

"I hope I am not ungrateful to him for his interest, but I did not want him here," said Mabel.

She had uttered these thoughts aloud, but was unaware of the fact, until Dorcas's voice in reply startled her.

"It's a good job he is gone with the rest of them. There was no peace with that lot," said Dorcas, bluntly.

Mabel looked at her companion, who was sitting by the window in her black dress, and had been so still there, that Mabel had forgotten her.

"I did not know you were here, Dorcas," said Mabel, "or I should not have commented on my friends."

"Is Mr. Angelo Salmon a very great friend of yours?" asked Dorcas, in her old abrupt way.

"Not a great friend; but he has been very kind."

"You did not want him to stay?"

"No, Dorcas. Why do you ask?"

"I hardly know," was the evasive answer; "but I have been thinking lately a great deal—I have had so much to think about, you see."

"And I have been thinking—of you," said Mabel.

"Of me? I am sorry you have not had something better to think about," she replied, looking intently out of the window.

"Of all those who have been kind to me, you are the kindest," Mabel said.

"I make a good nurse, they say; that is all I am fit for," was the answer.

"No, something better and higher than a nurse presently, and with me to take care of you in my turn," said Mabel.

"With you," exclaimed Dorcas, "to take care of me!"

"Yes—why not?"

"Ah! you don't know what a dreadful, hard-tempered, ill-grown girl I am. Ask Brian!"

"No, I shall not ask your brother anything about you," replied Mabel, "save to ask his permission to let me see whether I can make a friend of you, as I hope and think I can."

The girl's head shook in dissent, but it was turned more closely to the glass, and away from Mabel Westbrook.

"A rash act of mine took from you a protector and a home," Mabel continued, "and constituted you in my illness a dear nurse

and friend. Without your care and gentleness, the doctor tells me that I might have died, without showing you my gratitude, or keeping my old promise."

"What promise?"

"To see to you as long as I lived."

Dorcas regarded her with amazement.

"You promised Brian that!" she exclaimed.

"I promised an old friend in America; but I will tell you the whole story presently, when I am stronger. You must not ask me now."

"When then?" said Dorcas, looking from the window again.

"After the inquest; it has been remanded for my evidence, I hear."

"Yes."

"But I may say," Mabel added, "that it is not for the sake of the promise I wish to take you to my home—ah! Dorcas, and to my heart if you will come there."

The head of Dorcas Halfday pressed heavily against the glass now, and her hands trembled as they clutched the window-frame.

"Oh! you don't know—you can't guess!" she cried, and then a torrent of passionate tears escaped her, and alarmed the delicate woman listening to her.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, what is it?" she exclaimed, springing to her feet; "tell me what it is—trust in me always from to-day!"

She was advancing to her, when Dorcas sprang up, and led her back to the easy chair she had quitted.

"Keep your seat, Miss Westbrook," said Dorcas, speaking very hurriedly, and don't think of me. I trust in you—there—and God bless you for your loving words and kindly thoughts; but let me be, please, for a while. You have yourself to study, not me, and you are not strong yet."

"Oh! I am quite strong now!" said Mabel.

"And see, I am calm," answered Dorcas, returning to the window; "I give you my word not to be foolish and childish any more. I should have known better, with you so weak; but you took me off my guard."

"Still——"

"And here is Brian coming over the hills towards us," said Dorcas; "he will be very glad to learn you are better."

"I shall be glad to see him this time," said Mabel.