

Madame est très exigeante. Prenez garde là. Doucement—doucement, avec cette boîte là!—si vous avez chiffonné quelque chose! Ah! Ma foi! Chut, chut, chut!"

Perfectly innocent of all meaning these accents fell on the honest rustic ears of the men, but Vaughan Hesketh heard also, and he gathered therefrom something of desperate interest to himself. Madame de Vigny was taking her departure from Beacon's Cottage, and evidently was bent on no mere slight journey, or brief absence. Why was she going—and where? He must know—he must see her before she went—he must learn from her own lips. There he paused, and gnashed his teeth in impotent anger, thinking of Miss Kendal. Miss Kendal would be with her—there would be no possibility of private conference—every look, every word, would be watched by those jealous, keen eyes. And she would go, he might not know where; he might lose her irrevocably—for ever! If once she slipped from him, he could not tell—he could not insure to himself the possibility of finding her again. Fairy, witch that she was, she might elude him, like flame, or air, or light, or any other beautiful, fleeting mockery. He wrought himself up to a point almost of frenzy, thinking thus. Finally he arrived at a reckless boldness—a disregard of all considerations save the one. What was Miss Kendal to him? She could do him no harm now. Let her know that he did not care for Caroline! Let her know that his very life and soul—his whole capacity of love and of devotion—was solely and entirely engrossed and lost in Blanche de Vigny! Let her know it, let her even tell Caroline: it would but save him the trouble of doing so himself. Let her do her worst. She should no longer frighten him from the goal of his desires. He dared her to harm him—he would have his will.

Of the *femme-de-chambre* he inquired if her mistress was to be seen. A doubtful response at first ensued, but further consideration appeared to render the thing more feasible. She would see; and he followed her into the house—into the drawing-room, where he waited.

How lifeless the room looked, though the fire blazed brightly, and the pretty fauteuil was drawn close to it, as if in readiness for its former occupant. The flowers flourished at the windows, and the outer world was far more serene than at his previous visit. A calm haze rested over everything—the outline of the hilly landscape was softened into misty indistinctness, joining the gray clouds, which themselves looked as solid as if they had been another and further range of hills. Stillness most profound reigned paramount within that charmed apartment. No stir of children, no sound of voices disturbed it, though Vaughan listened with ears made doubly sensitive and acute. He hated to have to understand