

20 THE CASTLE OF THE SHADOWS

suite," the servant announced laconically. But though the castle was evidently very ancient and must have a private history of its own, centuries old, he offered no garrulous details of past grandeur, as most servants would. As they walked through a dining-room of magnificent proportions, but meagrely furnished, they passed a half-open door, and Virginia had a glimpse of a charming little room with a huge projecting window. Mechanically she paused, then drew away quickly as she saw that mademoiselle was seated at a table arranging the flowers she had gathered in the melancholy garden. The old man hobbled on, as if the door had not existed, and Virginia would have followed, had not the girl in black stepped forward and invited them in, with a certain proud humility.

"This is our sitting-room — my aunt's and mine," she said. "My aunt is not here now, so come in, if you will. It is a small room ; still, it is one of the brightest and most homelike we have left."

She held open the door, and the three visitors obeyed her gesture of invitation ; but suddenly the girl's face changed. The blood streamed up