

"Yes, he did till I sent to him to come home. But I invested every penny, Gertie, and there is the interest; and now what do you say? Is he a true man—good enough to love?"

"Oh, uncle—yes!" cried the girl, with the tears glittering in her eyes.

"Yes, my darling, a worthy husband for you; one who will love and protect you when I'm gone."

"But, uncle, dear——" faltered the girl.

"Yes—yes?"

"Does—does he know?"

"That he is to marry you? Yes. He knows by now that he is a rich man, or will be when I'm gone, and that he has the sweetest, truest little wife waiting for him here. Put the book away; you and Mr. Hampton know everything. Lock up the cabinet and put the keys under the pillow again; and some morning, when you find I'm too fast asleep to wake again, take the keys and keep them for my dear boy."

"Oh, uncle, dearest!" sobbed the girl.

"God bless you, my pet! But I put it off too long. I may not see my boy again. That's right; quite under the pillow, dear. Thank you. Kiss me, not as your uncle, but as James Harrington, the grim old man who told your father and mother he would protect their little girl, and has tried to do his duty by her."

Gertrude raised the withered hand, and held it to her lips, as, after removing the pillow, the old man lay back, tired out, and slept calmly and peacefully. And, as she watched him, she thought of her position there in that great house a dozen miles from town. How she had grown up with no young companions save those she had encountered at school, and how the time had glided away. How of late the old man who had adopted her had begun to talk of his approaching end, and chilled her at first with horror till she grew accustomed to his conversation; but never chilling her so much as when Saul Harrington, the old man's nephew, had begun to make advances to her—advances which filled her with disgust and dread.

She shivered as she thought of the scene in the dining-room that day; and, like a black cloud, the idea arose as to what her fate would be if the old man, hanging, as it were, on the brink of eternity, should pass away, leaving her alone.