

seat, but she seemed very weak, and her hand trembled as she leaned on the arm of her chair.

"Do not rise, my good woman," Miss Vaux said, kindly, and her voice sounded almost soft—she was so used to attune it so as to be in harmony with a sick chamber—"do not rise; I see you are very weak," and she drew a chair near, and sat down by her side.

"You have come quite lately to the village, my sister tells me?"

"Quite lately, less than a week ago," was the answer; but spoken in so low a voice that the words were scarcely audible.

"Were you ever here before? Have you any connection with the place?" Miss Vaux asked.

"No, none."

"But you had probably some motive in coming here! Have you no relations or friends?"

"No, no," the woman cried, suddenly bursting into tears, "I have no friends, no friends in the wide world!"

A gentle hand was laid on her shoulder: a gentle voice whispered some soft words in her ear, and the woman looked up into Gabrielle's dark eyes, and murmured something between her sobs. Then they were all silent for a few moments.

"I think you are a widow?" Miss Vaux asked, gently, when she had become calmer.

"Yes," she answered, slowly, as though the word had been dragged from her, so much it seemed to pain her to speak it.

"And have you any children?"

A moment's pause, and then another "yes," hardly intelligible from the choking sob which accompanied it.

Miss Vaux was silent, looking inquiringly into the woman's face. It was partly turned from her, partly shaded with her thin hand; her large eyes looking up with a strange agonized look into Gabrielle's eyes, her pale lips moving convulsively. Gabrielle's face was almost as pale as her's; her look almost as full of agony.

Miss Vaux glanced from one to the other, at first with pity; then suddenly a quick change came over her face; a deep flush mounted to her brow, she darted from her seat; and, calmer as she ordinarily was, her whole figure trembled as she stood before them, with her fierce gaze turned on them.

Pale as death, neither of them speaking, they bore her passionate look; quite motionless too, except that Gabrielle had instinctively clasped the widow's hand in her's, and held it tightly.

"Speak to me, Gabrielle!" Miss Vaux said; and her voice, harsh, loud, and quivering with passion, echoed through the room; "tell me who this woman is?"