

"I told you that poor Mamma fainted again and again." (Here Mr. Brereton sighed resignedly, and gave up all hopes of dining until he had heard the story of his wife's illness.) "But in the intervals between her attacks she kept asking for you, and seemed disappointed when I told her you were gone out. At last she revived strangely, and talked about you and Frank (Mr. Brereton groaned), and then she begged me to send for Mr. Carlton, but before he could reach the house she again became unconscious, and never spoke afterwards."

For two or three minutes neither father nor child moved. Then Maud said, "She told me to give you her love, and tell you that she had always loved you."

"Do you intend me to understand that Mrs. Brereton is dead?" he said at last.

Maud bowed her head.

"Speak. Answer me. Is your mother dead?"

"Yes, papa."

Another pause, longer than the last, ensued. Then Mr. Brereton turned and left the room. Before he had reached the top of the stairs Maud was again at his side. "Are you going to see her, dear papa? Shall I go into the room with you?"

"I shall not see her now. Do not detain me, for I cannot talk to you at present. Go now; I shall be ready for dinner in a quarter of an hour," replied Mr. Brereton, stroking his daughter's fair head, and giving her one kiss upon her forehead, he entered his dressing-room.

Dinner was a very silent meal that day at the Manor House, for neither Mr. Brereton nor his daughter felt inclined for conversation. As soon as the meal was over and the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Brereton took his customary seat by the fire, and Maud, having poured out his glass of port wine and placed it on a consol beside him, drew a foot-stool close to his chair and seated herself at his side. Then possessing herself of one of his hands she said, "Shall I tell you about the last few hours of her life?"

"No, my dear, no. Why give yourself the pain of repeating anything so sad?" and Mr. Brereton relapsed into silence.

Maud shrank into herself. She had hoped that the suddenness of her mother's end might have served, in some way, to call back her father's former love and sympathy. She was bitterly disappointed.

After a while he began, "I have been thinking what would be the best way of making the funeral arrangements. It must be rather a grand affair you know. The worst of these things is the expense, and your mother's doctors' bills, during the last year, have been enormous."

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