

Of family treasure it had been the sole repository; and the receptacle perhaps of many a family secret. Immensely large dark rooms opened on long and gloomy halls and ghostly passages which led to vaults beneath, into whose mysteries few had the desire and none the courage to penetrate. Its moss-grown walls, to which the ivy clung, and over which the morning-glory displayed its royal purple, were shaded by the larch and willow; in front a broad lawn stretched away, and from the richly curtained windows of my own room I looked out on ships at sea. Here I often sat, and childlike mused for hours and hours, happy in the love which my father lavished upon me, and grateful for the care with which my slightest wish was gratified.

Adjoining my father's estate was that of another peer, whose daughter Isabel, of exactly my own age, was my constant companion. Whatever might have been the charms of my own person, Isabel was very, very beautiful. Her form was willowy and graceful, her hair was raven black, her complexion olive, and her eyes a dark brown, deep and lustrous. Her wishes were my wishes, her friends were my friends; I shared her joys, and her griefs I made my own. The same teachers instructed us; we studied our lessons from the same book. Thus passed our childhood. When we had arrived at the age of nineteen years our friendship had not waned; if possible it was deeper and firmer than ever before.

"About this time a French teacher was engaged to instruct us in the language of his people. Louis was young, vivacious and agreeable; and under his tutorship we made rapid progress. When we rode out he accompanied us, and he was our companion in many a ramble across the fields and through the woods in search of ferns and flowers. As might have been expected, this daily intercourse led to yet more intimate relations. Isabel and I were young and thoughtless; Louis was full of the passion of his race, and he fell a victim to its fierce consuming fire. I supposed Isabel to be the object of his love by reason of the marked attention he paid her. Unconscious alike of its presence and of its nature, a change took place in all my feelings. This change I knew afterward to have been the beginning of a passion which gave rise to hopes, alas! never to be realized. I fell madly in love with our French tutor. When he smiled on me I was happy; when he sought Isabel's society I was miserable indeed. At last he turned from her and devoted himself to me exclusively; my cup of happiness was full. Contrary to what I had feared, and what I had expected Isabel's affection for me underwent no change. Thus a winter and a spring passed by, and with its balmy air, its clear blue sky, its birds and flowers, the month of June came on.

"In the northwest corner of the old hall was a room whose interior had never been seen by myself, or by any living servant; and even my father had never stood within its walls. Its heavy oaken door, with its rusty lock and the dusty cobwebs which enveloped it like a screen, were evidence of its long disuse. Among the servants was a tradition that, during a past generation, Lady

Alice—a beautiful and accomplished daughter of the house—was wont to meet her lover in this very room. Her lover was of a family at feud with her own, and he was forbidden to seek her hand. But through the bribery of a servant, he gained access to his lady's presence, and here in this ghostly chamber they secretly kept their tryst. One night they were discovered by an angry brother, who fought with and slew the lover with his mistress standing by. Shrieking she threw herself upon her lover's corpse; when removed, her reason had fled forever. Not long afterward she died a maniac, tearing out handfuls of her golden hair, and raving to the last her lover's name. The room in which the tragedy took place was closed and never afterward reopened.

"This tale was told me by my nurse over and over again. So firmly did the servants believe in this legend, and so filled were their minds with superstitious fears, that not one of them could be induced to approach the threshold of what they termed the haunted chamber. Beneath a portrait in my father's room, hung a large and rusty iron key. This the servants said belonged to the door of the haunted chamber, from which they fancied issued sounds of mortal combat. In vain I argued that what resembled scuffling was only the sound of the scampering rats.

"One day I asked my father if he knew what the room contained—why it remained a sealed and almost forgotten mystery. He shook his head sadly in reply. With his hand resting upon my hair he said,—

"My dear child, in this world are many, many things it were better never to have known, or if known better they were totally forgotten. This is one of them. The threshold of that chamber I have never crossed; neither did my father, nor his father before him. To stand within its walls, or to penetrate its mysteries, I have no desire; and I hope I never shall have. Go, my dear child, to your studies—never mention the subject again."

"As may be supposed, this, instead of satisfying my childish curiosity, served to inflame it the more. I mused over the mystery by day, and at night my dreams were of a ghostly creature with pleading eyes and streaming hair who kept pointing to the portals of the haunted room.

"One day in confidence I whispered the tale to Louis. He laughed in scorn.

"'Fudge! It is but the fancy of some daft creature,' he said.

"Next day, however, he asked me to repeat the story; I did so. Instead of jesting, he listened attentively. When I had done he asked me to show him the door of the haunted room. I complied, clinging to his arm, fearful lest evil might befall him.

"From this time forward a change came over him hardly perceptible at first, but more and more plainly marked each day. Formerly he was gay and sprightly and free of speech; now he was fitful, uneasy and taciturn. With sorrow I observed the change. How bitterly I upbraided myself for having told him the weird