

Gabrielle tried to speak again; but Bertha raised her hand warningly and they were all silent; Gabrielle with her face bowed down upon her hands in the thick twilight.

"We will close the window and have lights," Bertha said, after some time had passed; "the night air is getting cold."

With a deep sigh Gabrielle rose, and drew down the open window, standing there for some minutes alone, and looking out upon the dark evergreen ground.

CHAPTER II.

"I am going into the village," Miss Vaux said. "If you will tell me where that poor woman lives you were speaking of last night, Gabrielle, I will call upon her now."

"Let me go with you," Gabrielle said quickly. "I told her we would come together. Wait for me one minute, and I will be ready."

"I scarcely see the need of it. You are looking pale and ill, Gabrielle. I would advise you to stay in the house and rest."

"I have a headache, and the air will do it good," Gabrielle answered. "Let me go, sister."

"As you will, then," Miss Vaux said, and Gabrielle went away to dress.

She had not yet recovered her usual gay spirits: but was still grave, quiet, and apparently occupied with her own thoughts, and the two walked side by side, almost without speaking, along the little path over the field which lay between their house and the village. It was a very bright sunny summer's day, too hot, indeed, for walking, but beautiful to look at. The heat seemed to weary Gabrielle, she walked so very slowly, and was so pale.

"This is the house, sister. We go through the kitchen; she has the room above."

They raised the latch and went in. No one was in the lower room; so they passed through, and ascended a low narrow staircase, almost like a ladder, which rose abruptly from a doorway at the farther side, until they reached another door which stood facing them, without any landing between it and the highest step. Gabrielle knocked, and a faint voice from within answered, "Come in;" and she entered, followed by her sister. It was a very small room, and very bare of furniture; for there was little in it but a deal bedstead, an old table, and one or two odd rickety chairs, in one of which—that boasted of a pair of broken arms and something that had once been a cushion—sat the woman they had come to visit.

Gabrielle went quickly up to her, and taking her hand said in a low voice: "I have brought my sister, as I promised—my eldest sister."

The woman bowed her head without speaking: then tried to rise from her

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