

"It is too late an hour for your sister to be going to St. Lazarus alone."

"She is safe enough in Pentonshire; we are good people hereabouts," Brian said, drily.

"But she——"

"Would not have me for an escort—you heard what she said?"

"Yes. How is it that you and she are not friends?"

"Oh! we are very good friends," said Brian, lightly; "Dorcas is extremely fond of me."

"Is this satire?"

"Not at all," answered Brian, "and I am very fond of Dorcas. But I cannot let her have her own way altogether. You see what a cat she is?"

"She is an excitable girl. I do not understand her."

"You will find it a difficult task to understand any of the family," replied Brian; "I would not assert positively that the Halfdays understand themselves."

"Know thyself" is an excellent motto."

"Ah! if it were only practicable," said Brian. He was walking by Mabel's side now, with his gaze directed to the miry pavement. The streets were empty, and the wind came down them moaning like a child in pain.

"It's a miserable night for you to come back to Penton," he said, suddenly.

"I have never been in Penton before."

"I mean for the Westbrooks to step back to life here," he said. "I thought at one time or another I might meet you in America, seek you out there; but to come to us is strange. Very strange," he added.

Mabel glanced at him, and said timidly—

"My grandfather's history is no secret to you, Mr. Halfday. You have learned it years ago, I am sure."

"I have studied hard, and learned many things, but I do not know James Westbrook's history," was the reply.

"You know why I am in this city?" said Mabel; "you must know."

"I may guess at it from your own words," he answered, "but pray do not cross-examine me. I have pleaded twice for time to think of this."

"I will say good-night, Mr. Halfday, if you please," said Mabel, "I can find my way very well across the Close."

"The Close gates are shut. It is past

eleven," said Brian, "and you will find no one in the streets to ask your way. I would prefer to accompany you."

"But——"

"And I intend to accompany you," he said, emphatically, "not that I would be ungentlemanly enough to balk your desire to get rid of me, if I had not a few more words to say."

He did not say them very readily. He walked on in silence at her side, taking that time "to think of it" for which he had pleaded. Mabel did not intrude upon his reverie, but she glanced askance at him once or twice. He was thinking his hardest now; he had stepped from the kerbstone into the gutter in order to allow himself and her more room, and with his hands clutched behind his back he strode on at a pace with which it was difficult for her to keep up. As he passed beneath the gas-lamps, Mabel could see that it was a face almost of trouble, certainly of doubt.

They were close upon the "Mitre" when he spoke to her—swinging suddenly round with a precipitancy that startled her.

"I wish you had not come," he said; "it would have been much the better for you."

"I am not afraid," answered Mabel, lightly, "and there is nothing so malevolent in my intentions that should make any of your family afraid of me."

"You are proceeding in haste, Miss Westbrook, I tell you once more."

"I am acting on instructions."

"And will not be advised by me in any way?"

"No," she answered, very firmly.

Brian shrugged his shoulders, and then extended his hand.

"Good evening," he said.

Mabel placed her hand within his, and was surprised at the firmness with which he clutched it.

"Do you judge human nature, human character as quickly as you act?" he asked.

"I do not know. Probably," said Mabel, in reply. She did not admire the peremptory manner in which he spoke, and she withdrew her hand from his strong clasp of hers.

"Do not judge too hastily of me, then," he said, almost sorrowfully; "I may be compelled to act in a rash fashion myself, and I would ask you to suspend your judgment until we meet again. Good night."