

CHAPTER V.

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On the following morning, Mrs. Charlston found an opportunity of speaking privately to Fred about the unfortunate affair. She told him all that Clara had said, at the same time endeavoring to make as favorable impression in her behalf as the circumstances of the case would allow; and also earnestly beseeching him to come into good terms at once with Clara.

"*Never ! never !*" ejaculated Fred.

"Why should you talk so determinately, Fred, I'm sure that Clara has given sufficient reasons to justify the circumstances of an unpremeditated act, apparently so innocent, as to be undeserving of censure."

"Were it only the first innocent act, as you consider it, I would not have attached any importance to it," said he.

"Have you really been made aware of a previous intercourse between Charles and Clara?"

"Why, yes, I have heard of it a dozen times. I was informed by letter when at Tiverton that Clara was flirting with Charlie, or as the writer expressed it: 'In your absence your old friend, Charlie Holstrom, is playing at "*catch the beau*" with your affectionate Clara.'