

He paused, shading his eyes with his hand. The visualizing sense, stimulated by the nerve strain of the preceding weeks, beheld with ghastly clearness the face of Melrose in death, with the blood-stain on the lips.

"And so," he resumed, "there was no short way out. By merely writing to Miss Melrose, to offer her a fortune, it was not possible to void the will."

He paused. The intensity of his look held her motionless.

"You remember — how I refused — when you asked me — to take any steps toward voiding it?"

Her lips made a dumb movement of assent.

"But — at last — I took them. In the final interview I had with Melrose, he threatened me with the cancelling of his will, unless I consented — Tatham has told you — to sell him my uncle's gems. I refused. And so far as words could, he there and then stripped me of his property. It is by the mere accident of his murder at that precise moment that it has come to me. Now then — what is to be done?"

Her hand slipped further into his. For a few minutes he seemed to be absorbed in the silent reconstruction of past trains of thought, emerging with a cry — though it was under his breath:

"If I took his money now — against his will — I should feel his yoke — his hateful yoke — again, on my neck! I should be his slave still."

"You shall not take it!" she said with passion.

He smiled at her suddenly.

"It is nothing to Lydia, to be poor?"

"And free — and happy — and alive! — no, nothing!"