

4 THE CASTLE OF THE SHADOWS

"But I don't want to go further," she said.

"And I like this valley."

"Spoilt child!" ejaculated the Englishman, who claimed rights of cousinship, though by birth Virginia was American.

At that moment two members of the riding party, who had contrived to be left behind, came leisurely up. One was a very handsome, dark woman, who succeeded in looking not more than thirty, the other a young man of twenty-five, enough like Virginia to suggest that they were brother and sister.

"What are you stopping for?" inquired Lady Gardiner, who would not have been sorry to keep her friends in advance.

"Waiting for you," said Virginia promptly.

"I want to explore this valley."

As she spoke she gave her mare a little pat on the velvety neck. The animal, which was Virginia's own, brought from her namesake state, had never known the touch of the whip, but understood the language of hand and voice. She went off at a trot up the shadowed road; and the Marchese Loria was the first to follow. But he bit his lip under the black moustache,