

He took a sovereign from the bag and rubbed it between his thumb and finger lovingly. It seemed to Mattie that he had only taken it out to clean it and put it back again, he hesitated so long. But with a sudden convulsive movement of his thin fingers, he thrust it into her hand, pushing her away.

"For Mattie—for Mattie Grey. Take care of it, it's a deal of money. Give her the wine. There's the bundle of clothes; take them quick, and go away. Oh, it's a dreadful thing to be poor, my dear. Good night; go."

That night Mattie sat beside her mother's bed talking merrily and even laughing, for the widow had food and wine, and would soon be well again, she thought. But into the girl's dreams when she slept there came a vague oppression and dread. Dim at first, and then shaping itself into a form out of which the housekeeper's eyes looked upon her, and the housekeeper's harsh voice spoke.

With the dawning day, a little rumour arose in Grey's Old Court like the swaying of branches before a coming storm. It grew louder; the sound of many feet was on the widow's threshold, and clamorous hands knocked at her door; the door which presently Mattie opened, with her fresh young face a little paler than usual from her dream-oppressed sleep. First in all this throng of curious and condemning, Mattie met those eyes of the housekeeper twinkling upon her with a mixture of malice and triumph; and the sudden deadly hue that whitened the girl's face was taken by the experienced policeman for conscious guilt.

The old man had been found late at night flung forward from his chair, evidently by a violent hand, since both his own were raised as though to ward off some threatened blow, and the bag of gold was gone.

And Mattie, turning from one to the other in terror and dismay, cried out with trembling lips, "Is he dead? Have they killed him?"

Have *they* killed him! Men repeated it with a sneer; women shook their heads in conscious virtue, and pity for such depravity; they had long known she was no better than she should be, with her meek airs. So this was what she had crept up the old man's sleeve for! No, he was not dead. In all probability he would live to bear witness to her guilt. And when Mattie sighed out, "Thank God he isn't dead!" these people lifted up horror-stricken hands and said that she was even worse than they had thought. But who was to tell the poor helpless woman up-stairs? Who was to go and say to her, "This food and this wine is the price of your daughter's soul. It is robbery and attempted murder?"

For that was the charge under which Mattie was to be taken into custody. The poor child scarcely understood it. She went where they conducted her blindly. No one in all that curious throng spoke to her; they only stared. And in that scene which seemed so unreal, only one thing roused the girl from her strange stupor. A dressmaker who lodged in the court, and whom she knew slightly, came down from her room as the procession passed it. She forced a way through them all, and took Mattie's cold hand in both her own.