

"Some one of trust! Who is there?" she repeated several times. At length she exclaimed hurriedly:

"You—you may do so if you like."

"But, madame, you forget; I am a stranger to you."

"No. You are a young man, but I know that you would not deceive a poor, helpless old woman."

I reflected a moment. Was this due to the charm for which Monsieur Vorbist had given me credit? Be that as it may, I readily gave my consent, on condition that the transfer of power into my hands be made in the presence of a lawyer, and I asked her to fix the day and hour. She made no reply, but kept fast hold of my hand, and when at length I rose to leave her she seemed to drop it with reluctance. I asked whether she would like me to send a doctor, who would help to re-establish her strength. At these words she looked into my eyes, as though hoping to find some confirmation of the sympathy she detected in my voice, and then, holding up her left hand, of which two fingers were closed and paralyzed, she exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh:

"Behold the work of the celebrated Dr. Nicolovius! No, no, my friend—no doctors for me; they are all quacks. I know my own constitution better than any one else."

With these words my task for that day was ended.

On the second day after my visit the old lady was able to leave her room. I called and brought a notary to indorse the stipulated contract. Madame Jansen was seated at a table in a dingy room, employed in folding and marking small packets of bank notes. All along the wainscot lay bags of crowns, the bags being mostly made from remnants of silk dresses. The old lady was as reserved to-day as she had been garrulous on the previous occasion. Her trembling hands placed each bag in turn before us, as with a sad, fixed stare she watched us count the crowns, seal the bags and number the tickets. When we had sealed up the last bag I asked Madame Jansen if there was not something more.

She started nervously, but said drily:

"Is not that enough, my friend?"

"Are there no gold pieces, madame?"

"Gold? People never pay me in gold."

We had now completed our task; the inventory was finished, and the old lady affixed her name to it with a trembling hand. The titles were placed in a strong box, of which I kept the key. It was arranged that both the box and the money were to be removed to my house early on the following morning. We bade Madame Jansen good night.

When I reached the street I remembered having left a silver pencil-case behind me. With a few words of apology to my friend, I turned back and ran quickly up the stairs. I knocked at the door, and without waiting for an answer entered the room. To my surprise I saw, by the feeble rays of a rushlight, Madame Jansen still seated at the table, holding in one hand an empty purse of red silk, while with the other she endeavored to hide a heap of gold which was spread out before her. On seeing me she uttered a piercing cry and bowed her head over

the treasure. Then she lifted up her hands supplicatingly and cried:

"Oh! leave me this! It is my sole consolation."

Then she rose, seized my hand and drew me to the door, beyond which the staircase was lost in gloom.

"It is all empty," she said. "All darkness and solitude! I have only my gold! Oh! do not take it. The long nights are so lonely!"

"I have no right to take what you do not give me," said I; "though the plaything is costly, you are rich enough to afford it. Good night."

It was spring. The larch woods which bordered our little bay wore all the brightness and freshness so peculiar to the month of May.

During the past few weeks an intimacy had sprung up between us and the family of the chef de police. His eldest daughter, Matilde, had evinced a romantic attachment for my wife—a devotion reciprocated with true feminine fervor. It would have been strange, indeed, if this innocent young girl, with her deep blue eyes, had not fascinated us both, and we encouraged her to visit us as often as possible. But we perceived that an unaccountable vein of sadness stole over her at times, which contrasted painfully with her otherwise joyous and artless nature. It was Sunday morning. We had arranged to make an excursion across the bay, and had invited several friends to join us. Before eleven o'clock we were all on board and gliding merrily over the sparkling waters.

At one end of the boat a group of girls and young officers were carrying on a desultory conversation; Matilde was not among them. She was leaning against the mast, her graceful figure swaying with every motion of the boat. Never had she seemed to me more beautiful as she stood alone under the blue canopy of heaven, the wind stirring her dress and hair, and her eyes gazing sadly over the bay toward the wooded shore. Something in her manner attracted me toward her. "Matilde," said I, softly, "would you like to inherit a fortune?"

She looked at me for a moment in mute astonishment, and then said sadly:

"Why do you ask? I suppose that every one would be glad to inherit money, though I confess that I have not much hope of anything of the kind."

"Look," said I, "do you see, among those low buildings, that high, sombre house? A poor woman lives there who knows nothing of blue skies or sunshine."

"I see the house. Who lives there?"

"An aunt of yours and your father's."

"Oh! that woman!" replied Matilde, disdainfully. "She is not my aunt. My grandmother was only her cousin. We went to call on her once. No. I should not like to inherit her fortune."

"Are you so sure of that?" said I, looking steadily into the depth of those eloquent eyes. She did not wince, but a sudden flush overspread her face and her eyes lost their lustre. After a pause she said composedly:

"Well, yes. Perhaps I should, after all."