

Mrs. Brookes, whose strong point was certainly not delicacy of feeling, resulted in producing, at any rate for a time, a change in the girl's way of regarding her brother's friend. As a consequence, she became shy and quieter in his presence, and far less ready than before to ask his assistance in her troubled path.

But it was not until she had been at home for more than a week that the full force of the position broke upon her.

She was sitting at the piano in the dim light of the waning evening, singing to herself, when the door opened, and Helen appeared in evening dress. With one glance round she crossed the floor to the window, where the last rays of the setting sun fell full upon her.

"A most silly little girl it is not to come to the beautiful concert," she said banteringly to Stella. "Did she think that I would have let some bad man eat her?"

For in spite of all persuasions upon the part of her step-mother's friends, and, indeed, of Mrs. Brookes herself, Stella had been firm in her refusal to appear in public with Helen. And her persistence had angered the Countess more than that lady had, thus far, allowed to be seen. Now, however, revenge was in her grasp, and she would not forego it.

With her usual winning gentleness Stella rose and followed her across the room.

"It was very kind of you to be anxious to give me pleasure," she said. "But——" then breaking off with a start as her glance fell upon the necklace which her companion wore,—"why, where did you buy that? I have seen one of exactly the same pattern before."

It was a rather remarkable ornament, formed of pearls, set in a filigree of gold, and clasped tightly



"SHE WAS SITTING AT THE PIANO."

round the throat after the fashion of a dog-collar. Helen put up her hand and touched it.

"Ah! The too dear Madame, who is so good, she gave me my little treasure. And you like it? You think it becomes me?"

Stella had grown quite pale. Such intelligence was indeed a shock, and Helen was able to enjoy her vengeance to the full.

"It was my mother's!" the girl stammered. "Mrs. Brookes never *could* have given it to you!" And with that she hastily left the room.

But on inquiry she found that the Countess had not deceived her. The statement was only too correct.

"Why should I not do what I like with my *hown*?" Mrs. Brookes demanded. "She has laid herself *hout* to please me, as neither you nor Mary *hever* did. In one more week I draw my first dividends, too, and become a richer woman than I *hever* *he*xpected to be, thanks to 'er brother. And then you blame me for *hoffer*ing 'er some little token of gratitood!"

And Stella could do nothing but write to Mary of how the most