

"It's a pity women can't take things quietly," he said, "but must always rattle on in a flare-away fashion. Dorcas is quite safe—she is used to this kind of game, but you are not."

"Used to this!"

"Many and many a row about meeting her lover in the fields beyond the cottages has she had with old Adam—"

"Her lover!" repeated Mabel; "she has a lover then?"

"To be sure; she was as agile as a cat after him too; she would cross the river with one spring—there was no keeping that madcap on the premises when she wanted to get off them. She—"

"Tell me all this another time," said Mabel, restlessly; "I must go to St. Lazarus to-night."

"You will never find her," said Peter; "she will return as she came, by the field-path, which you do not know."

"So that she has met with no harm, I shall not care for that," replied Mabel; "I shall not be long away—anything that you require, ring that bell for."

"I shall want some supper, and some beer," mumbled the old man, "and there's an awful draught in this room somewhere, which will give me my death of cold if it's not stopped."

"The air comes through the windows which you broke."

"Oh—I forgot the windows. They can be stuffed up with something, I suppose."

"Yes—yes—tell the landlady. I am going now."

"It's very foolish of you, I must say again," said Peter; but Mabel took no heed of his renewed protest against her wilfulness, but went at once from the house. She paused at the gate before commencing her journey—some one was rapidly approaching along the high road, and the sharp, quick steps seemed not wholly unfamiliar to her. The traveller was advancing from the sleeping city towards the country suburbs, and instinctively she waited for him, standing back in the shadow of the trees which grew within the garden. It was as well that travellers on the road should pass her, if untrustworthy and bound in her direction.

The footsteps came nearer; from her point of observation Mabel could perceive now the figure of a man walking in the middle of the road, and at a fair swinging pace. As it

approached and passed her, she called out, "Mr. Halfday."

Brian, for it was he, stopped at once, and Mabel came from her hiding-place to meet him.

"Miss Westbrook!" he exclaimed, "something *has* happened, then!"

"Yes—something has happened."

"What can you be doing here—where are you going?" he asked, almost sharply.

"I will tell you as we proceed, and if you will accompany me to St. Lazarus."

"I am going to St. Lazarus—but you?"

"Your sister is there," exclaimed Mabel; "she has heard news from Peter Scone—"

"Of a will—yes," he said, interrupting her with his customary quickness.

"How did you know?" asked Mabel.

"I will tell you presently. Have you seen this Scone?"

"He is in my house," said Mabel, pointing to the cottage she had recently quitted.

"You are lodging there?"

"Yes."

"I will see that old scamp before we proceed any further," said Brian, stepping towards the house, when Mabel put her hands upon his arm.

"We are losing time," she said; "Dorcas may be in danger—your father may be already at St. Lazarus."

"You are right, Miss Westbrook," he said; "I can learn all the news from you,"

He turned, and together they proceeded along the country road.

"I am selfish in allowing you to accompany me," he said, stopping again; "I can act in this matter, if Dorcas is really in danger, so much better without you. You must go back."

"I could not do it. Please let me come with you," she entreated, "I am unhappy in that house already."

He wavered and relented, but not too graciously.

"I hate to keep changing my mind—like a girl," he said, "but—but you wish it," he added suddenly.

He offered her his arm, and she placed her hand confidently upon it.

"I am glad I have met you," Mabel said frankly, "I feel safe with you."

"It is something to have gained your confidence," Brian replied, "and yet I hardly know now why distrust has changed to faith. I don't deserve it."