

trait, though she feared to let her interest be observed, lest it should unjustly be put down to vulgar curiosity. And when the old man who conducted them, having met and answered a quick glance from his mistress, invited the visitors to continue their tour of inspection, Virginia left her thoughts behind in the room of the portrait, walking as in a dream through the series of lofty, half-dismantled apartments which still remained to be visited.

She hoped that, when they should see their hostess again for the promised leave-taking, it would be in the same room as before. But she was doomed to disappointment. Mademoiselle met the party in the great hall, and, hearing from George Trent that his sister thought seriously of buying the château, gave them the address of an estate agent in Mentone.

Virginia was not a self-centred girl, and at any other time she would have been surprised at the encouragement given to this new whim of hers by her half-brother; she would have sought some underlying cause, for George Trent—who was her mother's son by a first marriage—was nearly five years older than she, and rather piqued