

Grey's Old Court.

CHAPTER V.

"PATIENCE!"

WHAT was it all about? All that sea of faces; that human bee-hive, in every unit of which Mattie saw a judge and an accuser? All eyes were turned upon her, a poor trembling child, for she looked little more, with cheeks so wan and death-like, and great wistful eyes which had a hunted expression in them, terrible to see. No friend was near her that day, so far as she knew. Once, indeed, she had felt a warm hand clasp her own, but the touch failed to rouse her. She yielded her own chilled fingers passively and without response. Sometimes she tried to wake up and think; a faint wonder even crossed her mind whether Richard Grey would be there or not, and what he would say. Would they find her guilty? And if so, should she be hung? There was little terror in the word for her just now. It was true that she was young, but then she had suffered so much. And it would be so terrible to go back to the old life with this stain upon her name, that it seemed to her death might perhaps be the best ending. Out of all the people who bore their testimony either for or against her, Mattie's dulled brain took in only the image of the housekeeper, as she stood forth in her gaunt ugliness to criminate, if possible, the girl who had never harmed her; all for the greed of gold. And Mattie's thoughts wandered strangely from the present back to that night when she awoke from a dream about Janet, in terror lest the woman should do her bodily harm. It seemed that there really was no one to suspect but the prisoner. The housekeeper certainly admitted that ten minutes or even a quarter of an hour *might* have elapsed before she fastened the door after the girl went away. But then she had been on the ground floor the whole time, and must surely have heard any strange footstep, since she had distinguished Mattie's which was light and quiet. She had warned her master that it was not safe to keep the bag of gold in the room, for she never much liked the look of that Mattie Grey. As for any suspicion resting upon Janet, that was impossible. She had kept her master's keys for years, and took what money she liked, for he knew that she wouldn't waste it like some folks. And if she had wanted a few pounds, she said scornfully, she needn't have troubled herself to get them in that way.

Presently Mattie was conscious of a little stir in the court; of stern gentlemen asking her questions which she answered mechanically, feeling at the same time as if it were not herself that spoke, but some strange voice far away in the distance. She was dimly aware of an incredulous movement when she spoke of the sovereign which the miser had given her; his character was too well known for that to seem probable. Of the canvas bag which had been found amongst the soiled linen she knew nothing; she had never opened the bundle, but supposed that it was put amongst the other things to be washed.

"Was she in the habit of washing such bags for Mr. Grey?"

"No; she had never done so."

Then followed more questions, till weary and confused, she was sinking into a dull apathy, when one question roused her, and she forgot time, place, everything, except the revolting horror of the thought.