could, even if it's of no use."

"And, you know, I may be quite wrong," the doctor said.

"Ellen, you will watch her, and keep Jack quiet. If she wakes, give her some of the beef-tea we made for Mrs. Mason—just a teacup full. I'll get back as soon as I can."

"If she wakes, Miss Ellen, let me know," said Dr. Jephson. "I'll tell the old pensioner who is always about here to keep near your door. If she seems quite herself, I'll take down her account of the boy."

Ellen, who seemed half stupefied, made no answer.

"You understand, don't you, Ellen? It may be of great importance to our little Jack."

"I understand," said Ellen.

Hannah went to get ready, and was soon gone on her errand.

She was delayed some time at St. Anne's, for the doctor was busy. But when she saw him at last, he said he would be with her at four o'clock; he had an appointment which would occupy him until then. Hannah hurried home.

She found Ellen at the door, looking very much frightened.

"Is she awake, Ellen?"

"No, but somehow I got frightened. She does not seem in a right kind of sleep now. I was sending for Dr. Jephson—the man is gone for him."

Hannah hurried upstairs.

"You tried to give her the beef-tea, I see."

"Yes. She opened her eyes and I got it ready at once, but she took none. She did not seem to waken really."

"You should have sent for Dr. Jephson."

"So I did—it was only just now."

"Fanny! Fanny dear! Wake up—Ellen, this is no sleep."

"Here's Dr. Jephson."

It was then past three o'clock; Dr. Jephson tried everything he could think of, but could not rouse the poor worn out woman.

Dr. L'Estrange came punctually. But, after a brief examination, he said—"I am very sorry, Mrs. Rule. I can do nothing for her."

"Sir," said Hannah, "she knows who our little Jack is—that little fellow over there. It was to seek him she came. If she might only tell me that! For she seemed so anxious."

"She may wake up and know you. I will wait as long as I can—we may be able to give her strength to speak."

He wrote a few words and gave the paper to Jephson.

"Send me that at once," he said. He sat down and waited.

Ellen brought up the medicine he had ordered, and then took the baby off her bed, where he lay asleep, carried him to the stairs, where she sat down and rocked him in her arms.

Presently Fanny opened her eyes and looked up at her sister.

"Hannah, 'tis all in the letter."

"Try to take this," said Dr. L'Estrange, gently.

"I'm past that. I can't take it."

"It is useless, Mrs. Rule."

"I wouldn't torment her now for fifty babies," said Hannah, kneeling by the bed, holding the thin hand in hers.

"'Tis written in the letter. 'Tis all there. Now I've found the child, I'm glad to go. Always kind to me, Hannah! Ah, he's been a cruel man to me—twice—but tell him I forgave him, and if I disobeyed him, I couldn't help it. Yes, hold my hand, Hannah—for I'm passing."

"Pass peacefully, my dear. You're going home."

And with a sob, and a fluttering sigh, poor Fanny Morgan was gone.

Hannah hid her face and cried. Ellen got up and stole downstairs with the child. Dr. L'Estrange waited until Hannah raised her head, and looked at him.

"I must go, Mrs. Rule."

Hannah got up and took out her purse.

"No, no—I was of no use, you know. Indeed, from what you told me, I feared I should find it so. By-and-by you will like to know that nothing could have prolonged her life—I mean, since she came to you. She was dying, and you did all that could be done for her."

"And she's gone to a better home, sir. Fanny was a very good girl. Whatever we learn about Jack, I'm certain the fault was Morgan's, not hers. Fanny always tried to do right. She was a good Christian, when I was hard and cold. She's had a hard life with a bad husband, and if wrong was done, Owen Morgan did it, not our Fanny."

"Shall you require help, Mrs. Rule? Can I send any one to you?"

"No, sir, thank you. Ellen will give me what help I need."

But in this, Hannah found that she was mistaken, for nothing she could say could persuade Ellen to enter the room again, until poor Fanny's body had

been carried away. She became hysterical, and was really in no state to be reasoned with.

Mrs. Collins came and gave all the help that Hannah wanted. And when all was arranged, Hannah made a careful search for the letter of which Fanny had spoken, and which Hannah thought would be found in the pocket of the thin, shabby dress. But all she found there was a purse with a very little money in it, and the most diligent search failed to bring to light a scrap of writing of any kind.

"'Tis very strange, Ellen, I can find no letter."

"Very strange," echoed Ellen.

"Poor little Jack, 'tis very sad for him. I've just one hope left."

"Hope—what hope?" asked Ellen, quickly.

"The letter most likely was to the child's parents, and 'twas written before she found him. So she may have posted it before she came here. If so, there'll be something in the papers about it. Poor little fellow—it seems so sad to be so near knowing all, and yet to miss it—my poor girl was so anxious, too."

"Jack's very well off where he is," Ellen said, "and it can make no difference to your sister now."

"No, I suppose not. But her heart was set on putting it right. She spoke of blame, but I'm sure she did nothing to be blamed of her own free will. I do hope it will all come out, for her sake."

"You don't love Jack as I do, or you'd be glad to keep him."

"I wasn't thinking of myself at all, but of Fanny, and of Jack's mother, if she's alive. Indeed, I know I should miss the little rogue now."

"I wish we had never seen him," Ellen said bitterly.

"Never seen him!" repeated Hannah, surprised.

"If he's to be taken away. It's not fair—when we love him so."

"Ellen, dear child, don't allow yourself to talk like that. Jack was brought to us, to take care of and to keep safe, and it has been a great pleasure to us. But the two of us put together can't love him as his mother does, and it will be a blessed thing to give him back to her, as healthy and pretty as when we first got him."

Ellen got up and left the room.

On the day of the funeral, Mrs. Collins came to No. 3, and offered to take care of Jack, so that Ellen might go with Hannah. But Ellen refused to go, begging piteously that she might be left at home.

"Well, Mrs. Rule, I think it don't look well for you to go alone; and as my dress is black, me being a widow these many years, I'll go with you if you like, though funerals is a thing I have no liking for."

"I shall be glad if you'll come," Hannah said. "You've been real kind, Mrs. Collins."

So Mrs. Collins climbed into the mourning-coach, and, I suspect, enjoyed herself, though she remarked afterwards, that Hannah cried all the time.

"Most dispiriting, though I more than once reminded her that, after all, when the poor thing couldn't have recovered, it was a blessing that the very handsome funeral was the only expense she had to go to. Doctors and medicine are so dear."

When she reached home, Hannah went up to her room to put off her new black bonnet and shawl. To her surprise, she found that Ellen had been busy during her absence in moving the furniture of the attic in which they slept. Some time ago Hannah had said that, when summer came, they ought to put Ellen's bed into the second attic room, till now only used as a place for hanging up clothes; for she thought that three people in so small a room were too many, even though one was only a baby. Ellen had been unwilling to make the move, as she was a light sleeper, and somewhat nervous at night. Now, she had moved her bed into the second room, and also baby's cradle—he had a real cradle now, having outgrown the basket. Ellen had also made such changes in the arrangement of the original bedroom as were possible with its scanty furniture.

"The poor child," thought Hannah; "now, she fancied I would forget sooner if the room was not quite the same. But I'll keep Jack, for she'd never get a wink of sleep if she had him, and I don't mind."

To her astonishment, when she said all this to Ellen, the girl burst into tears.

"Don't thank me," she said; "and let me have baby at night! Do, Mrs. Rule dear."

"I can't indeed, honey. Growing girls must have their nights' rest, and you'd get none with Jack on your mind."

Ellen begged hard to have Jack, but Hannah was firm.

"That's enough now, Ellen. You're upset, and not quite yourself, or you'd know I am right. If it is that you think you'll be nervous alone, we'll leave the door between the two rooms open."

But Ellen did not leave the door open. Hannah suspected that she did not sleep well, for she looked white and weary, and grew somewhat lazy, seeming to care for nothing but sitting with Jack in her arms. And ungrateful Jack was always stiffening his small person, and slipping down on the floor to creep about.

"I don't think Ellen is well," Hannah said to Mrs. Collins. "If 'twasn't for the child, I'd send her to the country for a bit; she's nervous, and 'twould rouse her up."

"Then I'd rouse her with a good shaking," said the ancient Collins, briskly, with a knowing nod. "The notion of a—well, you know, she 'is' only a charity foundling—setting up to be nervous!"



"What good would a shaking do?" said Hannah.

"Oh, hire a carriage and give her carriage exercise, if you like, Mrs. Rule. You'll spoil her teetotally, I know that!"

"Mrs. Anstruther will be home soon; I'll have her advice about Ellen."

"I thought Mrs. Anstruther had nothing to do with Ellen," Mrs. Collins said sharply.

"Oh, she'll advise me. I never knew the thing yet that Mrs. Anstruther couldn't put her mind to, and advise for the best. She has more sense than most."

"If she has, she'll just approve of a good shaking, and perhaps a slap on the face," replied Mrs. Collins, with conviction.

Chapter XI

Owen Morgan'S Visit

THE spring was a very fine and early one, and Mrs. Anstruther came home before she had intended, and, as it proved, before she ought. Hannah saw her arrival in the paper; for she bought one nearly every day now, to watch for some advertisement which might concern little Jack, who grew and prospered, and was learning to walk.

Hannah lost no time in going to consult Mrs. Anstruther, for she was getting more and more anxious about Ellen, who really seemed to be losing her health completely. Mrs. Anstruther welcomed her with all her usual kindness.

"Why, Hannah, is this you? Only this morning, I said to Miss Cartwright, that we must write to you. I wanted you to see how much better I am, and how well she looks. She is out now, but will soon be here. And tell me about that delightful baby."

"Indeed, you do look better, ma'am. What does your doctor say to you?"

"Scolds me for coming home so soon, but he acknowledges that, with care and a quiet life, I may do very well. Come now, tell me what is the matter? For I know you have something on your mind."

"Indeed, I have, ma'am. You'll maybe remember my sister Fanny?"

"Oh, certainly! A pretty creature she was! She was our nursery maid after you."

"Yes, ma'am, but only for a little time. You went to the schoolroom, and the mistress got Fanny a fine place in Wales. Well, ma'am, as you may perhaps remember, she married, and we lost sight of her."

"I remember."

"I think, ma'am, her husband was a bad lot. Anyhow, about a month ago, Fanny, looking like a ghost—and not even her own ghost, so changed she was—knocked at my door, not knowing that I lived there, but having heard about the child. And she knew him the moment she saw him. But I knew her voice, and called her by name. And the surprise and joy—for she was very glad to see me—overcame her so, that she fainted. I got a doctor at once, but no one could save my poor girl. I even had Dr. L'Estrange from St. Anne's to her, but she never was able so much as to tell me the child's name."

"You do not mean that she is dead, Hannah!"

"Died that same day, ma'am. Hardship and sorrow were the cause of it, I'm sure. She was so poorly clad, and so thin, it would have gone to your heart to see her. And only a couple of shillings in her pocket. But she managed to tell me, at the last, that it was all in a letter that she had written, but that letter I could not find. I thought maybe she had posted it, but though I've watched the papers, I've seen nothing that could concern Jack."

Mrs. Anstruther asked a few questions, and heard every particular. Hannah also told her of Ellen's illness, and said she really did not know what to do for her.

"What papers do you see, Hannah?"

Hannah named one or two.

"I will watch in the 'Times,'" said Mrs. Anstruther; "it is more likely to be chosen than those you name. But I think you ought to put in an advertisement yourself."

"I'll do anything you advise, ma'am, but I don't see what I could say."

Mrs. Anstruther took up a pencil and a sheet of notepaper, and wrote as follows:—

"Fanny Morgan. The child is safe. Apply to Hannah Rule, 3, Wellington Road, Clapham."

"I think that would catch the eye of any one connected with the child."

"Yes, ma'am, but it will bring Morgan down on me, most likely; not that it matters, only, suppose he claims the boy?"

"On no account let him have the boy, Hannah."

"How can I help it, ma'am? Suppose he says it is his own child? Fanny is not here to say no, and she did not actually say it was not hers, though I am certain it is not."

"I will tell you what we can do. I am going to the Isle of Wight for a few weeks; let Ellen and the child come with me. The change is the very thing for Ellen, and the boy will be safe. I can go to-morrow. The doctor will be delighted to get me out of town. We will not have this printed till the day after to-morrow. Bring Ellen and the child here this evening, and do not tell any of your neighbours where they are going."

"You're very kind, ma'am. It seems the very best thing that could be. I'll go home and get them ready."

"Yes, and come with them, Hannah. Do not lose sight of them till you give them up to me. As poor Fanny found out where the boy is, so may Morgan, and so we must be very cautious."

"He'd have come before now in that case, I think."

"Well, perhaps; but be careful. You will see Mildred in the evening. I have to thank you for her; and she is such a good, nice girl, and a great comfort to me."

"She's a lucky girl to find such a home," replied Hannah.

And then, arranging to return at about six o'clock, she left the house and hastened home.

Ellen was out with the child, and Hannah set to work to get ready a box, and to pack up baby's belongings, and such clothes as she thought Ellen would like to take with her. She was thus employed when Ellen came home.

"Why, Mrs. Rule dear, what are you doing?"

"Packing your box, honey. Mrs. Anstruther's going to the Isle of Wight—which I believe is a lovely place—and she'll take you. The change will do you good, and you really need it, Ellen; and—"

"Oh, don't send me away! I'm not ill! I'll make myself eat, and get strong! Dear, dear Mrs. Rule, don't send me away. I shall never have the courage to come back."

Hannah stared at her, then laughed uneasily, and said—

"Is it the passage by sea that you're afraid of? Why, child, you can see the island, I've been told, when you get into the steamer. It's nothing of a passage. And how could Jack go without you?"

"Then she's going to take Jack from us? I always knew she would."

"Not a bit of it. It's only for a few weeks. Jack will be safer out of London, for I'm going to put an advertisement in the paper. Mrs. Anstruther wrote it for me. It has poor Fanny's name to begin with, and it says the child is safe, and here in this house—at least, I mean, to apply here about him."

Ellen had the boy in her arms. She set him down, and crept to a chair, into which she all but fell. She sat silent, her hands clasped, and great hot tears rolling over her cheeks.

"Now, Ellen, my dear girl, I know you must be sorry when the child is claimed, but we have no right to keep him—no right to leave anything undone that may help to find out who he is. If his rightful parents claim him, you and I must give him up with thankful hearts. But the danger is that this advertisement may bring my poor Fanny's husband on us—a bad man, I

fear—and if he knows all about Jack, he may want to take him, in order to get a reward for giving him back. He'd very likely say he was his own child, and what could we do? So Jack is safest away for a while, and you must go to take care of him."

Ellen listened attentively, but made no reply.

Hannah went on with the packing, and presently, among the girl's clothes, she came upon a big blue envelope, not directed, but carefully closed.

"What's this?" she said. "Some of your school papers, I suppose? It may as well stay at home."

Ellen was crimson, and then pale in a moment.

I think, had Hannah looked at her, she would have opened the envelope. But she did not look, and Ellen, quieting herself as well as she could, said—

"I'd rather take it with me, please."

Hannah tossed it in.

"Now we must have something to eat, and then we'll go. We're to be at Mrs. Anstruther's at six. We'll get a cab, but we won't go all the way in it, but get a second—you see, I don't want any one to know where you are going, and then they can't tell if they're asked. And I'll write and tell you if anything happens—you shall know at once."

She looked at the girl, and added fondly—

"Indeed, 'tis time you got a change or something to set you up. You've never been the same since the day my poor Fanny came to me. You got a great fright that day, Ellen, but you must try to forget it, or you'll end in being downright ill. You'll have a lovely time now, with Miss Mildred too, you know. You'll be quite sorry to come back to me."

Ellen got up and hurried over to her, flung her arms round her, and clung to her, crying out—

"Oh no! 'Tis you—you'll maybe love me no more! Oh, I wish—I wish—I'm so miserable—I'm such a coward—I don't know what I'm saying. Only promise me—promise me you'll not give me up! You won't leave off loving me!"

"Now, Ellen, all this fright because I let you go for your own good, just for a few weeks! Have sense, honey!"

Here Jack set up a terrible roar, being a little frightened, and decidedly of opinion that he was being neglected.

But for once Ellen did not run to console him. She clung to Hannah, crying—

"Promise me—do promise!"

"Not to forget you in six weeks or so? I may promise that for sure, unless I lose my senses. So, after all, Ellen, you think that you and I can be enough for each other, even without Jack?"

"I sometimes wish—I shall be glad when 'tis over!"

Hannah was rather alarmed; the usually quiet girl seemed so excited. But she said no more, and Ellen went to Jack.

All was done as Hannah had planned. She desired the first cabman to drive to a small inn, the mistress of which was one of her friends. Here she dismissed him, and presently took another cab, and was driven to Mrs. Anstruther's. When questioned by the ever-watchful Collins, she said she was sending Ellen and the child into the country for a few weeks, and managed to avoid saying more.

The advertisement came out in the "Times," and had only appeared twice when "something came of it, just as I thought," Hannah said.

She had finished her housework, and was resting before setting out to fulfil an engagement in the cooking line. She was looking at her flowers when she saw a man pass the window, and immediately there was a knock at the door.

"Well, I never saw Owen Morgan," said she to herself, "but somehow I feel sure that's him. And, if it is, I'm glad my poor Fanny is safe from him."

If the truth must be told, she felt a little bit nervous, and, after a moment's consideration, she opened the window wide and pushed aside the stand of flowers, so that any one passing by could look in. Then she went to the door.

"Is your name Rule, ma'am?" said the stranger, a short, powerful-looking man, with beady, black eyes, a very red nose, and a very bad expression of countenance, at once fierce and cunning.

"Yes, I'm Hannah Rule."

"Is my wife here?—Your sister Fanny?"

"Then you're Owen Morgan. No, my poor sister is not here. She came to me some time ago."

"About a child that some woman handed over to you, or to some one belonging to you?"

"Yes."

"And where is Fanny now?"

Hannah looked at him in silence for a moment. Then she asked him to come in.

"Step into the parlour and I'll tell you about Fanny."

He followed her, and she placed a chair for him.

"Were you fond of Fanny?" she said, looking hard at him. "I know you were not a good husband to her, but some men are not kind even to those they love."

"Oh, I'm a good enough husband, as men go," he said carelessly. "Fanny was a pretty lass when I married her, and, if all had gone well with me, I'd have made her happy; but I've had nothing but ill luck."

"If your love ran off with your good luck, it was a poor sort. But it's no concern of mine, and it don't matter to my poor Fanny now. She knocked at my door one morning, looking, as she well might, a dying woman. She fainted in the hall there. All that mortal could do for her was done—but she died before night."

"Fanny dead!" the man cried out, and then sat silent for some time.

Hannah watched for any sign of grief, but could see none. His face was grave, indeed, but he looked more like one whose plans have been upset, and require reconsidering, than like one in grief. This set her on her guard, and she determined to say as little about the child as she possibly could.

"Poor Fanny," he said presently. "I may say she'd have done better to stay where I left her. What about the child, ma'am?"

"Ay," said Hannah, "what about the child?"

"Where is it?"

"I've sent it to the country with a lady who offered to take it."

"You know, ma'am, Fanny came here after that child?"

"She did."

"By your advertisement, I'm sure she did not tell you who he belongs to."

"Can you tell me?" said Hannah.

Again he kept silence for some time, then said—

"I have some idea, but it suits me better to manage the matter for myself. Fanny stole him, you know."

"I don't know it; and nothing will make me believe it!"

"Oh, well, she did, all the same. She was his nurse, you see. She was in service somewhere in the country, and she did not know where I was. I had been down on my luck for some time, and had gone to America. After a time, I got employment as steward on board a liner, and made a few passages, but I've hit upon a kind of business that may make my fortune, and I wanted her to help. So I wrote to her to give notice and to meet me in London. When she got my letter, her master and mistress were away, and she came to me at once, bringing the child with her, and a lot of its clothes, which she sold. And she left

the child in the care of the old woman you know of, meaning, I expect, to get money for restoring it. I think she came back to get the child, and see what she could do. I had her in lodgings, for she wasn't able for the work I wanted her for, nor for any work at all. Last time I went back, I found she had left, and no word for me as to where she was going, but, of course, I guessed. When I reached England yesterday, I saw your advertisement in the "Times."

"That's a very fine story, Owen Morgan, but I saw you making it when you sat there silent. I don't believe it. Fanny could have stolen the clothes without stealing the child. If she had turned thief, and no one would take charge of it for her without being paid, which would be a certain expense, whereas getting money for restoring it was a very doubtful matter. She'd get taken up and punished more likely. Now, you tell me who the child is, and I'll restore him to his parents, and if there's a reward going, you may have it. I suppose that's what you're after. And that's my last word. I don't believe your story, and I won't hand the child over to you."

"I'm not quite a fool, thank you," said Morgan, with a wink; "you own to having the child, and I dare say I can manage just as well without him. I'll see his parents, and make my own bargain with them, and if you don't want to see the inside of a jail for aiding and abetting your sister in stealing the child, you'll have him here when they come for him."

"When do you suppose they'll come?"

"Oh, I've no time to lose; I must get back to the ship. Day after to-morrow say."

"I'll have him here then, and very glad I'll be to see him safe with his father and mother. But I can prove how he came to me, and the police know all about it. You won't frighten me, and I don't believe a word against Fanny."

"I believe you have the child in the house. Now, you just go for him this moment, or it may be the worse for you," Morgan began in a blustering tone. And as he spoke, he stood up and took a step or two towards her.

But Hannah's spirit was up.

"Sit down again," she said, with great contempt; "if either of us is frightened presently, it won't be me. The window's open, and there's a policeman and the old pensioner at the other side of the street, and if you go on like that, I call out to the policeman in half a moment. The child is not here, as I told you before, but I shall go for him, and bring him here. But you won't get possession of him then, or at any other time. I will give him up to his father

and mother, and to no one else. I shall ask the police to keep an eye on the house. Make what bargain you like, and can, but you don't get the child."

Morgan subsided into his chair, and quite laid aside any notion of frightening his sister-in-law. She was of stouter stuff than poor Fanny had been. Yet, had he only known it, his next words frightened her thoroughly.

"Which is the shortest way to Orfer Street? There's a place there called Armine's Trust, a kind of Foundling Hospital. I've a child in it."

"A child! Do you mean a child of Fanny's?" Poor Hannah, her voice was quite hoarse.

"Yes. Now Fanny's dead, I shall want the girl. She's old enough now to be of use. We lost the three children that were born in Wales; they died of scarlet fever. And this child came when we were in great want, and we left it where the people were sure to see it—the people at Armine's, I mean. I know they took it in. I suppose I've a right to claim her."

"How will you know her?"

"I pinned a bit of writing to her clothes, with just her name and the date on it. They'll have kept that. Maybe she died—she was a weakly brat. But if she's alive, she may be of use to me. I'm setting up a kind of eating-house, with a bar, you know, and I must have some one to help me. I'll go and ask about the girl now, and see about the other matter to-morrow."

"What's the child's name?" asked Hannah.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, she's my niece, you know."

"So she is, surely. I have the name and date in my pocket-book. Ay, here it is—

"Ellen, born August 1, 18—, and left near Armine's Trust, August 16, same year.'

"I always thought I might want her."

He got up, and looked round the comfortable room, saying—

"You seem to be very well off."

"Yes," said Hannah, rousing herself. "I have plenty of employment, and a tidy sum of money saved. And, poor Fanny being gone, her child is the only relation I have in the world. And, mind you, I as little believe that Fanny deserted her own child as that she stole the boy. The few words she said about you were,—

"'He was very cruel to me twice.'"

"And I feel sure she meant about the little girl, and about this boy. There is no use in telling that story to any one, for I'll contradict it, so you may as well speak the truth."

"You'll find your case rather hard to prove, ma'am, seeing Fanny's dead, and you know nothing about it. However, I'll say good morning now; I'll see you again perhaps."



"Not with my will, Owen Morgan. I don't want to see you again. I'll give the boy to his own parents, and to none other."

Here she shut the door, shutting Morgan out. Going to her parlour, she closed the window, pushed the flower-stand into its proper place, and sat down to think.

"My poor, poor Ellen! What can I do to save her? Mrs. Anstruther will help me, I know, if help there is. I remember thinking the child like Fanny. Let me see—I must lose no time. He'll take an hour to reach Armine's Trust, but his business there won't take long. They'll tell him that Ellen's with me, and he'll come back here at once. He'll be here in about two hours and a half. I must get away at once. I won't see him till I've made up my mind what to do. It may be best for Ellen to stay where she is. I'll go myself and bring Jack home."

She began her preparations at once by packing a few things in a little black handbag, which she used for carrying her cap and apron when she went out to her engagements. And so much was she upset by this discovery about Ellen that even the sight of the bag failed to remind her of her engagement for that day. Never had Hannah failed one of her employers before, but there was wrath and dismay in Mrs. Arnott's house that day.

She was far too early for the train to Portsmouth, but that she did not mind, as she felt safe from Morgan. And in the interval, she sent a telegram to Mrs. Anstruther, begging her to send some one to meet her when she left the steamboat, as she did not know the way. So when in due time she landed at Ryde, she found Miss Mildred waiting for her, with a little pony carriage, in which they drove what seemed a very long way, and it was rather dark when they reached "Sea View House."

"Miss Mildred, how is Ellen? Do you think she is any stronger?"

"I am afraid not, Mrs. Rule. Yet Ellen does not seem to me ill, so much as—uneasy. She was out with the child when your telegram came, or she would have come with me."

"Poor child! I'm sure I don't know how to tell her. Is this the place? Ay, and poor Ellen on the watch for me!"

And Ellen's voice called out—"Is that you, Mrs. Rule dear? Has Jack's mother claimed him?"

To Hannah's pleased surprise, the girl spoke as if hopefully; she had expected to find her in despair.

"Not yet, Ellen; but he has both father and mother, and they will claim him the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, I am thankful!" cried Ellen. "It is a burthen off my heart. You're to come to Mrs. Anstruther at once; she's longing to know all about it."

Mrs. Anstruther welcomed Hannah kindly, and would not hear a word of her story till she had had some tea and bread and butter.

"It is only my very great goodness, Hannah, that makes me able to wait; for I am just wildly curious to know how any people lost that lovely child, and took no steps to find him for nearly eight months! And now, to begin—what is his name?"

"I know no more than you do, ma'am. It was poor Fanny's husband, Owen Morgan, that saw the advertisement, and came to me. He knows the father and mother; at least, he knows who they are, and he's to see them and tell them to come to me for the child. But that's not all I have to tell."

"No; I felt sure there was something, or you would have had Ellen and the baby sent to you. Why, Hannah, you look—what is it, dear Hannah?"

"Ellen, my dear, it concerns you. I remember thinking you were like her—like my poor Fanny, but you lost the look as you grew up. You are my own niece, Ellen—my dear sister's child."

Ellen stood up, trembling all over.

"Not 'hers!'" she said. "Not Fanny's—who—died at our house?"

"Yes, dear. I never had but one sister."

Ellen uttered a kind of wail—it was really the most piteous sound possible. She slipped down on her knees, and hid her face in her hands.

"And she was my mother—and I—"

"How could you know it? But I don't wonder you feel it like that. It was very pitiful—my poor Fanny. But I must consult Mrs. Anstruther, and get her advice as to the best way of defending her character, and I must say things you had better not hear, Ellen. So go away, dear, just for a time."

"No; I want to know all. Let me stay."

"She must know some day, Hannah. Let her stay."

Then Hannah told the story of Morgan's visit; his assertion that Fanny had stolen the boy, and his determination to claim Ellen. Poor Ellen still knelt in the same place, with her face hidden, but she listened intently.

"I do not think you need alarm yourself, Hannah. I will speak to my solicitor—a man of such a character will not be allowed to remove Ellen from your care. Besides, Mr. Hastings will no doubt prosecute him—he will not trouble you, I suspect. You will not lose your child."

"Oh, she has lost her!" said Ellen. "She'll be glad to let me go, and I deserve it—I deserve anything. I've acted so that no one can ever love me again. I'll go with him—he's good enough for me."

"What on earth can the child mean?" Hannah whispered anxiously.

"Ellen," Mrs. Anstruther said, "I have more than once told you that I feared you had something on your mind. Speak out now; what is it?"

"I must speak out," Ellen said, "if such things are being said of my mother. Only that she is my mother, I don't think I ever could do it. Mrs. Rule—oh, dear! it's like killing myself—you'll hate me; you won't be able to help it. That day when she came, you went for a doctor and left me with her, bidding me send for Dr. Jephson if she woke up able to speak. She did wake; you were not long gone when it happened. She told me of the letter, and made me get it out of her pocket. She bid me give it to you. She said,—

"It tells the whole story as well as I could write it. But if I die before Hannah comes back, ask her not to use it against Owen if she can help it.'

"And she told me something about how he took the child, but I did not understand it. I didn't send for Dr. Jephson. I thought if I kept the letter, Jack would not be claimed. I gave her beef-tea, but she did not take much. She asked me how old I was, and said that would be the age of a little girl that she lost. She said I was very kind. Oh she little knew! She seemed very drowsy, and fell asleep again. It was then, while I was sitting by her, that I made up my mind to keep Jack if I could. I've never had a happy moment since. I even thought I'd read the letter—I never opened it—and some day when you were out, I could take him to his people. I had fifty plans, but I never meant to tell, because I knew you would say I had done a wicked thing. But if she was my own mother, and would be thought to have stolen the baby, I feel I must tell. Now, I've told, and I wish I could hide myself away."

There was a long silence, only broken by Ellen's miserable sobs.

At last, Mrs. Anstruther said—

"Have you the letter here, Ellen?"

"Yes, ma'am, in my box."

"Go and get it. Bring it here at once."

Ellen got up, made her way to the door as if she were blind, and presently came back with a big blue packet, which Hannah recognized at once.

Mrs. Anstruther held out her hand for it, saying—

"May I open it for you, Hannah? Ellen, remain here, if you please."

She broke open the envelope, and took out several papers, all folded up in a large sheet of foolscap, all covered with writing. This was poor Fanny's letter. It began—

"HONOURER MASTER, "I write this in fear that I may be prevented seeking the child. I cannot bear to think what you and my dear kind mistress have suffered. I am very ill—I know I am a dying woman—so you will believe what I tell you. "When you landed me and the baby at Southampton along with Derrick, we did just what you told us. We went to London. When we got there, Derrick told me to wait a bit in the station, and he would go to the lady, and get her to send her carriage for the child, for he heard there was so much illness about that he did not like to take him in a cab. We stayed in the waiting-room; but the baby began to cry, and I got up and walked him about. I went out on the platform. There I met my husband, Owen Morgan. You did not know I was married, for he had deserted me; and as all my discharges

were in my old name, Rule, I somehow went back to it. "Owen said he was in search of me; he wanted me at once. I begged and prayed, but he would not even wait till Derrick came back; but he said he'd send the child home in the evening. He was not quite sober, and he got a cab and put me and baby in it, and the box I had in the waiting-room, that you told Derrick to be so careful of. Owen had lodgings in a horrid low place, and here he kept me and the child in spite of all I could say. He said he had friends going to America, and I should go with them; he would not lose sight of me, as he had the luck to pounce on me. The child was very fretful, from the bad air and bad milk, and not like his dear little self. One morning when I woke, the child was gone. Owen said he had taken it to a woman he knew, who would take care of it for awhile, and that when you were well frightened you would give a round sum to get him back. I nearly went mad, but he did not care; he sent me off to New York with the people he had spoken of. He himself was employed as steward on board an American liner, so he soon joined me in New York. I was never allowed to write a letter, and I had no money, for he took both my own and what you gave me; and he took the box, and I know he opened it. When he came he told me the child was dead. I was very ill, and that killed me—I'm dying now. "I cannot remember how long it was when I saw a letter from London to Owen, and I read it. It was signed Martha Jacobs, and she wanted money, and would tell the police about the child, and where it was, unless he sent the money. She would tell him where it was if he promised her half the reward. "I said nothing of having read this letter; but I got away. I took a little money, but I felt it was right—he had taken yours. So I took my passage, and got safe to London. I found the woman, her address being on her letter, and by threatening to go to the police, I made her tell me where the child is. But for fear I may not live to see the child, for I feel so very bad, I write this to make all sure; he is at No. 3, Wellington Row, Clapham, and is well and well-cared for, the woman says. That you may be sure this comes from his nurse, I send copies of my discharges—you have the real ones; and I send your letter that I was to give your cousin. I hope my mistress has not had to know the baby was lost, for it would nearly kill her; but indeed, sir, I was not to blame, unless for not telling you that I was married. "Now I remember that I do not know where this letter would find you, I must take it to Mrs. Amesbury's house, and she will direct it to you. I should like to know that you believe my story, but I never shall. I feel sure I am near death. "I remain, honoured master, "Your poor, unhappy servant, "FANNY MORGAN (or RULE)."

Hannah was crying, if less miserably, quite as bitterly as Ellen.
The unopened letter enclosed was addressed to:
"Mrs. Amesbury, 15, B— Square, London, W."

Chapter XII

Master Hastings

"MRS. AMESBURY!" exclaimed Mrs. Anstruther. "Now I can tell you who your little Jack is! I can even make a good guess at the solution of the mystery, for a mystery I have always thought it. How such a child could be lost and never inquired about! He must be the son of Mr. Hastings, of Cotherby, in Yorkshire. Mr. Hastings is a most excellent good man; I am glad to think the child belongs to him. Mrs. Hastings is very young, ever so much younger than her husband—a sweet little thing, and quite a beauty. She was very ill when the child was born, and never regained strength; in fact, I heard that she had lost the power of walking without help, and I know that Mr. Hastings was advised to take her to sea in his yacht, and keep her away for months, as her best chance of a cure.

"They sailed, I know, taking the child with them, but I suppose it did not answer, and they must have put back to Southampton, and landed poor Fanny and the baby, and this Derrick, to go to Mrs. Amesbury, who would take good care of them, for she was very fond of the Hastingses. But when Derrick reached her house, he would have heard that she was very ill; she had a dreadfully infectious fever, and she died, poor thing; in fact, this Derrick may have found that she was dead. So, you see, she never heard about the child, and the Hastingses probably got no letters for ever so long, as they have been sailing about, keeping at sea as much as possible. I dare say it was hearing of Mrs. Amesbury's death that brought them home, for I think they meant to be absent much longer—they are at home, I know. I only wonder what became of Derrick, whoever he is."

"Well," said Hannah, standing up, "'tis clear to me that to let Owen Morgan get a reward for such a piece of villainy would be just a sin. I'll take the child to town at once, and take him to his father's house to-morrow early; that is, ma'am, if you can give me his address in London."

"I can do that. But you will weary yourself to death going back to town to-night. Let us send a telegram instead."

"I'd rather go, ma'am. Telegraphs are all very well, but I never feel as sure of them as I should like to feel about this. If the poor lady is ill, nothing will make her feel easy about her child like having him in her arms. Then Morgan

will go to the house and find his game is up, and he'll come direct to me. I want to see him and to tell him that he won't get Ellen, that is, if you're certain sure, ma'am, that she will not have to go with him?"

Ellen looked up for the first time. "Maybe I had better go," she said, "for oh, I don't see how you're going to bear the sight of me again; I've been so wicked."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Anstruther, "I must say, Ellen, that you take more after your father than after your mother. I do not know how Hannah can feel the same to you."

"Ah, ma'am, don't you be too hard on Ellen. She's been a good girl, I can truly say, all the years we've been together, and this was just a sudden temptation. She's had few to love, and she set her heart on Jack, and never would allow a word said of parting with him; and so, when the temptation came, she fell. But I'm very sure she couldn't have kept it up. She'd have told me all when she came home, even if all this had never happened, now wouldn't you, Ellen?"

"I would have tried. I meant to try. But I'm not sure that I'd have had the courage. I was very near telling Miss Mildred, when she said she saw I was miserable. I could take no pleasure in the child, though you know how I used to love him; indeed, I love him still, but yet I could not bear to look at him."

"Please let me say a word," put in Mildred Cartwright, who had not hitherto spoken. "Ellen really did begin to tell me why she was so unhappy, but her courage failed. She was always very timid."

"And I must say," Mrs. Anstruther added, "that she has been exceedingly unhappy. I am sure she says what is quite true when she says that."

"And she told us all as soon as she knew that my poor Fanny was her mother. Ellen," went on Hannah, stretching out her hand and touching the girl gently, "I don't tell you to forget all about it, for that you couldn't do, nor ought to do, but I will never mention it to you as long as you live and I live. Give me your hand, child. Why, you're as cold as ice, and shivering. You can't come with me to-night, that's very plain. But if Mrs. Anstruther will keep you for a few days, it will be better in every way."

"Of course I will keep her, Hannah. She is really safer here in every way, as you say."

"Now go, Ellen dear, and take Jack up and get him dressed. Wrap him up well. I shall be in time for the night mail, if you'll send me back to Ryde, ma'am."

Ellen rose and left the room. No punishment could have been devised for her, short of handing her over to her worthless father, more severe than this; for she was at all times afraid of Mrs. Anstruther, and just now would have done anything rather than face her. But she made no resistance; she felt that she deserved it.

She dressed the child carefully, and if he caught cold, it would not be for want of wraps.

Hannah took poor Fanny's papers and a note from Mrs. Anstruther to Mr. Hastings, and was soon on her way to Ryde. Without meeting with any adventure, she reached London early in the morning.

"Shall I ever forget poor Ellen's face, and how she clung to me when I kissed her? The poor thing hardly thought of Jack, though she may never see him again. Indeed, now, I think I was a bit cruel to leave her there. But still, it is for the best. Miss Mildred will talk to her better than I could. And there's no saying what Morgan might do if he got hold of her."

Having slept a good deal in the railway carriage, Hannah was less tired than was to have been expected. She got into a cab and drove home, meaning to dress Jack in his best attire before she went to Queen's Gate with him. She was hardly out of the cab, when trotting down the pavement came Mrs. Collins, her head wagging portentously, and her hands uplifted.

"Oh, Mrs. Rule! Oh, such a day as I had of it yesterday! Oh to think that you could be deceiving me all these years!—To find that you are so sly and—"

"Let me pay the man and open my door," said Hannah. "I don't know what you've got in your head now, but I suppose it needn't be all said in the street. Come back for me at eleven, will you?" she said to the driver. "I want to go to—a good way off."

"Yes, mum, I will," said cabby, and departed.

"Now, Mrs. Collins, while I light the fire to get ready some food for Jack and me, maybe you'll tell me what bee you've got in your bonnet now?"

Mrs. Collins, foreseeing tea and more solid refreshment, sat down and moderated her tone a good deal.

"I see you've brought the baby back, Mrs. Rule; but where's Ellen?"

"I left her behind," said Hannah.

"And that's all I'm to hear, I suppose. Well, you've no friendliness in you, Hannah Rule! To go away and lock your house up, and never give me a hint of it! Why, I was so certain you'd be home presently that I asked him into my

kitchen to wait for you, and wait he did, decent man, for a length of time, and bid me say he'd come again when he could."

"And who was it, Mrs. Collins? You've not named him."

"Who should it be but your brother-in-law, Mr. Morgan? And you know well enough what he wanted, ma'am. He'd been to Armine's Trust and claimed his child, and found that you had removed her long ago, and never told him when he spoke about her that very morning. But, as I said to him, that's Hannah Rule! Secret as secret, she is. What's her conduct to you compared with her conduct to me? I said. Seven years she has had the girl and never told me she was her own niece; ashamed no doubt of her having been reared in a foundling."

"I couldn't tell you what I did not know myself, and I am not bound to tell you anything. Did Morgan say anything more?"

"Nothing much. He talked of his business, that he means to put Ellen into."

"Ay, indeed? Will you have a cup of tea? 'Tis made now."

"Thank you. If he comes again while you're out, what am I to tell him?"

"Just tell him all you know," said Hannah, with a private chuckle.

Mrs. Collins finished her tea and trotted home; being a woman of a slow intellect, it did not strike her at the time that she knew nothing.

"And there'd have been no use in questions," she muttered when this idea occurred to her. "I will ever say, 'Hannah Rule is as close as wax.'"

Hannah, in her decent mourning, and Baby in his clean white frock and cape, drove up to the door of a great mansion in Queen's Gate, at a little before twelve o'clock. Before the cabman knocked at the door, Hannah tenderly kissed the bright little face, and said—

"God bless you, little Jack! I fare to feel quite low, parting with you."

A footman opened the door, and Hannah asked if Mr. Hastings were at home.

"He is," said the man, eyeing her and the child closely.

Hannah dismissed her cab, and handed Mrs. Anstruther's note to the servant.

"Will you take that to your master if he's alone. Don't let Mrs. Hastings see it. Is she better?"

"Not much," he said, looking at her hard. "I wonder—"

He took the note, showed her into a small room off the hall, and hurried away.

Long before Hannah thought it possible, the door was flung open, and an elderly looking gentleman came hurriedly in. The footman was behind him.

"A child, did you say?"—Then his eyes met Hannah's and he became silent; his lips moved, but no words were heard.

"Are you Mr. Hastings, sir."

"Yes. And you?"

"This is your boy, sir. You may believe me, indeed; I can prove it beyond a doubt. I'm Fanny's sister."

"Freeman—shut the door—stay here: not a word must be heard of this, till I am sure. Yet I 'am' sure! The child is so like its mother."

Hannah set the boy on the floor; he could walk a little now, but he stood holding her dress and staring at his father.

"If you'll glance at this, sir, it will make all clear." And she gave him Fanny's packet of papers.



His hands shook and his eyes were dim, but he forced himself to read Fanny's letter and to look at the other papers.

Then he gazed at the boy, as if he could never gaze enough.

But Jack hid his face in Hannah's dress after a minute or so.

"It is seven months since he was lost," Mr. Hastings said, rousing himself. "Where has he been?"

Hannah told her story briefly. While she spoke, Mr. Hastings lifted the child to his knee and held him in a close embrace.

"It seems all quite certain," he said, "and Mrs. Anstruther answers for you—she knows you. I owe you more than I can ever tell you. It may be that I owe you my wife's life. My little Alaric, the sight of you may save her. It is but a few hours since I had to tell her that the child was lost. I have known it myself for some time, but we were at sea, and my letters kept following us about. I could not leave her, so I was forced to bring her home, and I have put her off with excuses. But she began to suspect, and we had to tell her. And now, how to tell her that he is found, I really do not know—the shock nearly killed her, and this will be as great."

"But quite different, sir. Joy never hurt any one yet, that I heard of. Just carry Jack—you'll excuse me, but that's what we call him—to her door and let him toddle in; he can walk grand, holding your finger; and you'll see how she'll rejoice. Let me take off his hat—look at his pretty curls! Believe me, sir, 'twill be new life to her, just to twist one of them round her fingers."

But Jack, or Alaric, call him which you will, declined with piteous whimpers to be separated from Hannah, and she had to go upstairs with him to the lady's dressing-room, or rather to the door of it, attended by Mr. Hastings and followed by the footman, who carried Mr. Hastings's hat!

At the door Mr. Hastings came to a stand.

"I dare not do it," he whispered. "I had better send for the doctor—she is so weak, poor child."

"Well, sir, if it will be a relief to you," said Hannah.

So Freeman was despatched for the doctor, and Hannah was conducted to a distant room, there to await his arrival. In a short time, they were joined by Dr. Marshall, who looked quite excited.

"Your servant has been telling me, Mr. Hastings. Well, you cannot doubt that this is the child! He is the image of his mother. Eh, little fellow! We'll soon have your mother well now. You must tell me all about it some other time; the fact that he is here, safe and sound, is enough for me just now. My patient's state has really alarmed me."

By Dr. Marshall's advice, no time was lost. They all went to the poor mother's room at once. But Hannah and the child remained hidden by a

screen which was drawn across the door, while the doctor and Mr. Hastings tried to prepare her for the sudden joy that awaited her.

But the poor little lady—a fragile, lovely creature, who was really only nineteen, and did not look fifteen, with her short, curly hair, just like Jack's—was in so low and despairing a state of mind that it seemed impossible to rouse her to hope.

"Oh, I know my baby is dead; you may as well tell me all at once!" she said hopelessly. "Why did we ever part with him? But I know it was not his nurse's fault; she was very fond of him."

"God bless the dear little soul for that word!" murmured Hannah.

And, getting impatient at the slow progress the two gentlemen were making, she took the law into her own hands. Instead of trying to keep the child quiet, she made a face at him which never failed to send him into a jolly fit of laughing. At the sound, the lady started, and Hannah never forgot her cry of half-terrified delight.

"Is it—oh, can it be 'my' baby?"

Hannah walked round the screen, set Jack on his sturdy little legs, and led him up to the sofa.

"Ah! If Ellen could only see that, she'd be glad to give him up," said Hannah.

At first, Mrs. Hastings could only hold the child close, and gaze at him. But he put an end to this state of things, of which he greatly disapproved, by raising a tremendous shout, and holding out his arms to Hannah. And Mrs. Hastings, who for many a day had been unable to bear the least noise, listened to his howls with a tearful smile of bliss, and said—

"What a great big noise he makes; he must be very strong."

Hannah quieted the child, and persuaded him to kiss his mother, which he did with a loud hearty smack, which amused her highly. Then Master Hastings laid his head down on Hannah's shoulder, and uttered a kind of humming noise, which, she said, meant that he was sleepy; and the mother was astonished at his cleverness. When he was asleep, she said—

"Lay him here, please. I want to be sure it is all true."

Then there was a great talk. Hannah felt real gratitude when the pretty little thing cried over poor Fanny's death, saying—

"I knew she was not to blame; she loved baby."

Hannah had to tell her story more than once, for Mr. Hastings wanted to write it down.

"All this time," he said, when he laid down his pen, "neither of us, Grace, has thought of thanking Mrs. Rule for all she has done for our boy. And her niece, too, who has been so fond of him. I really do not know how to thank you. You must have been at considerable expense, too, as the child had no clothes when he came to you."

"I cannot bear to talk of 'that' part of it," Mrs. Hastings said, taking Hannah's rough hand in her little delicate ones, "for she never minded, but did it for kindness' sake. And though I cannot 'ever' say all I feel about it, she knows."

"Indeed, ma'am, I do. And, if I may say it, I truly did it partly because Ellen took so to the child, and partly for His sake Who blessed the little children. As to expense, I was at none worth mentioning except the clothes, and as I always thought his people were not poor, I kept all the little bills, thinking they would rather pay for them. But if I may ask a question or two, I would like to do so."

"Certainly; anything you want to know."

"Well, sir, what do you mean to do about Owen Morgan? I want to have some notion what I may expect 'him' to do."

"I shall have a policeman here to meet him if he comes. There were some valuable ornaments in that box; things I bought at Malta."

"Then you'll give him in charge, sir? I dare say that will be best for us, too. Ellen is timid, and I don't want her to be frightened by him, and I think he won't care to draw attention to himself when he is at liberty again; so I've nothing to say against that. The other question is, what sort of man was the servant you sent with my poor Fanny? And what can have become of him?"

"Derrick? He is a very old man, and was my valet for years; a good, honest man, and an old family servant, really attached to us. I cannot imagine what has become of him. He must have arrived at my poor cousin's house on the very day of her death, but none of her own servants saw him. Many of them had been sent out of the house, and of course there were strangers, nurses, and so forth, who would have told him what had happened. I suppose he went back to the station, and found the nurse and child gone, but I should have expected him to go to the police—to telegraph to me. I cannot understand it at all. But I have been so completely in the dark that I have been unable to make inquiries with any chance of success."

"Was he leaving your service, sir?"

"Not at all. The idea of parting with old Derrick! He had attached himself to the child, and insisted on coming with us to attend to him. So, when we sent the boy back, he naturally went with him."

"And did he never call here, at your own house sir?"

"No; nothing has been heard of him."

"Well, I would seek him in the hospitals nearest the station, sir. A very old man—the shock of losing the child might make him ill, or, he might meet with an accident. Some way, that is what seems likely to me."

"A very practical idea; but there are one or two things that we must arrange before I go about that," said Mr. Hastings. "Could you stay with us, at least for a time, until the boy knows us a little? I have an idea that he will shout for hours, if he finds himself among strangers."

"I don't doubt that, sir. I can stay very well, but I must go home to lock up my house. And I cannot stay long, for I have a good business connection, and can't afford to lose it. Besides, there's Ellen to be thought of. But if you'll get a nurse for the darling, I'll stay till he gets friendly with her."

She got up and turned to look at the mother and child.

"He'll sleep a good long time now, ma'am; and it would do you no harm to do the same. And you and he look like a pair of babies, I do declare! I'll come back as soon as I can, and don't you be frightened if he cries a bit. Ah, ma'am, but I'm thankful to God for this day! It's a wonderful thing for a woman like me to be allowed to do a real bit of service like this, and to finish it off so beautiful. God bless you, little Jack! You're in your right place now."

Hannah reached home to find Owen Morgan waiting at her door.

"I thought you might be coming home to-day," he said. "But where's my daughter, ma'am, and where's the child?"

Hannah opened her door, and stood in the doorway.

"Your daughter isn't in London, nor yet near it," she said. "The child is in his mother's arms, and by this time, the police are looking for you. So, good-bye, Mr. Morgan, and don't let me see your face again, for I don't care to give you in charge myself."

Morgan swore a good deal, but Hannah shut the door and let him severely alone. The sight of a policeman in the distance caused him to flee. He never troubled Hannah or Ellen again, and the police failed to find him. He returned to New York, and never visited England again.

When Hannah got back to Queen's Gate, she found the whole house in commotion. Master Hastings had awakened—hungry, frightened, and cross,

and his roars were truly awful! All the female servants were assembled in Mrs. Hastings's room, but their endeavours to amuse him, or even to get him to eat, were unavailing. However, when Hannah appeared, he was soon pacified, and consented to empty a bowl of bread and milk very promptly.

Sitting beside the child's cot that night, Hannah began a long letter to Ellen, saying everything she could think of to cheer and comfort her. And before the letter was finished, she was able to tell that poor Derrick was found.

The poor old man, shocked by the unexpected death of his master's cousin, and uncertain how he ought to act, was completely overcome by the loss of the child, and had a paralytic stroke while trying to tell the station-master what he wanted. He had been taken to a hospital, and though he was now better and had recovered the power of speech, he had become quite childish, and had been sent to the poorhouse. His master sent him to his Yorkshire home, where he was well-cared for, and lived for some months.

When Hannah was able to return home, Mr. Hastings made her many presents—among them a beautiful photograph of the child, which both Hannah and Ellen valued above all the rest of their possessions. At Hannah's earnest entreaty, the Hastingses took no notice of Ellen's concealment of her poor mother's letter, and allowed her to come with her aunt to see the little boy. And it showed how poor Ellen's heart clung to the boy, that, in spite of her feelings of shame and sorrow, she did at last go to see her darling.

"I think he knew me," she said; "but—'twasn't my little Jack, Mrs. Rule dear. Ah, I'll never let myself make an idol again; I loved him too much."

"Not a bit of it," said Hannah, in the quick, blunt way that Ellen once upon a time used to dread. "It was not him you loved too much, Ellen dear, but yourself. You did not think of what was best for him, or of his mother's grief, but only of your own pleasure in having him. It's as well to call things by their right names."

It was some time before Ellen could bring herself to acknowledge this, but she learned the lesson at last. She and her aunt are very happy together, and Mrs. Collins has forgiven Hannah for concealing the fact that Ellen was her niece.

"And I've given up denying that I knew it," said Hannah, "for it's a pleasure to the poor soul to believe it—and to come to tea because we are friends in spite of it."

The one mystery about the adventures of little Alaric Hastings that Hannah never solved to her own satisfaction was, why the woman with whom

Morgan left him gave him up to Ellen instead of restoring him to his people herself, which would have ensured a reward. But the truth was as follows:—

The child had been very fractious and troublesome, and the woman gave him a dose of some soothing mixture to quiet him. Accidentally she gave him too much, and, thinking him dying, resolved, if possible, to get rid of him.

Alaric Hastings has both brothers and sisters now, and their young mother frisks about among them, nearly as happy and joyous as the children she loves so dearly. But perhaps she would hardly have been so devoted to them had she never lost her eldest boy. For she was but a child, and a spoilt child, until that terrible trial roused her deeper feelings, and taught her to think of others as well as of herself.