

"We will tell Miss Westbrook the whole story presently," said Brian, "and she shall judge between us."

He took the will from his sister's hands, and opened it where they were standing, holding it close to his eyes, after looking upwards once as if doubtful of the quality of the light to be obtained from the stars, a few of which had stolen forth again from the cloudy sky. His was a strong sight and did not betray him in this instance—and his grandfather's handwriting was familiar to him. He read the document through quickly—it was not a long one—folded it, and returned it to his sister.

"Yes—you are quite right, Dorcas," he said in a deep voice; "you have more to think of than people fancy—and the end of this is far from clear."

"I know it," answered Dorcas.

The three went on together a few more yards, and then Dorcas stopped again.

"I wish you two would proceed by yourselves. I don't like this watching of me," she said sullenly again.

"We are not watching you, Dorcas," said Mabel.

"I did not expect you to follow me like this."

"We thought there might be danger."

"I am used to danger," said Dorcas; "go on, please; I will keep you in sight. I can only bear with my own company to-night."

"Come, Miss Westbrook," said Brian, offering his arm again, which Mabel did not take this time, but walked on by his side, at a pace less rapid than they had set forth upon their journey.

"What makes her so strange?" asked Mabel of her companion.

"On the brink of her good fortune, she turns giddy—that is all," was the reply; "weak-minded folk invariably do."

"It is a poor explanation," said Mabel, "but I do not wish to force myself upon your confidence."

"Meaning that there is no confidence between us?" he rejoined.

"Not much," answered Mabel.

"After paying twenty thousand pounds for it too—that is hard," was his caustic comment.

"Are you in one of your aggravating moods to-night?" she asked.

"Very likely," he confessed; "I have been perplexed, harassed, tortured within the last

few hours; if I have said anything harsh to you, forgive me."

"You are strange, that is all," said Mabel, softened by his apology.

"I come of a strange family. You will find that young woman in the background a trifle eccentric also on a closer acquaintance," he remarked.

"Yes. But I have seemed to look to you for help, in some incomprehensible way," said Mabel; "I feel to be waiting, as it were, for your courage to support me when my troubles come. But that is an odd feeling that will soon die out."

"Let it last, Miss Westbrook, if you can," he added earnestly.

"As long as I live?" she rejoined archly.

"That may be too rash a promise, like the other."

They went on in silence for awhile, with Dorcas Halfday some thirty yards in the background. Dorcas had no interest in them at that time;—beyond the present hour, and present life, she was trying vainly to guess of all that might be waiting to change her, tempt her, set her apart from the man and woman going on away from her—just as they would do presently for the remainder of their lives, and she not much to blame for it.

They were talking of her again, but she did not hear them.

"You do not ask me the tenor of the will which Dorcas has discovered," was Brian's next remark to Mabel.

"I am not curious."

"No."

"It lies further away than ever; it is wholly beyond your power to recover it; and you do not feel as if you had fallen into the hands of robbers?" he said.

"No—but I thought we were not to speak of this money again," said Mabel. "What an inexhaustible subject it is to you! how you change and twist it into different shapes to lead me into an argument concerning it! Why is this?"

"It is on my mind, and you have been treated badly," he replied; "I have tried hard to restore you to your rights, and failed so miserably—my family is ever a curse to yours—and two generations only perpetuate the wrong."

"You regard this morbidly, indeed."

"And you too lightly," he replied; "if you would only fret about it, or revile me, you