

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE JAMES' PLAN.

"THAT you, Gertie?"

"Yes, uncle, dear," and the girl, who had made a brave effort to grow calm, approached the side of a great four-post bedstead, where a large, thin, yellow hand lay upon the white coverlet.

"That's right, my dear, don't leave me long. It's getting very near the end, my darling."

"Oh, uncle, dearest, don't—don't talk like that," cried the girl, throwing herself upon her knees, and passionately kissing the yellow hand.

"Ah, that's nice, my pet—that's real. You couldn't have acted that."

"Uncle, dear," whispered the girl, as she raised herself, and gently passed her arm beneath the neck of the gaunt, withered old man whose head lay upon the white pillow, "it doesn't sound like you to talk so bitterly."

"Oh, yes, it does, my dear. Why shouldn't I tell you I know you are a dear, good, patient little darling, true as steel to the disagreeable, miserly old hunks whom everybody hates and wishes dead. But who was that downstairs?"

"Mr. Saul Harrington, uncle."

"D——n him!"

"Uncle, dear!"

"Well, he deserves it. Do you know, Gertie, that man only says one prayer, and that is for my death."

"Oh, uncle, you misjudge him."

"Eh? What? Has he been trying to court you again?"

Gertrude inclined her head.

"Eh? What?" cried the old man excitedly, and his deeply sunken eyes seemed to glow. "You—you are not beginning to like him?"

"Oh! uncle, dear," sobbed the girl, "I detest him, and he frightens me."