

All her life Miss Caroline had prided herself upon the beauty of her hands; and they were exquisite yet, though seldom visible, for she was busy preserving them still.

"Would you like the candles, ma'am, or the light turned on?" said Dunham, advancing to the bed.

"No, there is a good fire; the room is light enough, one can talk better by firelight," said Miss Marney, in a tone so brisk that it made Jeanne jump. She had expected to find her aunt in a semi-moribund condition, and was no less astonished than relieved to find her in such cheerful-wise, and so well able to speak naturally, and give orders as usual.

She decided that Dunham must have taken an unnecessarily gloomy view of the situation.

"Don't fidget about, Dunham," said the invalid, imperiously, "but go out of the room and shut the door after you. I want to make acquaintance with my grand-niece."

"You won't tire yourself, ma'am?"

"When I feel tired, Miss Jane will ring."

Dunham turned a warning face towards Jeanne before leaving the room, and Jeanne nodded acquiescence and encouragement.

The door was shut, and she found herself alone with her great-aunt.

"I like to see your fresh face, my love," said Miss Caroline graciously. "You have the Marney complexion. When I was young the reddest rose could not vie with my colour. There is no such thing as a complexion nowadays. Young women are all pasty-faced."

Jeanne's confidence was restored by this complimentary address. Though she was alarmed by the butler and footman, and even rather fearful of Dunham and Mrs. Pyke, she became at once easy and natural in the presence of her august relative; for, like many ultra-sensitive persons, she alternated between the extremes of courage and timidity.

"You are neither thin nor sallow," said Miss Marney. "No