

BOOK THE FIFTH. DE STANCY AND PAULA.

I.

Miss Power was reclining on a red velvet couch in the bedroom of an old-fashioned red hotel at Strassburg, and her friend Miss De Stancy was sitting by a window of the same apartment. They were both rather wearied by a long journey of the previous day. The hotel overlooked the large open Kleber Platz, erect in the midst of which the bronze statue of General Kleber received the rays of a warm sun that was powerless to brighten him. The whole square, with its people and vehicles going to and fro as if they had plenty of time, was visible to Charlotte in her chair; but Paula from her horizontal position could see nothing below the level of the many dormered house-tops on the opposite side of the Platz. After watching this upper storey of the city for some time in silence, she asked Charlotte to hand her a binocular lying on the table, through which instrument she quietly regarded the distant roofs.

'What strange and philosophical creatures storks are,' she said. 'They give a taciturn, ghostly character to the whole town.'

The birds were crossing and recrossing the field of the glass in their flight hither and thither between the Strassburg chimneys, their sad grey forms sharply outlined against the sky, and their skinny legs showing beneath like the limbs of dead martyrs in Crivelli's emaciated

imaginings. The indifference of these birds to all that was going on beneath them impressed her: to harmonize with their solemn and silent movements the houses beneath should have been deserted, and grass growing in the streets.

Behind the long roofs thus visible to Paula over the window-sill, with their tiers of dormer-windows, rose the cathedral spire in airy openwork, forming the highest object in the scene; it suggested something which for a long time she appeared unwilling to utter; but natural instinct had its way.

'A place like this,' she said, 'where he can study Gothic architecture, would, I should have thought, be a spot more congenial to him than Monaco.'

The person referred to was the misrepresented Somerset, whom the two had been gingerly discussing from time to time, allowing any casual subject, such as that of the storks, to interrupt the personal one at every two or three sentences.

'It would be more like him to be here,' replied Miss De Stancy, trusting her tongue with only the barest generalities on this matter.

Somerset was again dismissed for the stork topic, but Paula could not let him alone; and she presently resumed, as if an irresistible fascination compelled what judgment had forbidden: 'The strongest-minded

persons are sometimes caught unawares at that place, if they once think they will retrieve their first losses; and I am not aware that he is particularly strong-minded.'

For a moment Charlotte looked at her with a mixed expression, in which there was deprecation that a woman with any feeling should criticize Somerset so frigidly, and relief that it was Paula who did so. For, notwithstanding her assumption that Somerset could never be anything more to her than he was already, Charlotte's heart would occasionally step down and trouble her views so expressed.

Whether looking through a glass at distant objects enabled Paula to bottle up her affection for the absent one, or whether her friend Charlotte had so little personality in Paula's regard that she could commune with her as with a lay figure, it was certain that she evinced remarkable ease in speaking of Somerset, resuming her words about him in the tone of one to whom he was at most an ordinary professional adviser. 'It would be very awkward for the works at the castle if he has got into a scrape. I suppose the builders were well posted with instructions before he left: but he ought certainly to return soon. Why did he leave England at all just now?'

'Perhaps it was to see you.'

'He should have waited; it would not have been so dreadfully long to May or June. Charlotte, how can a man who does such a hare-brained thing as

this be deemed trustworthy in an important work like that of rebuilding Stancy Castle?'

There was such stress in the inquiry that, whatever factitiousness had gone before, Charlotte perceived Paula to be at last speaking her mind; and it seemed as if Somerset must have considerably lost ground in her opinion, or she would not have criticized him thus.

'My brother will tell us full particulars when he comes: perhaps it is not at all as we suppose,' said Charlotte. She strained her eyes across the Platz and added, 'He ought to have been here before this time.'

While they waited and talked, Paula still observing the storks, the hotel omnibus came round the corner from the station. 'I believe he has arrived,' resumed Miss De Stancy; 'I see something that looks like his portmanteau on the top of the omnibus.... Yes; it is his baggage. I'll run down to him.'

De Stancy had obtained six weeks' additional leave on account of his health, which had somewhat suffered in India. The first use he made of his extra time was in hastening back to meet the travelling ladies here at Strassburg. Mr. Power and Mrs. Goodman were also at the hotel, and when Charlotte got downstairs, the former was welcoming De Stancy at the door.

Paula had not seen him since he set out from Genoa for Nice,

commissioned by her to deliver the hundred pounds to Somerset. His note, stating that he had failed to meet Somerset, contained no details, and she guessed that he would soon appear before her now to answer any question about that peculiar errand.

Her anticipations were justified by the event; she had no sooner gone into the next sitting-room than Charlotte De Stancy appeared and asked if her brother might come up. The closest observer would have been in doubt whether Paula's ready reply in the affirmative was prompted by personal consideration for De Stancy, or by a hope to hear more of his mission to Nice. As soon as she had welcomed him she reverted at once to the subject.

'Yes, as I told you, he was not at the place of meeting,' De Stancy replied. And taking from his pocket the bag of ready money he placed it intact upon the table.

De Stancy did this with a hand that shook somewhat more than a long railway journey was adequate to account for; and in truth it was the vision of Dare's position which agitated the unhappy captain: for had that young man, as De Stancy feared, been tampering with Somerset's name, his fate now trembled in the balance; Paula would unquestionably and naturally invoke the aid of the law against him if she discovered such an imposition.

'Were you punctual to the time mentioned?' she asked curiously.

De Stancy replied in the affirmative.

'Did you wait long?' she continued.

'Not very long,' he answered, his instinct to screen the possibly guilty one confining him to guarded statements, while still adhering to the literal truth.

'Why was that?'

'Somebody came and told me that he would not appear.'

'Who?'

'A young man who has been acting as his clerk. His name is Dare. He informed me that Mr. Somerset could not keep the appointment.'

'Why?'

'He had gone on to San Remo.'

'Has he been travelling with Mr. Somerset?'

'He had been with him. They know each other very well. But as you commissioned me to deliver the money into no hands but Mr. Somerset's, I

adhered strictly to your instructions.'

'But perhaps my instructions were not wise. Should it in your opinion have been sent by this young man? Was he commissioned to ask you for it?'

De Stancy murmured that Dare was not commissioned to ask for it; that upon the whole he deemed her instructions wise; and was still of opinion that the best thing had been done.

Although De Stancy was distracted between his desire to preserve Dare from the consequences of folly, and a gentlemanly wish to keep as close to the truth as was compatible with that condition, his answers had not appeared to Paula to be particularly evasive, the conjuncture being one in which a handsome heiress's shrewdness was prone to overleap itself by setting down embarrassment on the part of the man she questioned to a mere lover's difficulty in steering between honour and rivalry.

She put but one other question. 'Did it appear as if he, Mr. Somerset, after telegraphing, had--had--regretted doing so, and evaded the result by not keeping the appointment?'

'That's just how it appears.' The words, which saved Dare from ignominy, cost De Stancy a good deal. He was sorry for Somerset, sorry for himself, and very sorry for Paula. But Dare was to De Stancy what Somerset could never be: and 'for his kin that is near unto him shall a

man be defiled.'

After that interview Charlotte saw with warring impulses that Somerset slowly diminished in Paula's estimate; slowly as the moon wanes, but as certainly. Charlotte's own love was of a clinging, uncritical sort, and though the shadowy intelligence of Somerset's doings weighed down her soul with regret, it seemed to make not the least difference in her affection for him.

In the afternoon the whole party, including De Stancy, drove about the streets. Here they looked at the house in which Goethe had lived, and afterwards entered the cathedral. Observing in the south transept a crowd of people waiting patiently, they were reminded that they unwittingly stood in the presence of the popular clock-work of Schwilgue.

Mr. Power and Mrs. Goodman decided that they would wait with the rest of the idlers and see the puppets perform at the striking. Charlotte also waited with them; but as it wanted eight minutes to the hour, and as Paula had seen the show before, she moved on into the nave.

Presently she found that De Stancy had followed. He did not come close till she, seeing him stand silent, said, 'If it were not for this cathedral, I should not like the city at all; and I have even seen cathedrals I like better. Luckily we are going on to Baden to-morrow.'



'Your uncle has just told me. He has asked me to keep you company.'

'Are you intending to?' said Paula, probing the base-moulding of a pier with her parasol.

'I have nothing better to do, nor indeed half so good,' said De Stancy.

'I am abroad for my health, you know, and what's like the Rhine and its neighbourhood in early summer, before the crowd comes? It is delightful to wander about there, or anywhere, like a child, influenced by no fixed motive more than that of keeping near some friend, or friends, including the one we most admire in the world.'

'That sounds perilously like love-making.'

'Tis love indeed.'

'Well, love is natural to men, I suppose,' rejoined the young lady. 'But you must love within bounds; or you will be enervated, and cease to be useful as a heavy arm of the service.'

'My dear Miss Power, your didactic and respectable rules won't do for me. If you expect straws to stop currents, you are sadly mistaken! But no--let matters be: I am a happy contented mortal at present, say what you will.... You don't ask why? Perhaps you know. It is because all I care for in the world is near me, and that I shall never be more than a hundred yards from her as long as the present arrangement continues.'

'We are in a cathedral, remember, Captain De Stancy, and should not keep up a secular conversation.'

'If I had never said worse in a cathedral than what I have said here, I should be content to meet my eternal judge without absolution. Your uncle asked me this morning how I liked you.'

'Well, there was no harm in that.'

'How I like you! Harm, no; but you should have seen how silly I looked. Fancy the inadequacy of the expression when my whole sense is absorbed by you.'

'Men allow themselves to be made ridiculous by their own feelings in an inconceivable way.'

'True, I am a fool; but forgive me,' he rejoined, observing her gaze, which wandered critically from roof to clerestory, and then to the pillars, without once lighting on him. 'Don't mind saying Yes.--You look at this thing and that thing, but you never look at me, though I stand here and see nothing but you.'

'There, the clock is striking--and the cock crows. Please go across to the transept and tell them to come out this way.'

De Stancy went. When he had gone a few steps he turned his head. She had at last ceased to study the architecture, and was looking at him. Perhaps his words had struck her, for it seemed at that moment as if he read in her bright eyes a genuine interest in him and his fortunes.

## II.

Next day they went on to Baden. De Stancy was beginning to cultivate the passion of love even more as an escape from the gloomy relations of his life than as matrimonial strategy. Paula's juxtaposition had the attribute of making him forget everything in his own history. She was a magic alternative; and the most foolish boyish shape into which he could throw his feelings for her was in this respect to be aimed at as the act of highest wisdom.

He supplemented the natural warmth of feeling that she had wrought in him by every artificial means in his power, to make the distraction the more complete. He had not known anything like this self-obscuration for a dozen years, and when he conjectured that she might really learn to love him he felt exalted in his own eyes and purified from the dross of his former life. Such uneasiness of conscience as arose when he suddenly remembered Dare, and the possibility that Somerset was getting ousted unfairly, had its weight in depressing him; but he was inclined to accept his fortune without much question.

The journey to Baden, though short, was not without incidents on which he could work out this curious hobby of cultivating to superlative power an already positive passion. Handing her in and out of the carriage, accidentally getting brushed by her clothes, of all such as this he made available fuel. Paula, though she might have guessed the general nature of what was going on, seemed unconscious of the refinements he was

trying to throw into it, and sometimes, when in stepping into or from a railway carriage she unavoidably put her hand upon his arm, the obvious insignificance she attached to the action struck him with misgiving.

One of the first things they did at Baden was to stroll into the Trink-halle, where Paula sipped the water. She was about to put down the glass, when De Stancy quickly took it from her hands as though to make use of it himself.

'O, if that is what you mean,' she said mischievously, 'you should have noticed the exact spot. It was there.' She put her finger on a particular portion of its edge.

'You ought not to act like that, unless you mean something, Miss Power,' he replied gravely.

'Tell me more plainly.'

'I mean, you should not do things which excite in me the hope that you care something for me, unless you really do.'

'I put my finger on the edge and said it was there.'

'Meaning, "It was there my lips touched; let yours do the same."'

'The latter part I wholly deny,' she answered, with disregard, after

which she went away, and kept between Charlotte and her aunt for the rest of the afternoon.

Since the receipt of the telegram Paula had been frequently silent; she frequently stayed in alone, and sometimes she became quite gloomy--an altogether unprecedented phase for her. This was the case on the morning after the incident in the Trink-halle. Not to intrude on her, Charlotte walked about the landings of the sunny white hotel in which they had taken up their quarters, went down into the court, and petted the tortoises that were creeping about there among the flowers and plants; till at last, on going to her friend, she caught her reading some old letters of Somerset's.

Paula made no secret of them, and Miss De Stancy could see that more than half were written on blue paper, with diagrams amid the writing: they were, in fact, simply those sheets of his letters which related to the rebuilding. Nevertheless, Charlotte fancied she had caught Paula in a sentimental mood; and doubtless could Somerset have walked in at this moment instead of Charlotte it might have fared well with him, so insidiously do tender memories reassert themselves in the face of outward mishaps.

They took a drive down the Lichtenthal road and then into the forest, De Stancy and Abner Power riding on horseback alongside. The sun streamed yellow behind their backs as they wound up the long inclines, lighting the red trunks, and even the blue-black foliage itself. The summer had

already made impression upon that mass of uniform colour by tipping every twig with a tiny sprout of virescent yellow; while the minute sounds which issued from the forest revealed that the apparently still place was becoming a perfect reservoir of insect life.

Abner Power was quite sentimental that day. 'In such places as these,' he said, as he rode alongside Mrs. Goodman, 'nature's powers in the multiplication of one type strike me as much as the grandeur of the mass.'

Mrs. Goodman agreed with him, and Paula said, 'The foliage forms the roof of an interminable green crypt, the pillars being the trunks, and the vault the interlacing boughs.'

'It is a fine place in a thunderstorm,' said De Stancy. 'I am not an enthusiast, but to see the lightning spring hither and thither, like lazy-tongs, bristling, and striking, and vanishing, is rather impressive.'

'It must be indeed,' said Paula.

'And in the winter winds these pines sigh like ten thousand spirits in trouble.'

'Indeed they must,' said Paula.

'At the same time I know a little fir-plantation about a mile square not far from Markton,' said De Stancy, 'which is precisely like this in miniature,--stems, colours, slopes, winds, and all. If we were to go there any time with a highly magnifying pair of spectacles it would look as fine as this--and save a deal of travelling.'

'I know the place, and I agree with you,' said Paula.

'You agree with me on all subjects but one,' he presently observed, in a voice not intended to reach the others.

Paula looked at him, but was silent.

Onward and upward they went, the same pattern and colour of tree repeating themselves endlessly, till in a couple of hours they reached the castle hill which was to be the end of their journey, and beheld stretched beneath them the valley of the Murg. They alighted and entered the fortress.

'What did you mean by that look of kindness you bestowed upon me just now, when I said you agreed with me on all subjects but one?' asked De Stancy half humorously, as he held open a little door for her, the others having gone ahead.

'I meant, I suppose, that I was much obliged to you for not requiring agreement on that one subject,' she said, passing on.



'Not more than that?' said De Stancy, as he followed her. 'But whenever I involuntarily express towards you sentiments that there can be no mistaking, you seem truly compassionate.'

'If I seem so, I feel so.'

'If you mean no more than mere compassion, I wish you would show nothing at all, for your mistaken kindness is only preparing more misery for me than I should have if let alone to suffer without mercy.'

'I implore you to be quiet, Captain De Stancy! Leave me, and look out of the window at the view here, or at the pictures, or at the armour, or whatever it is we are come to see.'

'Very well. But pray don't extract amusement from my harmless remarks. Such as they are I mean them.'

She stopped him by changing the subject, for they had entered an octagonal chamber on the first floor, presumably full of pictures and curiosities; but the shutters were closed, and only stray beams of light gleamed in to suggest what was there.

'Can't somebody open the windows?' said Paula.

'The attendant is about to do it,' said her uncle; and as he spoke the

shutters to the east were flung back, and one of the loveliest views in the forest disclosed itself outside.

Some of them stepped out upon the balcony. The river lay along the bottom of the valley, irradiated with a silver shine. Little rafts of pinewood floated on its surface like tiny splinters, the men who steered them not appearing larger than ants.

Paula stood on the balcony, looking for a few minutes upon the sight, and then came into the shadowy room, where De Stancy had remained. While

the rest were still outside she resumed: 'You must not suppose that I shrink from the subject you so persistently bring before me. I respect deep affection--you know I do; but for me to say that I have any such for you, of the particular sort you only will be satisfied with, would be absurd. I don't feel it, and therefore there can be nothing between us. One would think it would be better to feel kindly towards you than to feel nothing at all. But if you object to that I'll try to feel nothing.'

'I don't really object to your sympathy,' said De Stancy, rather struck by her seriousness. 'But it is very saddening to think you can feel nothing more.'

'It must be so, since I CAN feel no more,' she decisively replied, adding, as she stopped her seriousness: 'You must pray for strength to

get over it.'

'One thing I shall never pray for; to see you give yourself to another man. But I suppose I shall witness that some day.'

'You may,' she gravely returned.

'You have no doubt chosen him already,' cried the captain bitterly.

'No, Captain De Stancy,' she said shortly, a faint involuntary blush coming into her face as she guessed his allusion.

This, and a few glances round at the pictures and curiosities, completed their survey of the castle. De Stancy knew better than to trouble her further that day with special remarks. During the return journey he rode ahead with Mr. Power and she saw no more of him.

She would have been astonished had she heard the conversation of the two gentlemen as they wound gently downwards through the trees.

'As far as I am concerned,' Captain De Stancy's companion was saying, 'nothing would give me more unfeigned delight than that you should persevere and win her. But you must understand that I have no authority over her--nothing more than the natural influence that arises from my being her father's brother.'

'And for exercising that much, whatever it may be, in my favour I thank you heartily,' said De Stancy. 'But I am coming to the conclusion that it is useless to press her further. She is right! I am not the man for her. I am too old, and too poor; and I must put up as well as I can with her loss--drown her image in old Falernian till I embark in Charon's boat for good!--Really, if I had the industry I could write some good Horatian verses on my inauspicious situation!... Ah, well;--in this way I affect levity over my troubles; but in plain truth my life will not be the brightest without her.'

'Don't be down-hearted! you are too--too gentlemanly, De Stancy, in this matter--you are too soon put off--you should have a touch of the canvasser about you in approaching her; and not stick at things. You have my hearty invitation to travel with us all the way till we cross to England, and there will be heaps of opportunities as we wander on. I'll keep a slow pace to give you time.'

'You are very good, my friend! Well, I will try again. I am full of doubt and indecision, mind, but at present I feel that I will try again. There is, I suppose, a slight possibility of something or other turning up in my favour, if it is true that the unexpected always happens--for I foresee no chance whatever.... Which way do we go when we leave here to-morrow?'

'To Carlsruhe, she says, if the rest of us have no objection.'

'Carlsruhe, then, let it be, with all my heart; or anywhere.'

To Carlsruhe they went next day, after a night of soft rain which brought up a warm steam from the Schwarzwald valleys, and caused the young tufts and grasses to swell visibly in a few hours. After the Baden slopes the flat thoroughfares of 'Charles's Rest' seemed somewhat uninteresting, though a busy fair which was proceeding in the streets created a quaint and unexpected liveliness. On reaching the old-fashioned inn in the Lange-Strasse that they had fixed on, the women of the party betook themselves to their rooms and showed little inclination to see more of the world that day than could be gleaned from the hotel windows.

### III.

While the malignant tongues had been playing havoc with Somerset's fame in the ears of Paula and her companion, the young man himself was proceeding partly by rail, partly on foot, below and amid the olive-clad hills, vineyards, carob groves, and lemon gardens of the Mediterranean shores. Arrived at San Remo he wrote to Nice to inquire for letters, and such as had come were duly forwarded; but not one of them was from Paula. This broke down his resolution to hold off, and he hastened directly to Genoa, regretting that he had not taken this step when he first heard that she was there.

Something in the very aspect of the marble halls of that city, which at any other time he would have liked to linger over, whispered to him that the bird had flown; and inquiry confirmed the fancy. Nevertheless, the architectural beauties of the palace-bordered street, looking as if mountains of marble must have been levelled to supply the materials for constructing it, detained him there two days: or rather a feat of resolution, by which he set himself to withstand the drag-chain of Paula's influence, was operative for that space of time.

At the end of it he moved onward. There was no difficulty in discovering their track northwards; and feeling that he might as well return to England by the Rhine route as by any other, he followed in the course they had chosen, getting scent of them in Strassburg, missing them at Baden by a day, and finally overtaking them at Carlsruhe, which town he

reached on the morning after the Power and De Stancy party had taken up their quarters at the ancient inn above mentioned. When Somerset was about to get out of the train at this place, little dreaming what a meaning the word Karlsruhe would have for him in subsequent years, he was disagreeably surprised to see no other than Dare stepping out of the adjoining carriage. A new brown leather valise in one of his hands, a new umbrella in the other, and a new suit of fashionable clothes on his back, seemed to denote considerable improvement in the young man's fortunes. Somerset was so struck by the circumstance of his being on this spot that he almost missed his opportunity for alighting.

Dare meanwhile had moved on without seeing his former employer, and Somerset resolved to take the chance that offered, and let him go. There was something so mysterious in their common presence simultaneously at one place, five hundred miles from where they had last met, that he exhausted conjecture on whether Dare's errand this way could have anything to do with his own, or whether their juxtaposition a second time was the result of pure accident. Greatly as he would have liked to get this answered by a direct question to Dare himself, he did not counteract his first instinct, and remained unseen.

They went out in different directions, when Somerset for the first time remembered that, in learning at Baden that the party had flitted towards Karlsruhe, he had taken no care to ascertain the name of the hotel they were bound for. Karlsruhe was not a large place and the point was immaterial, but the omission would necessitate a little inquiry. To

follow Dare on the chance of his having fixed upon the same quarters was a course which did not commend itself. He resolved to get some lunch before proceeding with his business--or fatuity--of discovering the elusive lady, and drove off to a neighbouring tavern, which did not happen to be, as he hoped it might, the one chosen by those who had preceded him.

Meanwhile Dare, previously master of their plans, went straight to the house which sheltered them, and on entering under the archway from the Lange-Strasse was saved the trouble of inquiring for Captain De Stancy by seeing him drinking bitters at a little table in the court. Had Somerset chosen this inn for his quarters instead of the one in the Market-Place which he actually did choose, the three must inevitably have met here at this moment, with some possibly striking dramatic results; though what they would have been remains for ever hidden in the darkness of the unfulfilled.

De Stancy jumped up from his chair, and went forward to the new-comer. 'You are not long behind us, then,' he said, with laconic disquietude. 'I thought you were going straight home?'

'I was,' said Dare, 'but I have been blessed with what I may call a small competency since I saw you last. Of the two hundred francs you gave me I risked fifty at the tables, and I have multiplied them, how many times do you think? More than four hundred times.'



De Stancy immediately looked grave. 'I wish you had lost them,' he said, with as much feeling as could be shown in a place where strangers were hovering near.

'Nonsense, captain! I have proceeded purely on a calculation of chances; and my calculations proved as true as I expected, notwithstanding a little in-and-out luck at first. Witness this as the result.' He smacked his bag with his umbrella, and the chink of money resounded from within. 'Just feel the weight of it!'

'It is not necessary. I take your word.'

'Shall I lend you five pounds?'

'God forbid! As if that would repay me for what you have cost me! But come, let's get out of this place to where we can talk more freely.' He put his hand through the young man's arm, and led him round the corner of the hotel towards the Schloss-Platz.

'These runs of luck will be your ruin, as I have told you before,' continued Captain De Stancy. 'You will be for repeating and repeating your experiments, and will end by blowing your brains out, as wiser heads than yours have done. I am glad you have come away, at any rate. Why did you travel this way?'

'Simply because I could afford it, of course.--But come, captain,

something has ruffled you to-day. I thought you did not look in the best temper the moment I saw you. Every sip you took of your pick-up as you sat there showed me something was wrong. Tell your worry!

'Pooh--I can tell you in two words,' said the captain satirically. 'Your arrangement for my wealth and happiness--for I suppose you still claim it to be yours--has fallen through. The lady has announced to-day that she means to send for Somerset instantly. She is coming to a personal explanation with him. So woe to me--and in another sense, woe to you, as I have reason to fear.'

'Send for him!' said Dare, with the stillness of complete abstraction.

'Then he'll come.'

'Well,' said De Stancy, looking him in the face. 'And does it make you feel you had better be off? How about that telegram? Did he ask you to send it, or did he not?'

'One minute, or I shall be up such a tree as nobody ever saw the like of.'

'Then what did you come here for?' burst out De Stancy. "'Tis my belief you are no more than a--But I won't call you names; I'll tell you quite plainly that if there is anything wrong in that message to her--which I believe there is--no, I can't believe, though I fear it--you have the chance of appearing in drab clothes at the expense of the Government

before the year is out, and I of being eternally disgraced!

'No, captain, you won't be disgraced. I am bad to beat, I can tell you. And come the worst luck, I don't say a word.'

'But those letters pricked in your skin would say a good deal, it strikes me.'

'What! would they strip me?--but it is not coming to that. Look here, now, I'll tell you the truth for once; though you don't believe me capable of it. I DID concoct that telegram--and sent it; just as a practical joke; and many a worse one has been only laughed at by honest men and officers. I could show you a bigger joke still--a joke of jokes--on the same individual.'

Dare as he spoke put his hand into his breast-pocket, as if the said joke lay there; but after a moment he withdrew his hand empty, as he continued:

'Having invented it I have done enough; I was going to explain it to you, that you might carry it out. But you are so serious, that I will leave it alone. My second joke shall die with me.'

'So much the better,' said De Stancy. 'I don't like your jokes, even though they are not directed against myself. They express a kind of humour which does not suit me.'

'You may have reason to alter your mind,' said Dare carelessly. 'Your success with your lady may depend on it. The truth is, captain, we aristocrats must not take too high a tone. Our days as an independent division of society, which holds aloof from other sections, are past. This has been my argument (in spite of my strong Norman feelings) ever since I broached the subject of your marrying this girl, who represents both intellect and wealth--all, in fact, except the historical prestige that you represent. And we mustn't flinch at things. The case is even more pressing than ordinary cases--owing to the odd fact that the representative of the new blood who has come in our way actually lives in your own old house, and owns your own old lands. The ordinary reason for such alliances is quintupled in our case. Do then just think and be reasonable, before you talk tall about not liking my jokes, and all that. Beggars mustn't be choosers.'

'There's really much reason in your argument,' said De Stancy, with a bitter laugh: 'and my own heart argues much the same way. But, leaving me to take care of my aristocratic self, I advise your aristocratic self to slip off at once to England like any hang-gallows dog; and if Somerset is here, and you have been doing wrong in his name, and it all comes out, I'll try to save you, as far as an honest man can. If you have done no wrong, of course there is no fear; though I should be obliged by your going homeward as quickly as possible, as being better both for you and for me.... Hullo--Damnation!'

They had reached one side of the Schloss-Platz, nobody apparently being near them save a sentinel who was on duty before the Palace; but turning as he spoke, De Stancy beheld a group consisting of his sister, Paula, and Mr. Power, strolling across the square towards them.

It was impossible to escape their observation, and putting a bold front upon it, De Stancy advanced with Dare at his side, till in a few moments the two parties met, Paula and Charlotte recognizing Dare at once as the young man who assisted at the castle.

'I have met my young photographer,' said De Stancy cheerily. 'What a small world it is, as everybody truly observes! I am wishing he could take some views for us as we go on; but you have no apparatus with you, I suppose, Mr. Dare?'

'I have not, sir, I am sorry to say,' replied Dare respectfully.

'You could get some, I suppose?' asked Paula of the interesting young photographer.

Dare declared that it would be not impossible: whereupon De Stancy said that it was only a passing thought of his; and in a few minutes the two parties again separated, going their several ways.

'That was awkward,' said De Stancy, trembling with excitement. 'I would advise you to keep further off in future.'

Dare said thoughtfully that he would be careful, adding, 'She is a prize for any man, indeed, leaving alone the substantial possessions behind her! Now was I too enthusiastic? Was I a fool for urging you on?'

'Wait till success justifies the undertaking. In case of failure it will have been anything but wise. It is no light matter to have a carefully preserved repose broken in upon for nothing--a repose that could never be restored!'

They walked down the Carl-Friedrichs-Strasse to the Margrave's Pyramid, and back to the hotel, where Dare also decided to take up his stay. De Stancy left him with the book-keeper at the desk, and went upstairs to see if the ladies had returned.

IV.

He found them in their sitting-room with their bonnets on, as if they had just come in. Mr. Power was also present, reading a newspaper, but Mrs. Goodman had gone out to a neighbouring shop, in the windows of which she had seen something which attracted her fancy.

When De Stancy entered, Paula's thoughts seemed to revert to Dare, for almost at once she asked him in what direction the youth was travelling. With some hesitation De Stancy replied that he believed Mr. Dare was returning to England after a spring trip for the improvement of his mind.

'A very praiseworthy thing to do,' said Paula. 'What places has he visited?'

'Those which afford opportunities for the study of the old masters, I believe,' said De Stancy blandly. 'He has also been to Turin, Genoa, Marseilles, and so on.' The captain spoke the more readily to her questioning in that he divined her words to be dictated, not by any suspicions of his relations with Dare, but by her knowledge of Dare as the draughtsman employed by Somerset.

'Has he been to Nice?' she next demanded. 'Did he go there in company with my architect?'

'I think not.'

'Has he seen anything of him? My architect Somerset once employed him. They know each other.'

'I think he saw Somerset for a short time.'

Paula was silent. 'Do you know where this young man Dare is at the present moment?' she asked quickly.

De Stancy said that Dare was staying at the same hotel with themselves, and that he believed he was downstairs.

'I think I can do no better than send for him,' said she. 'He may be able to throw some light upon the matter of that telegram.'

She rang and despatched the waiter for the young man in question, De Stancy almost visibly trembling for the result. But he opened the town directory which was lying on a table, and affected to be engrossed in the names.

Before Dare was shown in she said to her uncle, 'Perhaps you will speak to him for me?'

Mr. Power, looking up from the paper he was reading, assented to her proposition. Dare appeared in the doorway, and the waiter retired. Dare



seemed a trifle startled out of his usual coolness, the message having evidently been unexpected, and he came forward somewhat uneasily.

'Mr. Dare, we are anxious to know something of Miss Power's architect; and Captain De Stancy tells us you have seen him lately,' said Mr. Power sonorously over the edge of his newspaper.

Not knowing whether danger menaced or no, or, if it menaced, from what quarter it was to be expected, Dare felt that honesty was as good as anything else for him, and replied boldly that he had seen Mr. Somerset, De Stancy continuing to cream and mantle almost visibly, in anxiety at the situation of the speaker.

'And where did you see him?' continued Mr. Power.

'In the Casino at Monte Carlo.'

'How long did you see him?'

'Only for half an hour. I left him there.'

Paula's interest got the better of her reserve, and she cut in upon her uncle: 'Did he seem in any unusual state, or in trouble?'

'He was rather excited,' said Dare.

'And can you remember when that was?'

Dare considered, looked at his pocket-book, and said that it was on the evening of April the twenty-second.

The answer had a significance for Paula, De Stancy, and Charlotte, to which Abner Power was a stranger. The telegraphic request for money, which had been kept a secret from him by his niece, because of his already unfriendly tone towards Somerset, arrived on the morning of the twenty-third--a date which neighboured with painfully suggestive nicety upon that now given by Dare.

She seemed to be silenced, and asked no more questions. Dare having furbished himself up to a gentlemanly appearance with some of his recent winnings, was invited to stay on awhile by Paula's uncle, who, as became a travelled man, was not fastidious as to company. Being a youth of the world, Dare made himself agreeable to that gentleman, and afterwards tried to do the same with Miss De Stancy. At this the captain, to whom the situation for some time had been amazingly uncomfortable, pleaded some excuse for going out, and left the room.

Dare continued his endeavours to say a few polite nothings to Charlotte De Stancy, in the course of which he drew from his pocket his new silk handkerchief. By some chance a card came out with the handkerchief, and fluttered downwards. His momentary instinct was to make a grasp at the card and conceal it: but it had already tumbled to the floor, where it

lay face upward beside Charlotte De Stancy's chair.

It was neither a visiting nor a playing card, but one bearing a photographic portrait of a peculiar nature. It was what Dare had characterized as his best joke in speaking on the subject to Captain De Stancy: he had in the morning put it ready in his pocket to give to the captain, and had in fact held it in waiting between his finger and thumb while talking to him in the Platz, meaning that he should make use of it against his rival whenever convenient. But his sharp conversation with that soldier had dulled his zest for this final joke at Somerset's expense, had at least shown him that De Stancy would not adopt the joke by accepting the photograph and using it himself, and determined him to lay it aside till a more convenient time. So fully had he made up his mind on this course, that when the photograph slipped out he did not at first perceive the appositeness of the circumstance, in putting into his own hands the role he had intended for De Stancy; though it was asserted afterwards that the whole scene was deliberately planned. However, once having seen the accident, he resolved to take the current as it served.

The card having fallen beside her, Miss De Stancy glanced over it, which indeed she could not help doing. The smile that had previously hung upon her lips was arrested as if by frost and she involuntarily uttered a little distressed cry of 'O!' like one in bodily pain.

Paula, who had been talking to her uncle during this interlude, started round, and wondering what had happened, inquiringly crossed the room

to poor Charlotte's side, asking her what was the matter. Charlotte had regained self-possession, though not enough to enable her to reply, and Paula asked her a second time what had made her exclaim like that. Miss De Stancy still seemed confused, whereupon Paula noticed that her eyes were continually drawn as if by fascination towards the photograph on the floor, which, contrary to his first impulse, Dare, as has been said, now seemed in no hurry to regain. Surmising at last that the card, whatever it was, had something to do with the exclamation, Paula picked it up.

It was a portrait of Somerset; but by a device known in photography the operator, though contriving to produce what seemed to be a perfect likeness, had given it the distorted features and wild attitude of a man advanced in intoxication. No woman, unless specially cognizant of such possibilities, could have looked upon it and doubted that the photograph was a genuine illustration of a customary phase in the young man's private life.

Paula observed it, thoroughly took it in; but the effect upon her was by no means clear. Charlotte's eyes at once forsook the portrait to dwell on Paula's face. It paled a little, and this was followed by a hot blush--perceptibly a blush of shame. That was all. She flung the picture down on the table, and moved away.

It was now Mr. Power's turn. Anticipating Dare, who was advancing with a deprecatory look to seize the photograph, he also grasped it. When he

saw whom it represented he seemed both amused and startled, and after scanning it a while handed it to the young man with a queer smile.

'I am very sorry,' began Dare in a low voice to Mr. Power. 'I fear I was to blame for thoughtlessness in not destroying it. But I thought it was rather funny that a man should permit such a thing to be done, and that the humour would redeem the offence.'

'In you, for purchasing it,' said Paula with haughty quickness from the other side of the room. 'Though probably his friends, if he has any, would say not in him.'

There was silence in the room after this, and Dare, finding himself rather in the way, took his leave as unostentatiously as a cat that has upset the family china, though he continued to say among his apologies that he was not aware Mr. Somerset was a personal friend of the ladies.

Of all the thoughts which filled the minds of Paula and Charlotte De Stancy, the thought that the photograph might have been a fabrication was probably the last. To them that picture of Somerset had all the cogency of direct vision. Paula's experience, much less Charlotte's, had never lain in the fields of heliographic science, and they would as soon have thought that the sun could again stand still upon Gibeon, as that it could be made to falsify men's characters in delineating their features. What Abner Power thought he himself best knew. He might have seen such pictures before; or he might never have heard of them.

While pretending to resume his reading he closely observed Paula, as did also Charlotte De Stancy; but thanks to the self-management which was Miss Power's as much by nature as by art, she dissembled whatever emotion was in her.

'It is a pity a professional man should make himself so ludicrous,' she said with such careless intonation that it was almost impossible, even for Charlotte, who knew her so well, to believe her indifference feigned.

'Yes,' said Mr. Power, since Charlotte did not speak: 'it is what I scarcely should have expected.'

'O, I am not surprised!' said Paula quickly. 'You don't know all.' The inference was, indeed, inevitable that if her uncle were made aware of the telegram he would see nothing unlikely in the picture. 'Well, you are very silent!' continued Paula petulantly, when she found that nobody went on talking. 'What made you cry out "O," Charlotte, when Mr. Dare dropped that horrid photograph?'

'I don't know; I suppose it frightened me,' stammered the girl.

'It was a stupid fuss to make before such a person. One would think you were in love with Mr. Somerset.'

'What did you say, Paula?' inquired her uncle, looking up from the newspaper which he had again resumed.

'Nothing, Uncle Abner.' She walked to the window, and, as if to tide over what was plainly passing in their minds about her, she began to make remarks on objects in the street. 'What a quaint being--look, Charlotte!' It was an old woman sitting by a stall on the opposite side of the way, which seemed suddenly to hit Paula's sense of the humorous, though beyond the fact that the dame was old and poor, and wore a white handkerchief over her head, there was really nothing noteworthy about her.

Paula seemed to be more hurt by what the silence of her companions implied--a suspicion that the discovery of Somerset's depravity was wounding her heart--than by the wound itself. The ostensible ease with which she drew them into a bye conversation had perhaps the defect of proving too much: though her tacit contention that no love was in question was not incredible on the supposition that affronted pride alone caused her embarrassment. The chief symptom of her heart being really tender towards Somerset consisted in her apparent blindness to Charlotte's secret, so obviously suggested by her momentary agitation.

V.

And where was the subject of their condemnatory opinions all this while? Having secured a room at his inn, he came forth to complete the discovery of his dear mistress's halting-place without delay. After one or two inquiries he ascertained where such a party of English were staying; and arriving at the hotel, knew at once that he had tracked them to earth by seeing the heavier portion of the Power luggage confronting him in the hall. He sent up intelligence of his presence, and awaited her reply with a beating heart.

In the meanwhile Dare, descending from his pernicious interview with Paula and the rest, had descried Captain De Stancy in the public drawing-room, and entered to him forthwith. It was while they were here together that Somerset passed the door and sent up his name to Paula.

The incident at the railway station was now reversed, Somerset being the observed of Dare, as Dare had then been the observed of Somerset. Immediately on sight of him Dare showed real alarm. He had imagined that Somerset would eventually impinge on Paula's route, but he had scarcely expected it yet; and the architect's sudden appearance led Dare to ask himself the ominous question whether Somerset had discovered his telegraphic trick, and was in the mood for prompt measures.

'There is no more for me to do here,' said the boy hastily to De Stancy. 'Miss Power does not wish to ask me any more questions. I may as well proceed on my way, as you advised.'



De Stancy, who had also gazed with dismay at Somerset's passing figure, though with dismay of another sort, was recalled from his vexation by Dare's remarks, and turning upon him he said sharply, 'Well may you be in such a hurry all of a sudden!'

'True, I am superfluous now.'

'You have been doing a foolish thing, and you must suffer its inconveniences.--Will, I am sorry for one thing; I am sorry I ever owned you; for you are not a lad to my heart. You have disappointed me--disappointed me almost beyond endurance.'

'I have acted according to my illumination. What can you expect of a man born to dishonour?'

'That's mere speciousness. Before you knew anything of me, and while you thought you were the child of poverty on both sides, you were well enough; but ever since you thought you were more than that, you have led a life which is intolerable. What has become of your plan of alliance between the De Stancys and the Powers now? The man is gone upstairs who can overthrow it all.'

'If the man had not gone upstairs, you wouldn't have complained of my nature or my plans,' said Dare drily. 'If I mistake not, he will come down again with the flea in his ear. However, I have done; my play is played out. All the rest remains with you. But, captain, grant me this!

If when I am gone this difficulty should vanish, and things should go well with you, and your suit should prosper, will you think of him, bad as he is, who first put you on the track of such happiness, and let him know it was not done in vain?'

'I will,' said De Stancy. 'Promise me that you will be a better boy?'

'Very well--as soon as ever I can afford it. Now I am up and away, when I have explained to them that I shall not require my room.'

Dare fetched his bag, touched his hat with his umbrella to the captain and went out of the hotel archway. De Stancy sat down in the stuffy drawing-room, and wondered what other ironies time had in store for him.

A waiter in the interim had announced Somerset to the group upstairs. Paula started as much as Charlotte at hearing the name, and Abner Power stared at them both.

'If Mr. Somerset wishes to see me ON BUSINESS, show him in,' said Paula.

In a few seconds the door was thrown open for Somerset. On receipt of the pointed message he guessed that a change had come. Time, absence, ambition, her uncle's influence, and a new wooer, seemed to account sufficiently well for that change, and he accepted his fate. But a stoical instinct to show her that he could regard vicissitudes with the equanimity that became a man; a desire to ease her mind of any fear

she might entertain that his connection with her past would render him troublesome in future, induced him to accept her permission, and see the act to the end.

'How do you do, Mr. Somerset?' said Abner Power, with sardonic geniality: he had been far enough about the world not to be greatly concerned at Somerset's apparent failing, particularly when it helped to reduce him from the rank of lover to his niece to that of professional adviser.

Miss De Stancy faltered a welcome as weak as that of the Maid of Neidpath, and Paula said coldly, 'We are rather surprised to see you. Perhaps there is something urgent at the castle which makes it necessary for you to call?'

'There is something a little urgent,' said Somerset slowly, as he approached her; 'and you have judged rightly that it is the cause of my call.' He sat down near her chair as he spoke, put down his hat, and drew a note-book from his pocket with a despairing sang froid that was far more perfect than had been Paula's demeanour just before.

'Perhaps you would like to talk over the business with Mr. Somerset alone?' murmured Charlotte to Miss Power, hardly knowing what she said.

'O no,' said Paula, 'I think not. Is it necessary?' she said, turning to him.

'Not in the least,' replied he, bestowing a penetrating glance upon his questioner's face, which seemed however to produce no effect; and turning towards Charlotte, he added, 'You will have the goodness, I am sure, Miss De Stancy, to excuse the jargon of professional details.'

He spread some tracings on the table, and pointed out certain modified features to Paula, commenting as he went on, and exchanging occasionally a few words on the subject with Mr. Abner Power by the distant window.

In this architectural dialogue over his sketches, Somerset's head and Paula's became unavoidably very close. The temptation was too much for the young man. Under cover of the rustle of the tracings, he murmured, 'Paula, I could not get here before!' in a low voice inaudible to the other two.

She did not reply, only busying herself the more with the notes and sketches; and he said again, 'I stayed a couple of days at Genoa, and some days at San Remo, and Mentone.'

'But it is not the least concern of mine where you stayed, is it?' she said, with a cold yet disquieted look.

'Do you speak seriously?' Somerset brokenly whispered.

Paula concluded her examination of the drawings and turned from him with

sorrowful disregard. He tried no further, but, when she had signified her pleasure on the points submitted, packed up his papers, and rose with the bearing of a man altogether superior to such a class of misfortune as this. Before going he turned to speak a few words of a general kind to Mr. Power and Charlotte.

'You will stay and dine with us?' said the former, rather with the air of being unhappily able to do no less than ask the question. 'My charges here won't go down to the table-d'hote, I fear, but De Stancy and myself will be there.'

Somerset excused himself, and in a few minutes withdrew. At the door he looked round for an instant, and his eyes met Paula's. There was the same miles-off expression in hers that they had worn when he entered; but there was also a look of distressful inquiry, as if she were earnestly expecting him to say something more. This of course Somerset did not comprehend. Possibly she was clinging to a hope of some excuse for the message he was supposed to have sent, or for the other and more degrading matter. Anyhow, Somerset only bowed and went away.

A moment after he had gone, Paula, impelled by something or other, crossed the room to the window. In a short time she saw his form in the broad street below, which he traversed obliquely to an opposite corner, his head somewhat bent, and his eyes on the ground. Before vanishing into the Ritterstrasse he turned his head and glanced at the hotel windows, as if he knew that she was watching him. Then he disappeared;

and the only real sign of emotion betrayed by Paula during the whole episode escaped her at this moment. It was a slight trembling of the lip and a sigh so slowly breathed that scarce anybody could hear--scarcely even Charlotte, who was reclining on a couch her face on her hand and her eyes downcast.

Not more than two minutes had elapsed when Mrs. Goodman came in with a manner of haste.

'You have returned,' said Mr. Power. 'Have you made your purchases?'

Without answering, she asked, 'Whom, of all people on earth, do you think I have met? Mr. Somerset! Has he been here?--he passed me almost without speaking!'

'Yes, he has been here,' said Paula. 'He is on the way from Genoa home, and called on business.'

'You will have him here to dinner, of course?'

'I asked him,' said Mr. Power, 'but he declined.'

'O, that's unfortunate! Surely we could get him to come. You would like to have him here, would you not, Paula?'

'No, indeed. I don't want him here,' said she.

'You don't?'

'No!' she said sharply.

'You used to like him well enough, anyhow,' bluntly rejoined Mrs. Goodman.

Paula sedately: 'It is a mistake to suppose that I ever particularly liked the gentleman mentioned.'

'Then you are wrong, Mrs. Goodman, it seems,' said Mr. Power.

Mrs. Goodman, who had been growing quietly indignant, notwithstanding a vigorous use of her fan, at this said. 'Fie, fie, Paula! you did like him. You said to me only a week or two ago that you should not at all object to marry him.'

'It is a mistake,' repeated Paula calmly. 'I meant the other one of the two we were talking about.'

'What, Captain De Stancy?'

'Yes.'

Knowing this to be a fiction, Mrs. Goodman made no remark, and hearing

a slight noise behind, turned her head. Seeing her aunt's action, Paula also looked round. The door had been left ajar, and De Stancy was standing in the room. The last words of Mrs. Goodman, and Paula's reply, must have been quite audible to him.

They looked at each other much as if they had unexpectedly met at the altar; but after a momentary start Paula did not flinch from the position into which hurt pride had betrayed her. De Stancy bowed gracefully, and she merely walked to the furthest window, whither he followed her.

'I am eternally grateful to you for avowing that I have won favour in your sight at last,' he whispered.

She acknowledged the remark with a somewhat reserved bearing. 'Really I don't deserve your gratitude,' she said. 'I did not know you were there.'

'I know you did not--that's why the avowal is so sweet to me. Can I take you at your word?'

'Yes, I suppose.'

'Then your preference is the greatest honour that has ever fallen to my lot. It is enough: you accept me?'



'As a lover on probation--no more.'

The conversation being carried on in low tones, Paula's uncle and aunt took it as a hint that their presence could be spared, and severally left the room--the former gladly, the latter with some vexation.

Charlotte De Stancy followed.

'And to what am I indebted for this happy change?' inquired De Stancy, as soon as they were alone.

'You shouldn't look a gift-horse in the mouth,' she replied brusquely, and with tears in her eyes for one gone.

'You mistake my motive. I am like a reprieved criminal, and can scarcely believe the news.'

'You shouldn't say that to me, or I shall begin to think I have been too kind,' she answered, some of the archness of her manner returning. 'Now, I know what you mean to say in answer; but I don't want to hear more at present; and whatever you do, don't fall into the mistake of supposing I have accepted you in any other sense than the way I say. If you don't like such a limitation you can go away. I dare say I shall get over it.'

'Go away! Could I go away?--But you are beginning to tease, and will soon punish me severely; so I will make my escape while all is well. It would be presumptuous to expect more in one day.'

'It would indeed,' said Paula, with her eyes on a bunch of flowers.

## VI.

On leaving the hotel, Somerset's first impulse was to get out of sight of its windows, and his glance upward had perhaps not the tender significance that Paula imagined, the last look impelled by any such whiff of emotion having been the lingering one he bestowed upon her in passing out of the room. Unluckily for the prospects of this attachment, Paula's conduct towards him now, as a result of misrepresentation, had enough in common with her previous silence at Nice to make it not unreasonable as a further development of that silence. Moreover, her social position as a woman of wealth, always felt by Somerset as a perceptible bar to that full and free eagerness with which he would fain have approached her, rendered it impossible for him to return to the charge, ascertain the reason of her coldness, and dispel it by an explanation, without being suspected of mercenary objects. Continually does it happen that a genial willingness to bottle up affronts is set down to interested motives by those who do not know what generous conduct means. Had she occupied the financial position of Miss De Stancy he would readily have persisted further and, not improbably, have cleared up the cloud.

Having no further interest in Carlsruhe, Somerset decided to leave by an evening train. The intervening hour he spent in wandering into the thick of the fair, where steam roundabouts, the proprietors of wax-work shows, and fancy-stall keepers maintained a deafening din. The animated environment was better than silence, for it fostered in him

an artificial indifference to the events that had just happened--an indifference which, though he too well knew it was only destined to be temporary, afforded a passive period wherein to store up strength that should enable him to withstand the wear and tear of regrets which would surely set in soon. It was the case with Somerset as with others of his temperament, that he did not feel a blow of this sort immediately; and what often seemed like stoicism after misfortune was only the neutral numbness of transition from palpitating hope to assured wretchedness.

He walked round and round the fair till all the exhibitors knew him by sight, and when the sun got low he turned into the Erbprinzen-Strasse, now raked from end to end by ensaffroned rays of level light. Seeking his hotel he dined there, and left by the evening train for Heidelberg.

Heidelberg with its romantic surroundings was not precisely the place calculated to heal Somerset's wounded heart. He had known the town of yore, and his recollections of that period, when, unfettered in fancy, he had transferred to his sketch-book the fine Renaissance details of the Otto-Heinrichs-Bau came back with unpleasant force. He knew of some carved cask-heads and other curious wood-work in the castle cellars, copies of which, being unobtainable by photographs, he had intended to make if all went well between Paula and himself. The zest for this was now well-nigh over. But on awaking in the morning and looking up the valley towards the castle, and at the dark green height of the

Konigsstuhl alongside, he felt that to become vanquished by a passion, driven to suffer, fast, and pray in the dull pains and vapours of despised love, was a contingency not to be welcomed too readily. Thereupon he set himself to learn the sad science of renunciation, which everybody has to learn in his degree--either rebelling throughout the lesson, or, like Somerset, taking to it kindly by force of judgment. A more obstinate pupil might have altogether escaped the lesson in the present case by discovering its illegality.

Resolving to persevere in the heretofore satisfactory paths of art while life and faculties were left, though every instinct must proclaim that there would be no longer any collateral attraction in that pursuit, he went along under the trees of the Anlage and reached the castle vaults, in whose cool shades he spent the afternoon, working out his intentions with fair result. When he had strolled back to his hotel in the evening the time was approaching for the table-d'hote. Having seated himself rather early, he spent the few minutes of waiting in looking over his pocket-book, and putting a few finishing touches to the afternoon performance whilst the objects were fresh in his memory. Thus occupied he was but dimly conscious of the customary rustle of dresses and pulling up of chairs by the crowd of other diners as they gathered around him. Serving began, and he put away his book and prepared for the meal. He had hardly done this when he became conscious that the person on his left hand was not the typical cosmopolite with boundless hotel knowledge and irrelevant experiences that he was accustomed to find next him, but a face he recognized as that of a young man whom he had met

and talked to at Stancy Castle garden-party, whose name he had now forgotten. This young fellow was conversing with somebody on his left hand--no other personage than Paula herself. Next to Paula he beheld De Stancy, and De Stancy's sister beyond him. It was one of those gratuitous encounters which only happen to discarded lovers who have shown commendable stoicism under disappointment, as if on purpose to reopen and aggravate their wounds.

It seemed as if the intervening traveller had met the other party by accident there and then. In a minute he turned and recognized Somerset, and by degrees the young men's cursory remarks to each other developed into a pretty regular conversation, interrupted only when he turned to speak to Paula on his left hand.

'Your architectural adviser travels in your party: how very convenient,' said the young tourist to her. 'Far pleasanter than having a medical attendant in one's train!'

Somerset, who had no distractions on the other side of him, could hear every word of this. He glanced at Paula. She had not known of his presence in the room till now. Their eyes met for a second, and she bowed sedately. Somerset returned her bow, and her eyes were quickly withdrawn with scarcely visible confusion.

'Mr. Somerset is not travelling with us,' she said. 'We have met by accident. Mr. Somerset came to me on business a little while ago.'

'I must congratulate you on having put the castle into good hands,' continued the enthusiastic young man.

'I believe Mr. Somerset is quite competent,' said Paula stiffly.

To include Somerset in the conversation the young man turned to him and added: 'You carry on your work at the castle con amore, no doubt?'

'There is work I should like better,' said Somerset.

'Indeed?'

The frigidity of his manner seemed to set her at ease by dispersing all fear of a scene; and alternate dialogues of this sort with the gentleman in their midst were more or less continued by both Paula and Somerset till they rose from table.

In the bustle of moving out the two latter for one moment stood side by side.

'Miss Power,' said Somerset, in a low voice that was obscured by the rustle, 'you have nothing more to say to me?'

'I think there is nothing more?' said Paula, lifting her eyes with longing reticence.

'Then I take leave of you; and tender my best wishes that you may have a pleasant time before you!.... I set out for England to-night.'

'With a special photographer, no doubt?'

It was the first time that she had addressed Somerset with a meaning distinctly bitter; and her remark, which had reference to the forged photograph, fell of course without its intended effect.

'No, Miss Power,' said Somerset gravely. 'But with a deeper sense of woman's thoughtless trifling than time will ever eradicate.'

'Is not that a mistake?' she asked in a voice that distinctly trembled.

'A mistake? How?'

'I mean, do you not forget many things?' (throwing on him a troubled glance). 'A woman may feel herself justified in her conduct, although it admits of no explanation.'

'I don't contest the point for a moment.... Goodbye.'

'Good-bye.'

They parted amid the flowering shrubs and caged birds in the hall,



and he saw her no more. De Stancy came up, and spoke a few commonplace words, his sister having gone out, either without perceiving Somerset, or with intention to avoid him.

That night, as he had said, he was on his way to England.

## VII.

The De Stancys and Powers remained in Heidelberg for some days. All remarked that after Somerset's departure Paula was frequently irritable, though at other times as serene as ever. Yet even when in a blithe and saucy mood there was at bottom a tinge of melancholy. Something did not lie easy in her undemonstrative heart, and all her friends excused the inequalities of a humour whose source, though not positively known, could be fairly well guessed.

De Stancy had long since discovered that his chance lay chiefly in her recently acquired and fanciful predilection d'artiste for hoary mediaeval families with ancestors in alabaster and primogenitive renown. Seeing this he dwelt on those topics which brought out that aspect of himself more clearly, talking feudalism and chivalry with a zest that he had never hitherto shown. Yet it was not altogether factitious. For, discovering how much this quondam Puritan was interested in the attributes of long-chronicled houses, a reflected interest in himself arose in his own soul, and he began to wonder why he had not prized these things before. Till now disgusted by the failure of his family to hold its own in the turmoil between ancient and modern, he had grown to undervalue its past prestige; and it was with corrective ardour that he adopted while he ministered to her views.

Henceforward the wooing of De Stancy took the form of an intermittent address, the incidents of their travel furnishing pegs whereon to hang

his subject; sometimes hindering it, but seldom failing to produce in her a greater tolerance of his presence. His next opportunity was the day after Somerset's departure from Heidelberg. They stood on the great terrace of the Schloss-Garten, looking across the intervening ravine to the north-east front of the castle which rose before them in all its customary warm tints and battered magnificence.

'This is a spot, if any, which should bring matters to a crisis between you and me,' he asserted good-humouredly. 'But you have been so silent to-day that I lose the spirit to take advantage of my privilege.'

She inquired what privilege he spoke of, as if quite another subject had been in her mind than De Stancy.

'The privilege of winning your heart if I can, which you gave me at Carlsruhe.'

'O,' she said. 'Well, I've been thinking of that. But I do not feel myself absolutely bound by the statement I made in that room; and I shall expect, if I withdraw it, not to be called to account by you.'

De Stancy looked rather blank.

'If you recede from your promise you will doubtless have good reason. But I must solemnly beg you, after raising my hopes, to keep as near as you can to your word, so as not to throw me into utter despair.'

Paula dropped her glance into the Thier-Garten below them, where gay promenaders were clambering up between the bushes and flowers. At length she said, with evident embarrassment, but with much distinctness: 'I deserve much more blame for what I have done than you can express to me. I will confess to you the whole truth. All that I told you in the hotel at Carlsruhe was said in a moment of pique at what had happened just before you came in. It was supposed I was much involved with another man, and circumstances made the supposition particularly objectionable. To escape it I jumped at the alternative of yourself.'

'That's bad for me!' he murmured.

'If after this avowal you bind me to my words I shall say no more: I do not wish to recede from them without your full permission.'

'What a caprice! But I release you unconditionally,' he said. 'And I beg your pardon if I seemed to show too much assurance. Please put it down to my gratified excitement. I entirely acquiesce in your wish. I will go away to whatever place you please, and not come near you but by your own permission, and till you are quite satisfied that my presence and what it may lead to is not undesirable. I entirely give way before you, and will endeavour to make my future devotedness, if ever we meet again, a new ground for expecting your favour.'

Paula seemed struck by the generous and cheerful fairness of his

remarks, and said gently, 'Perhaps your departure is not absolutely necessary for my happiness; and I do not wish from what you call caprice--'

'I retract that word.'

'Well, whatever it is, I don't wish you to do anything which should cause you real pain, or trouble, or humiliation.'

'That's very good of you.'

'But I reserve to myself the right to accept or refuse your addresses--just as if those rash words of mine had never been spoken.'

'I must bear it all as best I can, I suppose,' said De Stancy, with melancholy humorousness.

'And I shall treat you as your behaviour shall seem to deserve,' she said playfully.

'Then I may stay?'

'Yes; I am willing to give you that pleasure, if it is one, in return for the attentions you have shown, and the trouble you have taken to make my journey pleasant.'

She walked on and discovered Mrs. Goodman near, and presently the whole party met together. De Stancy did not find himself again at her side till later in the afternoon, when they had left the immediate precincts of the castle and decided on a drive to the Konigsstuhl.

The carriage, containing only Mrs. Goodman, was driven a short way up the winding incline, Paula, her uncle, and Miss De Stancy walking behind under the shadow of the trees. Then Mrs. Goodman called to them and asked when they were going to join her.

'We are going to walk up,' said Mr. Power.

Paula seemed seized with a spirit of boisterousness quite unlike her usual behaviour. 'My aunt may drive up, and you may walk up; but I shall run up,' she said. 'See, here's a way.' She tripped towards a path through the bushes which, instead of winding like the regular track, made straight for the summit.

Paula had not the remotest conception of the actual distance to the top, imagining it to be but a couple of hundred yards at the outside, whereas it was really nearer a mile, the ascent being uniformly steep all the way. When her uncle and De Stancy had seen her vanish they stood still, the former evidently reluctant to forsake the easy ascent for a difficult one, though he said, 'We can't let her go alone that way, I suppose.'

'No, of course not,' said De Stancy.

They then followed in the direction taken by Paula, Charlotte entering the carriage. When Power and De Stancy had ascended about fifty yards the former looked back, and dropped off from the pursuit, to return to the easy route, giving his companion a parting hint concerning Paula. Whereupon De Stancy went on alone. He soon saw Paula above him in the path, which ascended skyward straight as Jacob's Ladder, but was so overhung by the brushwood as to be quite shut out from the sun. When he reached her side she was moving easily upward, apparently enjoying the seclusion which the place afforded.

'Is not my uncle with you?' she said, on turning and seeing him.

'He went back,' said De Stancy.

She replied that it was of no consequence; that she should meet him at the top, she supposed.

Paula looked up amid the green light which filtered through the leafage as far as her eyes could stretch. But the top did not appear, and she allowed De Stancy to get in front. 'It did not seem such a long way as this, to look at,' she presently said.

He explained that the trees had deceived her as to the real height, by reason of her seeing the slope foreshortened when she looked up from the

castle. 'Allow me to help you,' he added.

'No, thank you,' said Paula lightly; 'we must be near the top.'

They went on again; but no Königsstuhl. When next De Stancy turned he found that she was sitting down; immediately going back he offered his arm. She took it in silence, declaring that it was no wonder her uncle did not come that wearisome way, if he had ever been there before.

De Stancy did not explain that Mr. Power had said to him at parting, 'There's a chance for you, if you want one,' but at once went on with the subject begun on the terrace. 'If my behaviour is good, you will reaffirm the statement made at Karlsruhe?'

'It is not fair to begin that now!' expostulated Paula; 'I can only think of getting to the top.'

Her colour deepening by the exertion, he suggested that she should sit down again on one of the mossy boulders by the wayside. Nothing loth she did, De Stancy standing by, and with his cane scratching the moss from the stone.

'This is rather awkward,' said Paula, in her usual circumspect way. 'My relatives and your sister will be sure to suspect me of having arranged this scramble with you.'



'But I know better,' sighed De Stancy. 'I wish to Heaven you had arranged it!'

She was not at the top, but she took advantage of the halt to answer his previous question. 'There are many points on which I must be satisfied before I can reaffirm anything. Do you not see that you are mistaken in clinging to this idea?--that you are laying up mortification and disappointment for yourself?'

'A negative reply from you would be disappointment, early or late.'

'And you prefer having it late to accepting it now? If I were a man, I should like to abandon a false scent as soon as possible.'

'I suppose all that has but one meaning: that I am to go.'

'O no,' she magnanimously assured him, bounding up from her seat; 'I adhere to my statement that you may stay; though it is true something may possibly happen to make me alter my mind.'

He again offered his arm, and from sheer necessity she leant upon it as before.

'Grant me but a moment's patience,' he began.

'Captain De Stancy! Is this fair? I am physically obliged to hold your

arm, so that I MUST listen to what you say!

'No, it is not fair; 'pon my soul it is not!' said De Stancy. 'I won't say another word.'

He did not; and they clambered on through the boughs, nothing disturbing the solitude but the rustle of their own footsteps and the singing of birds overhead. They occasionally got a peep at the sky; and whenever a twig hung out in a position to strike Paula's face the gallant captain bent it aside with his stick. But she did not thank him. Perhaps he was just as well satisfied as if she had done so.

Paula, panting, broke the silence: 'Will you go on, and discover if the top is near?'

He went on. This time the top was near. When he returned she was sitting where he had left her among the leaves. 'It is quite near now,' he told her tenderly, and she took his arm again without a word. Soon the path changed its nature from a steep and rugged watercourse to a level green promenade.

'Thank you, Captain De Stancy,' she said, letting go his arm as if relieved.

Before them rose the tower, and at the base they beheld two of their friends, Mr. Power being seen above, looking over the parapet through

his glass.

'You will go to the top now?' said De Stancy.

'No, I take no interest in it. My interest has turned to fatigue. I only want to go home.'

He took her on to where the carriage stood at the foot of the tower, and leaving her with his sister ascended the turret to the top. The landscape had quite changed from its afternoon appearance, and had become rather marvellous than beautiful. The air was charged with a lurid exhalation that blurred the extensive view. He could see the distant Rhine at its junction with the Neckar, shining like a thread of blood through the mist which was gradually wrapping up the declining sun. The scene had in it something that was more than melancholy, and not much less than tragic; but for De Stancy such evening effects possessed little meaning. He was engaged in an enterprise that taxed all his resources, and had no sentiments to spare for air, earth, or skies.

'Remarkable scene,' said Power, mildly, at his elbow.

'Yes; I dare say it is,' said De Stancy. 'Time has been when I should have held forth upon such a prospect, and wondered if its livid colours shadowed out my own life, et caetera, et caetera. But, begad, I have almost forgotten there's such a thing as Nature, and I care for nothing but a comfortable life, and a certain woman who does not care for me!...

Now shall we go down?

## VIII.

It was quite true that De Stancy at the present period of his existence wished only to escape from the hurly-burly of active life, and to win the affection of Paula Power. There were, however, occasions when a recollection of his old renunciatory vows would obtrude itself upon him, and tinge his present with wayward bitterness. So much was this the case that a day or two after they had arrived at Mainz he could not refrain from making remarks almost prejudicial to his cause, saying to her, 'I am unfortunate in my situation. There are, unhappily, worldly reasons why I should pretend to love you, even if I do not: they are so strong that, though really loving you, perhaps they enter into my thoughts of you.'

'I don't want to know what such reasons are,' said Paula, with promptness, for it required but little astuteness to discover that he alluded to the alienated Wessex home and estates. 'You lack tone,' she gently added: 'that's why the situation of affairs seems distasteful to you.'

'Yes, I suppose I am ill. And yet I am well enough.'

These remarks passed under a tree in the public gardens during an odd minute of waiting for Charlotte and Mrs. Goodman; and he said no more to her in private that day. Few as her words had been he liked them better than any he had lately received. The conversation was not resumed till

they were gliding 'between the banks that bear the vine,' on board one of the Rhine steamboats, which, like the hotels in this early summer time, were comparatively free from other English travellers; so that everywhere Paula and her party were received with open arms and cheerful countenances, as among the first swallows of the season.

The saloon of the steamboat was quite empty, the few passengers being outside; and this paucity of voyagers afforded De Stancy a roomy opportunity.

Paula saw him approach her, and there appearing in his face signs that he would begin again on the eternal subject, she seemed to be struck with a sense of the ludicrous.

De Stancy reddened. 'Something seems to amuse you,' he said.

'It is over,' she replied, becoming serious.

'Was it about me, and this unhappy fever in me?'

'If I speak the truth I must say it was.'

'You thought, "Here's that absurd man again, going to begin his daily supplication."'

'Not "absurd,"' she said, with emphasis; 'because I don't think it is

absurd.'

She continued looking through the windows at the Lurlei Heights under which they were now passing, and he remained with his eyes on her.

'May I stay here with you?' he said at last. 'I have not had a word with you alone for four-and-twenty hours.'

'You must be cheerful, then.'

'You have said such as that before. I wish you would say "loving" instead of "cheerful."'

'Yes, I know, I know,' she responded, with impatient perplexity. 'But why must you think of me--me only? Is there no other woman in the world who has the power to make you happy? I am sure there must be.'

'Perhaps there is; but I have never seen her.'

'Then look for her; and believe me when I say that you will certainly find her.'

He shook his head.

'Captain De Stancy, I have long felt for you,' she continued, with a frank glance into his face. 'You have deprived yourself too long of

other women's company. Why not go away for a little time? and when you have found somebody else likely to make you happy, you can meet me again. I will see you at your father's house, and we will enjoy all the pleasure of easy friendship.'

'Very correct; and very cold, O best of women!'

'You are too full of exclamations and transports, I think!'

They stood in silence, Paula apparently much interested in the manoeuvring of a raft which was passing by. 'Dear Miss Power,' he resumed, 'before I go and join your uncle above, let me just ask, Do I stand any chance at all yet? Is it possible you can never be more pliant than you have been?'

'You put me out of all patience!'

'But why did you raise my hopes? You should at least pity me after doing that.'

'Yes; it's that again! I unfortunately raised your hopes because I was a fool--was not myself that moment. Now question me no more. As it is I think you presume too much upon my becoming yours as the consequence of my having dismissed another.'



'Not on becoming mine, but on listening to me.'

'Your argument would be reasonable enough had I led you to believe I would listen to you--and ultimately accept you; but that I have not done. I see now that a woman who gives a man an answer one shade less peremptory than a harsh negative may be carried beyond her intentions, and out of her own power before she knows it.'

'Chide me if you will; I don't care!'

She looked steadfastly at him with a little mischief in her eyes. 'You DO care,' she said.

'Then why don't you listen to me? I would not persevere for a moment longer if it were against the wishes of your family. Your uncle says it would give him pleasure to see you accept me.'

'Does he say why?' she asked thoughtfully.

'Yes; he takes, of course, a practical view of the matter; he thinks it commends itself so to reason and common sense that the owner of Stancy Castle should become a member of the De Stancy family.'

'Yes, that's the horrid plague of it,' she said, with a nonchalance which seemed to contradict her words. 'It is so dreadfully reasonable that we should marry. I wish it wasn't!'

'Well, you are younger than I, and perhaps that's a natural wish. But to me it seems a felicitous combination not often met with. I confess that your interest in our family before you knew me lent a stability to my hopes that otherwise they would not have had.'

'My interest in the De Stancys has not been a personal interest except in the case of your sister,' she returned. 'It has been an historical interest only; and is not at all increased by your existence.'

'And perhaps it is not diminished?'

'No, I am not aware that it is diminished,' she murmured, as she observed the gliding shore.

'Well, you will allow me to say this, since I say it without reference to your personality or to mine--that the Power and De Stancy families are the complements to each other; and that, abstractedly, they call earnestly to one another: "How neat and fit a thing for us to join hands!"'

Paula, who was not prudish when a direct appeal was made to her common sense, answered with ready candour: 'Yes, from the point of view of domestic politics, that undoubtedly is the case. But I hope I am not so calculating as to risk happiness in order to round off a social idea.'

'I hope not; or that I am either. Still the social idea exists, and my increased years make its excellence more obvious to me than to you.'

The ice once broken on this aspect of the question, the subject seemed further to engross her, and she spoke on as if daringly inclined to venture where she had never anticipated going, deriving pleasure from the very strangeness of her temerity: 'You mean that in the fitness of things I ought to become a De Stancy to strengthen my social position?'

'And that I ought to strengthen mine by alliance with the heiress of a name so dear to engineering science as Power.'

'Well, we are talking with unexpected frankness.'

'But you are not seriously displeased with me for saying what, after all, one can't help feeling and thinking?'

'No. Only be so good as to leave off going further for the present. Indeed, of the two, I would rather have the other sort of address. I mean,' she hastily added, 'that what you urge as the result of a real affection, however unsuitable, I have some remote satisfaction in listening to--not the least from any reciprocal love on my side, but from a woman's gratification at being the object of anybody's devotion; for that feeling towards her is always regarded as a merit in a woman's eye, and taken as a kindness by her, even when it is at the expense of her convenience.'

She had said, voluntarily or involuntarily, better things than he expected, and perhaps too much in her own opinion, for she hardly gave him an opportunity of replying.

They passed St. Goar and Boppard, and when steering round the sharp bend of the river just beyond the latter place De Stancy met her again, exclaiming, 'You left me very suddenly.'

'You must make allowances, please,' she said; 'I have always stood in need of them.'

'Then you shall always have them.'

'I don't doubt it,' she said quickly; but Paula was not to be caught again, and kept close to the side of her aunt while they glided past Brauback and Oberlahnstein. Approaching Coblenz her aunt said, 'Paula, let me suggest that you be not so much alone with Captain De Stancy.'

'And why?' said Paula quietly.

'You'll have plenty of offers if you want them, without taking trouble,' said the direct Mrs. Goodman. 'Your existence is hardly known to the world yet, and Captain De Stancy is too near middle-age for a girl like you.' Paula did not reply to either of these remarks, being seemingly so interested in Ehrenbreitstein's heights as not to hear them.

IX.

It was midnight at Coblenz, and the travellers had retired to rest in their respective apartments, overlooking the river. Finding that there was a moon shining, Paula leant out of her window. The tall rock of Ehrenbreitstein on the opposite shore was flooded with light, and a belated steamer was drawing up to the landing-stage, where it presently deposited its passengers.

'We should have come by the last boat, so as to have been touched into romance by the rays of this moon, like those happy people,' said a voice.

She looked towards the spot whence the voice proceeded, which was a window quite near at hand. De Stancy was smoking outside it, and she became aware that the words were addressed to her.

'You left me very abruptly,' he continued.

Paula's instinct of caution impelled her to speak.

'The windows are all open,' she murmured. 'Please be careful.'

'There are no English in this hotel except ourselves. I thank you for what you said to-day.'

'Please be careful,' she repeated.

'My dear Miss P----'

'Don't mention names, and don't continue the subject!'

'Life and death perhaps depend upon my renewing it soon!'

She shut the window decisively, possibly wondering if De Stancy had drunk a glass or two of Steinberg more than was good for him, and saw no more of moonlit Ehrenbreitstein that night, and heard no more of De Stancy. But it was some time before he closed his window, and previous to doing so saw a dark form at an adjoining one on the other side.

It was Mr. Power, also taking the air. 'Well, what luck to-day?' said Power.

'A decided advance,' said De Stancy.

None of the speakers knew that a little person in the room above heard all this out-of-window talk. Charlotte, though not looking out, had left her casement open; and what reached her ears set her wondering as to the result.

It is not necessary to detail in full De Stancy's imperceptible advances with Paula during that northward journey--so slowly performed that it seemed as if she must perceive there was a special reason for delaying her return to England. At Cologne one day he conveniently overtook her when she was ascending the hotel staircase. Seeing him, she went to the window of the entresol landing, which commanded a view of the Rhine, meaning that he should pass by to his room.

'I have been very uneasy,' began the captain, drawing up to her side; 'and I am obliged to trouble you sooner than I meant to do.'

Paula turned her eyes upon him with some curiosity as to what was coming of this respectful demeanour. 'Indeed!' she said.

He then informed her that he had been overhauling himself since they last talked, and had some reason to blame himself for bluntness and general want of euphemism; which, although he had meant nothing by it, must have been very disagreeable to her. But he had always aimed at sincerity, particularly as he had to deal with a lady who despised hypocrisy and was above flattery. However, he feared he might have carried his disregard for conventionality too far. But from that time he would promise that she should find an alteration by which he hoped he might return the friendship at least of a young lady he honoured more than any other in the world.

This retrograde movement was evidently unexpected by the honoured young lady herself. After being so long accustomed to rebuke him for his persistence there was novelty in finding him do the work for her. The guess might even have been hazarded that there was also disappointment.

Still looking across the river at the bridge of boats which stretched to the opposite suburb of Deutz: 'You need not blame yourself,' she said, with the mildest conceivable manner, 'I can make allowances. All I wish is that you should remain under no misapprehension.'

'I comprehend,' he said thoughtfully. 'But since, by a perverse fate, I have been thrown into your company, you could hardly expect me to feel and act otherwise.'

'Perhaps not.'

'Since I have so much reason to be dissatisfied with myself,' he added, 'I cannot refrain from criticizing elsewhere to a slight extent, and thinking I have to do with an ungenerous person.'

'Why ungenerous?'

'In this way; that since you cannot love me, you see no reason at all for trying to do so in the fact that I so deeply love you; hence I say that you are rather to be distinguished by your wisdom than by your humanity.'



'It comes to this, that if your words are all seriously meant it is much to be regretted we ever met,' she murmured. 'Now will you go on to where you were going, and leave me here?'

Without a remonstrance he went on, saying with dejected whimsicality as he smiled back upon her, 'You show a wisdom which for so young a lady is perfectly surprising.'

It was resolved to prolong the journey by a circuit through Holland and Belgium; but nothing changed in the attitudes of Paula and Captain De Stancy till one afternoon during their stay at the Hague, when they had gone for a drive down to Scheveningen by the long straight avenue of chestnuts and limes, under whose boughs tufts of wild parsley waved their flowers, except where the *buitenplaatsen* of retired merchants blazed forth with new paint of every hue. On mounting the dune which kept out the sea behind the village a brisk breeze greeted their faces, and a fine sand blew up into their eyes. De Stancy screened Paula with his umbrella as they stood with their backs to the wind, looking down on the red roofs of the village within the sea wall, and pulling at the long grass which by some means found nourishment in the powdery soil of the dune.

When they had discussed the scene he continued, 'It always seems to me that this place reflects the average mood of human life. I mean, if we strike the balance between our best moods and our worst we shall find

our average condition to stand at about the same pitch in emotional colour as these sandy dunes and this grey scene do in landscape.'

Paula contended that he ought not to measure everybody by himself.

'I have no other standard,' said De Stancy; 'and if my own is wrong, it is you who have made it so. Have you thought any more of what I said at Cologne?'

'I don't quite remember what you did say at Cologne?'

'My dearest life!' Paula's eyes rounding somewhat, he corrected the exclamation. 'My dear Miss Power, I will, without reserve, tell it to you all over again.'

'Pray spare yourself the effort,' she said drily. 'What has that one fatal step betrayed me into!... Do you seriously mean to say that I am the cause of your life being coloured like this scene of grass and sand? If so, I have committed a very great fault!'

'It can be nullified by a word.'

'Such a word!'

'It is a very short one.'

'There's a still shorter one more to the purpose. Frankly, I believe you suspect me to have some latent and unowned inclination for you--that you think speaking is the only point upon which I am backward.... There now, it is raining; what shall we do? I thought this wind meant rain.'

'Do? Stand on here, as we are standing now.'

'Your sister and my aunt are gone under the wall. I think we will walk towards them.'

'You had made me hope,' he continued (his thoughts apparently far away from the rain and the wind and the possibility of shelter), 'that you might change your mind, and give to your original promise a liberal meaning in renewing it. In brief I mean this, that you would allow it to merge into an engagement. Don't think it presumptuous,' he went on, as he held the umbrella over her; 'I am sure any man would speak as I do. A distinct permission to be with you on probation--that was what you gave me at Karlsruhe: and flinging casuistry on one side, what does that mean?'

'That I am artistically interested in your family history.' And she went out from the umbrella to the shelter of the hotel where she found her aunt and friend.

De Stancy could not but feel that his persistence had made some impression. It was hardly possible that a woman of independent nature

would have tolerated his dangling at her side so long, if his presence were wholly distasteful to her. That evening when driving back to the Hague by a devious route through the dense avenues of the Bosch he conversed with her again; also the next day when standing by the Vijver looking at the swans; and in each case she seemed to have at least got over her objection to being seen talking to him, apart from the remainder of the travelling party.

Scenes very similar to those at Scheveningen and on the Rhine were enacted at later stages of their desultory journey. Mr. Power had proposed to cross from Rotterdam; but a stiff north-westerly breeze prevailing Paula herself became reluctant to hasten back to Stancy Castle. Turning abruptly they made for Brussels.

It was here, while walking homeward from the Park one morning, that her uncle for the first time alluded to the situation of affairs between herself and her admirer. The captain had gone up the Rue Royale with his sister and Mrs. Goodman, either to show them the house in which the ball took place on the eve of Quatre Bras or some other site of interest, and the two Powers were thus left to themselves. To reach their hotel they passed into a little street sloping steeply down from the Rue Royale to the Place Ste. Gudule, where, at the moment of nearing the cathedral, a wedding party emerged from the porch and crossed in front of uncle and niece.

'I hope,' said the former, in his passionless way, 'we shall see a

performance of this sort between you and Captain De Stancy, not so very long after our return to England.'

'Why?' asked Paula, following the bride with her eyes.

'It is diplomatically, as I may say, such a highly correct thing--such an expedient thing--such an obvious thing to all eyes.'

'Not altogether to mine, uncle,' she returned.

'Twould be a thousand pities to let slip such a neat offer of adjusting difficulties as accident makes you in this. You could marry more tin, that's true; but you don't want it, Paula. You want a name, and historic what-do-they-call-it. Now by coming to terms with the captain you'll be Lady De Stancy in a few years: and a title which is useless to him, and a fortune and castle which are in some degree useless to you, will make a splendid whole useful to you both.'

'I've thought it over--quite,' she answered. 'And I quite see what the advantages are. But how if I don't care one atom for artistic completeness and a splendid whole; and do care very much to do what my fancy inclines me to do?'

'Then I should say that, taking a comprehensive view of human nature of all colours, your fancy is about the silliest fancy existing on this earthly ball.'

Paula laughed indifferently, and her uncle felt that, persistent as was his nature, he was the wrong man to influence her by argument. Paula's blindness to the advantages of the match, if she were blind, was that of a woman who wouldn't see, and the best argument was silence.

This was in some measure proved the next morning. When Paula made her appearance Mrs. Goodman said, holding up an envelope: 'Here's a letter from Mr. Somerset.'

'Dear me,' said she blandly, though a quick little flush ascended her cheek. 'I had nearly forgotten him!'

The letter on being read contained a request as brief as it was unexpected. Having prepared all the drawings necessary for the rebuilding, Somerset begged leave to resign the superintendence of the work into other hands.

'His letter caps your remarks very aptly,' said Mrs. Goodman, with secret triumph. 'You are nearly forgetting him, and he is quite forgetting you.'

'Yes,' said Paula, affecting carelessness. 'Well, I must get somebody else, I suppose.'

X.

They next deviated to Amiens, intending to stay there only one night; but their schemes were deranged by the sudden illness of Charlotte. She had been looking unwell for a fortnight past, though, with her usual self-abnegation, she had made light of her ailment. Even now she declared she could go on; but this was said over-night, and in the morning it was abundantly evident that to move her was highly unadvisable. Still she was not in serious danger, and having called in a physician, who pronounced rest indispensable, they prepared to remain in the old Picard capital two or three additional days. Mr. Power thought he would take advantage of the halt to run up to Paris, leaving De Stancy in charge of the ladies.

In more ways than in the illness of Charlotte this day was the harbinger of a crisis.

It was a summer evening without a cloud. Charlotte had fallen asleep in her bed, and Paula, who had been sitting by her, looked out into the Place St. Denis, which the hotel commanded. The lawn of the square was all ablaze with red and yellow clumps of flowers, the acacia trees were brightly green, the sun was soft and low. Tempted by the prospect Paula went and put on her hat; and arousing her aunt, who was nodding in the next room, to request her to keep an ear on Charlotte's bedroom, Paula descended into the Rue de Noyon alone, and entered the green enclosure.

While she walked round, two or three little children in charge of a nurse trundled a large variegated ball along the grass, and it rolled to Paula's feet. She smiled at them, and endeavoured to return it by a slight kick. The ball rose in the air, and passing over the back of a seat which stood under one of the trees, alighted in the lap of a gentleman hitherto screened by its boughs. The back and shoulders proved to be those of De Stancy. He turned his head, jumped up, and was at her side in an instant, a nettled flush having meanwhile crossed Paula's face.

'I thought you had gone to the Hotoie Promenade,' she said hastily. 'I am going to the cathedral;' (obviously uttered lest it should seem that she had seen him from the hotel windows, and entered the square for his company).

'Of course: there is nothing else to go to here--even for Roundheads.'

'If you mean ME by that, you are very much mistaken,' said she testily.

'The Roundheads were your ancestors, and they knocked down my ancestors'

castle, and broke the stained glass and statuary of the cathedral,' said De Stancy slyly; 'and now you go not only to a cathedral, but to a service of the unreformed Church in it.'



'In a foreign country it is different from home,' said Paula in extenuation; 'and you of all men should not reproach me for tergiversation--when it has been brought about by--by my sympathies with--'

'With the troubles of the De Stancys.'

'Well, you know what I mean,' she answered, with considerable anxiety not to be misunderstood; 'my liking for the old castle, and what it contains, and what it suggests. I declare I will not explain to you further--why should I? I am not answerable to you!'

Paula's show of petulance was perhaps not wholly because she had appeared to seek him, but also from being reminded by his criticism that Mr. Woodwell's prophecy on her weakly succumbing to surroundings was slowly working out its fulfilment.

She moved forward towards the gate at the further end of the square, beyond which the cathedral lay at a very short distance. Paula did not turn her head, and De Stancy strolled slowly after her down the Rue du College. The day happened to be one of the church festivals, and people were a second time flocking into the lofty monument of Catholicism at its meridian. Paula vanished into the porch with the rest; and, almost catching the wicket as it flew back from her hand, he too entered the high-shouldered edifice--an edifice doomed to labour under the melancholy misfortune of seeming only half as vast as it really is, and

as truly as whimsically described by Heine as a monument built with the strength of Titans, and decorated with the patience of dwarfs.

De Stancy walked up the nave, so close beside her as to touch her dress; but she would not recognize his presence; the darkness that evening had thrown over the interior, which was scarcely broken by the few candles dotted about, being a sufficient excuse if she required one.

'Miss Power,' De Stancy said at last, 'I am coming to the service with you.'

She received the intelligence without surprise, and he knew she had been conscious of him all the way.

Paula went no further than the middle of the nave, where there was hardly a soul, and took a chair beside a solitary rushlight which looked amid the vague gloom of the inaccessible architecture like a lighthouse at the foot of tall cliffs.

He put his hand on the next chair, saying, 'Do you object?'

'Not at all,' she replied; and he sat down.

'Suppose we go into the choir,' said De Stancy presently. 'Nobody sits out here in the shadows.'

'This is sufficiently near, and we have a candle,' Paula murmured.

Before another minute had passed the candle flame began to drown in its own grease, slowly dwindled, and went out.

'I suppose that means I am to go into the choir in spite of myself.

Heaven is on your side,' said Paula. And rising they left their now totally dark corner, and joined the noiseless shadowy figures who in twos and threes kept passing up the nave.

Within the choir there was a blaze of light, partly from the altar, and more particularly from the image of the saint whom they had assembled to honour, which stood, surrounded by candles and a thicket of flowering plants, some way in advance of the foot-pace. A secondary radiance from the same source was reflected upward into their faces by the polished marble pavement, except when interrupted by the shady forms of the officiating priests.

When it was over and the people were moving off, De Stancy and his companion went towards the saint, now besieged by numbers of women anxious to claim the respective flower-pots they had lent for the decoration. As each struggled for her own, seized and marched off with it, Paula remarked--'This rather spoils the solemn effect of what has gone before.'

'I perceive you are a harsh Puritan.'

'No, Captain De Stancy! Why will you speak so? I am far too much otherwise. I have grown to be so much of your way of thinking, that I accuse myself, and am accused by others, of being worldly, and half-and-half, and other dreadful things--though it isn't that at all.'

They were now walking down the nave, preceded by the sombre figures with the pot flowers, who were just visible in the rays that reached them through the distant choir screen at their back; while above the grey night sky and stars looked in upon them through the high clerestory windows.

'Do be a little MORE of my way of thinking!' rejoined De Stancy passionately.

'Don't, don't speak,' she said rapidly. 'There are Milly and Champreau!'

Milly was one of the maids, and Champreau the courier and valet who had been engaged by Abner Power. They had been sitting behind the other pair throughout the service, and indeed knew rather more of the relations between Paula and De Stancy than Paula knew herself.

Hastening on the two latter went out, and walked together silently up the short street. The Place St. Denis was now lit up, lights shone from the hotel windows, and the world without the cathedral had so far advanced in nocturnal change that it seemed as if they had been gone

from it for hours. Within the hotel they found the change even greater than without. Mrs. Goodman met them half-way on the stairs.

'Poor Charlotte is worse,' she said. 'Quite feverish, and almost delirious.'

Paula reproached herself with 'Why did I go away!'

The common interest of De Stancy and Paula in the sufferer at once reproduced an ease between them as nothing else could have done. The physician was again called in, who prescribed certain draughts, and recommended that some one should sit up with her that night. If Paula allowed demonstrations of love to escape her towards anybody it was towards Charlotte, and her instinct was at once to watch by the invalid's couch herself, at least for some hours, it being deemed unnecessary to call in a regular nurse unless she should sicken further.

'But I will sit with her,' said De Stancy. 'Surely you had better go to bed?' Paula would not be persuaded; and thereupon De Stancy, saying he was going into the town for a short time before retiring, left the room.

The last omnibus returned from the last train, and the inmates of the hotel retired to rest. Meanwhile a telegram had arrived for Captain De Stancy; but as he had not yet returned it was put in his bedroom, with directions to the night-porter to remind him of its arrival.

Paula sat on with the sleeping Charlotte. Presently she retired into the adjacent sitting-room with a book, and flung herself on a couch, leaving the door open between her and her charge, in case the latter should awake. While she sat a new breathing seemed to mingle with the regular sound of Charlotte's that reached her through the doorway: she turned quickly, and saw her uncle standing behind her.

'O--I thought you were in Paris!' said Paula.

'I have just come from there--I could not stay. Something has occurred to my mind about this affair.' His strangely marked visage, now more noticeable from being worn with fatigue, had a spectral effect by the night-light.

'What affair?'

'This marriage.... Paula, De Stancy is a good fellow enough, but you must not accept him just yet.'

Paula did not answer.

'Do you hear? You must not accept him,' repeated her uncle, 'till I have been to England and examined into matters. I start in an hour's time--by the ten-minutes-past-two train.'

'This is something very new!'

'Yes--'tis new,' he murmured, relapsing into his Dutch manner. 'You must not accept him till something is made clear to me--something about a queer relationship. I have come from Paris to say so.'

'Uncle, I don't understand this. I am my own mistress in all matters, and though I don't mind telling you I have by no means resolved to accept him, the question of her marriage is especially a woman's own affair.'

Her uncle stood irresolute for a moment, as if his convictions were more than his proofs. 'I say no more at present,' he murmured. 'Can I do anything for you about a new architect?'

'Appoint Havill.'

'Very well. Good night.' And then he left her. In a short time she heard him go down and out of the house to cross to England by the morning steamboat.

With a little shrug, as if she resented his interference in so delicate a point, she settled herself down anew to her book.

One, two, three hours passed, when Charlotte awoke, but soon slumbered sweetly again. Milly had stayed up for some time lest her mistress should require anything; but the girl being sleepy Paula sent her to

bed.

It was a lovely night of early summer, and drawing aside the window curtains she looked out upon the flowers and trees of the Place, now quite visible, for it was nearly three o'clock, and the morning light was growing strong. She turned her face upwards. Except in the case of one bedroom all the windows on that side of the hotel were in darkness. The room being rather close she left the casement ajar, and opening the door walked out upon the staircase landing. A number of caged canaries were kept here, and she observed in the dim light of the landing lamp how snugly their heads were all tucked in. On returning to the sitting-room again she could hear that Charlotte was still slumbering, and this encouraging circumstance disposed her to go to bed herself. Before, however, she had made a move a gentle tap came to the door.

Paula opened it. There, in the faint light by the sleeping canaries, stood Charlotte's brother.

'How is she now?' he whispered.

'Sleeping soundly,' said Paula.

'That's a blessing. I have not been to bed. I came in late, and have now come down to know if I had not better take your place?'

'Nobody is required, I think. But you can judge for yourself.'



Up to this point they had conversed in the doorway of the sitting-room, which De Stancy now entered, crossing it to Charlotte's apartment. He came out from the latter at a pensive pace.

'She is doing well,' he said gently. 'You have been very good to her. Was the chair I saw by her bed the one you have been sitting in all night?'

'I sometimes sat there; sometimes here.'

'I wish I could have sat beside you, and held your hand--I speak frankly.'

'To excess.'

'And why not? I do not wish to hide from you any corner of my breast, futile as candour may be. Just Heaven! for what reason is it ordered that courtship, in which soldiers are usually so successful, should be a failure with me?'

'Your lack of foresight chiefly in indulging feelings that were not encouraged. That, and my uncle's indiscreet permission to you to travel with us, have precipitated our relations in a way that I could neither foresee nor avoid, though of late I have had apprehensions that it might come to this. You vex and disturb me by such words of regret.'

'Not more than you vex and disturb me. But you cannot hate the man who loves you so devotedly?'

'I have said before I don't hate you. I repeat that I am interested in your family and its associations because of its complete contrast with my own.' She might have added, 'And I am additionally interested just now because my uncle has forbidden me to be.'

'But you don't care enough for me personally to save my happiness.'

Paula hesitated; from the moment De Stancy confronted her she had felt that this nocturnal conversation was to be a grave business. The cathedral clock struck three. 'I have thought once or twice,' she said with a naivete unusual in her, 'that if I could be sure of giving peace and joy to your mind by becoming your wife, I ought to endeavour to do so and make the best of it--merely as a charity. But I believe that feeling is a mistake: your discontent is constitutional, and would go on just the same whether I accepted you or no. My refusal of you is purely an imaginary grievance.'

'Not if I think otherwise.'

'O no,' she murmured, with a sense that the place was very lonely and silent. 'If you think it otherwise, I suppose it is otherwise.'

'My darling; my Paula!' he said, seizing her hand. 'Do promise me something. You must indeed!'

'Captain De Stancy!' she said, trembling and turning away. 'Captain De Stancy!' She tried to withdraw her fingers, then faced him, exclaiming in a firm voice a third time, 'Captain De Stancy! let go my hand; for I tell you I will not marry you!'

'Good God!' he cried, dropping her hand. 'What have I driven you to say in your anger! Retract it--O, retract it!'

'Don't urge me further, as you value my good opinion!'

'To lose you now, is to lose you for ever. Come, please answer!'

'I won't be compelled!' she interrupted with vehemence. 'I am resolved not to be yours--not to give you an answer to-night! Never, never will I be reasoned out of my intention; and I say I won't answer you to-night! I should never have let you be so much with me but for pity of you; and now it is come to this!'

She had sunk into a chair, and now leaned upon her hand, and buried her face in her handkerchief. He had never caused her any such agitation as this before.

'You stab me with your words,' continued De Stancy. 'The experience

I have had with you is without parallel, Paula. It seems like a distracting dream.'

'I won't be hurried by anybody!'

'That may mean anything,' he said, with a perplexed, passionate air.

'Well, mine is a fallen family, and we must abide caprices. Would to Heaven it were extinguished!'

'What was extinguished?' she murmured.

'The De Stancys. Here am I, a homeless wanderer, living on my pay; in the next room lies she, my sister, a poor little fragile feverish invalid with no social position--and hardly a friend. We two represent the De Stancy line; and I wish we were behind the iron door of our old vault at Sleeping-Green. It can be seen by looking at us and our circumstances that we cry for the earth and oblivion!'

'Captain De Stancy, it is not like that, I assure you,' sympathized Paula with damp eyelashes. 'I love Charlotte too dearly for you to talk like that, indeed. I don't want to marry you exactly: and yet I cannot bring myself to say I permanently reject you, because I remember you are Charlotte's brother, and do not wish to be the cause of any morbid feelings in you which would ruin your future prospects.'

'My dear life, what is it you doubt in me? Your earnestness not to do me

harm makes it all the harder for me to think of never being more than a friend.'

'Well, I have not positively refused!' she exclaimed, in mixed tones of pity and distress. 'Let me think it over a little while. It is not generous to urge so strongly before I can collect my thoughts, and at this midnight time!'

'Darling, forgive it!--There, I'll say no more.'

He then offered to sit up in her place for the remainder of the night; but Paula declined, assuring him that she meant to stay only another half-hour, after which nobody would be necessary.

He had already crossed the landing to ascend to his room, when she stepped after him, and asked if he had received his telegram.

'No,' said De Stancy. 'Nor have I heard of one.'

Paula explained that it was put in his room, that he might see it the moment he came in.

'It matters very little,' he replied, 'since I shall see it now.'

Good-night, dearest: good-night!' he added tenderly.

She gravely shook her head. 'It is not for you to express yourself like

that,' she answered. 'Good-night, Captain De Stancy.'

He went up the stairs to the second floor, and Paula returned to the sitting-room. Having left a light burning De Stancy proceeded to look for the telegram, and found it on the carpet, where it had been swept from the table. When he had opened the sheet a sudden solemnity overspread his face. He sat down, rested his elbow on the table, and his forehead on his hands.

Captain De Stancy did not remain thus long. Rising he went softly downstairs. The grey morning had by this time crept into the hotel, rendering a light no longer necessary. The old clock on the landing was within a few minutes of four, and the birds were hopping up and down their cages, and whetting their bills. He tapped at the sitting-room, and she came instantly.

'But I told you it was not necessary--' she began.

'Yes, but the telegram,' he said hurriedly. 'I wanted to let you know first that--it is very serious. Paula--my father is dead! He died suddenly yesterday, and I must go at once... . About Charlotte--and how to let her know--'

'She must not be told yet,' said Paula.... 'Sir William dead!'

'You think we had better not tell her just yet?' said De Stancy

anxiously. 'That's what I want to consult you about, if you--don't mind my intruding.'

'Certainly I don't,' she said.

They continued the discussion for some time; and it was decided that Charlotte should not be informed of what had happened till the doctor had been consulted, Paula promising to account for her brother's departure.

De Stancy then prepared to leave for England by the first morning train, and roused the night-porter, which functionary, having packed off Abner Power, was discovered asleep on the sofa of the landlord's parlour. At half-past five Paula, who in the interim had been pensively sitting with her hand to her chin, quite forgetting that she had meant to go to bed, heard wheels without, and looked from the window. A fly had been brought round, and one of the hotel servants was in the act of putting up a portmanteau with De Stancy's initials upon it. A minute afterwards the captain came to her door.

'I thought you had not gone to bed, after all.'

'I was anxious to see you off,' said she, 'since neither of the others is awake; and you wished me not to rouse them.'

'Quite right, you are very good;' and lowering his voice: 'Paula, it is

a sad and solemn time with me. Will you grant me one word--not on our last sad subject, but on the previous one--before I part with you to go and bury my father?'

'Certainly,' she said, in gentle accents.

'Then have you thought over my position? Will you at last have pity upon my loneliness by becoming my wife?'

Paula sighed deeply; and said, 'Yes.'

'Your hand upon it.'

She gave him her hand: he held it a few moments, then raised it to his lips, and was gone.

When Mrs. Goodman rose she was informed of Sir William's death, and of his son's departure.

'Then the captain is now Sir William De Stancy!' she exclaimed. 'Really, Paula, since you would be Lady De Stancy by marrying him, I almost think--'

'Hush, aunt!'

'Well; what are you writing there?'



'Only entering in my diary that I accepted him this morning for pity's sake, in spite of Uncle Abner. They'll say it was for the title, but knowing it was not I don't care.'

XI.

On the evening of the fourth day after the parting between Paula and De Stancy at Amiens, when it was quite dark in the Markton highway, except in so far as the shades were broken by the faint lights from the adjacent town, a young man knocked softly at the door of Myrtle Villa, and asked if Captain De Stancy had arrived from abroad. He was answered in the affirmative, and in a few moments the captain himself came from an adjoining room.

Seeing that his visitor was Dare, from whom, as will be remembered, he had parted at Carlsruhe in no very satisfied mood, De Stancy did not ask him into the house, but putting on his hat went out with the youth into the public road. Here they conversed as they walked up and down, Dare beginning by alluding to the death of Sir William, the suddenness of which he feared would delay Captain De Stancy's overtures for the hand of Miss Power.

'No,' said De Stancy moodily. 'On the contrary, it has precipitated matters.'

'She has accepted you, captain?'

'We are engaged to be married.'

'Well done. I congratulate you.' The speaker was about to proceed to

further triumphant notes on the intelligence, when casting his eye upon the upper windows of the neighbouring villa, he appeared to reflect on what was within them, and checking himself, 'When is the funeral to be?'

'To-morrow,' De Stancy replied. 'It would be advisable for you not to come near me during the day.'

'I will not. I will be a mere spectator. The old vault of our ancestors will be opened, I presume, captain?'

'It is opened.'

'I must see it--and ruminate on what we once were: it is a thing I like doing. The ghosts of our dead--Ah, what was that?'

'I heard nothing.'

'I thought I heard a footstep behind us.'

They stood still; but the road appeared to be quite deserted, and likely to continue so for the remainder of that evening. They walked on again, speaking in somewhat lower tones than before.

'Will the late Sir William's death delay the wedding much?' asked the younger man curiously.

De Stancy languidly answered that he did not see why it should do so. Some little time would of course intervene, but, since there were several reasons for despatch, he should urge Miss Power and her relatives to consent to a virtually private wedding which might take place at a very early date; and he thought there would be a general consent on that point.

'There are indeed reasons for despatch. Your title, Sir William, is a new safeguard over her heart, certainly; but there is many a slip, and you must not lose her now.'

'I don't mean to lose her!' said De Stancy. 'She is too good to be lost. And yet--since she gave her promise I have felt more than once that I would not engage in such a struggle again. It was not a thing of my beginning, though I was easily enough inflamed to follow. But I will not lose her now.--For God's sake, keep that secret you have so foolishly pricked on your breast. It fills me with remorse to think what she with her scrupulous notions will feel, should she ever know of you and your history, and your relation to me!'

Dare made no reply till after a silence, when he said, 'Of course mum's the word till the wedding is over.'

'And afterwards--promise that for her sake?'

'And probably afterwards.'

Sir William De Stancy drew a dejected breath at the tone of the answer. They conversed but a little while longer, the captain hinting to Dare that it was time for them to part; not, however, before he had uttered a hope that the young man would turn over a new leaf and engage in some regular pursuit. Promising to call upon him at his lodgings De Stancy went indoors, and Dare briskly retraced his steps to Markton.

When his footfall had died away, and the door of the house opposite had been closed, another man appeared upon the scene. He came gently out of the hedge opposite Myrtle Villa, which he paused to regard for a moment. But instead of going townward, he turned his back upon the distant sprinkle of lights, and did not check his walk till he reached the lodge of Stancy Castle.

Here he pulled the wooden acorn beside the arch, and when the porter appeared his light revealed the pedestrian's countenance to be scathed, as by lightning.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Power,' said the porter with sudden deference as he opened the wicket. 'But we wasn't expecting anybody to-night, as there is nobody at home, and the servants on board wages; and that's why I was so long a-coming.'

'No matter, no matter,' said Abner Power. 'I have returned on sudden business, and have not come to stay longer than to-night. Your mistress

is not with me. I meant to sleep in Markton, but have changed my mind.'

Mr. Power had brought no luggage with him beyond a small hand-bag, and as soon as a room could be got ready he retired to bed.

The next morning he passed in idly walking about the grounds and observing the progress which had been made in the works--now temporarily suspended. But that inspection was less his object in remaining there than meditation, was abundantly evident. When the bell began to toll from the neighbouring church to announce the burial of Sir William De Stancy, he passed through the castle, and went on foot in the direction indicated by the sound. Reaching the margin of the churchyard he looked over the wall, his presence being masked by bushes and a group of idlers from Markton who stood in front. Soon a funeral procession of simple--almost meagre and threadbare--character arrived, but Power did not join the people who followed the deceased into the church. De Stancy was the chief mourner and only relation present, the other followers of the broken-down old man being an ancient lawyer, a couple of faithful servants, and a bowed villager who had been page to the late Sir William's father--the single living person left in the parish who remembered the De Stancys as people of wealth and influence, and who firmly believed that family would come into its rights ere long, and oust the uncircumcized Philistines who had taken possession of the old lands.

The funeral was over, and the rusty carriages had gone, together with

many of the spectators; but Power lingered in the churchyard as if he were looking for some one. At length he entered the church, passing by the cavernous pitfall with descending steps which stood open outside the wall of the De Stancy aisle. Arrived within he scanned the few idlers of antiquarian tastes who had remained after the service to inspect the monuments; and beside a recumbent effigy--the effigy in alabaster whose features Paula had wiped with her handkerchief when there with Somerset--he beheld the man it had been his business to find. Abner Power went up and touched this person, who was Dare, on the shoulder.

'Mr. Power--so it is!' said the youth. 'I have not seen you since we met in Carlsruhe.'

'You shall see all the more of me now to make up for it. Shall we walk round the church?'

'With all my heart,' said Dare.

They walked round; and Abner Power began in a sardonic recitative: 'I am a traveller, and it takes a good deal to astonish me. So I neither swooned nor screamed when I learnt a few hours ago what I had suspected for a week, that you are of the house and lineage of Jacob.' He flung a nod towards the canopied tombs as he spoke.--'In other words, that you are of the same breed as the De Stancys.'

Dare cursorily glanced round. Nobody was near enough to hear their

words, the nearest persons being two workmen just outside, who were bringing their tools up from the vault preparatively to closing it.

Having observed this Dare replied, 'I, too, am a traveller; and neither do I swoon nor scream at what you say. But I assure you that if you busy yourself about me, you may truly be said to busy yourself about nothing.'

'Well, that's a matter of opinion. Now, there's no scarlet left in my face to blush for men's follies; but as an alliance is afoot between my niece and the present Sir William, this must be looked into.'

Dare reflectively said 'O,' as he observed through the window one of the workmen bring up a candle from the vault and extinguish it with his fingers.

'The marriage is desirable, and your relationship in itself is of no consequence,' continued the elder, 'but just look at this. You have forced on the marriage by unscrupulous means, your object being only too clearly to live out of the proceeds of that marriage.'

'Mr. Power, you mock me, because I labour under the misfortune of having an illegitimate father to provide for. I really deserve commiseration.'

'You might deserve it if that were all. But it looks bad for my niece's happiness as Lady De Stancy, that she and her husband are to be



perpetually haunted by a young chevalier d'industrie, who can forge a telegram on occasion, and libel an innocent man by an ingenious device in photography. It looks so bad, in short, that, advantageous as a title and old family name would be to her and her children, I won't let my brother's daughter run the risk of having them at the expense of being in the grip of a man like you. There are other suitors in the world, and other titles: and she is a beautiful woman, who can well afford to be fastidious. I shall let her know at once of these things, and break off the business--unless you do ONE THING.'

A workman brought up another candle from the vault, and prepared to let down the slab. 'Well, Mr. Power, and what is that one thing?'

'Go to Peru as my agent in a business I have just undertaken there.'

'And settle there?'

'Of course. I am soon going over myself, and will bring you anything you require.'

'How long will you give me to consider?' said Dare.

Power looked at his watch. 'One, two, three, four hours,' he said. 'I leave Markton by the seven o'clock train this evening.'

'And if I meet your proposal with a negative?'

'I shall go at once to my niece and tell her the whole circumstances--tell her that, by marrying Sir William, she allies herself with an unhappy gentleman in the power of a criminal son who makes his life a burden to him by perpetual demands upon his purse; who will increase those demands with his accession to wealth, threaten to degrade her by exposing her husband's antecedents if she opposes his extortions, and who will make her miserable by letting her know that her old lover was shamefully victimized by a youth she is bound to screen out of respect to her husband's feelings. Now a man does not care to let his own flesh and blood incur the danger of such anguish as that, and I shall do what I say to prevent it. Knowing what a lukewarm sentiment hers is for Sir William at best, I shall not have much difficulty.'

'Well, I don't feel inclined to go to Peru.'

'Neither do I want to break off the match, though I am ready to do it. But you care about your personal freedom, and you might be made to wear the broad arrow for your tricks on Somerset.'

'Mr. Power, I see you are a hard man.'

'I am a hard man. You will find me one. Well, will you go to Peru? Or I don't mind Australia or California as alternatives. As long as you choose to remain in either of those wealth-producing places, so long will Cunningham Haze go uninformed.'

'Mr. Power, I am overcome. Will you allow me to sit down? Suppose we go into the vestry. It is more comfortable.'

They entered the vestry, and seated themselves in two chairs, one at each end of the table.

'In the meantime,' continued Dare, 'to lend a little romance to stern realities, I'll tell you a singular dream I had just before you returned to England.' Power looked contemptuous, but Dare went on: 'I dreamt that once upon a time there were two brothers, born of a Nonconformist family, one of whom became a railway-contractor, and the other a mechanical engineer.'

'A mechanical engineer--good,' said Power, beginning to attend.

'When the first went abroad in his profession, and became engaged on continental railways, the second, a younger man, looking round for a start, also betook himself to the continent. But though ingenious and scientific, he had not the business capacity of the elder, whose rebukes led to a sharp quarrel between them; and they parted in bitter estrangement--never to meet again as it turned out, owing to the dogged obstinacy and self-will of the younger man. He, after this, seemed to lose his moral ballast altogether, and after some eccentric doings he was reduced to a state of poverty, and took lodgings in a court in a back street of a town we will call Geneva, considerably in doubt as to

what steps he should take to keep body and soul together.'

Abner Power was shooting a narrow ray of eyesight at Dare from the corner of his nearly closed lids. 'Your dream is so interesting,' he said, with a hard smile, 'that I could listen to it all day.'

'Excellent!' said Dare, and went on: 'Now it so happened that the house opposite to the one taken by the mechanician was peculiar. It was a tall narrow building, wholly unornamented, the walls covered with a layer of white plaster cracked and soiled by time. I seem to see that house now! Six stone steps led up to the door, with a rusty iron railing on each side, and under these steps were others which went down to a cellar--in my dream of course.'

'Of course--in your dream,' said Power, nodding comprehensively.

'Sitting lonely and apathetic without a light, at his own chamber-window at night time, our mechanician frequently observed dark figures descending these steps and ultimately discovered that the house was the meeting-place of a fraternity of political philosophers, whose object was the extermination of tyrants and despots, and the overthrow of established religions. The discovery was startling enough, but our hero was not easily startled. He kept their secret and lived on as before. At last the mechanician and his affairs became known to the society, as the affairs of the society had become known to the mechanician, and, instead of shooting him as one who knew too much for their safety, they were

struck with his faculty for silence, and thought they might be able to make use of him.'

'To be sure,' said Abner Power.

'Next, like friend Bunyan, I saw in my dream that denunciation was the breath of life to this society. At an earlier date in its history, objectionable persons in power had been from time to time murdered, and curiously enough numbered; that is, upon the body of each was set a mark or seal, announcing that he was one of a series. But at this time the question before the society related to the substitution for the dagger, which was vetoed as obsolete, of some explosive machine that would be both more effectual and less difficult to manage; and in short, a large reward was offered to our needy Englishman if he would put their ideas of such a machine into shape.'

Abner Power nodded again, his complexion being peculiar--which might partly have been accounted for by the reflection of window-light from the green-baize table-cloth.

'He agreed, though no politician whatever himself, to exercise his wits on their account, and brought his machine to such a pitch of perfection, that it was the identical one used in the memorable attempt--' (Dare whispered the remainder of the sentence in tones so low that not a mouse in the corner could have heard.) 'Well, the inventor of that explosive has naturally been wanted ever since by all the heads of police in

Europe. But the most curious--or perhaps the most natural part of my story is, that our hero, after the catastrophe, grew disgusted with himself and his comrades, acquired, in a fit of revulsion, quite a conservative taste in politics, which was strengthened greatly by the news he indirectly received of the great wealth and respectability of his brother, who had had no communion with him for years, and supposed him dead. He abjured his employers and resolved to abandon them; but before coming to England he decided to destroy all trace of his combustible inventions by dropping them into the neighbouring lake at night from a boat. You feel the room close, Mr. Power?'

'No, I suffer from attacks of perspiration whenever I sit in a consecrated edifice--that's all. Pray go on.'

'In carrying out this project, an explosion occurred, just as he was throwing the stock overboard--it blew up into his face, wounding him severely, and nearly depriving him of sight. The boat was upset, but he swam ashore in the darkness, and remained hidden till he recovered, though the scars produced by the burns had been set on him for ever. This accident, which was such a misfortune to him as a man, was an advantage to him as a conspirators' engineer retiring from practice, and afforded him a disguise both from his own brotherhood and from the police, which he has considered impenetrable, but which is getting seen through by one or two keen eyes as time goes on. Instead of coming to England just then, he went to Peru, connected himself with the guano trade, I believe, and after his brother's death revisited England, his

old life obliterated as far as practicable by his new principles. He is known only as a great traveller to his surviving relatives, though he seldom says where he has travelled. Unluckily for himself, he is WANTED by certain European governments as badly as ever.'

Dare raised his eyes as he concluded his narration. As has been remarked, he was sitting at one end of the vestry-table, Power at the other, the green cloth stretching between them. On the edge of the table adjoining Mr. Power a shining nozzle of metal was quietly resting, like a dog's nose. It was directed point-blank at the young man.

Dare started. 'Ah--a revolver?' he said.

Mr. Power nodded placidly, his hand still grasping the pistol behind the edge of the table. 'As a traveller I always carry one of 'em,' he returned; 'and for the last five minutes I have been closely considering whether your numerous brains are worth blowing out or no. The vault yonder has suggested itself as convenient and snug for one of the same family; but the mental problem that stays my hand is, how am I to despatch and bury you there without the workmen seeing?'

"'Tis a strange problem, certainly,' replied Dare, 'and one on which I fear I could not give disinterested advice. Moreover, while you, as a traveller, always carry a weapon of defence, as a traveller so do I. And for the last three-quarters of an hour I have been thinking concerning you, an intensified form of what you have been thinking of me, but

without any concern as to your interment. See here for a proof of it.'

And a second steel nose rested on the edge of the table opposite to the first, steadied by Dare's right hand.

They remained for some time motionless, the tick of the tower clock distinctly audible.

Mr. Power spoke first.

'Well, 'twould be a pity to make a mess here under such dubious circumstances. Mr. Dare, I perceive that a mean vagabond can be as sharp as a political regenerator. I cry quits, if you care to do the same?'

Dare assented, and the pistols were put away.

'Then we do nothing at all, either side; but let the course of true love run on to marriage--that's the understanding, I think?' said Dare as he rose.

'It is,' said Power; and turning on his heel, he left the vestry.

Dare retired to the church and thence to the outside, where he idled away a few minutes in looking at the workmen, who were now lowering into its place a large stone slab, bearing the words 'DE STANCY,' which covered the entrance to the vault. When the footway of the churchyard was restored to its normal condition Dare pursued his way to Markton.



Abner Power walked back to the castle at a slow and equal pace, as though he carried an over-brimming vessel on his head. He silently let himself in, entered the long gallery, and sat down. The length of time that he sat there was so remarkable as to raise that interval of inanition to the rank of a feat.

Power's eyes glanced through one of the window-casements: from a hole without he saw the head of a tomtit protruding. He listlessly watched the bird during the successive epochs of his thought, till night came, without any perceptible change occurring in him. Such fixity would have meant nothing else than sudden death in any other man, but in Mr. Power it merely signified that he was engaged in ruminations which necessitated a more extensive survey than usual. At last, at half-past eight, after having sat for five hours with his eyes on the residence of the tomtits, to whom night had brought cessation of thought, if not to him who had observed them, he rose amid the shades of the furniture, and rang the bell. There were only a servant or two in the castle, one of whom presently came with a light in her hand and a startled look upon her face, which was not reduced when she recognized him; for in the opinion of that household there was something ghoul-like in Mr. Power, which made him no desirable guest.

He ate a late meal, and retired to bed, where he seemed to sleep not unsoundly. The next morning he received a letter which afforded him infinite satisfaction and gave his stagnant impulses a new momentum. He

entered the library, and amid objects swathed in brown holland sat down and wrote a note to his niece at Amiens. Therein he stated that, finding that the Anglo-South-American house with which he had recently connected himself required his presence in Peru, it obliged him to leave without waiting for her return. He felt the less uneasy at going, since he had learnt that Captain De Stancy would return at once to Amiens to his sick sister, and see them safely home when she improved. He afterwards left the castle, disappearing towards a railway station some miles above Markton, the road to which lay across an unfrequented down.

## XII.

It was a fine afternoon of late summer, nearly three months subsequent to the death of Sir William De Stancy and Paula's engagement to marry his successor in the title. George Somerset had started on a professional journey that took him through the charming district which lay around Stancy Castle. Having resigned his appointment as architect to that important structure--a resignation which had been accepted by Paula through her solicitor--he had bidden farewell to the locality after putting matters in such order that his successor, whoever he might be, should have no difficulty in obtaining the particulars necessary to the completion of the work in hand. Hardly to his surprise this successor was Havill.

Somerset's resignation had been tendered in no hasty mood. On returning to England, and in due course to the castle, everything bore in upon his mind the exceeding sorrowfulness--he would not say humiliation--of continuing to act in his former capacity for a woman who, from seeming more than a dear friend, had become less than an acquaintance.

So he resigned; but now, as the train drew on into that once beloved tract of country, the images which met his eye threw him back in point of emotion to very near where he had been before making himself a stranger here. The train entered the cutting on whose brink he had walked when the carriage containing Paula and her friends surprised him the previous summer. He looked out of the window: they were passing the

well-known curve that led up to the tunnel constructed by her father, into which he had gone when the train came by and Paula had been alarmed

for his life. There was the path they had both climbed afterwards, involuntarily seizing each other's hand; the bushes, the grass, the flowers, everything just the same:

'-----Here was the pleasant place,  
And nothing wanting was, save She, alas!'

When they came out of the tunnel at the other end he caught a glimpse of the distant castle-keep, and the well-remembered walls beneath it. The experience so far transcended the intensity of what is called mournful pleasure as to make him wonder how he could have miscalculated himself to the extent of supposing that he might pass the spot with controllable emotion.

On entering Markton station he withdrew into a remote corner of the carriage, and closed his eyes with a resolve not to open them till the embittering scenes should be passed by. He had not long to wait for this event. When again in motion his eye fell upon the skirt of a lady's dress opposite, the owner of which had entered and seated herself so softly as not to attract his attention.

'Ah indeed!' he exclaimed as he looked up to her face. 'I had not a notion that it was you!' He went over and shook hands with Charlotte De

Stancy.

'I am not going far,' she said; 'only to the next station. We often run down in summer time. Are you going far?'

'I am going to a building further on; thence to Normandy by way of Cherbourg, to finish out my holiday.'

Miss De Stancy thought that would be very nice.

'Well, I hope so. But I fear it won't.'

After saying that Somerset asked himself why he should mince matters with so genuine and sympathetic a girl as Charlotte De Stancy? She could tell him particulars which he burned to know. He might never again have an opportunity of knowing them, since she and he would probably not meet for years to come, if at all.

'Have the castle works progressed pretty rapidly under the new architect?' he accordingly asked.

'Yes,' said Charlotte in her haste--then adding that she was not quite sure if they had progressed so rapidly as before; blushing correcting herself at this point and that, in the tinkering manner of a nervous organization aiming at nicety where it was not required.

'Well, I should have liked to carry out the undertaking to its end,' said Somerset. 'But I felt I could not consistently do so. Miss Power--' (here a lump came into Somerset's throat--so responsive was he yet to her image)--'seemed to have lost confidence in me, and--it was best that the connection should be severed.'

There was a long pause. 'She was very sorry about it,' said Charlotte gently.

'What made her alter so?--I never can think!'

Charlotte waited again as if to accumulate the necessary force for honest speaking at the expense of pleasantness. 'It was the telegram that began it of course,' she answered.

'Telegram?'

She looked up at him in quite a frightened way--little as there was to be frightened at in a quiet fellow like him in this sad time of his life--and said, 'Yes: some telegram--I think--when you were in trouble? Forgive my alluding to it; but you asked me the question.'

Somerset began reflecting on what messages he had sent Paula, troublous or otherwise. All he had sent had been sent from the castle, and were as gentle and mellifluous as sentences well could be which had neither articles nor pronouns. 'I don't understand,' he said. 'Will you explain

a little more--as plainly as you like--without minding my feelings?'

'A telegram from Nice, I think?'

'I never sent one.'

'O! The one I meant was about money.'

Somerset shook his head. 'No,' he murmured, with the composure of a man who, knowing he had done nothing of the sort himself, was blinded by his own honesty to the possibility that another might have done it for him.

'That must be some other affair with which I had nothing to do. O no, it was nothing like that; the reason for her change of manner was quite different!'

So timid was Charlotte in Somerset's presence, that her timidity at this juncture amounted to blameworthiness. The distressing scene which must have followed a clearing up there and then of any possible misunderstanding, terrified her imagination; and quite confounded by contradictions that she could not reconcile, she held her tongue, and nervously looked out of the window.

'I have heard that Miss Power is soon to be married,' continued Somerset.

'Yes,' Charlotte murmured. 'It is sooner than it ought to be by rights,

considering how recently my dear father died; but there are reasons in connection with my brother's position against putting it off: and it is to be absolutely simple and private.'

There was another interval. 'May I ask when it is to be?' he said.

'Almost at once--this week.'

Somerset started back as if some stone had hit his face.

Still there was nothing wonderful in such promptitude: engagements broken in upon by the death of a near relative of one of the parties had been often carried out in a subdued form with no longer delay.

Charlotte's station was now at hand. She bade him farewell; and he rattled on to the building he had come to inspect, and next to Budmouth, whence he intended to cross the Channel by steamboat that night.

He hardly knew how the evening passed away. He had taken up his quarters at an inn near the quay, and as the night drew on he stood gazing from the coffee-room window at the steamer outside, which nearly thrust its spars through the bedroom casements, and at the goods that were being tumbled on board as only shippers can tumble them. All the goods were laden, a lamp was put on each side the gangway, the engines broke into a crackling roar, and people began to enter. They were only waiting for the last train: then they would be off. Still Somerset did not move;



he was thinking of that curious half-told story of Charlotte's, about a telegram to Paula for money from Nice. Not once till within the last half-hour had it recurred to his mind that he had met Dare both at Nice and at Monte Carlo; that at the latter place he had been absolutely out of money and wished to borrow, showing considerable sinister feeling when Somerset declined to lend: that on one or two previous occasions he had reasons for doubting Dare's probity; and that in spite of the young man's impoverishment at Monte Carlo he had, a few days later, beheld him in shining raiment at Carlsruhe. Somerset, though misty in his conjectures, was seized with a growing conviction that there was something in Miss De Stancy's allusion to the telegram which ought to be explained.

He felt an insurmountable objection to cross the water that night, or till he had been able to see Charlotte again, and learn more of her meaning. He countermanded the order to put his luggage on board, watched the steamer out of the harbour, and went to bed. He might as well have gone to battle, for any rest that he got. On rising the next morning he felt rather blank, though none the less convinced that a matter required investigation. He left Budmouth by a morning train, and about eleven o'clock found himself in Markton.

The momentum of a practical inquiry took him through that ancient borough without leaving him much leisure for those reveries which had yesterday lent an unutterable sadness to every object there. It was just before noon that he started for the castle, intending to arrive at a

time of the morning when, as he knew from experience, he could speak to Charlotte without difficulty. The rising ground soon revealed the old towers to him, and, jutting out behind them, the scaffoldings for the new wing.

While halting here on the knoll in some doubt about his movements he beheld a man coming along the road, and was soon confronted by his former competitor, Havill. The first instinct of each was to pass with a nod, but a second instinct for intercourse was sufficient to bring them to a halt. After a few superficial words had been spoken Somerset said, 'You have succeeded me.'

'I have,' said Havill; 'but little to my advantage. I have just heard that my commission is to extend no further than roofing in the wing that you began, and had I known that before, I would have seen the castle fall flat as Jericho before I would have accepted the superintendence. But I know who I have to thank for that--De Stancy.'

Somerset still looked towards the distant battlements. On the scaffolding, among the white-jacketed workmen, he could discern one figure in a dark suit.

'You have a clerk of the works, I see,' he observed.

'Nominally I have, but practically I haven't.'

'Then why do you keep him?'

'I can't help myself. He is Mr. Dare; and having been recommended by a higher power than I, there he must stay in spite of me.'

'Who recommended him?'

'The same--De Stancy.'

'It is very odd,' murmured Somerset, 'but that young man is the object of my visit.'

'You had better leave him alone,' said Havill drily.

Somerset asked why.

'Since I call no man master over that way I will inform you.' Havill then related in splenetic tones, to which Somerset did not care to listen till the story began to advance itself, how he had passed the night with Dare at the inn, and the incidents of that night, relating how he had seen some letters on the young man's breast which long had puzzled him. 'They were an E, a T, an N, and a C. I thought over them long, till it eventually occurred to me that the word when filled out was "De Stancy," and that kinship explains the offensive and defensive alliance between them.'

'But, good heavens, man!' said Somerset, more and more disturbed. 'Does she know of it?'

'You may depend she does not yet; but she will soon enough. Hark--there it is!' The notes of the castle clock were heard striking noon. 'Then it is all over.'

'What?--not their marriage!'

'Yes. Didn't you know it was the wedding day? They were to be at the church at half-past eleven. I should have waited to see her go, but it was no sight to hinder business for, as she was only going to drive over in her brougham with Miss De Stancy.'

'My errand has failed!' said Somerset, turning on his heel. 'I'll walk back to the town with you.'

However he did not walk far with Havill; society was too much at that moment. As soon as opportunity offered he branched from the road by a path, and avoiding the town went by railway to Budmouth, whence he resumed, by the night steamer, his journey to Normandy.

### XIII.

To return to Charlotte De Stancy. When the train had borne Somerset from her side, and she had regained her self-possession, she became conscious of the true proportions of the fact he had asserted. And, further, if the telegram had not been his, why should the photographic distortion be trusted as a phase of his existence? But after a while it seemed so improbable to her that God's sun should bear false witness, that instead of doubting both evidences she was inclined to readmit the first. Still, upon the whole, she could not question for long the honesty of Somerset's denial and if that message had indeed been sent by him, it must have been done while he was in another such an unhappy state as that exemplified by the portrait. The supposition reconciled all differences; and yet she could not but fight against it with all the strength of a generous affection.

All the afternoon her poor little head was busy on this perturbing question, till she inquired of herself whether after all it might not be possible for photographs to represent people as they had never been. Before rejecting the hypothesis she determined to have the word of a professor on the point, which would be better than all her surmises. Returning to Markton early, she told the coachman whom Paula had sent, to drive her to the shop of Mr. Ray, an obscure photographic artist in that town, instead of straight home.

Ray's establishment consisted of two divisions, the respectable and the

shabby. If, on entering the door, the visitor turned to the left, he found himself in a magazine of old clothes, old furniture, china, umbrellas, guns, fishing-rods, dirty fiddles, and split flutes. Entering the right-hand room, which had originally been that of an independent house, he was in an ordinary photographer's and print-collector's depository, to which a certain artistic solidity was imparted by a few oil paintings in the background. Charlotte made for the latter department, and when she was inside Mr. Ray appeared in person from the lumber-shop adjoining, which, despite its manginess, contributed by far the greater share to his income.

Charlotte put her question simply enough. The man did not answer her directly, but soon found that she meant no harm to him. He told her that such misrepresentations were quite possible, and that they embodied a form of humour which was getting more and more into vogue among certain facetious persons of society.

Charlotte was coming away when she asked, as on second thoughts, if he had any specimens of such work to show her.

'None of my own preparation,' said Mr. Ray, with unimpeachable probity of tone. 'I consider them libellous myself. Still, I have one or two samples by me, which I keep merely as curiosities.--There's one,' he said, throwing out a portrait card from a drawer. 'That represents the German Emperor in a violent passion: this one shows the Prime Minister out of his mind; this the Pope of Rome the worse for liquor.'

She inquired if he had any local specimens.

'Yes,' he said, 'but I prefer not to exhibit them unless you really ask for a particular one that you mean to buy.'

'I don't want any.'

'O, I beg pardon, miss. Well, I shouldn't myself own such things were produced, if there had not been a young man here at one time who was very ingenious in these matters--a Mr. Dare. He was quite a gent, and only did it as an amusement, and not for the sake of getting a living.'

Charlotte had no wish to hear more. On her way home she burst into tears: the entanglement was altogether too much for her to tear asunder, even had not her own instincts been urging her two ways, as they were.

To immediately right Somerset's wrong was her impetuous desire as an honest woman who loved him; but such rectification would be the jeopardizing of all else that gratified her--the marriage of her brother with her dearest friend--now on the very point of accomplishment. It was a marriage which seemed to promise happiness, or at least comfort, if the old flutter that had transiently disturbed Paula's bosom could be kept from reviving, to which end it became imperative to hide from her the discovery of injustice to Somerset. It involved the advantage of leaving Somerset free; and though her own tender interest in him had

been too well schooled by habitual self-denial to run ahead on vain personal hopes, there was nothing more than human in her feeling pleasure in prolonging Somerset's singleness. Paula might even be allowed to discover his wrongs when her marriage had put him out of her power. But to let her discover his ill-treatment now might upset the impending union of the families, and wring her own heart with the sight of Somerset married in her brother's place.

Why Dare, or any other person, should have set himself to advance her brother's cause by such unscrupulous blackening of Somerset's character was more than her sagacity could fathom. Her brother was, as far as she could see, the only man who could directly profit by the machination, and was therefore the natural one to suspect of having set it going. But she would not be so disloyal as to entertain the thought long; and who or what had instigated Dare, who was undoubtedly the proximate cause of the mischief, remained to her an inscrutable mystery.

The contention of interests and desires with honour in her heart shook Charlotte all that night; but good principle prevailed. The wedding was to be solemnized the very next morning, though for before-mentioned reasons this was hardly known outside the two houses interested; and there were no visible preparations either at villa or castle. De Stancy and his groomsman--a brother officer--slept at the former residence.

De Stancy was a sorry specimen of a bridegroom when he met his sister in the morning. Thick-coming fancies, for which there was more than good



reason, had disturbed him only too successfully, and he was as full of apprehension as one who has a league with Mephistopheles. Charlotte told him nothing of what made her likewise so wan and anxious, but drove off to the castle, as had been planned, about nine o'clock, leaving her brother and his friend at the breakfast-table.

That clearing Somerset's reputation from the stain which had been thrown on it would cause a sufficient reaction in Paula's mind to dislocate present arrangements she did not so seriously anticipate, now that morning had a little calmed her. Since the rupture with her former architect Paula had sedulously kept her own counsel, but Charlotte assumed from the ease with which she seemed to do it that her feelings towards him had never been inconveniently warm; and she hoped that Paula would learn of Somerset's purity with merely the generous pleasure of a friend, coupled with a friend's indignation against his traducer.

Still, the possibility existed of stronger emotions, and it was only too evident to poor Charlotte that, knowing this, she had still less excuse for delaying the intelligence till the strongest emotion would be purposeless.

On approaching the castle the first object that caught her eye was Dare, standing beside Havill on the scaffolding of the new wing. He was looking down upon the drive and court, as if in anticipation of the event. His contiguity flurried her, and instead of going straight to Paula she sought out Mrs. Goodman.

'You are come early; that's right!' said the latter. 'You might as well have slept here last night. We have only Mr. Wardlaw, the London lawyer you have heard of, in the house. Your brother's solicitor was here yesterday; but he returned to Markton for the night. We miss Mr. Power so much--it is so unfortunate that he should have been obliged to go abroad, and leave us unprotected women with so much responsibility.'

'Yes, I know,' said Charlotte quickly, having a shy distaste for the details of what troubled her so much in the gross.

'Paula has inquired for you.'

'What is she doing?'

'She is in her room: she has not begun to dress yet. Will you go to her?'

Charlotte assented. 'I have to tell her something,' she said, 'which will make no difference, but which I should like her to know this morning--at once. I have discovered that we have been entirely mistaken about Mr. Somerset.' She nerved herself to relate succinctly what had come to her knowledge the day before.

Mrs. Goodman was much impressed. She had never clearly heard before what

circumstances had attended the resignation of Paula's architect. 'We had better not tell her till the wedding is over,' she presently said; 'it would only disturb her, and do no good.'

'But will it be right?' asked Miss De Stancy.

'Yes, it will be right if we tell her afterwards. O yes--it must be right,' she repeated in a tone which showed that her opinion was unstable enough to require a little fortification by the voice. 'She loves your brother; she must, since she is going to marry him; and it can make little difference whether we rehabilitate the character of a friend now, or some few hours hence. The author of those wicked tricks on Mr. Somerset ought not to go a moment unpunished.'

'That's what I think; and what right have we to hold our tongues even for a few hours?'

Charlotte found that by telling Mrs. Goodman she had simply made two irresolute people out of one, and as Paula was now inquiring for her, she went upstairs without having come to any decision.

XIV.

Paula was in her boudoir, writing down some notes previous to beginning her wedding toilet, which was designed to harmonize with the simplicity that characterized the other arrangements. She owned that it was depriving the neighbourhood of a pageant which it had a right to expect of her; but the circumstance was inexorable.

Mrs. Goodman entered Paula's room immediately behind Charlotte. Perhaps the only difference between the Paula of to-day and the Paula of last year was an accession of thoughtfulness, natural to the circumstances in any case, and more particularly when, as now, the bride's isolation made self-dependence a necessity. She was sitting in a light dressing-gown, and her face, which was rather pale, flushed at the entrance of Charlotte and her aunt.

'I knew you were come,' she said, when Charlotte stooped and kissed her. 'I heard you. I have done nothing this morning, and feel dreadfully unsettled. Is all well?'

The question was put without thought, but its aptness seemed almost to imply an intuitive knowledge of their previous conversation. 'Yes,' said Charlotte tardily.

'Well, now, Clementine shall dress you, and I can do with Milly,' continued Paula. 'Come along. Well, aunt--what's the matter?--and you,

Charlotte? You look harassed.'

'I have not slept well,' said Charlotte.

'And have not you slept well either, aunt? You said nothing about it at breakfast.'

'O, it is nothing,' said Mrs. Goodman quickly. 'I have been disturbed by learning of somebody's villainy. I am going to tell you all some time to-day, but it is not important enough to disturb you with now.'

'No mystery!' argued Paula. 'Come! it is not fair.'

'I don't think it is quite fair,' said Miss De Stancy, looking from one to the other in some distress. 'Mrs. Goodman--I must tell her! Paula, Mr. Som--'

'He's dead!' cried Paula, sinking into a chair and turning as pale as marble. 'Is he dead?--tell me!' she whispered.

'No, no--he's not dead--he is very well, and gone to Normandy for a holiday!'

'O--I am glad to hear it,' answered Paula, with a sudden cool mannerliness.

'He has been misrepresented,' said Mrs. Goodman. 'That's all.'

'Well?' said Paula, with her eyes bent on the floor.

'I have been feeling that I ought to tell you clearly, dear Paula,' declared her friend. 'It is absolutely false about his telegraphing to you for money--it is absolutely false that his character is such as that dreadful picture represented it. There--that's the substance of it, and I can tell you particulars at any time.'

But Paula would not be told at any time. A dreadful sorrow sat in her face; she insisted upon learning everything about the matter there and then, and there was no withstanding her.

When it was all explained she said in a low tone: 'It is that pernicious, evil man Dare--yet why is it he?--what can he have meant by it! Justice before generosity, even on one's wedding-day. Before I become any man's wife this morning I'll see that wretch in jail! The affair must be sifted.... O, it was a wicked thing to serve anybody so!--I'll send for Cunningham Haze this moment--the culprit is even now on the premises, I believe--acting as clerk of the works!' The usually well-balanced Paula was excited, and scarcely knowing what she did went to the bell-pull.

'Don't act hastily, Paula,' said her aunt. 'Had you not better consult Sir William? He will act for you in this.'

'Yes--He is coming round in a few minutes,' said Charlotte, jumping at this happy thought of Mrs. Goodman's. 'He's going to run across to see how you are getting on. He will be here by ten.'

'Yes--he promised last night.'

She had scarcely done speaking when the prancing of a horse was heard in the ward below, and in a few minutes a servant announced Sir William De Stancy.

De Stancy entered saying, 'I have ridden across for ten minutes, as I said I would do, to know if everything is easy and straightforward for you. There will be time enough for me to get back and prepare if I start shortly. Well?'

'I am ruffled,' said Paula, allowing him to take her hand.

'What is it?' said her betrothed.

As Paula did not immediately answer Mrs. Goodman beckoned to Charlotte, and they left the room together.

'A man has to be given in charge, or a boy, or a demon,' she replied. 'I was going to do it, but you can do it better than I. He will run away if we don't mind.'

'But, my dear Paula, who is it?--what has he done?'

'It is Dare--that young man you see out there against the sky.' She looked from the window sideways towards the new wing, on the roof of which Dare was walking prominently about, after having assisted two of the workmen in putting a red streamer on the tallest scaffold-pole. 'You must send instantly for Mr. Cunningham Haze!'

'My dearest Paula,' repeated De Stancy faintly, his complexion changing to that of a man who had died.

'Please send for Mr. Haze at once,' returned Paula, with graceful firmness. 'I said I would be just to a wronged man before I was generous to you--and I will. That lad Dare--to take a practical view of it--has attempted to defraud me of one hundred pounds sterling, and he shall suffer. I won't tell you what he has done besides, for though it is worse, it is less tangible. When he is handcuffed and sent off to jail I'll proceed with my dressing. Will you ring the bell?'

'Had you not better consider?' began De Stancy.

'Consider!' said Paula, with indignation. 'I have considered. Will you kindly ring, Sir William, and get Thomas to ride at once to Mr. Haze? Or must I rise from this chair and do it myself?'



'You are very hasty and abrupt this morning, I think,' he faltered.

Paula rose determinedly from the chair. 'Since you won't do it, I must,' she said.

'No, dearest!--Let me beg you not to!'

'Sir William De Stancy!'

She moved towards the bell-pull; but he stepped before and intercepted her.

'You must not ring the bell for that purpose,' he said with husky deliberateness, looking into the depths of her face.

'It wants two hours to the time when you might have a right to express such a command as that,' she said haughtily.

'I certainly have not the honour to be your husband yet,' he sadly replied, 'but surely you can listen? There exist reasons against giving this boy in charge which I could easily get you to admit by explanation; but I would rather, without explanation, have you take my word, when I say that by doing so you are striking a blow against both yourself and me.'

Paula, however, had rung the bell.

'You are jealous of somebody or something perhaps!' she said, in tones which showed how fatally all this was telling against the intention of that day. 'I will not be a party to baseness, if it is to save all my fortune!'

The bell was answered quickly. But De Stancy, though plainly in great misery, did not give up his point. Meeting the servant at the door before he could enter the room he said. 'It is nothing; you can go again.'

Paula looked at the unhappy baronet in amazement; then turning to the servant, who stood with the door in his hand, said, 'Tell Thomas to saddle the chestnut, and--'

'It's all a mistake,' insisted De Stancy. 'Leave the room, James!'

James looked at his mistress.

'Yes, James, leave the room,' she calmly said, sitting down. 'Now what have you to say?' she asked, when they were again alone. 'Why must I not issue orders in my own house? Who is this young criminal, that you value his interests higher than my honour? I have delayed for one moment sending my messenger to the chief constable to hear your explanation--only for that.'

'You will still persevere?'

'Certainly. Who is he?'

'Paula... he is my son.'

She remained still as death while one might count ten; then turned her back upon him. 'I think you had better go away,' she whispered. 'You need not come again.'

He did not move. 'Paula--do you indeed mean this?' he asked.

'I do.'

De Stancy walked a few paces, then said in a low voice: 'Miss Power, I knew--I guessed just now, as soon as it began--that we were going to split on this rock. Well--let it be--it cannot be helped; destiny is supreme. The boy was to be my ruin; he is my ruin, and rightly. But before I go grant me one request. Do not prosecute him. Believe me, I will do everything I can to get him out of your way. He shall annoy you no more.... Do you promise?'

'I do,' she said. 'Now please leave me.'

'Once more--am I to understand that no marriage is to take place to-day between you and me?'

'You are.'

Sir William De Stancy left the room. It was noticeable throughout the interview that his manner had not been the manner of a man altogether taken by surprise. During the few preceding days his mood had been that of the gambler seasoned in ill-luck, who adopts pessimist surmises as a safe background to his most sanguine hopes.

She remained alone for some time. Then she rang, and requested that Mr. Wardlaw, her father's solicitor and friend, would come up to her. A messenger was despatched, not to Mr. Cunningham Haze, but to the parson of the parish, who in his turn sent to the clerk and clerk's wife, then busy in the church. On receipt of the intelligence the two latter functionaries proceeded to roll up the carpet which had been laid from the door to the gate, put away the kneeling-cushions, locked the doors, and went off to inquire the reason of so strange a countermand. It was soon proclaimed in Markton that the marriage had been postponed for a fortnight in consequence of the bride's sudden indisposition: and less public emotion was felt than the case might have drawn forth, from the ignorance of the majority of the populace that a wedding had been going to take place at all.

Meanwhile Miss De Stancy had been closeted with Paula for more than an hour. It was a difficult meeting, and a severe test to any friendship but that of the most sterling sort. In the turmoil of her distraction

Charlotte had the consolation of knowing that if her act of justice to Somerset at such a moment were the act of a simpleton, it was the only course open to honesty. But Paula's cheerful serenity in some measure laid her own troubles to rest, till they were reawakened by a rumour--which got wind some weeks later, and quite drowned all other surprises--of the true relation between the vanished clerk of works, Mr. Dare, and the fallen family of De Stancy.