

Maud was watching her with a feeling of intense sympathy, but could not help observing that, in spite of the crape veil which fell over face, the dark eyes of her companion were fixed upon Mr. Carlton, with a look of enquiry, and that the pocket-handkerchief-application was not made until he was well out of sight.

"That is our church," said Maud, pointing to a spire which was visible from that portion of the road.

"Gothic, I see. That was the clergyman, I suppose, who was talking to you,—Mr. Carlton, I think?"

"Yes," said Maud, wondering how Mrs. Murray was acquainted with Mr. Carlton.

"A nice gentlemanly looking man."

Maud returned answer. She felt aggrieved that any one should venture to criticise Mr. Carlton's appearance. Then she felt she had no right to be offended at a passing observation on a stranger. Her silence, however, could have attracted no attention, for at the same moment Sir William reined in his horse by the side of the carriage.

"Excuse me, Miss Brereton," he said: "I happened to be riding along the lower road, when I saw your carriage returning from Thornham, and I thought you would forgive me for coming to enquire for Mrs. Murray. We are, you know, old friends." He smiled, and Miss Brereton bowed coldly, saying, "such a true and tried friend must indeed be a treasure."

"You are pleased to jest cruelly."

"Not at all. There is nothing in the world I desire so much as a real friend."

"There are many, I have no doubt, who would be only too thankful if you would permit them to stand in such or even in a nearer relation to you."

Maud was silent. All her old antipathy to the man, which his kindness to Mrs. Murray had temporarily lulled, had re-awakened in full force. The baronet turned to her guest. "I am glad to see you looking a little better, Mrs. Murray."

"It is due to your goodness in introducing me to such kind-friends. Ah, Sir William, it is not every poor widow who finds such noble-hearted sympathy in her sorrow."

They had by this time reached the house, and Sir William, after assisting the ladies to alight, stood hesitating a moment before he remounted his horse.

"I am sorry I cannot ask you in. Mrs. Murray I am sure must be tired, and my father is not at home," said Maud, entering the hall.