

He walked quickly and abruptly from her, and Mabel Westbrook, pondering on his words, returned to the friendly shelter of the "Mitre." Hers had been an easy mission to fulfil she had thought until a few hours since, but the mists were rising fast upon the road she would pursue, and there might be pitfalls in her way, and dangers of which she had never dreamed. She had been twice warned, but it was beyond her power to listen. The one voice that might have checked her was for ever still, and her task was to go on at any risk.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE.

WITH the brightness of the next day, Mabel Westbrook looked at life more brightly. She was young, impulsive, sanguine, generous, and without an enemy in the world. Before the death of James Westbrook and his wife there had not been a lighter-hearted, kinder, or more unselfish girl in the States, and she had borne the oncoming of her first trouble with a brave front. She had heard much and suffered much of late days, but she had grown strong, not weak, in affliction, as the best of women invariably do. She had hardly known of evil, of men's rapacity and greed and weakness, until the last year of her life, and the knowledge had sobered her without breaking her down, strengthened many resolutions without narrowing her heart. She had heard of a wrong which it was in her power to set right, and she had given up her birthplace, her American friends and American home, and set forth on a mission of justice to the wronged. It was her own wish, as it had been James Westbrook's—and there was nothing to dismay her in the prophecies of Adam Halfday's grandchildren. She could do her duty to the living and the dead without one regret to follow. The strange young folk whom she had seen last night had put a false construction on her reticence, but they would understand her clearly in a few more hours. The end of her task was nearly accomplished, and she would be glad for all sakes when it was complete.

It was eleven o'clock in the day when she was once more at the gates of St. Lazarus.

The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and the air was warm again—the brotherhood of the noble poor had toddled from their places round the great ring of fire in the hall, and were basking like lizards in the sunshine. The porter, Hodsman, touched his cap at her appearance, and said, with old-fashioned homely courtesy—

"You bring the sunshine with you, lady, this time."

"Have there been many visitors to-day?" she asked.

"No visitors, exactly," he replied. "Not strangers, that is. Mr. Salmon told me to say that he would be glad to see you, ma'am, directly you arrived."

Mabel's brow contracted a little. This irrepressible Salmon would not leave her a moment to herself, if he could help it.

"Where is the Master now?" she asked.

"Praying in the church or fishing in the river, I hardly know which." He craned his head over the wicket-gate which confined him to the lodge, and peered into the quadrangle.

"Oh, the brothers are out. He's fishing," said Hodsman; "you'll find him at the back of the church yonder."

"Thank you."

Mabel Westbrook passed into the courtyard, and turned away from the direction which the porter had indicated. The old men in the black gowns stared across at her from their sunny corners, but Adam Halfday was not one of them. She passed into the banqueting hall or refectory, the door of which was handy on her right, and looked carefully around her, but the place was empty and full of echoes, and the fire within the iron hoop was smouldering to itself.

"He is waiting for me at his cottage," thought Mabel. "Now, if I could reach there quietly without encountering Mr. Salmon, I should be glad."

She was considering her plan of action, when the door was pushed open slowly, and a short old man, with a head that might have been a skeleton's—the skin was drawn so tightly over it and showed the outline of the skull so clearly—came shuffling towards her. He was in the garb of the brotherhood, and he bowed low as he advanced.

"My lady would like to see the church," he piped in feeble accents; "will you please to step this way?"

"Thank you; but I have promised to