

reached her ear soon after her return home. "Mr. Brand is coming back," said Mrs. Accrington to her, with a meaning smile. "I hear that there are great preparations at the Red House. His wife is dead, you know."

"Indeed," said Lady Caroline, stiffly.

"Yes, died at Nice last spring or summer, I forget which; I suppose he means to settle at home now. They say he's quite a changed character."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lady Caroline.

She felt annoyed as well as anxious. Was it possible that Margaret knew that Wyvis Brand was coming home? In spite of the inveterate habit of caressing Margaret and making soft speeches, in spite also of the very real love that she had for her daughter, Lady Caroline did not altogether trust her. Margaret had once or twice disappointed her too much.

"His little boy," continued Mrs. Accrington in a conversational tone, "has been spending the time with Mr. Brand's younger brother and his wife, one of the Colwyn girls, wasn't she? And the eldest Colwyn girl, the one who sang, has been acting as his governess. She used to be companion to old Mrs. Brand you know."

"I remember," said Lady Caroline, and managed to change the subject.

She would have liked to question Margaret, but she did not dare. She watched her carefully for the next few days, and she was not satisfied. Margaret was nervous and uneasy, as she had been about the time when Wyvis Brand made his indiscreet proposal for her hand; it seemed to Lady Caroline that she was watching for some person to arrive—some person who never came. Who was the person for whom she watched? so Lady Caroline asked herself. But she dared not question Margaret.

She noticed, too, that Mr. Adair looked once or twice at his daughter in a curiously doubtful way, as if he were puzzled or distressed. And one day he said musingly:

"It is surely time for Margaret to be getting married, is it not?"

"Somebody has been saying so to you," said Lady Caroline, with less urbanity than usual.

"No, no, only Isabel; she wrote this morning expressing some surprise at not having heard that Margaret was engaged before now. I suppose," Mr. Adair hesitated a little, "I suppose she *will* marry?"