

The widow stopped to put her iron to her cheek, but it wasn't exactly that sort of heat which brought the sudden colour over it.

"I shouldn't like Mattie to creep up anybody's sleeve," she said, "least of all, *his*; she isn't going to do it, Mrs. Tozer; and if it comes to that, I don't quite believe in Richard Grey's money. He had some once, but his son must have drained him pretty dry."

Mrs. Tozer sniffed incredulously.

"Well, it's nothing to me. There now, did ever anybody see such frills and furbelows to a petticoat before? The ladies don't think how it worrits one to get 'em up."

"We're paid for it," said the widow, quietly.

"Aye, to be sure. And I must say you are wonderfully patient, considering you're not well. One thing, these little collars and cuffs are a blessing; I hope they won't go out of fashion. Where's the lassie this evening, Mrs. Grey?"

"Gone to take some clothes home," replied the widow. "I like to send her. She isn't used to being shut up in a town, and the walk does her good."

"Ah. Well, I must be going. There's a heap of muslins waiting to be starched, and that flighty girl of mine is worth nothing when my back's turned. You are lucky to have a good daughter; I know that."

Mrs. Tozer said this in a repining, injured sort of way, as though the load laid upon her were altogether unjust and undeserved; but it never occurred to her that very opposite examples and precepts had been set before the two girls who were so different.

Meantime Mattie had emptied her basket and turned back in the direction of the Old Court. She turned reluctantly, for there was a suspicion of country up here amongst the grand houses with their large gardens, and the trees in front, and peeps of gorgeous flower-beds beyond. Mattie began to speculate. How much money had old Richard Grey? Enough to live out here if he chose, no doubt; perhaps even to take one of the fine houses with the sloping lawns and flowers. But then he didn't care for flowers.

It was a fact which cannot perhaps be explained, that these two had an odd attraction for each other. The old man had taken to count the days of the week till Friday came, and then he would set his door open and listen all day till the light footstep sprang up the stairs, and the girl stood before him, radiant with youth and life and hope. She was like a sunbeam coming to shine upon the dust and cobwebs and mould that surrounded him. And then he said quaint things, which Mattie liked to ponder over until she understood them. She was sorry for him too in his loneliness. She never told him this, but by some subtle instinct he felt it; and the knowledge that in all the careless indifferent world one fresh heart had a tiny spot in it for him, the worn-out miser, touched him strangely. In her turn, Mattie must have known this too. She always spoke of him to her mother with a sort of gentle pity which had an element of affection in it; and she thought of him compassionately this evening as the fresh air blew softly upon her and the birds sang in the tall trees that were fast vanishing behind her.