

irons heated at the coals—all formed a whole which was a new world to Miss Challoner, and she thought with bitterness and anger, "And it is from this place that he would bring a mistress to Donningdean!"

She looked at Elsie with some surprise as she entered, and after the first greeting, said, "I understood you were working in Mr. Barton's factory."

"My daughter was employed there," said Mrs. Ford, "but she is not strong enough for the work, and is not going there again."

"Why did you leave Mrs. Martin's?"

"I was only one of some extra assistants she required because she had several large orders at the same time. When those were finished I was dismissed like others."

"Then you were not in her employment when she recommended you to me?"

"No, madam. I was living at home then."

"And how long have you been in the factory?"

"Since last November, madam."

It struck Miss Challoner for a moment that less surprise was evinced at her visit than she would have expected; but she did not dwell on the idea. She proceeded now to her main object; and turning again to Elsie, said, "I wish to speak to your mother alone, young woman; will you leave us for a time?"

Elsie went; but though left alone with Mrs. Ford, Miss Challoner seemed at a loss how to begin what she had to say. She hesitated, commenced, and stopped again, and at last said, "Your daughter looks very delicate."

"She is not strong," was Mrs. Ford's reply.

"She is very pretty," said Charlotte, with what she meant to be most affable kindness. "I suppose you know that."

"I have heard some people say so," said Mrs. Ford, quietly.

"You are very careful of her, no doubt?"

"She is a good girl. She gives me little trouble."

Miss Challoner saw that she must come to the point without help, and plunged into the subject at once. "Do you know, Mrs. Ford, or am I the first to tell you, that my brother, Mr. Allan Challoner, has taken a

foolish fancy to your daughter's pretty face."

Mrs. Ford smiled, a peculiar smile. "I have lately heard that Mr. Challoner has honored Elsie with his notice and attentions."

Charlotte could not tell whether the words were intended to be sarcastic or not. Mrs. Ford's tone annoyed her, but she did not show it, and said, "I was not aware that you knew, and therefore thought it right to put you on your guard."

"On my guard?" repeated Mrs. Ford, in seeming surprise.

"You must be conscious, Mrs. Ford, that a marriage between your daughter and my brother is entirely out of the question. I have no doubt she is as good as she is pretty; but the difference in station would render a marriage impossible."

"I am quite aware that Mr. Challoner has no intention of marrying Elsie;" and again came the strange smile.

"Then I am sure you must see how desirable it is that she should see no more of him. He has admitted to me that his only object is a little harmless amusement. Young men do not think much of these things, but girls look on them in a different light, and her feelings might be interested in a way which by being disappointed might cause her sorrow."

"I am much obliged for your care of her." Again Charlotte could not decide whether the words were meant to be respectful or impudent. "But there is no more fear that Elsie will give her heart in the wrong place than if she was a lady born. She is quite contented with her lot, and has no desire to rise above her present station." Mrs. Ford spoke quietly, but there was a flush on her cheek and a gleam in her dark eyes which told a different story.

"I am glad to hear she is so sensible," said Miss Challoner, drawing her shawl round her as she prepared to depart. "I shall always be willing to do anything for her that lies in my power."

She bent her head, and left the room. "I am safe," she thought. "That woman is as proud as Lucifer. She would have inveigled Allan into a marriage if it had been possible; now she knows that cannot be, there will be nothing more between them. Insolent!