

"You are very good to say so; will you come in and have some dinner with us? Maud and I are quite alone, so there is not much inducement."

"Well, thank you, but you see my own dinner will be ready for me at home, and Mrs. Pringle is very particular that I should tell her when I am going out," hesitated Sir William.

"Never mind your housekeeper! why, man, you do not half make use of your bachelor freedom! Come in; Maud will be delighted to see you."

"But look at me. I am not fit to appear in a ladies' drawing-room," said Sir William, giving a dissatisfied glance at his dress, which, though not consisting of white tie and swallow tails, was as elegant a morning costume as any gentleman could have desired.

"Never mind your coat; I told you we should be alone."

"Well, if you will excuse it, I will run the risk of incurring Mrs. Pringle's displeasure." And so they went into the house.

Maud ran to meet her father, but drew back on finding he was not alone. She perceived it too late, however; for Mr. Brereton had heard her step, and now called her to welcome Sir William. Her greeting was cold and formal, but she was too well bred to show how wholly distasteful the presence of her father's guest was to her. She listened with praiseworthy politeness while he entreated her pardon for his intrusion, and apologized for his want of evening dress.

During dinner Maud's manner was crushingly civil, and Mr. Brereton could find no tone or action which gave him an opening for blame, although he watched her narrowly. She listened with a perfect attention, devoid of the slightest vestige of interest, to the baronet's most entertaining stories; replied with cool self-possession when he addressed her, and carefully avoided introducing any topic which might lead him to enter into any prolonged conversation with her. Almost as soon as the dessert was put upon the table, she rose and left the room.

Scarcely had she done so, when Mr. Carlton was announced. His face, pale already, grew paler when he perceived Sir William in morning dress, apparently quite at home in his neighbour's house, and the now vacant place of his host's daughter. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Brereton," he said hastily, "for intruding upon you this evening. I was not aware that you were engaged. Parish matters alone would have induced me to disturb you at this hour."

"Don't distress yourself, Mr. Carlton; sit down, and tell me what I can do for you. Take a glass of wine?" replied Mr. Brereton, in a patronizing tone.

"No wine, I thank you. I merely called to ask you if you could give me an hospital ticket for widow Baines's child. You are the only person, I am told, who has one left."