

William Halfday, 'and everybody is speaking of your murder. I have been in terrible suspense the last four and twenty hours, for Dorcas deserted me and left only three and sixpence on the mantel-piece, and nothing to eat in the house—said she was coming back again in an hour, and never came near me again. Pretty treatment that, madam,' he said, turning towards Mabel at last, 'from one's own daughter too, and I so dreadfully ill. If she had thought a little more of me, and a little less of that trumpery husband of hers, it would have been far more creditable to her in every way. But I'm an utter wreck, and without a soul to care for me.'

'There, don't cry again,' said Brian quickly, 'it will do you no good, and it takes up a great deal of your time. So you heard of my murder, Mr. Halfday—and terribly shocked you were, of course?'

'You might have knocked me down with a feather,' replied his father, 'for I was very weak this morning, not having had proper attention, or proper nourishment since six o'clock last night. A dreadful time to leave a man in my delicate condition—only think of it?'

'Yes—I am thinking of it,' said Brian.

'And as for the facts of the case, I was fairly bewildered in endeavouring to discover them,' William Halfday continued, 'but that Dorcas and Michael were taken up at Bridlington, and Michael had tried to kill you—just like him, that wretch would kill anybody in his tempers!—was sufficient for me to act upon. I came on at once, weak as I was—and here I am, and if you have got any brandy-and-water about—half a thimbleful—I'll take it as a mercy.'

Mabel looked towards Brian who nodded his head. Mr. William Halfday was completely prostrated and required a stimulant, it was evident, and Mabel tendered him a glass of cold brandy-and-water which he drank with avidity, and with his teeth rattling against the glass.

'Thank you very much,' he said, giving back the empty glass, 'I am exceedingly obliged to you. My gratitude is none the less genuine for being a poor dependent on your bounty. And you are really going to leave us, Brian?'

'The doctor says so,' answered his son.

'And with Michael taken up for the murder, and Dorcas under arrest also, I suppose

—ahem—it has not struck you very forcibly what is to become of me?' said William Halfday. 'But it is a serious position—I am entirely helpless. I don't know what to do. I haven't a friend in the whole world, upon my soul.'

Brian shrugged his shoulders, but he did not respond harshly to this poor exhibition of selfishness. It was natural that this man should think of himself in his weakness as much as he had done in his strength, and care as little for the weakness of others. The troubles closing round William Halfday, rather than the night drawing in upon the son, had been this man's first thought in coming to Bridlington.

'No—I have not considered you a great deal,' Brian confessed.

'Don't apologize,' said the father.

'I have even made my will this afternoon without a thought of you.'

'I am astonished at that,' replied William Halfday, 'for when a man is setting his house in order, he should think of all those by whom he has been surrounded, and of those ties of kindred, which, growing strong at the last, elevate a man above the petty animosities of this world. It is not too late to make a codicil, you know. You're looking pretty strong still.'

'Strange being,' said Brian, mournfully regarding him, 'I have taken your neglect of me all my life as a grievance—surely it was a blessing in disguise.'

'I—I don't know what you mean,' stammered his father as he looked away from him.

'See to him, now and then, Mabel, if I should die,' said Brian, 'don't let him starve.'

'He is your father,' murmured Mabel, 'and therefore—'

'No fresh promises—no new task beyond your strength—no more mistakes,' cried Brian energetically. 'I will not have your life devoted to one who has done his best to shipwreck yours. I only ask you to see to him now and then—to make sure he is in good hands—and so to leave him there. This man is deserving of less from you, and must have no more.'

William Halfday shook with greater force.

'I don't know,' he said tremulously, 'that I ever heard a crueller speech than that—from a man in your position too.'

'The Halfdays must never cross her