

lect the apples which lay scattered about the grass. After a time I set a ladder against a fruit-laden tree, which I proceeded to mount, while my wife steadied with her foot and hand the somewhat rickety contrivance. The tree stood close beside the high wall which separated our garden from the Jansen property. Just as I was ascending, I heard a noise as of a stone thrown against the wall, at the same moment our tortoise-shell cat came floundering helplessly down and crouched tremblingly at our feet. I was so much surprised at signs of life issuing from a garden where hitherto silence had only been broken by the faint rustling of leaves, that I resolved to mount my ladder high enough to look over the wall.

Never before had I seen such a crop of tangled briars and weeds! Not a vestige of either flowers or vegetables, not a trace of a path anywhere! Huge stones lay scattered about just where they had fallen, and the sombre foliage of the deadly nightshade predominated over all.

Above this wilderness a few fruit trees reared their heads, and I saw under one of them the crouching figure of a diminutive woman bent almost double. She was dressed in an old-fashioned black silk gown, worn and faded, while on her head she wore a Leghorn hat, from which a white ostrich feather trailed dismally. The tangled weeds rose higher than her knees, and I had some misgivings lest she would disappear altogether before I had time to catch a glimpse of her features. Suddenly she raised herself, and seized a basket fastened to a stick, which she had probably dropped in order to stone my cat.

Although the old woman seemed to move with difficulty, she vigorously shook the branches of the tree, and managed to collect some fine pears, which she dropped one by one, and with great solemnity, into her basket. I watched her attentively, while my wife, with the characteristic impatience of her sex, tried to make me descend by shaking the ladder in a provoking manner. I contrived to remain firm, however, by grasping a strong branch with both hands. At this moment the old lady, who had turned round to gather some fruit which had previously escaped her notice, caught sight of me. She was visibly startled and remained motionless. From under her large hat shone two black eyes, which lit up every other feature in her wizened face; as they were fixed upon me I felt a momentary sensation of shame. While she scrutinized me I also studied her, and discerned traces of past beauty, marred by a profusion of false curls. I raised my hat by way of salute; I was embarrassed, and hardly knew what else to do. To my surprise the wizened old lady returned my bow, and curtsied low after the manner of our great-grandmothers. At this moment my wife again shook the ladder, and to such purpose that I was forced to descend.

"I have paid our visit to Madame Sievert Jansen."

On the following morning an old woman, the same that sold the edibles at the street corner, brought us, with Madame Jansen's compliments, a basket of fruit, hoping that I would accept them as a sample of her jargonel pears, which had always been considered excellent.

We were very much surprised. The fruit was delicious. Shortly afterwards I told my right-hand neighbor of the incident.

"It is a sure sign that her end is near," said he, solemnly, "unless, indeed, you possess a mysterious charm," and he glanced comically at me from head to foot.

One morning I started on a pilgrimage which my conscience told me ought to have been made long ago. As I trudged along alone my thoughts reverted to my childhood, until I almost forgot the present in the past. My memory carried me back to my father's house, wherein a few steps led from the corridor to an isolated chamber which had been built out into the garden. Even at this great distance of time I never see that room in my dreams otherwise than bathed in sunshine and bright in the radiance of flowers. Its occupant was a fine and gentle old man, my mother's father, who, after a stormy and adventurous life, had come here to end his days in peace. How often had he told me stories of his native town which he had not seen since his boyhood! His descriptions were so minute that I was soon familiar with the arrangement of the house, its staircases and passages; and one day, to please him, I made a plan of it.

"If ever you are in those parts," said he, placing his hand on my head, "do not fail to visit that house."

Then he suddenly rose and opened a cabinet where he kept his treasures.

"Look!" he said, holding up a miniature mounted in silver, "that was my playmate; she lived next door to us. From the gable of her house hung a dried shark's skin. Her father was a sea captain."

As I gazed at the miniature my face lit up with genuine admiration. I saw before me the semblance of a young girl of rare beauty, and was struck by its simple charm and the sweet expression which beamed from those wondrous eyes.

"Does it please you?" asked my grandfather. "Here she is painted in her bridal attire. Ah! you should have seen her—that little brown head!—when she was at your age!"

And he told me many things about his pretty playmate which interested me exceedingly.

"Her father was often absent on his voyages. When he came from across the seas he would bring her quantities of toys, ornaments, bright scarfs and other things. He was very good to her. She had quite a formidable collection of strange gold and silver pieces, of which she was very proud. In the garden we passed the long summer days, on the steps of a quaint summer house which her father had constructed for her out of an old boat; we built castles in the air, and here she would spread out her rich collection of coins for me to see and admire. Ah! my poor little brown mouse! That was the name her father gave her. And yet," continued the old man, following the train of his thoughts, "when she was clothed in her Greek robe, with colored feathers in her hair, she looked more like a bird of paradise than a mouse, and one almost expected to see her fly away. I remember