

had entered it was still lingering around. The stunted evergreens, on which, since they first grew, no sunlight had ever fallen, no single ray of golden light to brighten their dark sad leaves for years, looked gloomier, darker, sadder, than they had ever looked before; the very house, with its closed shutters—all closed except one in the room where the dead had lain—seemed mourning for the stern mistress it had lost. A lonely woman now, lonely and sad, was Bertha Vaux.

She sat in the summer evening in her silent cheerless room. It was so very still, not even a breath of wind to stir the trees; no voice of living thing to break upon her solitude; no sound even of a single footstep on the dusty road; but in the solitude that was around her, countless thought seemed springing into life; things long forgotten; feelings long smothered; hopes once bright—bright as the opening of her life had been, that had been faded and buried long ago.

She thought of the time when she and her sister, fifteen years ago, had come first to the lonely house where now she was; of a few years later—two or three—when another younger sister had joined them there; and it seemed to Bertha, looking back, as if the house had sometimes then been filled with sunlight. The dark room in which she sat had once been lightened up—was it with the light from Gabrielle's bright eyes? In these long sad fifteen years, that little time stood out so clearly, so hopefully; it brought the tears to Bertha's eyes, thinking of it in her solitude. And how had it ended? For ten years nearly, now—for ten long years—the name of Gabrielle had never been spoken in that house. The light was gone—extinguished in a moment, suddenly; a darkness deeper than before had ever since fallen on the lonely house.

The thought of the years that had passed since then—of their eventlessness and weary sorrow; and then the thought of the last scene of all—that scene which still was like a living presence to her—her sister's death.

Joanna Vaux had been cold, stern, and unforgiving to the last; meeting death unmoved; repenting of no hard thing that she had done throughout her sad, stern life; entering the valley of the shadow of death fearlessly. But that cold death-bed struck upon the heart of the solitary woman who watched beside it, and awakened thoughts and doubts there, which would not rest. She wept now as she thought of it, sadly and quietly, and some murmured words burst from her lips, which sounded like a prayer—not for herself only.

Then from her sister's death-bed she went far, far back—to her own childhood—and a scene rose up before her; one that she had closed her eyes on many a time before, thinking vainly that so she could crush it from her heart, but now she did not try to force it back. The dark room where she sat, the gloomy, sunless house, seemed fading from her sight; the long, long years, with their weary train of shame and suffering—all were forgotten. She was in her old lost home again—the home where she was born; she saw a sunny lawn embowered with trees, each tree familiar to her and remembered well, and she herself, a happy child, was standing there; and by her side—with soft arms twining round her,