

raise itself on the pillows. A small, wrinkled face gazed into mine, while a shrill voice shrieked discordantly:

"Turn out that witch."

Madame Jansen made an effort to strike the nurse with her keys. But a moment later the sick woman sank back helpless on her pillows.

"You are come to inquire after my health, sir?" she said in softer tones, "and I thank you for your neighborly attention. But this person," and then she raised her voice again in anger, "this person, who thrusts herself upon me, is only come to watch me."

"But you have met with an accident; your state of health requires care," I said, soothingly.

"I have no need of a nurse," she replied, sharply. "Last night they tried to rob me. There were strange sounds in the basement. Masked figures crept through the garret windows, and all the bells in the house pealed."

"All the bells!" said I. "That would have been a most unusual proceeding on the part of thieves."

"I tell you," cried the sick woman with rekindled energy, "I tell you, all the bells rang! My nephew, who is at the head of the police, is far too stupid to catch the robbers. He came here and tried to persuade me that I had been dreaming. Ha, ha! He would have liked it better if I had dreamt my will also."

I knew that her nephew was burdened with a large family, and that his salary was small, so I tried to enlist her sympathy mainly on the score of the relationship subsisting between them.

"Your nephew is, of course, one of your heirs," said I, interrogatively.

"My heirs?" she exclaimed, disdainfully. "No, no, my dear sir. My heirs are those whom I am at liberty to choose, and I have chosen them."

She then explained, with evident satisfaction, the provisions of her will.

"But," said I, "that charity is now amply endowed."

"Is that your opinion?" she muttered. "No matter, it is my will. I desire these old pensioners to have something better to drink than vile potato brandy. After my death they shall taste Jamaica rum that has crossed the line three times."

"And your nephew's large family?"

"Yes, yes," she said, petulantly, "they increase and multiply in the confident hope of living on my fortune. But I," and she now spoke with much bitterness, "I have no children."

"Will you not, at all events, make a codicil assigning a small portion of your fortune to these poor girls?"

"Poor girls!" she cried, as her old head shook pitilessly and her frame trembled with excitement. "They shall not have a groschen—not a groschen."

At these words she sank back exhausted, and I gazed in horror at this poor wreck, broken by age, apparently subsisting on the strong passion of hatred.

"What have you against your nephew? Has he offended you?"

"Me? Oh dear, no!" she replied. "Quite the contrary. No sooner had he received his appointment than

he came here to pay his respects;" and then added with bitterness, "to look up his inheritance, of course. Though I had never seen him before, he called me 'dear aunt;' but I saw through him. He brought his eldest daughter with him. Her name is Matilde—a grand lady—quite a grand lady, I assure you! They must be rich people, my nephew and his daughters. She wore a dress trimmed with rich Valenciennes, and a cameo brooch was fastened at her throat. She hoped, doubtless, that I would fall in love with her baby face. Her little mouth was so sweet and innocent, it was hard to believe that roast chicken and other delicacies were all put into it!"

She shook her head meditatively, recalling, perchance, her own past life. Suddenly she turned toward me, and with a strange light in her eyes, which seemed to have been borrowed from her buried youth, cried passionately:

"Look at me, look at me! I also have been beautiful."

I was for a moment taken aback at the sight of her shriveled form, held erect as a torch, among the pillows. But the large eyes had already become dull and fixed.

"You would not think so now, for I am old," she whispered. "Death is very near; but the nights, oh! those nights! Then must I wander about without ceasing; it is fortunate, indeed, that my house is so large."

"You are suffering from want of sleep," I said; "that is a consolation elderly people often woo in vain."

"No, no, my dear sir. I keep myself awake by main force—by main force, I tell you. I am afraid of the old Seythian; but only when I am asleep—he has so often taken folk by surprise then! But he shall not catch me yet. The town authorities would be glad to hear of my death. Bah! I believe they wish to place me under restraint. By the way," she exclaimed, glancing suddenly and suspiciously at me, "you are also an official?"

I nodded. Then, with her eyes still fixed intently on mine, she exclaimed:

"Have they charged you with a mission to my house?"

"They feared that your weak state of health might necessitate some kind of guardianship."

"Weak!" she cried, piteously. "No, no, not weak! I am rich, very rich, they think, and they want to rob me; but I will barricade my house, even though I die of hunger inside."

So saying, she seized the bed curtains and tried to put her feet to the ground. She must get up; she must show me how strong she was.

I called the nurse, and we both did our best to soothe her. I came round the bed and stood facing her, the light full upon me. Something in my appearance seemed to steady her, for she grew calm and listened attentively to my words. I told her that, in my opinion, there was no need for personal guardianship, but that the strange manner in which she had hoarded her wealth suggested a certain administrative incapacity on her part, and concluded by offering to find some trustworthy person who would invest her fortune to the best advantage.

I noticed that while I spoke she never took her eyes from me, and regarded me with that searching look which I had before observed in the garden.