

that the household was astonished, and the housekeeper was overheard to "wonder whether, after all, Miss Brereton had a soft place in her heart for Sir William."

At length the eventful Monday came, and Maud awaited eagerly the return of the carriage which she had despatched to Thornham to get Mrs. Murray, as the railway had not yet reached that remote village. A short time before the carriage might have been fairly expected, Maud left the house, hoping to meet her guest and return with her. But she had already reached the gates of the park before the carriage came in sight, so, feeling disinclined for any further walk, she seated herself upon the trunk of a tree which had been cut down, and waited. She had scarcely done so when Mr. Carlton turned the corner into the lane. He passed her with a formal bow which made the colour leave Maud's cheek as suddenly as it had flushed into it when she heard his step. But he had hardly gone a few yards when he turned round, retraced his steps, and coming up to her held out his hand. "You are better, I hope, Miss Brereton?"

"I am quite well, thank you," she replied. "But I have not been ill at all."

"You had a bad headache, and were unable to see me when I called last week."

"No. I have been perfectly well. There must be some mistake. I know how it was," she added, quickly. "Papa must have thought that because I left the room early that evening that I was ill. However, it is of no consequence," she added, with a suppressed sigh.

Mr. Carlton, however, did not seem to be of the same opinion. His face lighted up strangely. "Sir William, too, told me when he brought the ticket, that you were too unwell to see any one." At this moment the carriage came in sight, and Mr. Carlton raised his hat. "You are expecting visitors. I will not detain you."

"Only one—Mrs. Murray. She will be with us some time, I expect. Good-bye, Mr. Carlton." This she said in a gayer tone than she had used for some time.

The carriage drew up, and Maud placed herself beside a handsome woman, dressed in keep mourning.

"Papa will be very glad to see you, Mrs. Murray. So am I," and she held out her hand.

"You are very good, dear Miss Brereton. If you only knew how sweet it is to a widowed, childless heart to hear such words as yours!—but I trust you will never know it from bitter experience." And Mrs. Murray unfolded a clean pocket handkerchief, and applied the corner to her eyes.