

"Truly, Frances, I didn't mean to bang it. It just banged."

Three loud thumps sounded ominously from overhead.

"There she is!" said the child, her long eyes lighting with the lust of battle. "I'll go. You pretend you're out. Here, help me off with this old shawl."

Accentuated thumps, a perfect salvo of them, hastened the undraping process. "The turban too," whispered Rosme. "Hurry, or she'll smash the chandelier!" Then, as a final bang was followed by sudden silence, "Oh, thank goodness, she's dropped her cane!"

"Perhaps—" began Frances, but Rosme, always quicker in action than her cousin was in thought, was already on her way upstairs. A second later she presented herself a figure of unhurried calm, at the door of Aunt's bedroom.

"Were you calling, Aunt?"

A groan came hollowly from the bed just visible in the cool depths of the shaded room. But Rosme knew that this was not an answer. It was hardly even the beginning of one. Self-repression was not, at any time, one of Aunt's virtues and just now her natural energy had been reinforced by sleep. When she had expressed herself at great length and with much variety she groaned again and reverted to first causes.

"What was that crash I heard?" she demanded in a fainting voice. "Don't attempt to lie to me! I feel it is the mirror in the front parlour. It is broken—don't deny it! Where is Frances? Where is my cane? Oh, what a terrible thing it is to be helpless and alone!"

"It was only the door that banged, Aunt."

"Only! A door that bangs is nothing! My sleep is nothing! Besides it was not the door. My doors don't bang. If it did, it was done on purpose—to waken me. That is your gratitude. After all I have done for you. Where is Frances? If you didn't break the mirror, she did. I

know it is broken. I have ears, I hope!"

"Frances is out," fibbed Rosme shamelessly. "She's been up here twenty times to-day. I'm taking her place."

As she spoke the child came further into the room, and pausing at the foot of the old-fashioned bed, looked over gravely at the old lady who lay within.

"If you talk so loud, Aunt," she said in reasonable accents, "you'll begin to cough. And if you cough—" The rest of the sentence was thoughtful silence. Instantly, as if in response to some malign suggestion, the old lady began to cough. She coughed violently and at length. But when she had ceased coughing she took a long breath and began to scold again. The burden of her remarks seemed to be the hardness of heart apparent in Frances and still more noticeable in Rosme, who had no heart at all! Also the appalling lack of gratitude on the part of both to an Aunt who had done so much for them. References were made to the home which had been provided, to board, to clothes, to education, and it was particularly noted that all that was asked in return was a little consideration, a little care. But this of course was too much to expect. Only let their benefactress be confined to her bed for a day or two and what happened? Gallivanting—gross neglect—every mirror in the house broken, especially the large one in the front parlour bought in England by their dead uncle—

Rosme did not try to interrupt this flow of eloquence. Intent though her attitude was, she was in act not listening. Having heard it all with variations every day and several times a day for years she may have felt that she did not need to pay strict attention. Instead, she let her mind wander and fell to wondering if in the course of nature it were possible that some day she, Rosme, might come to look like Aunt? If she lived to be seventy-five years old? Perhaps all