BOOK THE SIXTH. PAULA.

I.

'I have decided that I cannot see Sir William again: I shall go away,' said Paula on the evening of the next day, as she lay on her bed in a flushed and highly-strung condition, though a person who had heard her words without seeing her face would have assumed perfect equanimity to be the mood which expressed itself with such quietness. This was the case with her aunt, who was looking out of the window at some idlers from Markton walking round the castle with their eyes bent upon its windows, and she made no haste to reply.

'Those people have come to see me, as they have a right to do when a person acts so strangely,' Paula continued. 'And hence I am better away.'

'Where do you think to go to?'

Paula replied in the tone of one who was actuated entirely by practical considerations: 'Out of England certainly. And as Normandy lies nearest, I think I shall go there. It is a very nice country to ramble in.'

'Yes, it is a very nice country to ramble in,' echoed her aunt, in moderate tones. 'When do you intend to start?'

'I should like to cross to-night. You must go with me, aunt; will you not?'

Mrs. Goodman expostulated against such suddenness. 'It will redouble the rumours that are afloat, if, after being supposed ill, you are seen going off by railway perfectly well.'

'That's a contingency which I am quite willing to run the risk of. Well, it would be rather sudden, as you say, to go to-night. But we'll go to-morrow night at latest.' Under the influence of the decision she bounded up like an elastic ball and went to the glass, which showed a light in her eye that had not been there before this resolution to travel in Normandy had been taken.

The evening and the next morning were passed in writing a final and kindly note of dismissal to Sir William De Stancy, in making arrangements for the journey, and in commissioning Havill to take advantage of their absence by emptying certain rooms of their furniture, and repairing their dilapidations--a work which, with that in hand, would complete the section for which he had been engaged. Mr. Wardlaw had left the castle; so also had Charlotte, by her own wish, her residence there having been found too oppressive to herself to be continued for the present. Accompanied by Mrs. Goodman, Milly, and Clementine, the elderly French maid, who still remained with them, Paula drove into Markton in the twilight and took the train to Budmouth.

When they got there they found that an unpleasant breeze was blowing out at sea, though inland it had been calm enough. Mrs. Goodman proposed to stay at Budmouth till the next day, in hope that there might be smooth water; but an English seaport inn being a thing that Paula disliked more than a rough passage, she would not listen to this counsel. Other impatient reasons, too, might have weighed with her. When night came their looming miseries began. Paula found that in addition to her own troubles she had those of three other people to support; but she did not audibly complain.

'Paula, Paula,' said Mrs. Goodman from beneath her load of wretchedness, 'why did we think of undergoing this?'

A slight gleam of humour crossed Paula's not particularly blooming face, as she answered, 'Ah, why indeed?'

'What is the real reason, my dear? For God's sake tell me!'

'It begins with S.'

'Well, I would do anything for that young man short of personal martyrdom; but really when it comes to that--'

'Don't criticize me, auntie, and I won't criticize you.'

'Well, I am open to criticism just now, I am sure,' said her aunt, with a green smile; and speech was again discontinued.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and it could again be seen in Paula's looks that she was glad she had come, though, in taking their rest at Cherbourg, fate consigned them to an hotel breathing an atmosphere that seemed specially compounded for depressing the spirits of a young woman; indeed nothing had particularly encouraged her thus far in her somewhat peculiar scheme of searching out and expressing sorrow to a gentleman for having believed those who traduced him; and this coup d'audace to which she had committed herself began to look somewhat formidable. When in England the plan of following him to Normandy had suggested itself as the quickest, sweetest, and most honest way of making amends; but having arrived there she seemed further off from his sphere of existence than when she had been at Stancy Castle. Virtually she was, for if he thought of her at all, he probably thought of her there; if he sought her he would seek her there. However, as he would probably never do the latter, it was necessary to go on. It had been her sudden dream before starting, to light accidentally upon him in some romantic old town of this romantic old province, but she had become aware that the recorded fortune of lovers in that respect was not to be trusted too implicitly.

Somerset's search for her in the south was now inversely imitated. By diligent inquiry in Cherbourg during the gloom of evening, in the disguise of a hooded cloak, she learnt out the place of his stay while

there, and that he had gone thence to Lisieux. What she knew of the architectural character of Lisieux half guaranteed the truth of the information. Without telling her aunt of this discovery she announced to that lady that it was her great wish to go on and see the beauties of Lisieux.

But though her aunt was simple, there were bounds to her simplicity. 'Paula,' she said, with an undeceivable air, 'I don't think you should run after a young man like this. Suppose he shouldn't care for you by this time.'

It was no occasion for further affectation. 'I am SURE he will,' answered her niece flatly. 'I have not the least fear about it--nor would you, if you knew how he is. He will forgive me anything.'

'Well, pray don't show yourself forward. Some people are apt to fly into extremes.'

Paula blushed a trifle, and reflected, and made no answer. However, her purpose seemed not to be permanently affected, for the next morning she was up betimes and preparing to depart; and they proceeded almost without stopping to the architectural curiosity-town which had so quickly interested her. Nevertheless her ardent manner of yesterday underwent a considerable change, as if she had a fear that, as her aunt suggested, in her endeavour to make amends for cruel injustice, she was allowing herself to be carried too far.

On nearing the place she said, 'Aunt, I think you had better call upon him; and you need not tell him we have come on purpose. Let him think, if he will, that we heard he was here, and would not leave without seeing him. You can also tell him that I am anxious to clear up a misunderstanding, and ask him to call at our hotel.'

But as she looked over the dreary suburban erections which lined the road from the railway to the old quarter of the town, it occurred to her that Somerset would at that time of day be engaged in one or other of the mediaeval buildings thereabout, and that it would be a much neater thing to meet him as if by chance in one of these edifices than to call upon him anywhere. Instead of putting up at any hotel, they left the maids and baggage at the station; and hiring a carriage, Paula told the coachman to drive them to such likely places as she could think of.

'He'll never forgive you,' said her aunt, as they rumbled into the town.

'Won't he?' said Paula, with soft faith. 'I'll see about that.'

'What are you going to do when you find him? Tell him point-blank that you are in love with him?'

'Act in such a manner that he may tell me he is in love with me.'

They first visited a large church at the upper end of a square that

sloped its gravelled surface to the western shine, and was pricked out with little avenues of young pollard limes. The church within was one to make any Gothic architect take lodgings in its vicinity for a fortnight, though it was just now crowded with a forest of scaffolding for repairs in progress. Mrs. Goodman sat down outside, and Paula, entering, took a walk in the form of a horse-shoe; that is, up the south aisle, round the apse, and down the north side; but no figure of a melancholy young man sketching met her eye anywhere. The sun that blazed in at the west doorway smote her face as she emerged from beneath it and revealed real sadness there.

'This is not all the old architecture of the town by far,' she said to her aunt with an air of confidence. 'Coachman, drive to St. Jacques'.'

He was not at St. Jacques'. Looking from the west end of that building the girl observed the end of a steep narrow street of antique character, which seemed a likely haunt. Beckoning to her aunt to follow in the fly Paula walked down the street.

She was transported to the Middle Ages. It contained the shops of tinkers, braziers, bellows-menders, hollow-turners, and other quaintest trades, their fronts open to the street beneath stories of timber overhanging so far on each side that a slit of sky was left at the top for the light to descend, and no more. A blue misty obscurity pervaded the atmosphere, into which the sun thrust oblique staves of light. It was a street for a mediaevalist to revel in, toss up his hat and shout

hurrah in, send for his luggage, come and live in, die and be buried in. She had never supposed such a street to exist outside the imaginations of antiquarians. Smells direct from the sixteenth century hung in the air in all their original integrity and without a modern taint. The faces of the people in the doorways seemed those of individuals who habitually gazed on the great Francis, and spoke of Henry the Eighth as the king across the sea.

She inquired of a coppersmith if an English artist had been seen here lately. With a suddenness that almost discomfited her he announced that such a man had been seen, sketching a house just below--the 'Vieux Manoir de Francois premier.' Just turning to see that her aunt was following in the fly, Paula advanced to the house. The wood framework of the lower story was black and varnished; the upper story was brown and not varnished; carved figures of dragons, griffins, satyrs, and mermaids swarmed over the front; an ape stealing apples was the subject of this cantilever, a man undressing of that. These figures were cloaked with little cobwebs which waved in the breeze, so that each figure seemed alive.

She examined the woodwork closely; here and there she discerned pencil-marks which had no doubt been jotted thereon by Somerset as points of admeasurement, in the way she had seen him mark them at the castle. Some fragments of paper lay below: there were pencilled lines on them, and they bore a strong resemblance to a spoilt leaf of Somerset's sketch-book. Paula glanced up, and from a window above protruded an old

woman's head, which, with the exception of the white handkerchief tied round it, was so nearly of the colour of the carvings that she might easily have passed as of a piece with them. The aged woman continued motionless, the remains of her eyes being bent upon Paula, who asked her in Englishwoman's French where the sketcher had gone. Without replying, the crone produced a hand and extended finger from her side, and pointed towards the lower end of the street.

Paula went on, the carriage following with difficulty, on account of the obstructions in the thoroughfare. At bottom, the street abutted on a wide one with customary modern life flowing through it; and as she looked, Somerset crossed her front along this street, hurrying as if for a wager.

By the time that Paula had reached the bottom Somerset was a long way to the left, and she recognized to her dismay that the busy transverse street was one which led to the railway. She quickened her pace to a run; he did not see her; he even walked faster. She looked behind for the carriage. The driver in emerging from the sixteenth-century street to the nineteenth had apparently turned to the right, instead of to the left as she had done, so that her aunt had lost sight of her. However, she dare not mind it, if Somerset would but look back! He partly turned, but not far enough, and it was only to hail a passing omnibus upon which she discerned his luggage. Somerset jumped in, the omnibus drove on, and diminished up the long road. Paula stood hopelessly still, and in a few minutes puffs of steam showed her that the train had gone.

She turned and waited, the two or three children who had gathered round her looking up sympathizingly in her face. Her aunt, having now discovered the direction of her flight, drove up and beckoned to her.

'What's the matter?' asked Mrs. Goodman in alarm.

'Why?'

'That you should run like that, and look so woebegone.'

'Nothing: only I have decided not to stay in this town.'

'What! he is gone, I suppose?'

'Yes!' exclaimed Paula, with tears of vexation in her eyes. 'It isn't every man who gets a woman of my position to run after him on foot, and alone, and he ought to have looked round! Drive to the station; I want to make an inquiry.'

On reaching the station she asked the booking-clerk some questions, and returned to her aunt with a cheerful countenance. 'Mr. Somerset has only gone to Caen,' she said. 'He is the only Englishman who went by this train, so there is no mistake. There is no other train for two hours. We will go on then--shall we?'

'I am indifferent,' said Mrs. Goodman. 'But, Paula, do you think this quite right? Perhaps he is not so anxious for your forgiveness as you think. Perhaps he saw you, and wouldn't stay.'

A momentary dismay crossed her face, but it passed, and she answered, 'Aunt, that's nonsense. I know him well enough, and can assure you that if he had only known I was running after him, he would have looked round sharply enough, and would have given his little finger rather than have missed me! I don't make myself so silly as to run after a gentleman without good grounds, for I know well that it is an undignified thing to do. Indeed, I could never have thought of doing it, if I had not been so miserably in the wrong!'

II.

That evening when the sun was dropping out of sight they started for the city of Somerset's pilgrimage. Paula seated herself with her face toward the western sky, watching from her window the broad red horizon, across which moved thin poplars lopped to human shapes, like the walking forms in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. It was dark when the travellers drove into Caen.

She still persisted in her wish to casually encounter Somerset in some aisle, lady-chapel, or crypt to which he might have betaken himself to copy and learn the secret of the great artists who had erected those nooks. Mrs. Goodman was for discovering his inn, and calling upon him in a straightforward way; but Paula seemed afraid of it, and they went out in the morning on foot. First they searched the church of St. Sauveur; he was not there; next the church of St. Jean; then the church of St. Pierre; but he did not reveal himself, nor had any verger seen or heard of such a man. Outside the latter church was a public flower-garden, and she sat down to consider beside a round pool in which water-lilies grew and gold-fish swam, near beds of fiery geraniums, dahlias, and verbenas just past their bloom. Her enterprise had not been justified by its results so far; but meditation still urged her to listen to the little voice within and push on. She accordingly rejoined her aunt, and they drove up the hill to the Abbaye aux Dames, the day by this time having grown hot and oppressive.

The church seemed absolutely empty, the void being emphasized by its grateful coolness. But on going towards the east end they perceived a bald gentleman close to the screen, looking to the right and to the left as if much perplexed. Paula merely glanced over him, his back being toward her, and turning to her aunt said softly, 'I wonder how we get into the choir?'

'That's just what I am wondering,' said the old gentleman, abruptly facing round, and Paula discovered that the countenance was not unfamiliar to her eye. Since knowing Somerset she had added to her gallery of celebrities a photograph of his father, the Academician, and he it was now who confronted her.

For the moment embarrassment, due to complicated feelings, brought a slight blush to her cheek, but being well aware that he did not know her, she answered, coolly enough, 'I suppose we must ask some one.'

'And we certainly would if there were any one to ask,' he said, still looking eastward, and not much at her. 'I have been here a long time, but nobody comes. Not that I want to get in on my own account; for though it is thirty years since I last set foot in this place, I remember it as if it were but yesterday.'

'Indeed. I have never been here before,' said Paula.

'Naturally. But I am looking for a young man who is making sketches in

some of these buildings, and it is as likely as not that he is in the crypt under this choir, for it is just such out-of-the-way nooks that he prefers. It is very provoking that he should not have told me more distinctly in his letter where to find him.'

Mrs. Goodman, who had gone to make inquiries, now came back, and informed them that she had learnt that it was necessary to pass through the Hotel-Dieu to the choir, to do which they must go outside. Thereupon they walked on together, and Mr. Somerset, quite ignoring his troubles, made remarks upon the beauty of the architecture; and in absence of mind, by reason either of the subject, or of his listener, retained his hat in his hand after emerging from the church, while they walked all the way across the Place and into the Hospital gardens.

'A very civil man,' said Mrs. Goodman to Paula privately.

'Yes,' said Paula, who had not told her aunt that she recognized him.

One of the Sisters now preceded them towards the choir and crypt, Mr. Somerset asking her if a young Englishman was or had been sketching there. On receiving a reply in the negative, Paula nearly betrayed herself by turning, as if her business there, too, ended with the information. However, she went on again, and made a pretence of looking round, Mr. Somerset also staying in a spirit of friendly attention to his countrywomen. They did not part from him till they had come out from the crypt, and again reached the west front, on their way to which he

additionally explained that it was his son he was looking for, who had arranged to meet him here, but had mentioned no inn at which he might be expected.

When he had left them, Paula informed her aunt whose company they had been sharing. Her aunt began expostulating with Paula for not telling Mr. Somerset what they had seen of his son's movements. 'It would have eased his mind at least,' she said.

'I was not bound to ease his mind at the expense of showing what I would rather conceal. I am continually hampered in such generosity as that by the circumstance of being a woman!'

'Well, it is getting too late to search further tonight.'

It was indeed almost evening twilight in the streets, though the graceful freestone spires to a depth of about twenty feet from their summits were still dyed with the orange tints of a vanishing sun. The two relatives dined privately as usual, after which Paula looked out of the window of her room, and reflected upon the events of the day. A tower rising into the sky quite near at hand showed her that some church or other stood within a few steps of the hotel archway, and saying nothing to Mrs. Goodman, she quietly cloaked herself, and went out towards it, apparently with the view of disposing of a portion of a dull dispiriting evening. The church was open, and on entering she found that it was only lighted by seven candles burning before the altar of a

chapel on the south side, the mass of the building being in deep shade. Motionless outlines, which resolved themselves into the forms of kneeling women, were darkly visible among the chairs, and in the triforium above the arcades there was one hitherto unnoticed radiance, dim as that of a glow-worm in the grass. It was seemingly the effect of a solitary tallow-candle behind the masonry.

A priest came in, unlocked the door of a confessional with a click which sounded in the silence, and entered it; a woman followed, disappeared within the curtain of the same, emerging again in about five minutes, followed by the priest, who locked up his door with another loud click, like a tradesman full of business, and came down the aisle to go out. In the lobby he spoke to another woman, who replied, 'Ah, oui, Monsieur l'Abbe!'

Two women having spoken to him, there could be no harm in a third doing likewise. 'Monsieur l'Abbe,' said Paula in French, 'could you indicate to me the stairs of the triforium?' and she signified her reason for wishing to know by pointing to the glimmering light above.

'Ah, he is a friend of yours, the Englishman?' pleasantly said the priest, recognizing her nationality; and taking her to a little door he conducted her up a stone staircase, at the top of which he showed her the long blind story over the aisle arches which led round to where the light was. Cautioning her not to stumble over the uneven floor, he left her and descended. His words had signified that Somerset was here.

It was a gloomy place enough that she found herself in, but the seven candles below on the opposite altar, and a faint sky light from the clerestory, lent enough rays to guide her. Paula walked on to the bend of the apse: here were a few chairs, and the origin of the light.

This was a candle stuck at the end of a sharpened stick, the latter entering a joint in the stones. A young man was sketching by the glimmer. But there was no need for the blush which had prepared itself beforehand; the young man was Mr. Cockton, Somerset's youngest draughtsman.

Paula could have cried aloud with disappointment. Cockton recognized Miss Power, and appearing much surprised, rose from his seat with a bow, and said hastily, 'Mr. Somerset left to-day.'

'I did not ask for him,' said Paula.

'No, Miss Power: but I thought--'

'Yes, yes--you know, of course, that he has been my architect. Well, it happens that I should like to see him, if he can call on me. Which way did he go?'

'He's gone to Etretat.'

'What for? There are no abbeys to sketch at Etretat.'

Cockton looked at the point of his pencil, and with a hesitating motion of his lip answered, 'Mr. Somerset said he was tired.'

'Of what?'

'He said he was sick and tired of holy places, and would go to some wicked spot or other, to get that consolation which holiness could not give. But he only said it casually to Knowles, and perhaps he did not mean it.'

'Knowles is here too?'

'Yes, Miss Power, and Bowles. Mr. Somerset has been kind enough to give us a chance of enlarging our knowledge of French Early-pointed, and pays half the expenses.'

Paula said a few other things to the young man, walked slowly round the triforium as if she had come to examine it, and returned down the staircase. On getting back to the hotel she told her aunt, who had just been having a nap, that next day they would go to Etretat for a change.

'Why? There are no old churches at Etretat.'

'No. But I am sick and tired of holy places, and want to go to some

wicked spot or other to find that consolation which holiness cannot give.'

'For shame, Paula! Now I know what it is; you have heard that he's gone there! You needn't try to blind me.'

'I don't care where he's gone!' cried Paula petulantly. In a moment, however, she smiled at herself, and added, 'You must take that for what it is worth. I have made up my mind to let him know from my own lips how the misunderstanding arose. That done, I shall leave him, and probably never see him again. My conscience will be clear.'

The next day they took the steamboat down the Orne, intending to reach Etretat by way of Havre. Just as they were moving off an elderly gentleman under a large white sunshade, and carrying his hat in his hand, was seen leisurely walking down the wharf at some distance, but obviously making for the boat.

'A gentleman!' said the mate.

'Who is he?' said the captain.

'An English,' said Clementine.

Nobody knew more, but as leisure was the order of the day the engines were stopped, on the chance of his being a passenger, and all eyes were

bent upon him in conjecture. He disappeared and reappeared from behind a pile of merchandise and approached the boat at an easy pace, whereupon the gangway was replaced, and he came on board, removing his hat to Paula, quietly thanking the captain for stopping, and saying to Mrs. Goodman, 'I am nicely in time.'

It was Mr. Somerset the elder, who by degrees informed our travellers, as sitting on their camp-stools they advanced between the green banks bordered by elms, that he was going to Etretat; that the young man he had spoken of yesterday had gone to that romantic watering-place instead of studying art at Caen, and that he was going to join him there.

Paula preserved an entire silence as to her own intentions, partly from natural reticence, and partly, as it appeared, from the difficulty of explaining a complication which was not very clear to herself. At Havre they parted from Mr. Somerset, and did not see him again till they were driving over the hills towards Etretat in a carriage and four, when the white umbrella became visible far ahead among the outside passengers of the coach to the same place. In a short time they had passed and cut in before this vehicle, but soon became aware that their carriage, like the coach, was one of a straggling procession of conveyances, some mile and a half in length, all bound for the village between the cliffs.

In descending the long hill shaded by lime-trees which sheltered their place of destination, this procession closed up, and they perceived that all the visitors and native population had turned out to welcome

them, the daily arrival of new sojourners at this hour being the chief excitement of Etretat. The coach which had preceded them all the way, at more or less remoteness, was now quite close, and in passing along the village street they saw Mr. Somerset wave his hand to somebody in the crowd below. A felt hat was waved in the air in response, the coach swept into the inn-yard, followed by the idlers, and all disappeared. Paula's face was crimson as their own carriage swept round in the opposite direction to the rival inn.

Once in her room she breathed like a person who had finished a long chase. They did not go down before dinner, but when it was almost dark Paula begged her aunt to wrap herself up and come with her to the shore hard by. The beach was deserted, everybody being at the Casino; the gate stood invitingly open, and they went in. Here the brilliantly lit terrace was crowded with promenaders, and outside the yellow palings, surmounted by its row of lamps, rose the voice of the invisible sea. Groups of people were sitting under the verandah, the women mostly in wraps, for the air was growing chilly. Through the windows at their back an animated scene disclosed itself in the shape of a room-full of waltzers, the strains of the band striving in the ear for mastery over the sounds of the sea. The dancers came round a couple at a time, and were individually visible to those people without who chose to look that way, which was what Paula did.

'Come away, come away!' she suddenly said. 'It is not right for us to be here.'

Her exclamation had its origin in what she had at that moment seen within, the spectacle of Mr. George Somerset whirling round the room with a young lady of uncertain nationality but pleasing figure. Paula was not accustomed to show the white feather too clearly, but she soon had passed out through those yellow gates and retreated, till the mixed music of sea and band had resolved into that of the sea alone.

'Well!' said her aunt, half in soliloquy, 'do you know who I saw dancing there, Paula? Our Mr. Somerset, if I don't make a great mistake!'

'It was likely enough that you did,' sedately replied her niece. 'He left Caen with the intention of seeking distractions of a lighter kind than those furnished by art, and he has merely succeeded in finding them. But he has made my duty rather a difficult one. Still, it was my duty, for I very greatly wronged him. Perhaps, however, I have done enough for honour's sake. I would have humiliated myself by an apology if I had found him in any other situation; but, of course, one can't he expected to take MUCH trouble when he is seen going on like that!'

The coolness with which she began her remarks had developed into something like warmth as she concluded.

'He is only dancing with a lady he probably knows very well.'

'He doesn't know her! The idea of his dancing with a woman of that

description! We will go away tomorrow. This place has been greatly over-praised.'

'The place is well enough, as far as I can see.'

'He is carrying out his programme to the letter. He plunges into excitement in the most reckless manner, and I tremble for the consequences! I can do no more: I have humiliated myself into following him, believing that in giving too ready credence to appearances I had been narrow and inhuman, and had caused him much misery. But he does not mind, and he has no misery; he seems just as well as ever. How much this finding him has cost me! After all, I did not deceive him. He must have acquired a natural aversion for me. I have allowed myself to be interested in a man of very common qualities, and am now bitterly alive to the shame of having sought him out. I heartily detest him! I will go back--aunt, you are right--I had no business to come.... His light conduct has rendered him uninteresting to me!'

III.

When she rose the next morning the bell was clanging for the second breakfast, and people were pouring in from the beach in every variety of attire. Paula, whom a restless night had left with a headache, which, however, she said nothing about, was reluctant to emerge from the seclusion of her chamber, till her aunt, discovering what was the matter with her, suggested that a few minutes in the open air would refresh her; and they went downstairs into the hotel gardens.

The clatter of the big breakfast within was audible from this spot, and the noise seemed suddenly to inspirit Paula, who proposed to enter. Her aunt assented. In the verandah under which they passed was a rustic hat-stand in the form of a tree, upon which hats and other body-gear hung like bunches of fruit. Paula's eye fell upon a felt hat to which a small block-book was attached by a string. She knew that hat and block-book well, and turning to Mrs. Goodman said, 'After all, I don't want the breakfast they are having: let us order one of our own as usual. And we'll have it here.'

She led on to where some little tables were placed under the tall shrubs, followed by her aunt, who was in turn followed by the proprietress of the hotel, that lady having discovered from the French maid that there was good reason for paying these ladies ample personal attention.

'Is the gentleman to whom that sketch-book belongs staying here?' Paula carelessly inquired, as she indicated the object on the hat-stand.

'Ah, no!' deplored the proprietress. 'The Hotel was full when Mr. Somerset came. He stays at a cottage beyond the Rue Anicet Bourgeois: he only has his meals here.'

Paula had taken her seat under the fuchsia-trees in such a manner that she could observe all the exits from the salle a manger; but for the present none of the breakfasters emerged, the only moving objects on the scene being the waitresses who ran hither and thither across the court, the cook's assistants with baskets of long bread, and the laundresses with baskets of sun-bleached linen. Further back towards the inn-yard, stablemen were putting in the horses for starting the flys and coaches to Les Ifs, the nearest railway-station.

'Suppose the Somersets should be going off by one of these conveyances,' said Mrs. Goodman as she sipped her tea.

'Well, aunt, then they must,' replied the younger lady with composure.

Nevertheless she looked with some misgiving at the nearest stableman as he led out four white horses, harnessed them, and leisurely brought a brush with which he began blacking their yellow hoofs. All the vehicles were ready at the door by the time breakfast was over, and the inmates soon turned out, some to mount the omnibuses and carriages, some to

ramble on the adjacent beach, some to climb the verdant slopes, and some to make for the cliffs that shut in the vale. The fuchsia-trees which sheltered Paula's breakfast-table from the blaze of the sun, also screened it from the eyes of the outpouring company, and she sat on with her aunt in perfect comfort, till among the last of the stream came Somerset and his father. Paula reddened at being so near the former at last. It was with sensible relief that she observed them turn towards the cliffs and not to the carriages, and thus signify that they were not going off that day.

Neither of the two saw the ladies, and when the latter had finished their tea and coffee they followed to the shore, where they sat for nearly an hour, reading and watching the bathers. At length footsteps crunched among the pebbles in their vicinity, and looking out from her sunshade Paula saw the two Somersets close at hand.

The elder recognized her, and the younger, observing his father's action of courtesy, turned his head. It was a revelation to Paula, for she was shocked to see that he appeared worn and ill. The expression of his face changed at sight of her, increasing its shade of paleness; but he immediately withdrew his eyes and passed by.

Somerset was as much surprised at encountering her thus as she had been distressed to see him. As soon as they were out of hearing, he asked his father quietly, 'What strange thing is this, that Lady De Stancy should be here and her husband not with her? Did she bow to me, or to you?'

'Lady De Stancy--that young lady?' asked the puzzled painter. He proceeded to explain all he knew; that she was a young lady he had met on his journey at two or three different times; moreover, that if she were his son's client--the woman who was to have become Lady De Stancy--she was Miss Power still; for he had seen in some newspaper two days before leaving England that the wedding had been postponed on account of her illness.

Somerset was so greatly moved that he could hardly speak connectedly to his father as they paced on together. 'But she is not ill, as far as I can see,' he said. 'The wedding postponed?--You are sure the word was postponed?--Was it broken off?'

'No, it was postponed. I meant to have told you before, knowing you would be interested as the castle architect; but it slipped my memory in the bustle of arriving.'

'I am not the castle architect.'

'The devil you are not--what are you then?'

'Well, I am not that.'

Somerset the elder, though not of penetrating nature, began to see that here lay an emotional complication of some sort, and reserved further

inquiry till a more convenient occasion. They had reached the end of the level beach where the cliff began to rise, and as this impediment naturally stopped their walk they retraced their steps. On again nearing the spot where Paula and her aunt were sitting, the painter would have deviated to the hotel; but as his son persisted in going straight on, in due course they were opposite the ladies again. By this time Miss Power, who had appeared anxious during their absence, regained her self-control. Going towards her old lover she said, with a smile, 'I have been looking for you!'

'Why have you been doing that?' said Somerset, in a voice which he failed to keep as steady as he could wish.

'Because--I want some architect to continue the restoration. Do you withdraw your resignation?'

Somerset appeared unable to decide for a few instants. 'Yes,' he then answered.

For the moment they had ignored the presence of the painter and Mrs. Goodman, but Somerset now made them known to one another, and there was friendly intercourse all round.

'When will you be able to resume operations at the castle?' she asked, as soon as she could again speak directly to Somerset.

'As soon as I can get back. Of course I only resume it at your special request.'

'Of course.' To one who had known all the circumstances it would have seemed a thousand pities that, after again getting face to face with him, she did not explain, without delay, the whole mischief that had separated them. But she did not do it--perhaps from the inherent awkwardness of such a topic at this idle time. She confined herself simply to the above-mentioned business-like request, and when the party had walked a few steps together they separated, with mutual promises to meet again.

'I hope you have explained your mistake to him, and how it arose, and everything?' said her aunt when they were alone.

'No, I did not.'

'What, not explain after all?' said her amazed relative.

'I decided to put it off.'

'Then I think you decided very wrongly. Poor young man, he looked so ill!'

'Did you, too, think he looked ill? But he danced last night. Why did he

dance?' She turned and gazed regretfully at the corner round which the Somersets had disappeared.

'I don't know why he danced; but if I had known you were going to be so silent, I would have explained the mistake myself.'

'I wish you had. But no; I have said I would; and I must.'

Paula's avoidance of tables d'hote did not extend to the present one. It was quite with alacrity that she went down; and with her entry the antecedent hotel beauty who had reigned for the last five days at that meal, was unceremoniously deposed by the guests. Mr. Somerset the elder came in, but nobody with him. His seat was on Paula's left hand, Mrs. Goodman being on Paula's right, so that all the conversation was between the Academician and the younger lady. When the latter had again retired upstairs with her aunt, Mrs. Goodman expressed regret that young Mr. Somerset was absent from the table. 'Why has he kept away?' she asked.

'I don't know--I didn't ask,' said Paula sadly. 'Perhaps he doesn't care to meet us again.'

'That's because you didn't explain.'

'Well--why didn't the old man give me an opportunity?' exclaimed the niece with suppressed excitement. 'He would scarcely say anything but yes and no, and gave me no chance at all of introducing the subject. I

wanted to explain--I came all the way on purpose--I would have begged George's pardon on my two knees if there had been any way of beginning; but there was not, and I could not do it!'

Though she slept badly that night, Paula promptly appeared in the public room to breakfast, and that not from motives of vanity; for, while not unconscious of her accession to the unstable throne of queen-beauty in the establishment, she seemed too preoccupied to care for the honour just then, and would readily have changed places with her unhappy predecessor, who lingered on in the background like a candle after sunrise.

Mrs. Goodman was determined to trust no longer to Paula for putting an end to what made her so restless and self-reproachful. Seeing old Mr. Somerset enter to a little side-table behind for lack of room at the crowded centre tables, again without his son, she turned her head and asked point-blank where the young man was.

Mr. Somerset's face became a shade graver than before. 'My son is unwell,' he replied; 'so unwell that he has been advised to stay indoors and take perfect rest.'

'I do hope it is nothing serious.'

'I hope so too. The fact is, he has overdone himself a little. He was not well when he came here; and to make himself worse he must needs go

dancing at the Casino with this lady and that--among others with a young American lady who is here with her family, and whom he met in London last year. I advised him against it, but he seemed desperately determined to shake off lethargy by any rash means, and wouldn't listen to me. Luckily he is not in the hotel, but in a quiet cottage a hundred yards up the hill.'

Paula, who had heard all, did not show or say what she felt at the news: but after breakfast, on meeting the landlady in a passage alone, she asked with some anxiety if there were a really skilful medical man in Etretat; and on being told that there was, and his name, she went back to look for Mr. Somerset; but he had gone.

They heard nothing more of young Somerset all that morning, but towards evening, while Paula sat at her window, looking over the heads of fuchsias upon the promenade beyond, she saw the painter walk by. She immediately went to her aunt and begged her to go out and ask Mr. Somerset if his son had improved.

'I will send Milly or Clementine,' said Mrs. Goodman.

'I wish you would see him yourself.'

'He has gone on. I shall never find him.'

'He has only gone round to the front,' persisted Paula. 'Do walk that

way, auntie, and ask him.'

Thus pressed, Mrs. Goodman acquiesced, and brought back intelligence to Miss Power, who had watched them through the window, that his son did not positively improve, but that his American friends were very kind to him.

Having made use of her aunt, Paula seemed particularly anxious to get rid of her again, and when that lady sat down to write letters, Paula went to her own room, hastily dressed herself without assistance, asked privately the way to the cottage, and went off thitherward unobserved.

At the upper end of the lane she saw a little house answering to the description, whose front garden, window-sills, palings, and doorstep were literally ablaze with nasturtiums in bloom.

She entered this inhabited nosegay, quietly asked for the invalid, and if he were well enough to see Miss Power. The woman of the house soon returned, and she was conducted up a crooked staircase to Somerset's modest apartments. It appeared that some rooms in this dwelling had been furnished by the landlady of the inn, who hired them of the tenant during the summer season to use as an annexe to the hotel.

Admitted to the outer room she beheld her architect looking as unarchitectural as possible; lying on a small couch which was drawn up to the open casement, whence he had a back view of the window flowers,

and enjoyed a green transparency through the undersides of the same nasturtium leaves that presented their faces to the passers without.

When the latch had again clicked into the catch of the closed door Paula went up to the invalid, upon whose pale and interesting face a flush had arisen simultaneously with the announcement of her name. He would have sprung up to receive her, but she pressed him down, and throwing all reserve on one side for the first time in their intercourse, she crouched beside the sofa, whispering with roguish solicitude, her face not too far from his own: 'How foolish you are, George, to get ill just now when I have been wanting so much to see you again!--I am so sorry to see you like this--what I said to you when we met on the shore was not what I had come to say!'

Somerset took her by the hand. 'Then what did you come to say, Paula?' he asked.

'I wanted to tell you that the mere wanton wandering of a capricious mind was not the cause of my estrangement from you. There has been a great deception practised--the exact nature of it I cannot tell you plainly just at present; it is too painful--but it is all over, and I can assure you of my sorrow at having behaved as I did, and of my sincere friendship now as ever.'

'There is nothing I shall value so much as that. It will make my work at the castle very pleasant to feel that I can consult you about it without

fear of intruding on you against your wishes.'

'Yes, perhaps it will. But--you do not comprehend me.'

'You have been an enigma always.'

'And you have been provoking; but never so provoking as now. I wouldn't for the world tell you the whole of my fancies as I came hither this evening: but I should think your natural intuition would suggest what they were.'

'It does, Paula. But there are motives of delicacy which prevent my acting on what is suggested to me.'

'Delicacy is a gift, and you should thank God for it; but in some cases it is not so precious as we would persuade ourselves.'

'Not when the woman is rich, and the man is poor?'

'O, George Somerset--be cold, or angry, or anything, but don't be like this! It is never worth a woman's while to show regret for her injustice; for all she gets by it is an accusation of want of delicacy.'

'Indeed I don't accuse you of that--I warmly, tenderly thank you for your kindness in coming here to see me.'

'Well, perhaps you do. But I am now in I cannot tell what mood--I will not tell what mood, for it would be confessing more than I ought. This finding you out is a piece of weakness that I shall not repeat; and I have only one thing more to say. I have served you badly, George, I know that; but it is never too late to mend; and I have come back to you. However, I shall never run after you again, trust me for that, for it is not the woman's part. Still, before I go, that there may be no mistake as to my meaning, and misery entailed on us for want of a word, I'll add this: that if you want to marry me, as you once did, you must say so; for I am here to be asked.'

It would be superfluous to transcribe Somerset's reply, and the remainder of the scene between the pair. Let it suffice that half-an-hour afterwards, when the sun had almost gone down, Paula walked briskly into the hotel, troubled herself nothing about dinner, but went upstairs to their sitting-room, where her aunt presently found her upon the couch looking up at the ceiling through her fingers. They talked on different subjects for some time till the old lady said 'Mr. Somerset's cottage is the one covered with flowers up the lane, I hear.'

'Yes,' said Paula.

'How do you know?'

'I've been there.... We are going to be married, aunt.'

'Indeed!' replied Mrs. Goodman. 'Well, I thought this might be the end of it: you were determined on the point; and I am not much surprised at your news. Your father was very wise after all in entailing everything so strictly upon your offspring; for if he had not I should have been driven wild with the responsibility!'

'And now that the murder is out,' continued Paula, passing over that view of the case, 'I don't mind telling you that somehow or other I have got to like George Somerset as desperately as a woman can care for any man. I thought I should have died when I saw him dancing, and feared I had lost him! He seemed ten times nicer than ever then! So silly we women are, that I wouldn't marry a duke in preference to him. There, that's my honest feeling, and you must make what you can of it; my conscience is clear, thank Heaven!'

'Have you fixed the day?'

'No,' continued the young lady, still watching the sleeping flies on the ceiling. 'It is left unsettled between us, while I come and ask you if there would be any harm--if it could conveniently be before we return to England?'

'Paula, this is too precipitate!'

'On the contrary, aunt. In matrimony, as in some other things, you should be slow to decide, but quick to execute. Nothing on earth would

make me marry another man; I know every fibre of his character; and he knows a good many fibres of mine; so as there is nothing more to be learnt, why shouldn't we marry at once? On one point I am firm: I will never return to that castle as Miss Power. A nameless dread comes over me when I think of it--a fear that some uncanny influence of the dead De Stancys would drive me again from him. O, if it were to do that,' she murmured, burying her face in her hands, 'I really think it would be more than I could bear!'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Goodman; 'we will see what can be done. I will write to Mr. Wardlaw.'

IV.

On a windy afternoon in November, when more than two months had closed over the incidents previously recorded, a number of farmers were sitting in a room of the Lord-Quantock-Arms Inn, Markton, that was used for the weekly ordinary. It was a long, low apartment, formed by the union of two or three smaller rooms, with a bow-window looking upon the street, and at the present moment was pervaded by a blue fog from tobacco-pipes, and a temperature like that of a kiln. The body of farmers who still sat on there was greater than usual, owing to the cold air without, the tables having been cleared of dinner for some time and their surface stamped with liquid circles by the feet of the numerous glasses.

Besides the farmers there were present several professional men of the town, who found it desirable to dine here on market-days for the opportunity it afforded them of increasing their practice among the agriculturists, many of whom were men of large balances, even luxurious livers, who drove to market in elegant phaetons drawn by horses of supreme blood, bone, and action, in a style never anticipated by their fathers when jogging thither in light carts, or afoot with a butter basket on each arm.

The buzz of groggy conversation was suddenly impinged on by the notes of a peal of bells from the tower hard by. Almost at the same instant the door of the room opened, and there entered the landlord of the little inn at Sleeping-Green. Drawing his supply of cordials from this superior

house, to which he was subject, he came here at stated times like a prebendary to the cathedral of his diocesan, afterwards retailing to his own humbler audience the sentiments which he had learnt of this. But curiosity being awakened by the church bells the usual position was for the moment reversed, and one of the farmers, saluting him by name, asked him the reason of their striking up at that time of day.

'My mis'ess out yonder,' replied the rural landlord, nodding sideways, 'is coming home with her fancy-man. They have been a-gaying together this turk of a while in foreign parts--Here, maid!--what with the wind, and standing about, my blood's as low as water--bring us a thimbleful of that that isn't gin and not far from it.'

'It is true, then, that she's become Mrs. Somerset?' indifferently asked a farmer in broadcloth, tenant of an estate in quite another direction than hers, as he contemplated the grain of the table immediately surrounding the foot of his glass.

'True--of course it is,' said Havill, who was also present, in the tone of one who, though sitting in this rubicund company, was not of it. 'I could have told you the truth of it any day these last five weeks.'

Among those who had lent an ear was Dairyman Jinks, an old gnarled character who wore a white fustian coat and yellow leggings; the only man in the room who never dressed up in dark clothes for marketing. He now asked, 'Married abroad, was they? And how long will a wedding abroad

stand good for in this country?'

'As long as a wedding at home.'

'Will it? Faith; I didn't know: how should I? I thought it might be some new plan o' folks for leasing women now they be so plentiful, so as to get rid o' 'em when the men be tired o' 'em, and hev spent all their money.'

'He won't be able to spend her money,' said the landlord of Sleeping-Green. ''Tis her very own person's--settled upon the hairs of her head for ever.'

'O nation! Then if I were the man I shouldn't care for such a one-eyed benefit as that,' said Dairyman Jinks, turning away to listen to the talk on his other hand.

'Is that true?' asked the gentleman-farmer in broadcloth.

'It is sufficiently near the truth,' said Havill. 'There is nothing at all unusual in the arrangement; it was only settled so to prevent any schemer making a beggar of her. If Somerset and she have any children, which probably they will, it will be theirs; and what can a man want more? Besides, there is a large portion of property left to her personal use--quite as much as they can want. Oddly enough, the curiosities and pictures of the castle which belonged to the De Stancys are not

restricted from sale; they are hers to do what she likes with. Old Power didn't care for articles that reminded him so much of his predecessors.'

'Hey?' said Dairyman Jinks, turning back again, having decided that the conversation on his right hand was, after all, the more interesting. 'Well--why can't 'em hire a travelling chap to touch up the picters into her own gaffers and gammers? Then they'd be worth sommat to her.'

'Ah, here they are? I thought so,' said Havill, who had been standing up at the window for the last few moments. 'The ringers were told to begin as soon as the train signalled.'

As he spoke a carriage drew up to the hotel-door, followed by another with the maid and luggage. The inmates crowded to the bow-window, except Dairyman Jinks, who had become absorbed in his own reflections.

'What be they stopping here for?' asked one of the previous speakers.

'They are going to stay here to-night,' said Havill. 'They have come quite unexpectedly, and the castle is in such a state of turmoil that there is not a single carpet down, or room for them to use. We shall get two or three in order by next week.'

'Two little people like them will be lost in the chammers of that wandering place!' satirized Dairyman Jinks. 'They will be bound to have a randy every fortnight to keep the moth out of the furniture!'

By this time Somerset was handing out the wife of his bosom, and Dairyman Jinks went on: 'That's no more Miss Power that was, than my niece's daughter Kezia is Miss Power--in short it is a different woman altogether!'

'There is no mistake about the woman,' said the landlord; 'it is her fur clothes that make her look so like a caterpillar on end. Well, she is not a bad bargain! As for Captain De Stancy, he'll fret his gizzard green.'

'He's the man she ought to ha' married,' declared the farmer in broadcloth. 'As the world goes she ought to have been Lady De Stancy. She gave up her chapel-going, and you might have thought she would have given up her first young man: but she stuck to him, though by all accounts he would soon have been interested in another party.'

''Tis woman's nature to be false except to a man, and man's nature to be true except to a woman,' said the landlord of Sleeping-Green. 'However, all's well that ends well, and I have something else to think of than new-married couples;' saying which the speaker moved off, and the others returned to their seats, the young pair who had been their theme vanishing through the hotel into some private paradise to rest and dine.

By this time their arrival had become known, and a crowd soon gathered outside, acquiring audacity with continuance there. Raising a hurrah,

the group would not leave till Somerset had showed himself on the balcony above; and then declined to go away till Paula also had appeared; when, remarking that her husband seemed a quiet young man enough, and would make a very good borough member when their present one misbehaved himself, the assemblage good-humouredly dispersed.

Among those whose ears had been reached by the hurrahs of these idlers was a man in silence and solitude, far out of the town. He was leaning over a gate that divided two meads in a watery level between Stancy Castle and Markton. He turned his head for a few seconds, then continued his contemplative gaze towards the towers of the castle, visible over the trees as far as was possible in the leaden gloom of the November eve. The military form of the solitary lounger was recognizable as that of Sir William De Stancy, notwithstanding the failing light and his attitude of so resting his elbows on the gate that his hands enclosed the greater part of his face.

The scene was inexpressibly cheerless. No other human creature was apparent, and the only sounds audible above the wind were those of the trickling streams which distributed the water over the meadow. A heron had been standing in one of these rivulets about twenty yards from the officer, and they vied with each other in stillness till the bird suddenly rose and flew off to the plantation in which it was his custom

to pass the night with others of his tribe. De Stancy saw the heron rise, and seemed to imagine the creature's departure without a supper to be owing to the increasing darkness; but in another minute he became conscious that the heron had been disturbed by sounds too distant to reach his own ears at the time. They were nearer now, and there came along under the hedge a young man known to De Stancy exceedingly well.

'Ah,' he said listlessly, 'you have ventured back.'

'Yes, captain. Why do you walk out here?'

'The bells began ringing because she and he were expected, and my thoughts naturally dragged me this way. Thank Heaven the battery leaves Markton in a few days, and then the precious place will know me no more!'

'I have heard of it.' Turning to where the dim lines of the castle rose he continued: 'Well, there it stands.'

'And I am not in it.'

'They are not in it yet either.'

'They soon will be.'

'Well--what tune is that you were humming, captain?'

'ALL IS LOST NOW,' replied the captain grimly.

'O no; you have got me, and I am a treasure to any man. I have another match in my eye for you, and shall get you well settled yet, if you keep yourself respectable. So thank God, and take courage!'

'Ah, Will--you are a flippant young fool--wise in your own conceit; I say it to my sorrow! 'Twas your dishonesty spoilt all. That lady would have been my wife by fair dealing--time was all I required. But base attacks on a man's character never deserve to win, and if I had once been certain that you had made them, my course would have been very different, both towards you and others. But why should I talk to you about this? If I cared an atom what becomes of you I would take you in hand severely enough; not caring, I leave you alone, to go to the devil your own way.'

'Thank you kindly, captain. Well, since you have spoken plainly, I will do the same. We De Stancys are a worn-out old party--that's the long and the short of it. We represent conditions of life that have had their day--especially me. Our one remaining chance was an alliance with new aristocrats; and we have failed. We are past and done for. Our line has had five hundred years of glory, and we ought to be content. Enfin les renards se trouvent chez le pelletier.'

'Speak for yourself, young Consequence, and leave the destinies of old

families to respectable philosophers. This fiasco is the direct result of evil conduct, and of nothing else at all. I have managed badly; I countenanced you too far. When I saw your impish tendencies I should have forsworn the alliance.'

'Don't sting me, captain. What I have told you is true. As for my conduct, cat will after kind, you know. You should have held your tongue on the wedding morning, and have let me take my chance.'

'Is that all I get for saving you from jail? Gad--I alone am the sufferer, and feel I am alone the fool!... Come, off with you--I never want to see you any more.'

'Part we will, then--till we meet again. It will be a light night hereabouts, I think, this evening.'

'A very dark one for me.'

'Nevertheless, I think it will be a light night. Au revoir!'

Dare went his way, and after a while De Stancy went his. Both were soon lost in the shades.

V.

The castle to-night was as gloomy as the meads. As Havill had explained, the habitable rooms were just now undergoing a scour, and the main block of buildings was empty even of the few servants who had been retained, they having for comfort's sake taken up their quarters in the detached rooms adjoining the entrance archway. Hence not a single light shone from the lonely windows, at which ivy leaves tapped like woodpeckers, moved by gusts that were numerous and contrary rather than violent. Within the walls all was silence, chaos, and obscurity, till towards eleven o'clock, when the thick immovable cloud that had dulled the daytime broke into a scudding fleece, through which the moon forded her way as a nebulous spot of watery white, sending light enough, though of a rayless kind, into the castle chambers to show the confusion that reigned there.

At this time an eye might have noticed a figure flitting in and about those draughty apartments, and making no more noise in so doing than a puff of wind. Its motion hither and thither was rapid, but methodical, its bearing absorbed, yet cautious. Though it ran more or less through all the principal rooms, the chief scene of its operations was the Long Gallery overlooking the Pleasance, which was covered by an ornamental wood-and-plaster roof, and contained a whole throng of family portraits, besides heavy old cabinets and the like. The portraits which were of value as works of art were smaller than these, and hung in adjoining rooms.

The manifest occupation of the figure was that of removing these small and valuable pictures from other chambers to the gallery in which the rest were hung, and piling them in a heap in the midst. Included in the group were nine by Sir Peter Lely, five by Vandyck, four by Cornelius Jansen, one by Salvator Rosa (remarkable as being among the few English portraits ever painted by that master), many by Kneller, and two by Romney. Apparently by accident, the light being insufficient to distinguish them from portraits, the figure also brought a Raffaelle Virgin-and-Child, a magnificent Tintoretto, a Titian, and a Giorgione.

On these was laid a large collection of enamelled miniature portraits of the same illustrious line; afterwards tapestries and cushions embroidered with the initials 'De S.'; and next the cradle presented by Charles the First to the contemporary De Stancy mother, till at length there arose in the middle of the floor a huge heap containing most of what had been personal and peculiar to members of the De Stancy family as distinct from general furniture.

Then the figure went from door to door, and threw open each that was unfastened. It next proceeded to a room on the ground floor, at present fitted up as a carpenter's shop, and knee-deep in shavings. An armful of these was added to the pile of objects in the gallery; a window at each end of the gallery was opened, causing a brisk draught along the walls; and then the activity of the figure ceased, and it was seen no more.

Five minutes afterwards a light shone upon the lawn from the windows of the Long Gallery, which glowed with more brilliancy than it had known in the meridian of its Caroline splendours. Thereupon the framed gentleman in the lace collar seemed to open his eyes more widely; he with the flowing locks and turn-up mustachios to part his lips; he in the armour, who was so much like Captain De Stancy, to shake the plates of his mail with suppressed laughter; the lady with the three-stringed pearl necklace, and vast expanse of neck, to nod with satisfaction and triumphantly signify to her adjoining husband that this was a meet and glorious end.

The flame increased, and blown upon by the wind roared round the pictures, the tapestries, and the cradle, up to the plaster ceiling and through it into the forest of oak timbers above.

The best sitting-room at the Lord-Quantock-Arms in Markton was as cosy this evening as a room can be that lacks the minuter furniture on which cosiness so largely depends. By the fire sat Paula and Somerset, the former with a shawl round her shoulders to keep off the draught which, despite the curtains, forced its way in on this gusty night through the windows opening upon the balcony. Paula held a letter in her hand, the contents of which formed the subject of their conversation. Happy as she was in her general situation, there was for the nonce a tear in her eye.

'MY EVER DEAR PAULA (ran the letter),--Your last letter has just reached me, and I have followed your account of your travels and intentions with more interest than I can tell. You, who know me, need no assurance of this. At the present moment, however, I am in the whirl of a change that has resulted from a resolution taken some time ago, but concealed from almost everybody till now. Why? Well, I will own--from cowardice--fear lest I should be reasoned out of my plan. I am going to steal from the world, Paula, from the social world, for whose gaieties and ambitions I never had much liking, and whose circles I have not the ability to grace. My home, and resting-place till the great rest comes, is with the Protestant Sisterhood at -----. Whatever shortcomings may be found in such a community, I believe that I shall be happier there than in any other place.

'Whatever you may think of my judgment in taking this step, I can assure you that I have not done it without consideration. My reasons are good, and my determination is unalterable. But, my own very best friend, and more than sister, don't think that I mean to leave my love and friendship for you behind me. No, Paula, you will ALWAYS be with me, and I believe that if an increase in what I already feel for you be possible, it will be furthered by the retirement and meditation I shall enjoy in my secluded home. My heart is very full, dear--too full to write more. God bless you, and your husband. You must come and see me there; I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose you who have been so kind. I write this with the fellow-pen to yours, that you gave

me when we went to Budmouth together. Good-bye!--Ever your own sister, CHARLOTTE.'

Paula had first read this through silently, and now in reading it a second time aloud to Somerset her voice faltered, and she wept outright. 'I had been expecting her to live with us always,' she said through her tears, 'and to think she should have decided to do this!'

'It is a pity certainly,' said Somerset gently. 'She was genuine, if anybody ever was; and simple as she was true.'

'I am the more sorry,' Paula presently resumed, 'because of a little plan I had been thinking of with regard to her. You know that the pictures and curiosities of the castle are not included in the things I cannot touch, or impeach, or whatever it is. They are our own to do what we like with. My father felt in devising the estate that, however interesting to the De Stancys those objects might be, they did not concern us--were indeed rather in the way, having been come by so strangely, through Mr. Wilkins, though too valuable to be treated lightly. Now I was going to suggest that we would not sell them--indeed I could not bear to do such a thing with what had belonged to Charlotte's forefathers--but to hand them over to her as a gift, either to keep for herself, or to pass on to her brother, as she should choose. Now I fear there is no hope of it: and yet I shall never like to see them in the house.'

'It can be done still, I should think. She can accept them for her brother when he settles, without absolutely taking them into her own possession.'

'It would be a kind of generosity which hardly amounts to more than justice (although they were purchased) from a recusant usurper to a dear friend--not that I am a usurper exactly; well, from a representative of the new aristocracy of internationality to a representative of the old aristocracy of exclusiveness.'

'What do you call yourself, Paula, since you are not of your father's creed?'

'I suppose I am what poor Mr. Woodwell said--by the way, we must call and see him--something or other that's in Revelation, neither cold nor hot. But of course that's a sub-species--I may be a lukewarm anything. What I really am, as far as I know, is one of that body to whom lukewarmth is not an accident but a provisional necessity, till they see a little more clearly.' She had crossed over to his side, and pulling his head towards her whispered a name in his ear.

'Why, Mr. Woodwell said you were that too! You carry your beliefs very comfortably. I shall be glad when enthusiasm is come again.'

'I am going to revise and correct my beliefs one of these days when I

have thought a little further.' She suddenly breathed a sigh and added, 'How transitory our best emotions are! In talking of myself I am heartlessly forgetting Charlotte, and becoming happy again. I won't be happy to-night for her sake!'

A few minutes after this their attention was attracted by a noise of footsteps running along the street; then a heavy tramp of horses, and lumbering of wheels. Other feet were heard scampering at intervals, and soon somebody ascended the staircase and approached their door. The head waiter appeared.

'Ma'am, Stancy Castle is all afire!' said the waiter breathlessly.

Somerset jumped up, drew aside the curtains, and stepped into the bow-window. Right before him rose a blaze. The window looked upon the street and along the turnpike road to the very hill on which the castle stood, the keep being visible in the daytime above the trees. Here rose the light, which appeared little further off than a stone's throw instead of nearly three miles. Every curl of the smoke and every wave of the flame was distinct, and Somerset fancied he could hear the crackling.

Paula had risen from her seat and joined him in the window, where she heard some people in the street saying that the servants were all safe; after which she gave her mind more fully to the material aspects of the catastrophe.

The whole town was now rushing off to the scene of the conflagration, which, shining straight along the street, showed the burgesses' running figures distinctly upon the illumined road. Paula was quite ready to act upon Somerset's suggestion that they too should hasten to the spot, and a fly was got ready in a few minutes. With lapse of time Paula evinced more anxiety as to the fate of her castle, and when they had driven as near as it was prudent to do, they dismounted, and went on foot into the throng of people which was rapidly gathering from the town and surrounding villages. Among the faces they recognized Mr. Woodwell, Havill the architect, the rector of the parish, the curate, and many others known to them by sight. These, as soon as they saw the young couple, came forward with words of condolence, imagining them to have been burnt out of bed, and vied with each other in offering them a lodging. Somerset explained where they were staying and that they required no accommodation, Paula interrupting with 'O my poor horses, what has become of them?'

'The fire is not near the stables,' said Mr. Woodwell. 'It broke out in the body of the building. The horses, however, are driven into the field.'

'I can assure you, you need not be alarmed, madam,' said Havill. 'The chief constable is here, and the two town engines, and I am doing all I can. The castle engine unfortunately is out of repair.'

Somerset and Paula then went on to another point of view near the gymnasium, where they could not be seen by the crowd. Three-quarters of a mile off, on their left hand, the powerful irradiation fell upon the brick chapel in which Somerset had first seen the woman who now stood beside him as his wife. It was the only object visible in that direction, the dull hills and trees behind failing to catch the light. She significantly pointed it out to Somerset, who knew her meaning, and they turned again to the more serious matter.

It had long been apparent that in the face of such a wind all the pigmy appliances that the populace could bring to act upon such a mass of combustion would be unavailing. As much as could burn that night was burnt, while some of that which would not burn crumbled and fell as a formless heap, whence new flames towered up, and inclined to the north-east so far as to singe the trees of the park. The thicker walls of Norman date remained unmoved, partly because of their thickness, and partly because in them stone vaults took the place of wood floors.

The tower clock kept manfully going till it had struck one, its face smiling out from the smoke as if nothing were the matter, after which hour something fell down inside, and it went no more.

Cunningham Haze, with his body of men, was devoted in his attention, and came up to say a word to our two spectators from time to time. Towards four o'clock the flames diminished, and feeling thoroughly weary, Somerset and Paula remained no longer, returning to Markton as they had

come.

On their journey they pondered and discussed what course it would be best to pursue in the circumstances, gradually deciding not to attempt rebuilding the castle unless they were absolutely compelled. True, the main walls were still standing as firmly as ever; but there was a feeling common to both of them that it would be well to make an opportunity of a misfortune, and leaving the edifice in ruins start their married life in a mansion of independent construction hard by the old one, unencumbered with the ghosts of an unfortunate line.

'We will build a new house from the ground, eclectic in style. We will remove the ashes, charred wood, and so on from the ruin, and plant more ivy. The winter rains will soon wash the unsightly smoke from the walls, and Stancy Castle will be beautiful in its decay. You, Paula, will be yourself again, and recover, if you have not already, from the warp given to your mind (according to Woodwell) by the mediaevalism of that place.'

'And be a perfect representative of "the modern spirit"?' she inquired; 'representing neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination; but what a finished writer calls "the imaginative reason"?'

'Yes; for since it is rather in your line you may as well keep straight on.'

'Very well, I'll keep straight on; and we'll build a new house beside the ruin, and show the modern spirit for evermore.... But, George, I wish--' And Paula repressed a sigh.

'Well?'

'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!'