

"Maud! where are you, Maud?" cried Mr. Brereton impatiently from below.

"I am coming, dear papa," she answered.

"I shall meet you in the wood at five o'clock to-morrow evening," whispered the girl to her brother. He shook his head; and, as an inducement, she added, "I will arrange for you to see her again if you will only stop."

"Maud!" exclaimed her father.

"At the foot of the knoll at five o'clock to-morrow," said Maud, warmly pressing her brother's hand as a farewell.

Then she ran down stairs, while Frank escaped to his sister's room, for he heard footsteps advancing rapidly along the gallery.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Brereton was standing in the hall, impatiently tapping his foot upon the floor as he waited for his daughter.

"Well, my dear, I do think that when I have been absent from home for a whole day I might receive a somewhat warmer welcome upon my return," he said.

"Dear papa, I hardly expected you could reach home so early. I am very sorry I kept you waiting."

"Early! hem! Half-past six—our usual dinner hour in the summer, I think. Besides, it seemed that you could find time for chattering on the staircase. Well, how's your mother? Pretty easy?" And then without waiting for an answer he added, "We'll dine at once, and I'll go and see her afterwards. Mind you do not keep me waiting."

So saying Mr. Brereton moved towards the staircase. For a moment Maud stood watching him, uncertain whether she should tell him the ill tidings at once—those tidings for which he was evidently so little prepared—or whether she should let him rest and recruit himself, for he was very weary, and gradually to break the sad news to him. Reflecting, however, that one of the servants or the nurse might, with ill-timed well-meaningness, allude to his loss, she quickly resolved to tell him that his wife had passed away during his absence from home. So she ran after him and said, "May I speak to you, papa, before you go to your room?"

"No, my dear, no. We shall have plenty of time for conversation this evening, and I am greatly in want of my dinner," was the reply in a querulous tone.

"Papa, I must speak to you, at once: before you go up stairs, please," returned Maud firmly, but gently.