

It was not till the summer had departed that I learned this story.

Whilst the sun shone and the roses bloomed, and the nightingales sang about the windows till midnight, I tried hard to shut my eyes to the memory of old Nelly's hint. So long as the summer lasted the Thatched House was a dwelling of sunshine and sweet odors, and bright fancies for me. It was different, however, when a wintry sky closed in around us, when solitary leaves dangled upon shivering boughs, to shudder at the windows all through the dark nights. Then I took fear to my heart, and wished that I had never seen the Thatched House.

Aunt Featherstone was a dear old, nervous, cross, good-natured, crotchety, kind-hearted lady, who was always needing to be coaxed. Therefore, as long as it was possible, I kept the dreadful secret from her ears. About the middle of November she noticed that I was beginning to look pale, to lose my appetite, and to start and tremble at the most common-place sounds. The truth was that the long nights of terror which passed over my head, in my pretty sleeping-room off the ghost's corridor, were wearing upon my health and spirits. Morning after morning I awakened, weary and jaded, after a short unsatisfying sleep, and resolved that I would confess to my aunt, and implore her to fly from the place at once. But, when seated at the breakfast table, my heart invariably failed me. I accounted by the mention of a headache for my pale cheeks, and kept my secret.

Some weeks passed, and then I in my turn noticed that Aunt Featherstone had grown exceedingly dull in spirits. "Can any one have told her the story of the Thatched House?" was the question I quickly asked myself. But the servants denied having broken their promise not to mention it in her presence. Things went on in this way for some time, and at last a dreadful night came. I had been for a long walk during the day, and had gone to bed rather earlier than usual. For about two hours I slept, and then I was roused suddenly by a slight noise just outside my door. I sat up shuddering and listened. I pressed my hands tightly over my heart to try and keep its throbbing from killing me; for distinctly in the merciless stillness of the winter night. I

heard the tread of a stealthy footstep in the passage outside my room. Along the corridor it crept, down the staircase it went, and was lost in the hall below.

I shall never forget the anguish of fear in which I passed the remainder of that wretched night. While cowering into my pillow, I made up my mind to leave the Thatched House as soon as morning broke, and never to enter it again.

I had heard of people whose hair had grown gray in a single night, of grief or terror. When I glanced in the looking-glass at dawn I almost expected to see a white head upon my own shoulders.

During the next day, I, as usual failed of courage to speak to my aunt. I desired one of the maids to sleep on the couch in my room, keeping this arrangement a secret. The following night I felt some little comfort from the presence of a second person near me; but the girl soon fell asleep. Lying awake in fearful expectation I was visited by a repetition of the previous night's horror.

I suffered secretly in this way for about a week. My aunt groaned over me, and sent for the doctor.

I said to him: "Doctor, I am only a little moped, I have got a bright idea for curing myself. You must prescribe me a schoolfellow."

Hereupon, Aunt Featherstone began to ride off on her old hobby about the loneliness, the unhealthiness and total objectionableness of the Thatched House. She never mentioned the word "haunted" though I afterwards knew that at that very time, and for some weeks previously, she had been in full possession of the story of the nightly footstep. The doctor recommended me a complete change of scene; but instead of taking advantage of this, I asked for a companion at the thatched house.

The prescription I had begged for was written in the shape of a note to my dear friend Ada Rivers, imploring her to come to me at once. When I wrote "Do come for I am sick," I was pretty sure she would obey the summons; but when I added, "I have a mystery for you to explore," I was convinced of her compliance beyond the possibility of a doubt.

It wanted just one fortnight of Christ