

did not occur to Mattie, and so he checked himself. And he went away into his workshop, stumbling about amongst the shavings, and began planing away vigorously at a deal board.

As for Mattie, a rough blow struck the golden dream away. When she got home the widow had left the ironing table, and sat in an old wicker chair by the fire, doing nothing. It was so unusual a sight that Mattie, startled, went up to her mother with an exclamation of wonder and alarm.

"I'm out of sorts," said the widow, trying to be cheerful, and breaking down signally. "I'm just one ache all over, Mattie, my dear, and I've kept up as long as I can. This place is so low and damp; I'm afraid—oh what shall I do if it's that fever again?"

CHAPTER IV.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE FOG.

THE summer weather was come, but the holiday poor Mattie dreamed about had vanished into dim uncertainty. No one thought of it, except perhaps the young wheelwright over his work. He had seen but little of Mattie since her mother's illness threw so heavy a burden on the girl's shoulders, for she had scarcely a moment to spare; and James did not know—how should he?—that a very terrible shadow hovered about the widow's door, and oppressed her daughter with a host of vague fears. This was poverty. To be sure the widow was recovering, but she still lay on her bed helpless from rheumatism; and then the doctor ordered her wine, and meat; what he called kitchen physic was all she wanted now, but how was Mattie to get it? She went on with her ironing, and the blinding tears would gather and fall down over the delicate bits of lace and muslin till she was fain to give up and sit, as her mother had done so many nights ago, in the wicker chair, doing nothing. But it was Friday, and she had to go to Richard Grey's as usual; indeed it was past the hour at which he always expected her, and Mattie threw on her bonnet hastily and went out. She passed down into the drying-ground, and thence to the little wicket which divided it from the strip of neglected garden. There Mattie stood still for a moment to look at the river fog which had come up thick and heavy, and the forms of distant trees like ghostly giants, dimly visible through it. Some sudden chill sense of her own forlorn condition, and of the lightheartedness which it seemed was gone for ever, crept over the girl at the sight, and she leaned on the wicket and broke into a passion of sobs. Gradually, as she grew quieter, a sound like stealthy footsteps struck upon her ear; it ceased when her sobs ceased, but, perhaps for the first time in her life, Mattie was terrified at an unseen danger, and she hurried to the miser's door, and knocked loudly. The clanking of heavy chains followed, and then the door creaked and groaned on its hinges, and the sour face of the housekeeper looked out upon Mattie.

"I think you might make less noise," said the woman. "Come in if you're coming, and you'd better not be long. I don't want the bother of undoing these chains for you again, so I shall