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Title: Peter the Priest

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Release date: December 23, 2007 [eBook #23985]

Language: English

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Peter The Priest

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NEW YORK
R. F. FENNO & COMPANY
9 AND 11 EAST 16TH STREET

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Peter the Priest

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PETER THE PRIEST.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE MONASTERY.

There were six of them besides the Prior and Abbot. The seventh was away in the village, collecting the gifts of charity.

"Benedicite," began the Prior. "Here is a message from our most gracious patroness." With that he laid upon the table a sealed letter in Latin, which the others passed from hand to hand. All understood it, but it was evident that not one of them liked the letter, for they turned up their noses, pursed their lips and knit their eyebrows.

"One of us is bidden to the court of our most munificent patroness to educate her only son."

"He is a little devil!" exclaimed the Abbot.

"He talks and whistles in church," cried another.

"He reviles the saints and the souls of the departed."

"He torments animals." Each one had something to say; especially the last.

"He is the accursed child of a mad mother."

"She is the destruction of all men," continued the Abbot. "She sins against all the commandments."

"She tramples under foot all the sacraments."

"She is a raging fury and a sacrilegious witch."

"She sent her husband to his grave with a deadly drink."

The Prior met all these horrible comments with a stoical calm. "Still she is our gracious patroness, and her son also will one day be our patron. We must drink the bitter cup to its dregs. Let us choose."

Still all shook their heads.

"I have the fever in my bones," said one, rubbing his leg.

"I have trouble with my liver," said another, and as proof he put out his tongue to the opposite brother, who hastened to say:

"It is my vocation to heal the sick."

Now all three looked at the fourth, who felt very confident of having the best excuse:

"And I am not acquainted with the Scythian speech, neither the Hungarian nor the Slavic."

The fifth was embarrassed what excuse to give:

"I have taken a vow never to speak to a woman."

Evidently no one cared for the office.

"Then let us send Peter," said the Prior calmly.

At this all five cried out: "He is too young," said one.

"But he is stern of character," replied the Prior.

"He will meet with very great temptations," threw in a second.

"The greater will be his triumph," returned the Prior.

"But he is still only a brother," a third protested.

"We can make him a father," the Prior answered. An answer which brought them all to their feet, opposing it loudly:

"That cannot be! that cannot be! our rules are against it."

"Then let some one else go," said the Prior coldly.

Silence fell upon the group: they shrugged their shoulders, fell back into their large richly carved arm-chairs, and murmured:

"Then let Peter be made father, and let father Peter go."

It was the student John's week in the bake-house, and from there he had heard every word; and now that the worthy fathers had gone away, he came out of the bake-house and hobbled off to the kitchen. The master of the kitchen was not there, but Samuel, a fellow-student, hung over the edge of a large two-handled tub. John was lank, and Samuel was thickset; both were in rags, out of respect to the golden saying, "In rags is a student at his best." It was the daily duty of these two students to carry to the pigs this large tub full of kitchen refuse. As soon as John saw that the kitchen master was not there, he began rummaging in the tub among the crusts of bread, apple parings, and scraps of mouldy cheese, selecting with an experienced eye.

"Leave some for Peter," growled Samuel, without raising his head from his knees.

John could not answer, for both cheeks were full. Samuel sprang up full of envy that John should be enjoying his feast with such gusto.

"Stop, you rascal! Leave some for the pigs." Then John looked for the pole to put through the handles of the tub.

"Take hold of the other end."

"I won't. Peter will be here soon and he carries it out alone."

"Peter will not be here."

"I hear his cart creaking now."

"All the same, he won't carry that tub out again. I heard what they said when I was in the bake-house."

"What did they say?" And the two sat down together on the edge of the tub for a gossip.

"The mistress of the castle sends for an instructor for her son, and they say that he a small devil."

"That's true, he's equal to twelve."

"He whistles in church."

"He puts sulphur in the incense when he assists at mass!"

"He curses and reviles the saints and the souls of the departed."

"He torments animals."

"You're right he does! He put a lighted sponge in my donkey's ear, and the poor beast smashed my cart."

"They said that he is as wild as his mother; and the Abbot said of her that she was the ruin of every man. Is that so?"

"Yes, she is a witch, who bridles men and rides them off to the devils' dance."

"They did say that she was a witch, and and that she broke all the ten commandments, and put the sacraments under her feet; and listen,—they said that she mixed poison in her husband's drink, and he died of it!"

"That's like her! Once they sent me to her with a letter, and she ordered a cup of mead that had something in it that made me feel all night long as if I must crawl up the wall."

"But the Prior said that she was our gracious patroness, and that her son would one day be our patron, and that we must drink the bitter cup."

"I can see how they all trembled!"

"One said that he had fever in his bones, another had trouble with his liver, a third said he was busy healing the sick, a fourth that he did not know either Hungarian or Slavic, and the fifth was bound by a holy vow not to speak to a woman."

"And so in the end they send Peter."

"The Devil's in you! You've guessed it!"

"It may turn out well for him."

"One thought he was still too young, and the Prior said, but he is of strong character; another that he would be exposed to great temptations; several objected that Peter was still a brother.

Then the Prior said, we'll make him a father. Then all objected, and the Prior said, Then one of you must go. Then they all gave in and said, well, make Peter a father, and let Father Peter be the one to go."

And then both the students began to laugh. "Peter will be in the right place there!" In the mean time, the creaking of the cartwheels stopped at the rear door; then came a knock; through this rear gate was an entrance into the court, but the duty of door-tender was limited to the main entrance.

"Do you hear? Peter's knocking."

"You hear him, yourself."

"Go open the gate."

"You can do it as well as I."

"I can't find my feet, I don't know which of the four they are." At that John struck the four bare legs with his birch broom, and his fellow scholar at once discovered his own; then they seized each other by the hair; the question was which should throw the other out of the kitchen; the vanquished one was to open the gate. During this struggle, they upset the tub and the contents streamed over the floor. Then, indeed, they separated, thoroughly pommelled and frightened.

"Get out, you overturned it."

"You pushed me into it."

"When the kitchen-master sees us, he'll beat you well." Neither one would set things to rights; meanwhile their brother, tired of knocking at the rear gate, had gone around to the main gate, been let in there, and now opened the rear gate for himself to bring in what he had collected in the villages.

It was a lumbering cart; its wobbling wheels described the letter S in their course, and as they had been long ungreased, creaked dismally. A one-eared donkey drew the cart filled with all kinds of provisions, which the begging monk had collected in the villages; this was called "temporizing." The steward was already waiting in the court, slate in hand to note down the receipts. He did not fail at each item to make severe criticisms and to look sharply at the collector. Everything he found poor; picking out the bad eggs, he said, "You can have those yourself, Peter." The meal was very coarse. "Go sift it, and make yourself a cake out of the bran." On the head of the brother rained down the thanks, "Do-nothing," "Bread-consumer," "Donkey;" he endured all with bowed head. The hood of his black cowl covered his face to his eyebrows, and from his beard hung large raindrops; under his cowl, which was fastened by a cord, could be seen his bare feet, covered with mud to the ankle; his sandals he carried on his staff, so that they should not be worn out on the rough road. There was no rest for the wet and weary monk. The kitchen-master at once called through the vaulted porch, "Petre, Petre, hue acceleras: ad culinam!" (Peter, Peter, come to the kitchen, quick!)

It was a fine kitchen; now when we look at its ruins, we might believe it a chapel and a tower; but it really was only a kitchen and a chimney. For Peter this roomy kitchen had the disadvantage that he had to put it in order.

The contents of the overturned tub had spread over the marble floor, and those who had been the cause of this condition could not repair the mischief, because the Abbot was at that moment investigating their case in a corner by means of the lash. The two students knelt before him; and so somebody else must clean up the floor, and that somebody was Peter. He went obediently to work; threw off his coarse black cowl; and as he rolled up his sleeves, one could see from the fine white skin that he had not from childhood been accustomed to such slave's work. His face was still young, his features regular, and, through the dulling discipline of self-denial, immovable. He was only a brother, so the monk's tonsure had not taken the place of his blond hair; and though his eyes filled with tears, it was clearly caused only by coming suddenly from the cold into the heated kitchen. Without a word, he knelt down to clean the floor with shovel, broom, and whisk of straw.

Meanwhile, the Abbot questioned the two rascals to find out who had done the mischief. It stood to reason neither one had. According to an old proverb, Mischief has no master. That they had scuffled, their faces bore evidence; John had a black and blue spot under the eye, and Samuel a bloody scratch on his brow, but both denied any scuffle.

"Then how came this black and blue spot under your eye?" The same story suggested itself to John which Baron de Manx was to use later in a critical situation.

"When I tried to light the fire I could not find the flint, so I struck myself in the eyes with one fist and with the other I held the match to it, so when my eyes saw sparks I lighted the match by them."

The Abbot said nothing, but turned to the other: "How did you get that wound on your forehead?" Samuel, encouraged by John's example, was also ready with an excuse:

"I bit myself."

"How could you bite yourself in the forehead?"

"In the looking-glass."

"But you could not reach it!"

"Yes I could, I climbed up on the bench."

The Abbot compressed his lips till his fat cheeks stood out from each other, and then pronounced the sentence:—"Joannes quia bene mentitus est, accipiat viginti verbera; Samuel, quia male mentitus est, accipiet triginta." (John, because he has lied well, shall have twenty lashes; Samuel, because he has lied badly, shall have thirty.)

The two lads gave themselves up to weeping and howling and wiping away the tears with their fists; but in secret, while the Abbot turned away, they winked at each other slyly, and this meant, I'll not strike hard, if you won't. But the Abbot had eyes that could see without looking.

"Peter," he said to the working monk who had just finished his cleaning, "come here."

Peter obeyed. "Take these two delinquents in charge; they would handle each other with sly consideration, and avoid their punishment, your hand will let the rods fall more heavily;" and he handed him a bundle of birch rods, dipped in salt water.

Now the two lads began to howl lustily and to crawl about on their knees, in their fear. But Peter did not reach out his hand for the bundle of rods. The demon of pride had stirred his blood to insurrection; his countenance glowed; his eyes blazed; he tossed back the lock of hair from his brow, clenched his fists, and advanced one foot. He emboldened himself to speak, although he had not been questioned. "I am no hangman's slave, I never learned to beat men with a besom; lock up the culprits, and I will do their work as long as they are confined, but I do not like to whip boys."

"Petre!" said the Abbot in even tones, "Putasve quod adhuc sis dux equitum nobilium? Es servus servorum." (Do you think you are still at the head of noble knights? You are the slave of slaves.) And in order to let him feel how completely he was under the rod, he laid the bundle of sticks on the head of the defiant youth. Under this frightful burden, the uplifted head gradually sank and the lids closed over the blazing eyes. He unclenched his fists and crossed them on his breast. The handsome knight was changed again to the humble monk. He reached tremblingly for the bundle of rods, which he raised to his speechless lips:

"Parce, pater." (Spare me, father.)

But as he laid hold of the instrument of shame, whose work it is to disgrace that masterpiece of creation, man; to reduce to an animal him whom God had created in his own likeness, then once again his pride reasserted itself; he raised that noble hand, accustomed to grasp the sword hilt, whose greatest pleasure was to cut through with sharp steel helmet and armor; and which was now compelled with a jailer's scourge to belabor the bare skin of unmannerly clowns.

He was only a novice, and had not yet learned that there are seventy-seven devils in the body, and that the body receives as many blows as there are devils. He had learned that we must regard the nail-studded belt and the hooked lash as our benefactors, and that to scourge the body at night until the blood flowed was an equivalent for a day of prayer. But to beat howling students was still a horror to him. Soon he will become accustomed to that too. At this moment was heard in the hall the voice of the Prior. "Petre ad me tendas." ("Peter, come to me.") Peter sighed with lightened heart and handed back the bunch of rods to the Abbot. "The Prior calls me."

"He commands you; hasten to him."

Peter wanted to lay aside his wet cowl and put on his coarse sandals. "Go just as you are," said the Abbot, "either you will come back here barefooted, or you will go hence in another garb."

The Jesuit Brother dared not inquire concerning what he did not understand, he knew only to obey, so Peter went barefooted to the Prior.

"Dearly beloved son," said the Prior to him, "it is now two years that you have practised obedience. You have learned to be poor, to beg, to take care of the sick, and to do the work of a day laborer. You have six years yet, before you can be numbered among the fathers. Three years you must pass in the library, must learn Saint Augustine by heart, and also the Turkish, Arabic, Greek, and Russian languages; for it is possible that when you are through your studies you may be sent into the desert of Arabia to convert the heathen, or to Russia to encourage to steadfastness the faithful of the Church who are persecuted by Ivan the Terrible. So then you must spend three years among your books, keeping awake night and day, and forcing your way into learning as yet unknown to you. The next three years, you must wander about among hostile peoples, where crucified martyrs and impaled saints will mark your way. The seventh year, you must make a pilgrimage into Spain to endure the test of your fidelity. If you endure all these tests, and all these temptations, then may you be numbered among the fathers. All this long way you can put behind you with one step, and out of all this learning you need only the one word, I will. This day you may lay down your novitiate, and tomorrow arise Father Peter, if you will voluntarily and obediently undertake this mission. Read!" And he handed him the letter of the Patroness.

When the young monk glanced at the hand-writing, (he must have known it before) his whole

countenance expressed sudden horror; he held the letter in his hand as if afraid to read it; then he took it, and as he read, his brow wrinkled, his face expressed contempt, and through his open lips, one could see his tightly closed teeth. He read the letter through and let his hand fall listlessly.

"We have chosen you," said the Prior. "To-morrow you will become Father Peter, and need only to say, 'I will'."

The youth looked steadfastly at the ground.

"Have you become speechless?"

The youth raised his head; his face had regained its manly calm. "Give me time for consideration, my father," he said, with a sweetly ringing voice, in which was heard the sincere vibration of a naive nature. "Let me compare the beginning and the end of this course. Surely it is not so far for me to the desert of Bab-el-Mandeb, or to the ice-sea of Siberia, as from the threshold of this monastery to the gate of the Madocsany castle. Neither the raging of Ivan the Terrible at his gory banquets, nor the nightly howl of the hyena, prowling after the dead through the desert of sand, is to me so terrible as one whisper of this woman. More rapidly can I learn Turkish and Arabic, Greek and Russian, and, if necessary, Sanskrit and Mongolian, than the one word, 'I will,' Grant me until to-morrow early to think of this."

"Very well. Take this letter to your cell, and pray God that He give you light. For it is true that the mission we lay upon you is more difficult than any into the land of the Scythian or Hyperborean. *Omnia ad majorem Dei gloriam.*"

Peter went to his cell. It was a small narrow room, five feet long and two feet wide, with only a bed, and on the wall a crucifix. Yet the whole night long, he did not lie down on his bed, but, like a lion in a cage, he went back and forth over the five feet of space. There on the bed lay the letter, and on the bed where that letter lay, he could not lay his head. Toward morning, his decision became strong. He pushed the letter off the bed and threw himself down, and then weariness overpowered him; he slept so soundly that even the matin bell did not rouse him; and he first wakened when the Abbot shook him by the arm. He sprang up.

"Well, Peter, what is your decision?"

"This," replied Peter, treading under foot the letter as it lay on the floor.

"Very well, then get up and follow me; the two delinquents are awaiting their punishment."

"Wait; the Prior told me that the two years of the novitiate in which I was to do menial service were over. Now follow three years of study; then three years more of pilgrimage among hostile people. The Prior did not say anything about such hangman's service as this."

"Oh, yes, he did, Peter; recollect, he said, finally you are to go to Spain: that meant that you are to spend a year in the service of the Holy Inquisition. Come and begin your practice now."

Peter's nerves quivered with horror. Tightly did he press his arms to his sides and his face grew deadly pale. He raised his eyes to Heaven and his mouth opened.

A vision passed before him of human wisdom in dog's shape, and of canine rage in man's shape—of Ivan the Terrible—of the Saracens—of the torture-chamber of Arbucs. It was more than his mind could bear. His knees gave way under him; he sank down; took up the letter trodden under foot and folded it together; concealed it in his bosom, and said, "I will go."

CHAPTER II.

THE FOOLS OF THE CASTLE.

That very day went forth from the Convent the answer to the letter of the Baroness. It read: "For the high office of instructing our future baron, Father Peter has been chosen. He will install himself to-morrow at the castle."

For this new rôle, Father Peter received a new costume. No one would have recognized the beggar-monk of yesterday in this figure of to-day, clad in silken robe with buckled shoes; as, with a large book under his arm, he turned from the highway into the entrance of the Madocsany castle, barely a thousand paces distant from the monastery.

This castle was formerly shunned by everybody. In the first place, the court swarmed with hunting dogs of every kind, which dashed out at every arrival, and fairly tore the travellers from their carriages; then the young lord had a custom of lying in wait with a few intimates, and shooting at passers-by with an air gun, on a wager; then inside the court was a peacock, which flew at everybody's head and tried to peck out his eyes. Man and beast were trained here to harass the stranger. The day when the arrival of Father Peter was expected, the mistress took care to have her beloved child's air gun put away, for the round Jesuit hat would be altogether too convenient a target; she had had part of the pack of hounds driven into the poultry yard, leaving out only the blood-hounds and pointers; but she could not herself take care that a

respectful reception should await the pious father, for just at the time of his arrival, the forester brought word that the night before the lord of Mitosin, with a troop of hunters, had crossed the Waag and shot down deer and other game; and when the gamekeepers tried to withstand this mad chase, they had been bound to trees, and the game had been dragged away.

The mistress of the castle fell into an ungovernable rage; sent at once for her stewards and agent, and prepared for a frightful retaliation by the most violent means.

Between the castles of Madocsany and Mitosin was an ancient feud that each lord took care to settle with his own hand. But when one of these domains passed into the hands of a woman, the situation became worse; for woman is less yielding than man. The preparations for revenge caused the mistress of the castle to forget entirely the arrival of Father Peter; so he was received by nobody but the dogs and the fools, in which latter class must be counted the young lord.

Nine blood-hounds and pointers plunged for the monk when his sable figure appeared in the gateway. But the monk did not act like those people who in their fright run this way and that, throwing out their arms, and provoking the spectator to laughter, but he remained standing quietly before the dogs—he had owned a fine pack once himself—and when they came baying around him, opened his large book and closed it noisily.

The dogs thought he had shot, and dashed off in every direction to hunt for the game, while the monk walked calmly into the castle court. The young Lord, the haiduk, the master of the hounds, and the fool were entertaining themselves playing ball.

"See, here comes the instructor," cried Matyi, the haiduk. "What a marvel that the dogs have not eaten him," said Petyko, the master of the hounds, greatly astonished. "Hit the monk in the back with the ball," the young Lord called out to the fool, who had the ball in his hand, and if he hit him it was bound to leave a big spot on the silken robe.

Hirsko, the fool, did as bidden. The monk caught the ball, and threw it back at the Fool with such force that his bearskin cap flew off his head. This pleased the young Lord greatly.

"That's a fine monk! Come here, Monk. So you know how to play ball! How the devil is that? I thought monks knew only how to pray. Can you throw a ball as far as Matyi? He is a strong fellow. See how far the ball has gone; he almost hit the window. See what you can do."

Father Peter took the bat and struck the ball with such force into the air that it flew over the roof of the castle. All were carried away with admiration.

"That's a rare monk!" said the young Lord. "I can learn to play 'Longa' and 'Meta' with him."

"Does your Honor know Latin already?" asked Father Peter of the boy.

"Latin! What's that got to do with this?"

"Why, 'Longa' means long, and 'Meta' means a goal. So in playing we add to learning."

"Really?"

"We make a kite out of what is to be learned, and while we let the kite go, the learning remains."

"So you understand kite-flying, do you? Have you ever seen a kite as large as mine? See how stout the cord is to hold by. Matyi can break this the first time trying. Show us, Matyi."

"That's nothing," said Father Peter, and with that he put the cord together three times and broke it.

"My, that's a strong monk! What's the Latin for kite?"

"Draco."

"And paper?"

"Charta."

"And the frame?"

"Arcus."

"I know all that. That's quite easy, Hirsko."

"It's got to be easy," said the Fool, an ugly dwarf, with a monstrously large head and hideous countenance. "The gracious Lady has given orders that the instructor shall teach the young Lord everything within one year, in such a manner that the young Lord shall not have to study anything."

"That is always the way, you know," said Father Peter. "Every young Lord keeps a small boy to be whipped, and when the young Lord does not know his lesson, the boy receives the punishment in his stead."

"You shall be this boy," said the young Lord, laughingly, to the Fool.

This system of pedagogics pleased the young Lord very much, and the monk by this means had won his favor in the highest measure. The Fool was the shrewdest of the company, for he saw that this new man would throw the old favorites out of the saddle, for he knew better how to

manage the hounds than the master of hounds, was stronger than the haiduk, and a better joker than the Fool. He wanted to bring the monk to confusion. "What did you bring that great, stupid book with you for?" he asked, opening the folio, which bristled with a strange handwriting, terrible to him. "Is the young Lord to learn the book by heart."

"No, my son; with this book I drive out devils."

"Then you have come just at the right time. Go up to our gracious Lady; she has three thousand devils; you can test your art with her."

All four burst out laughing.

"Yes, do go, monk," teased the young Lord, "let us see whether you dare appear before my lady mother. She understands Latin when she tries. Do go, monk."

And all four crowded around the spiritual director. One shoved him, another pulled him, and so they dragged him through the entrance hall, hall-ways, and saloons, in the direction from which came the loudest noise; but when suddenly a door opened and through this unexpectedly appeared the Lady herself, all four ran away, to crawl behind the stove, the table, or the highest chest, leaving Father Peter standing alone in the middle of the saloon before this fire-breathing dragon. The gracious lady had pushed open the door with the heel of her yellow riding boot, and when she saw the monk's figure standing in the dark background, she stamped violently with her foot.

"The Devil could not have brought a monk here, more opportunely." With that she turned toward the threshold with her back to the monk, and began to scold her retinue in the adjoining room. "What are you staring at there! Off with you, and do as I order! The peasants are to arm themselves with scythes and pitchforks, and the halberdiers are to mount their horses. Haiduks, hunters, peasants, off with you to Mitosin! Set the red cock on their roof. If they have other game, they shall have fire for it. Fall upon them while they are drunk; throw them into the water to sober them; set fire to their towers on all four sides, even if the dead Florian himself should rise from his grave to beg for them. But if you catch the master alive, swing him up on the cross bar over the well. Now off with you! I'll go too; saddle my horse. Where's that miserable priest? What the devil does he want? Let him show his face."

The Lady's face was flaming red with anger; even on her brow blazed the red spots; her nostrils quivered; her eyes flashed so that she could not see; her lips drawn into very ugly shape. Then too, her hair was disordered, her brown locks changing into red, gleamed on her temples in small bright red curls, and above them a high cap was fastened with four pins that gave the appearance of four horns. Her stately figure showed strength and passion, still further heightened by her costume. Her bodice, extending below the hips, was of brown and yellow stripes two fingers wide, a true tiger's skin, and instead of the stiff ruffle around the neck was a border of feathers. Below the hips hung a dagger from a Turkish girdle; and the skirt of heavy flowered brocade was festooned with strings of gold and silver coins that rattled as she walked; the skirt, made short in front, as she stamped her foot, showed the leg above the yellow riding boots, in bright red trousers. This was her appearance when she cried: "Now let that cringing priest come here!"

Father Peter came near, and said gently: "May peace and blessing rest upon this house." At this voice, the lady let fall her dagger and raised her hands to her brow, either to shade her eyes for better sight, or to conceal her face. The monk came nearer to her, and said in friendly tones: "Anger ruins beauty. Cleopatra was never angry, and so remained always beautiful. Rage disfigures the countenance, draws lasting wrinkles, and leaves its imprint on the skin." In one instant the rage had vanished from the lady's face, the blazing red became white, her brow relaxed, and her lips resumed their lines of beauty. Her flashing eyes remained fixed, like those of a sleep-walker, on the countenance of the speaker. An instant had sufficed to effect this change; at the last words of the Father, the Lady even tried to smile. Now the monk came still nearer, so that he could say in a whisper: "What unseemly revenge have you planned, gracious Lady? Who will consent to quarrels and firebrands? You are only preparing a new enjoyment for the one who has wronged you. A sword wound does not hurt a man. If you really want to take vengeance on this man, have a quantity of game shot and send it to him as a present. In this way you will shame him."

Like the sun beneath a heavy cloud, gleamed a smile on the face of the Lady. "True, true," she said, with a look of joy. "I will revenge myself that way. Steward, treasurer, forester; go at once into the forest; kill as much game as you can put in a wagon, and take it to Mitosin. Say to the lord of the castle, I send him my greetings, and since he is so desperately hungry for my game, I send him still more of it, that he may have enough."

Every one was astonished at this sudden change, including those in hiding behind the furniture, who were now quite convinced that the monk knew how to drive out the Devil with the aid of the large book he carried under his arm.

"Mother, don't give in to him," cried the young Lord, dashing out and seeking shelter beside his mother. Then happened to the young man what he had never experienced before; his dear mother gave him a box on the ear. Yes, the spoiled darling, the only son, the child of her heart, who never in his life before had heard the word, "Don't," received his first box on the ear.

Stunned and amazed, he quite forgot he ought to cry. "Off with you. Treat him as your Father.

Kiss his hand." And his mother's half-raised boot made the boy understand that she was quite ready to use her heel as a stimulus. But the monk intervened.

"Gracious Lady, treat him as your child." With these words he leaned forward, and enveloped him in his robe and the child sought refuge in the arm of his protector, and began to cry bitterly. "Do not cry, my little one, have confidence in your mother; she loves you. A mother's chastisement brings blessing to the child. Now take the book, and carry it to the room designed for me."

This commission so surprised the child that he forgot to cry. Curiosity overcame sorrow. He was delighted to take into his hand the wonderful book whose contents the devils themselves feared, as if they had themselves to spell it out, or take a whipping. Off he ran with his book, and the three fools after him. As soon as they could, they stopped to study the strange characters painted in gay colors on the parchment.

CHAPTER III.

THE LORDS OF MADOCSANY.

When they were left alone, the Lady began to laugh. Her pleasure was as passionately violent as her anger; she clapped her hands and pressed them to her head.

"Aha! So you're here, are you? At last! You are not dead! You did not go out into the wild world! You have come to me! A hundred times I have called you; a thousand times I have waited for you; but always in vain. When I did not expect you, you are before me! Ha ha! And in what a masquerade have you slunk in, Tihamer Csorbai!"

And with that she laid both hands on the monk's shoulders, rested her dimpled chin on her arm, and laughed in his face with her sparkling eyes.

"My name is Father Peter," said the monk calmly. And without change of countenance, he suffered the Lady to press him to her breast with all her might.

"That's not true!" she cried, seizing violently the monk's rough garment over his breast. "It's only a disguise," and she tore open the coarse cowl on his breast, expecting to see a gold-trimmed, buckled cloak of velvet. In its stead was a coarse shirt of unbleached linen, such as all Jesuits wore, down to the humblest begging monk; and where this coarse shirt parted on his breast, could be seen around his neck a chain of steel with iron cross. The points on the links of the chain and the sharp edges of the cross had left bloody prints on his neck, from her violent embrace. But he endured both the embrace and the torture without a smile, without a word.

"I am what I seem to be," he said coldly. The tone of his voice was so cold, his glance so steely hard, that from the face of the Lady suddenly vanished the smile, and with it every charm. With dignity she drew herself to her full height, rubbed her hands, gazed with her black eyes in terror at the cross, her whole body quivered; then she clasped both hands to her brow, throwing back her head. "'Tis a dream! Waken me! Give me water."

"We are awake, my Lady," said the monk, "What you see is the reality."

"Tihamer——"

"—is dead."

"But not in the struggle against the Turks?"

"No, only in the struggle against self."

"'Tis two years since we have heard anything of you."

"Yes, since that unfortunate duel, in which I killed somebody with whom I would gladly exchange my rest every night. You know the cause."

"Do not call it to mind. Rage fills my whole body."

"Every night his ghost comes to me."

"Why didn't you make more thorough work of it? His ghost leaves me in peace." And with that she smiled seductively. The man understood the words and understood the smile. This woman was a queen of sinners; all heart, and yet heartless. If she were to go to Hell, she would seduce the Devil, and instead of being among the damned, would take her place at Beelzebub's side as his wife.

"The Lord of Mitosin has cursed me," said the monk.

"How often has he cursed me! Every word he speaks is a curse. If all took effect, there would be no thunder left in Heaven or devil in Hell. I laugh at his curse."

"But he really has cursed me. At the funeral feast of his son, he hurled after me the words, that if he ever caught sight of my face again, he would put his daughter in a boat, push her out on the sea in the black night, and leave her to perish."

"And your love for her was so great that for this reason you went out into the wide world,—nay, more, you went out of the world—you became a monk! And yet you could not free yourself from her. Her charm brought you back again, that you might be near her, might even see her again. Am I not right?"

Envy and jealousy blazed in her glance.

"No. I made a pilgrimage to Rome, and was received into the Jesuit order. The Provincial, finding that I was of this vicinity ordered me to the monastery of Madocsany."

"Whither you never wanted to come."

"I had to obey. And since then, I have been spending my years of penance here. I have done the most menial work. Begged from village to village, and tortured my body and my soul."

"Just to see her once more!"

"To avoid her."

"What! Have you not yet seen her? Not heard of her? She is more beautiful than ever and still unmarried. She waits for you."

"She waits in vain! Even in prayer, I do not venture to approach her. I am what I have become—a rigid, unfeeling monk. Only in my hands do I carry the rose-wreath, not on my brow. Its fragrance is no more sweet; its thorns give no more pain."

"And you are the one the Jesuit convent selected to send to me!"

"The rest were all afraid of you."

"On account of my bad reputation; and yet they do not know me at all. You had most cause to fear, for you know me, and yet you came—to the woman whom you hate, whom you despise, at whose warm whisper you shudder, whom you have so often thrust aside, and of whom you know that she clings to you so madly that she will never give you up to God, or Devil, or angel! Whose windows are written all over with your name, who when she is silent, and when she speaks, and when she dreams, thinks only of you! And yet you came!"

"The command was given and I obeyed."

"And why are you here?"

"To fulfil a sacred mission."

"Ha, ha! What mission?"

"To instruct your son in the true faith, and in worldly knowledge."

"I understand. They are afraid that if I get angry, I will take my son with me to Saros-Patak, and make a Calvinist of him; and will my wealth to that college; they have a holy dread of that."

"Possibly."

"But you have still another sacred mission. As I understand from their letter, the Jesuits never send an instructor into a family except with the title of Father Confessor. You are to be my Father Confessor."

"I know it."

"You know it. And do not suspect that what I shall whisper in your ear day after day, will be not only my curse, but also yours. That you who must absolve my soul of the sin, if sin it is, renew that sin day by day; that when you lay your hand upon my head in blessing, every one of your five fingers will burn in my red hair as in glowing coals. Do you know that?"

"I know it."

"And yet you venture to incline your ear when I kneel before you and venture to hear me when I whisper, 'Father I have sinned;' I love a man with a maddening love that sets my brain on fire; I cannot pray, for his name ever rushes to my lips; I cannot look to the saints above, for everywhere I see his face; I cannot do penance, for I love my sin, and am ever returning to it; I had a good, true husband who was as gentle as a lamb; this good and gentle husband I tortured to death—perhaps I even caused his death—I exulted and rejoiced in my widow's veil for I thought, Now he whom I seek can be mine; ah, my sin, my sin! But his heart would not incline to me for he loved another,—a more beautiful, a better, an innocent maiden; and I disturbed their union, I roused her father and brother against him, I sowed enmity between them, and he killed the brother of his betrothed, and so I tore them from each other. My sin! My sin! Hear me, God in Heaven! I did not come to you to pray, but I will contend with you. This man I love more than my soul's salvation, the man to whom I pray rather than to Heaven, whose heart Thou first didst take from me, and now dost take him too. Thou hast chained him to Thine altar, but I will not leave him to Thee, I will tear him from Thine altar, and if Thou wilt not permit me to be happy on earth, to be blessed in Heaven with him, then will I be damned in Hell with him. Father, I will sin!"

The woman rocked on her knees in the dust before the man, kissing his feet, and with her hand beating her unrepentant breast.

A deep sigh was wrung from the heart of Father Peter. He turned his face away, and laying a trembling hand on the woman's head, sobbed with stifled voice, "May God pity you your sins, poor wretched woman!" And then he let her lie sobbing on the ground, and let her drag herself along the marble floor, following his footsteps and kissing them, one after the other.

CHAPTER IV.

YAW DEREVOCSID EHT.

That good-sized book that Father Peter had brought to the Castle with him was no book of magic to exorcise devils, but rather a book that had had some man-tormenting devil for composer: it had moulded already for two centuries in the Madocsany Monastery library before the Jesuit order was founded by Ignatius Loyola; at that time the Carmelite fathers were in the abbey; the contents of this book must have caused them, too, many a headache, for they wrote many pages of Latin commentaries to explain this text of a few leaves which nobody understood yet. This much had the investigators already worked out; that the characters were the same that the Arabs employed in their secret correspondence, and the alphabet was that known among Orientalists as "Lijakah." On the other hand, the words which the letters formed were not to be found in any speech of any known people on the whole globe. One linguist insisted that he recognized the Arabic, another the Coptic, and a third the Mongolian in some one of its forms. The words that most frequently appeared were explained by all kinds of philological cunning. The title of the book was YAW DEREVOCSID EHT. One word sounded like Arabic, and another was evidently of Turkish origin; but what the whole meant no human understanding could decide. Whole sheets were written over, with desperate and useless effort. It seemed as if everybody must go mad who attempted its investigation. The Jesuits later adopted the custom, whenever a monk ventured to demur against a task assigned, of putting into his hand this book, YAW DEREVOCSID EHT, and telling him that he might spend his time in quiet linguistic studies, that he might acquire the language in which these few pages were written, and when he had accomplished this, he might go as a missionary to the people who wrote and spoke this language. But this secret had never yet been penetrated throughout all the years in which it had vexed and tormented students. And so to Father Peter, this book had been given for a companion; in case he wished to escape from the hard service in the castle, this book would be welcome in gaining his exit through the closed door, and for that reason, Father Peter spent whole nights over the thick book, and studied in succession the writings of those who had gone astray before him.

The little son of the mistress of the castle slept with the monk in one room, but beside the monk, the child must have the Fool too; for he could not go to sleep unless the Fool told him fairy stories, and the Fool well knew how. Often he sat until midnight by the boy's bedside, weaving garlands of the Thousand and One Nights; this gave the monk a chance to study the secrets of the Arabic writing. The young Lord had very bad dreams. He dreamed of the fairies and witches in the fairy tales, and would waken screaming. Often he dreamed with wide open eyes, tried to escape, howled and wept, so that the monk and the Fool had all they could do to quiet him and lull him back to sleep again. And this was continued until early morning, when the boy fell into a deep sleep, and the monk and the Fool could give themselves to rest.

The monk found his Arabic book of sufficient service in these night watches, but for the Fool wine was furnished as a means of keeping awake. And so they sat through the still nights beside each other at a table; in front of the monk lay the open book and the large inkstand of lead, and before the Fool stood a large pitcher and a tin mug.

"What would a man say, Monk," said the Fool once, "if he should see us together this way every night? Which would he call the Fool and which the wise man?"

"He would call you wise, and me a fool."

"If you would like, I could share my wisdom with you, for my pitcher is full; there is wine in it."

"I do not drink wine."

"What have you there in front of you?"

"Ink."

"And I do not drink ink, but I'll taste your drink; give me some."

"Ink is not to drink."

"What is it for?"

"You see. Men dip quills in it, and write letters with it, and what is in the letters causes greater delight to the human soul than your wine to the human throat."

"Give me a swallow of it that I may learn its taste."

"Nobody can give of this drink."

"Is it frozen?"

"Yes, just that. It is written in a foreign language that I do not myself understand."

"You do not understand! and you follow with your finger along the line of those bird-tracks! Then this magic book is of no more value to you than to me. I might just as well sit in your place, and follow with my finger."

"You are quite right, Fool."

"Now I'll tell you a thing, and you can make two of it. If I can swallow a little of your drink which you cannot pour out for your own self, then will you taste mine which I do not begrudge you?"

"I can easily agree to that."

"Now then, wait a little. Before you came I had a student for companion in these night-watches, who used to work there busily, just where you sit. He was to have taught the young Lord to read and write, but every day he got hit in the head with the inkstand. I watched this foolish student carefully from the other end of the table, and saw that when he took his goosequill in his hand, and began to make all kinds of flourishes that he always worked from left to right, but as I observe your finger you go from right to left, and in that way get everything wrong end to. Now listen, and I will recite you a sweet song:

'Wolb sdnw hguor eht neh w neve,
Skaerc kao tuots eht neh w neve,
Woleb ssarg eht ni terewolf eht,
Skaerw yruf rieht tahw ton sraef.'

Did you understand? Arabic, isn't it? Now just read it backward and you will understand at once.

'Even when the rough winds blow,
Even when the stout oak creaks,
The floweret in the grass below
Fears not what their fury wreaks.'

"Quite right, Fool, but this is written in Arabic, and Arabic, like all Eastern languages, is written from right to left."

"What is the title of your book?"

"YAW DEREVOCSID EHT."

The Fool burst into a loud laugh. "Didn't I tell you that I would drink of your cup first? Now read from left to right just as you have done:

"YAW DEREVOCSID EHT means simply, The Discovered Way."

Father Peter's eyes and mouth stood wide open with astonishment. What fifty wise men had not been able to guess in two hundred years, a fool had found out in two minutes! Now Father Peter began to read as the Fool had instructed him. He read two, three lines, a whole page; and the more he read, the more his countenance lifted up, his eyes beamed, the ascetic hardness of his features melted under the glow of an indescribable fire; he began to pound on the table with his right hand.

"See, see!" cried the Fool, "The monk is drunk with his own wine."

At this the monk sprang up and closed the book.

"This book does not drive away the Devil, it summons him."

"Didn't I tell you I knew how to drink your wine? Now drink mine." And he poured the beaker full and reached it to the monk. Oh, how well Father Peter had once known this fiery drink, when he was not a slave of slaves, but leader of the knights; then no wine was too strong for him; he could drink on a wager with German or Polish cavaliers; but for two years his lips had not touched wine. Wine is the foam of that fiery stream that flows toward Hell. As thick as fish in the river, large and small, so thick are sins, large and small in the wine. There must have been in the book some kind of hidden fire, for as soon as the monk had let one page of it steal into his soul, the torments of a burning thirst were manifest in his countenance.

"Pass me your mug." His hand still trembled as he took the mug. At first his dry lips just sipped the wine; it could not have been especially good; but after two years of abstinence, the monk experienced a magic effect, and the wine exhilarated him as if he tasted it for the first time in his life. He sank back into his armchair, and in his upturned face were mirrored visions of ecstasy. His far-gazing eyes beamed, and on his half-opened lips trembled a smile. Where might his soul be wandering now? Involuntarily his hand reached for the book and opened its covers.

"Oh, woe, woe! Dromo the Devil is here! oh, woe, he will throw me into the fire!" So screamed the restless, dreaming boy, tossing on his couch, with his head hanging off.

The monk was roused, and shuddered, then ran to the boy, raised him, laid him back on his pillow and quieted him with caressing words:

"Don't be afraid, little one, I am here beside you." The child stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"Are you my father?"

"Yes, your spiritual father."

"My father, whom the Devil carried off to Hell? That's what my mother said. Leave me, leave me! I will not go with you. Your hand is fire, and your fingers burn me."

And yet the monk's hand was as cold as ice, as he stroked the child's silken hair. By the bed stood a silver pitcher with a small gold cup: the boy raised it to his lips and at once became quiet, as the terrifying visions vanished. He wound both arms around the neck of the monk and whispered to him, while still under the spell of the dream:

"Beautiful Knight, brave Knight! When you lift my mother into the saddle with you, you'll take me with you, won't you, my handsome Knight, my golden, diamond hero!" With that he fell into a gentle sleep.

"Just see what a good nurse you would make," said the Fool to his friend, "Sometimes I have to spend a good half-hour rubbing his feet and singing to him, and he is asleep at once. Have another mugful?"

"I don't like your wine."

"It's true you ought to drink yours, not mine." Father Peter saw with horror that the large book was open again. He thought it was magic.

"Did you touch this book?" he asked the Fool.

"No, not if you were to give me this castle, and its handsome mistress with it, would I open that book; it opened itself."

The red and blue letters were oh, so enticing! It was no sealed secret now that they contained; for they were all familiar. The monk leaned back in his chair and read the leaves of the secret writing until he had read them to the end. And the farther he read, the more intense grew that expression of unquenchable thirst, like that of a sick man who dreams that he is in a desert and longs for a cataract to drink. Every leaf of the book was a new catastrophe, the whole one unbroken delirium; he did not look up until he had finished the last line of the last page. Then he called to the Fool: "Bring me a whole bucket of wine."

The morning sun, which streamed in through the painted window, found them both in the same place; the Fool was under the table: the monk sat before his book, his head on his hands, his eyes wide open:—he did not read, he did not sleep, but yet he dreamed.

In YAW DEREVOCSID EHT was no cabalistic writing. The writer at the very first gave his reasons for employing this device. He had chosen the Arabic letters so that all would try to read it from right to left, and so fail to discover its meaning. In case it occurred to anybody to read it from left to right, still, as the people of that vicinity rarely knew more than Hungarian, no meaning would appear. In case anybody understood English, it was hardly probable the Arabic text would be familiar too. Only by rare chance could this mysterious book be deciphered. What it contained was the description of a secret passage or tunnel that led from the Madocsany Castle to the turreted walls of Mitosin. Midway was the river Waag, which was here quite wide, but the tunnel passed under the river bed, thus anticipating the Thames tunnel by about four hundred years. If any one shakes his head at this, and begins to doubt that our story is true, we will point out to such a doubter the secret way that leads from a certain castle to a distant village, a veritable catacomb which in a straight line would be fully a mile long, a work of the Hussites. The vaulted passage-way is covered with mould, from which in one place shines out two memorial tablets; one of stone bears the symbol of the cooper's trade, as peculiar to the Hussite monks as the trowel and the triangle to the Freemasons. In the stone vaulting, above is seen a goose, the Hussite symbol; what purpose this tunnel served the Hussites is yet to be discovered; but the object for which the Madocsany-Mitosin tunnel was made, was clearly set forth in this YAW DEREVOCSID EHT. Both castles belonged to Czech robbers and bandits in the days when the Hungarian regent, John Hunyadi, with all the military forces of the land, wore himself out trying to drive back the monstrous host of the Turkish Sultan. He who fights with a bear has no time to brush wasps from his face. The Czech could ravage the country at pleasure, and when sometimes bands of noblemen, led by Hungarian Counts, rose up against them to take vengeance for their plundering and reckless deeds, suddenly every trace of the pursued would be lost. The larger robber-hordes would withdraw to their strongholds and defy every attack; the lesser ones, led by impecunious noblemen, left their drawbridges down before the pursuing bands, and let them seek at will what they so eagerly pursued. The enemy searched everywhere, in every corner, cellar, loft, chapel, and crypt; and when they could find nothing more, still lingered on, days and weeks, and then cleared out the storehouses, and withdrew in unsatisfied rage. The entire robber-band meantime, with all their stolen wealth and beautiful Slavic maidens, passed down into this secret tunnel, and made their way to the other castle. And the freebooters who guarded the Waag was ready to swear that not one of them had passed over the river. It was true; they had gone under. But once Mathias Corvinus ordered the two castles attacked at one and the same time; the robbers fled first from Mitosin through the tunnel, only to find themselves surrounded in Madocsany. It was at this time that the monk wrote YAW DEREVOCSID EHT. He described in detail to whom the two castles belonged, and where the entrances and exits of the tunnel were. The book was intended to be a guide to the treasure which the robbers had concealed in a chamber in the tunnel. Every point of the chamber was clearly defined, all the small bags of gold and silver coin were numbered, there

were also given names of human beings, or beautiful women as precious as jewels; the name of each individual was given, and the families were enumerated from which they had been stolen. A description was set down of the coat, cap, and even the finger-rings that each one wore; who were of the Catholic, and who of the Lutheran faith. If any one ten or twenty years later should discover them in the subterranean dungeon, where, together with the stolen treasure, they had been hidden away, he would know at once in which consecrated ground to bury each one, what name to inscribe on each cross, what prayer to have said for each soul's weal. The monk had faithfully cared for all, and left the book in the archives of the convent. What happened to the robbers, the chronicles do not tell: probably the same that happened to the bandits of Dzuela. In a night attack, they were cut down by the royal troops and any who were taken alive were at once hung. The victors probably carried off enough gold with them so that they were satisfied no more remained. The two entrances of the tunnel were so well concealed, that six generations followed each other in both castles without anybody's having a suspicion of the common mystery that bound them. The YAW DEREVOCSID EHT, said everybody who looked at the writing. But no one understood the words until they came to Father Peter.

CHAPTER V.

THE LORDS OF MITOSIN.

Opposite the Madocsany Castle gleams forth the Mitosin. Its four towers are covered with tin, and when the setting sun shines on them, all four blaze like sheaves of fire. They are round and dome-topped in Russian style. There is still a fifth tower that would gladly show itself above the silver poplars; this one runs up into a spire and cross, while the others end in a star. What the tower with the cross could find inside the inclosure of the Mitosin Castle, where neither its former lords, the Hussite Knights, nor its present lord, a Lutheran magnate, were of the Catholic faith—this is explained by a curious history that one can learn piecemeal; here and there a fragment is kept back, and only at the very close is the whole truth known. Now one can fully believe that the little church was built in honor of Saint Anthony, though in reality a Hussite church. The purpose of this was to conceal from the Count Von Treuesin, or from Count Von Tipsen, that the builders were Hussites, by pointing to the church with its cross and picture as Roman Catholic. The present lord of the castle, Grazian Likovay, had inherited his estate from his mother, Susanna Szuhoy, a zealous Catholic, who had left this to her son on condition that the church of Mitosin Castle should always be maintained in its present condition: and a legacy had been deposited with the neighboring Dean of Tepla, to insure the reading of mass once a week in this church, whether there was anybody present or not. The lord of the castle was enjoined to maintain the church in good condition, not to coin its bell into counterfeit money, and to allow the sacristan of Tepla to ring the bell at the customary hours; furthermore, he was not to appropriate the church to the Lutherans. If he opposed these conditions, Mitosin with all its appurtenances, was to go to the public treasury. Had the pious lady ever seen the interior of this church, she would not have left this legacy, which was of no use whatever; for while there was a bell in the tower, there was no rope; and there was neither ladder, stairs, nor any other way of reaching the bell. And even if it had been rung by the hour, no honest Christian would have entered the church, on account of the altar picture. Whoever made that had not taken into consideration the temper of these people, or else had purposely set it aside. From an artistic point of view, the picture was a masterpiece. It represented the Temptation of Saint Anthony in the Wilderness, and had been painted by an Italian master.

The ascetic was the true ideal of a holy hermit who withstands all the temptations and seductions of Hell; yet the people of this vicinity could not enjoy the monsters from Hell in such frightful forms as can be conjured up only in the fancy of a melancholy painter. But apart from these terrifying monsters, the temptress, in whose form Satan surprises the pious hermit, had been painted with such striking boldness that at the first sight of the same from the threshold of the door, every good Christian would turn and run. Such may pass in Italy, but in our mountainous highland it is too cold for such a garb, so that even the priest himself took no pleasure in reading the liturgy in the presence of such an altar-picture. If, however, in spite of everything, any one could take pleasure in saying his prayers in this church, if an innocent soul could be found that took exceptions to nothing, that saw only what was godly in this church, and was not conscious of the painted devil, either in the form of a monster or of a beautiful woman; for any such provision was made.

Now you must know that there was just such an innocent creature in Mitosin Castle. The Lord's daughter, Magdalene, was the only Papist in the whole house, yes, in the whole village. According to the Hungarian laws, the children of a Protestant father and a Papist mother were divided for the Heavenly Kingdom as follows,—the sons followed the religion of their father, and the daughters of their mother. If anybody made objections, a terrible storm fell upon his head. The Lord of Mitosin was a stiff-necked Protestant, who persecuted priest and monk in every possible way. He would not allow his daughter to bring a Catholic prayer-book or a rosary into the house. If anybody wished to pray, he could do it in the church; it was not far away. From the rear gate of the castle straight to the church ran a beautiful path bordered by poplars a hundred years old; only a beautiful grove separated church from castle; and yet the way from the castle door to the church door was so luxuriantly overgrown with grass that it could have been mown;

for the space between church and castle was the bear-den.

Grazian Likovay owned two great overgrown bears, for which he had had pits dug in the garden, and there they could roam freely; their growls came up over the walls. Now you can understand why the way to the church was grown with grass,—no one would go to church who did not want to meet those monsters. When the watchman of the tower blew his evening horn, a window on the balcony would open, and a whistle blow from within, then would come forth with much noise the two bears. The thicket of the poplar-grove opened before them as they made their way straight through; a hoarse, rasping voice would call them by name, and some one would throw a bloody bone from the window; as soon as they had finished that, would follow a whole quarter of mutton; the two bears were twins, a division of the meat must be made, and so there would be a quarrel. When all had been devoured, neither one felt that he had had his share, and so they kept on quarrelling the whole night through; but the window was closed, and garden, church and beasts left to themselves.

Gradually as darkness fell, the nightly mists rose from the river; no light was to be seen, yet night after night a girl's figure slipped out by the door leading into the garden, and glided along like the vision of a dream. A long white mantle covered her slender form, and a black veil was over her head; she looked about, shuddered and stepped out into the darkness; she came alone without a lantern; her step did not betray her, for the grass was thick, but her white robe showed her figure. With a loud growl, both black monsters plunged at her, and their white teeth and blazing eyes shone out of the thicket. The maiden uttered no cry, but right and left threw something from her apron; it was honey-cakes, tid-bits for the bears. With a joyous growl they fell upon their honey-cakes; meanwhile the maiden slipped away over the grass to the church door, and before the beasts could plunge after her, she had closed the door behind her. The bears now began to strike against the heavy iron-bound door with their paws; they climbed up the posts and snuffled and finally dropped down, one on one side, the other on the other, licking their paws and listening for every rustle that came from the church.

What could this white vision do in the church in the darkness, alone, and, at night?

Herr Grazian had received many guests to-day. It was a memorial with him; the anniversary of the death of his only son, Casimir. This was the third anniversary. At the funeral feast, Grazian had informed his good friends, boon companions, clergy, scholars, singers, and buffoons, that every year this festival of mourning would be celebrated in Mitošin Castle, just as when the bier still stood in the hall, and the comrades came one by one to offer the dead a beaker and then drink the same to his happy resurrection; for mourning mingles in Hungary's rejoicings, so that one may mourn joyously.

"Now you can go pray for the soul of your brother," growled Grazian to Magdalene, as he closed the window after feeding the bears.

He was tall and broad-shouldered, and limped with the gout; his face was copper-colored, and his eyes were dark set, with bloated lids, and eyebrows bushy as his beard; his head was close shaven behind in Turkish fashion, and he wore a cap night and day, and over his brow hung a braided lock of hair. The hide of his bull-neck rose above his stiff collar; his fat chin covered his neckerchief, tied in a knot; he wore his cloak thrown over his shoulders, and his shirt-sleeves fastened at the wrist. He cared little for outward appearance. He wanted his clasps of gold, but it did not matter if the stuff did shine with grease, or the trimming was moth-eaten. From his broad Turkish girdle no sword hung, but behind was stuck a battle hammer, and above his boot-tops appeared a knife-hilt, studded with turquoises. In all his motions, there was an arrogance that brooked no contradiction, and expressed an immoderate love of fighting. Whoever met him was in peril, since a mere glance at his face was enough to give offence,—speaking was entirely out of the question; what another said, he neither listened to, nor answered; what he himself said, he said only for himself; if he spoke directly to any one, it was a command to which it was not customary to reply, as that provoked a blow from his crooked stick.

"Go, child, go to church," he said to himself, and limped away.

Yet there was one who heard him; his inseparable companion, Master Mathias; the strong body needed the support of somebody's shoulder, and the soul too needed a support: it was not so large as the body, but found room in a very small space, and could not fill this great form. Master Mathias had to think for his lord, in whose soul no smallest thought originated, only instinct roused him, and passion swept him along.

Master Mathias directed the memorial feast. He assembled the guests appropriate for such an occasion; carousers, buffoons, mendicants, and travelling scholars, persecuted clergy, beggarly nobility, outlaws, who carried their house on their back and their bread in the folds of their cloak, Slavic fiddlers and Polish Jews all together; all that seemed ready to celebrate the day of mourning in eating and drinking and outdoing one another in follies. Knife, fork and spoon each guest brought with him in his boot. Three long tables were spread in the vaulted halls, with places for two hundred guests. There were tin plates for the food, wooden pitchers for the beer, tin cups for the wine, and narrow-throated flasks for the brandy, which was a great delicacy, and only the masters could drink it. At the end of the carouse went around the "Bratina," the glass that nobody must set down, and that every one must drain to the bottom. Then, too, there must be some entertainment for the revellers; the bagpiper begins it with a gay song to dispel care; not only piping, but dancing at the same time; then follow two tall students, barefooted in

outgrown clothes, with unkempt, disordered hair; these begin to sing, at first pious Latin songs of past events, and of the differences between Heaven and Hell; the guests give them beer, wine, and mead, and they begin to sing more wantonly, mixing Slavic and Hungarian with their Latin; the entire company join in; only the Lord of the Castle mutters to himself, "He would have understood these songs best of any of them; it was he who taught these fellows." "He" was the son, whose funeral feast they were now celebrating.

The scholars were almost ready to drop with drinking, when Master Mathias sent for three Galician Jews, who were shoved into the hall, bound together by their forelocks, their beards sprinkled with pepper. Whenever one of them sneezed violently, and so jerked the heads of the other two, everybody laughed, but the master, whose eyes filled with tears. "In this too, he was master, he knew how to joke with the Jews; ah, he was a wit!" So the feast went on; it was already midnight, and the guests began to sing alone and to tumble against one another; then they brought in the final cup which each one was to empty at a single draught. There was great laughter, for its capacity was beyond any of them. The Lord again murmured to himself; "Ah, worthless set! He could out-drink them all. Nobody knows how, now."

Then at the drinking of this last cup, all the guests recalled some incident of the dead, and toasts were given, one as foolish as another. "All good for nothing. He was the only one who knew how to drink to the dead. The departed souls must have roared with laughter when they heard him. Sit down there, you can't come up to him." The sport ended with a wrestling match. Two or three of the befuddled lords strove together; the stronger was to throw the other under the table; but there was one martial youth whom all together could not drive out of his corner. "Oh, if he were only here; he would master you! He was not afraid of any two! He could even knock my arm down. How many times I've seen him drive out the whole company with a loaded cane." When the scuffling became general, pitchers and plates flew, tables and chairs were overturned, benches broken, canes whizzed through the air, and men with bruised heads groaned and swore; then suddenly a door opened, and in came the procession.

In front, disguised as a woman, came Bajozzo, and behind him a company in monks' cowls, and priestly garb, and all began to sing the familiar song of mockery, which scoffs at monks, imitates the litany of the pilgrim, and ends with a wild dance. That rouses those of the drunken company who can still stand up to join the pilgrims and follow on, through the halls and corridors of the castle, and out of doors, that the people may enjoy the sport. In the great banquet hall remain only those entirely overcome by drunkenness, or by blows, who lie stretched out on the floor; one and another tries to solve the problem how a four-footed beast can stand on two feet, and failing in his experiment, returns to all four. Only the House-Lord sits quietly in his place, with his flask of Polish brandy before him; strong as it was, it was none too strong for him. He gazed fixedly into the glowing wicks of burned-out candles, and let fall sentences that no one heeded. "How many jokes he knew! Even when I scolded him, he would make me laugh. I could not do anything with him, he was so strong. If I tried to beat him, he beat me.—If I wouldn't give him money, he would catch my Jews on the street, and take it from them.—He had a great mind!—He might have been a candidate for the Palatinate—He might have lived to be a hundred years old—He was only twenty-five—and three, that makes twenty-eight,—true, but those three don't count—for he has been dead since then—but why is he dead? because his horse made a mis-step in battle, otherwise he would have killed the other man—is that justice?—A fine world this where the four feet of a horse are the judge—that donkey of a priest says he will turn to dust—my son, dust! It's a lie.—More likely it'll be gold—to-morrow I'll have his coffin opened.—There he lies in the vault of a papist church.—What's that? What did they put him there for? Because he wanted it—he wanted it, himself.—So he could torment the saints after his death—I wonder if he does!—I wonder if he goes and hits Saint Anthony in the nose—I wonder if he gets up in the ghostly hours to hit the bell—What's that!—Is that the sound of a bell? Who heard it?—Anybody else?—Here, Master Mathias, where are you? Did you hear anything?" Nobody answered. The sleeping and drunken snored, the carousers had quartered themselves in the cellar and begun drinking afresh. In the great banquet hall, only the House-Lord was still awake, and he thought that he was dreaming.

The little bell in the church tower rang! Grazian sprang out of his arm-chair—seized his cane—steadying himself against the wall, he made his way out to the north tower, from which he could get a clear view of the church. The moon, just ready to set, lighted up the tower windows, and one could still see the bell swaying back and forth; it had stopped ringing, but the reverberation still trembled in the air.

"What's that? Who's there?" stammered Grazian, and leaned far out of the window. "Stop that noise down there, so I can hear." Another instant, and he could see, too. One of the long Gothic windows of the church suddenly blazed with light. "See there! What's that!" Against the bright window stood out the shadows of human figures. They vanished, appeared again and raised their hands. Grazian gathered all his strength that he might shout in the fulness of his rage at the ghosts—"Who are you? Away with you!" He fell, and the next morning was found stretched out before the open window: it was with difficulty they could bring him back to life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICTURE OF SAINT ANTHONY.

Magdalene knelt in prayer at the tomb of her brother. She too celebrated the anniversary of this sad day, when the blood of her beloved brother had been shed, and shed on her account. At one blow, she had lost brother and betrothed; for the hand that killed her brother could not lead her to the marriage altar, and yet both brother and betrothed had loved her. For this twofold love she had exchanged her father's hatred, for the father saw in his daughter only the murderer of his son. And what was the maiden's prayer? Both were dead, and prayer could not bring them back. Her happiness for this world was over, and she had no suspicion of the hand that had destroyed it.

Deep stillness reigned throughout the church. Any other maiden would have been afraid to kneel here. The moon shone through the window, and lighted up the carving on the altar, the figure of the martyr, that bound to a tree and pierced through with arrows, writhed in his pain; lighted up, too, the dragon trampled under foot by the victorious archangel, the heavy candelabra, with their wax candles burned down, and finally the altar picture itself, with the figure of the Saint, with the monsters and the seductive woman. The moonlight crept in farther, and lighted up the marble slab under which her brother rested—a prostrate figure, with hands folded on the breast. In the tower hooted the owls, and the death-bird screamed. In the garden outside, the two bears growled to show that they were still on watch. From the castle hall, from time to time, sounded the noise of the drunken revellers. Magdalene would have gladly entered a convent, where her broken heart could have found most peace, but her father would not listen to it. He wanted to marry her, but no suitor came; the young nobility shunned the castle, they pitied the maiden for her sad fate, but they shrunk before the evil nature of her father. The mourning bride and raging father-in-law alike repelled them, and the more mournful the maiden, the more raging became Grazian Likovay. Amid all terrors for the maiden, the most frightful were these wild banquets. It was from these that she sought refuge in the darkness of the church. She knew well that such a revel was nothing but a wild chorus of blasphemy. A hundred throats at once derided Heaven, the future state, and the departed souls,—and this was the way in which the dead brother's memory was celebrated. She tried with her prayers to crowd out the drunken yells on their upward path; while the revellers wandered to the cellars, and their wild cries sounded on the air as if they came from the very bowels of the earth. The maiden trembled as if in fever. The moonlight had left the windows; the church now lay in darkness: only high up on the tower the moon yet shone on the lonely bell. She gazed upwards. Suddenly it seemed to her as if the bell were in motion. Was it an hallucination? Did her dream make visions so real? The bell rang! Then it tolled as for the welfare of a dying soul. And yet the bell had no rope, and there was no one to pull it if it had. In her astonishment new marvels followed. The darkness in the church began to give way to a twilight; 'twas the twilight that comes in dreams. The altar picture shone; around the brow of the saint gleamed an aureole, while the form of the seductive woman grew black. Before this marvel, the maiden sank trembling on her knees. "O God, my Lord!" she murmured. The last notes of the bell were dying away, and at the same moment dropped down with a rolling sound the picture of Saint Anthony of Padua with all its terrifying adjuncts, and in the space thus left vacant stood a living figure. Again it was Anthony of Padua in monk's cowl, barefooted, with tonsured head, a lighted torch in his hand. The maiden in terror clasped both hands to her breast. Did this vision bring death for her? Would that it might be so! The living figure stepped down from the frame of the altar picture, and striding over books and stools came nearer. With a gentle cry of terror the maiden sprang up, stretched out both hands in entreaty, and turned away her face. She heard her name, "Magdalene." Everything swam around her,—she fell in a swoon to the ground. When she recovered consciousness, she saw those eyes beaming upon her, whose glow was more wonderful than that of the sun. Perhaps dreams come in a swoon. Dreams are deceivers; who knows how many worlds her soul had wandered through in this short dream, how many eternities she had lived through; she feared the phantom no more. With his name on her lips she awoke, "Tihamer." To her he was always only "Tihamer." "Have you come down from Heaven to me?" The young monk shook his head sadly. He might with assurance have said that he came down from the realms of the dead, so pallid was his countenance, so cold his hands. The wax candle that he had brought with him now stood in a candlestick on the altar and lighted up their faces. The young man spoke in a subdued and gentle voice. "Be not astounded, I am no marvel, nor ghost, nor spirit from the other world. I am a living, miserable man. The rumor of my death was false. It was not my head that the Turks cut off in prison, but my servant's, who had changed clothes with me."

"And this dress of yours?" whispered Magdalene, touching his rough monk's cowl.

"This is my mourning garb for you, and for the whole world lost to me. My name is Father Peter. I belong to the order of Jesuits. No longer your beloved and betrothed—no longer the hope of your future, nor your support in misfortune. No longer your defender against men, but only your mediator between Heaven and earth, Father Peter."

The maiden knelt before him and fervidly kissed his hand.

"Father!"

The youth sighed deeply.

"You could not belong to me, so I give you to the Lord, you could not be my bride, so you shall be Heaven's bride. I am come to make smooth the way, to prepare the way whither you long to go."

"To a convent? Then you know! Is it true, you have talked with me in my dreams?"

"Not in your dreams. I will not deceive you. Sound reason has brought me to the knowledge that after this staggering blow that has fallen on your heart, you must long to enter a convent. Your father will not allow it; he intends to marry you to the Pole Berezowsky."

"I do not know him at all."

"I know him; this bridegroom intended for you is an ugly decrepit old drunkard, who has already buried six wives, and furthermore is a Socinian."

"What! deny his God!"

"Denies the Trinity, believes Christ only a good man, and the Holy Ghost only a white dove; nothing more."

"But you will free me from him, won't you?" entreated the maiden, clasping the young man's knees.

"With your assent."

"How could you get here? Whence did you come?"

"Truly, I have taken my way through the lower regions to come to you; a long underground passage, that men worse than the devil planned for the destruction of mankind, and that is still filled with evidences of their deeds of terror. It is frightful to wander there. The secret of this hidden way, I learned from an old yellowed book, which had made ten wise men fools, and whose secret was finally revealed by a Fool. This book too was a work of the Devil, but the real Hell and the genuine Devil, Fate has shown me in another form. The inexorable rules of our order compel me to serve as instructor and confessor in the house of that woman, who, in my opinion, is worse than Belial and all his demons. I am at the castle of the Lady of Madocsany."

The maiden put her hand on her heart and caught her breath.

"This is my Hell and my Devil; day after day to see the woman whom I have hated since our first acquaintance. Offensive is the woman, however beautiful she may be, who is ever eager to disclose to a man the feelings of her heart, which ought to be a secret to divine, a prize to win, a treasure to guard for their possessor. Still more ought this woman to have concealed her secret, for every one of her thoughts was inspired by sin; her husband still lived. How she became a widow was a burden on her conscience. How she treated me—may she answer for it to God! Her secrets told in confession rest in my breast under the seal of the sacrament. I must in God's name absolve her from sins that my human heart cannot forgive. Day after day must I look upon that face whose accursed smile destroyed our fortunes. I must lend an ear to her diabolical words of enticement, which she whispers to me under the mantle of confession. Is not that worse than Hell?"

The maiden pressed his hand, and said in soothing tones, "You are right; yours is the greater suffering. I will not complain."

"Your sufferings too are well known to me. This demon entertains me daily with bad news about you. She knows everything that happens in your house, and she takes special delight when she can distress me with such tales. But let us not waste our time in complaining. We must part. I have a long way to go underground and must arrive while it is still dark, so no one can mark the entrance by which I go. Answer me one question. Do you wish to go into a convent?"

"It is my one wish."

"It shall be fulfilled. I must first tell your decision to the Abbess of a convent, so that when I take you away through the underground passage to the Madocsany Castle, a nun may be waiting for you there with a closed carriage. Great prudence and careful preparations are necessary. We must agree upon the day for meeting here again."

"Next Sunday."

"Well, then, any Sunday after midnight. I cannot get away earlier, for it is so late before the spoiled child who is entrusted to my care falls asleep, and the Fool who keeps vigils with me becomes drunk."

"But tell me," asked the maiden, "How could you guess that you would find me here at this hour? Did vision tell you?"

"Even if I deceive the whole world, I will tell you only the truth. I have had no visions; neither ecstasy nor second-sight revealed this to me. I had certainty. To-day is the anniversary of your brother's death, and to-night it is celebrated in your castle with a carouse. You could not remain in the house, where every nook and corner was filled with their disgusting gluttony. Here only, could you find protection—at your brother's grave, where you could pray through the frightful night. You must pray, first for the soul of your brother, and then for his murderer's—the whole litany from beginning to end. Finally, I decided that if I did not find you here, I would pass through the church door into the castle. Many buffoons are there now, disguised in monk's cowl, and it would not have been difficult for me to join them and look for you."

The young man saw a look of terror on Magdalene's face, and she seized him by the hand.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

She said nothing; she only thought what if her beloved had been torn to pieces by the bears in his attempt to pass to the castle. But she would not say this to him, lest she waken his fears for her, a weak woman; she must always pass to the church through such perils.

"I was thinking," she said, with a constrained, distressed smile, "what if you had found the door locked when you tried to go out of the church?"

"I knew for a fact that the door of the church is never locked. Your father has given orders that it shall always remain open. Every corner of this church has its sad history, but none more sad than the history of the door."

"You know it?"

"I heard it from the tormentor of my soul. It will be better for you not to know it; you have enough in your misfortune."

"I beg of you, tell me this story. The knowledge that another has suffered still more gives me consolation. Who was it?"

"Your older sister, Sophie."

"I remember her; she was tall and beautiful, with large dark eyes. How often I stroked her beautiful rosy cheeks, when she took me in her lap, for I was still a child. And then I remember when they laid her in her coffin, I stroked her cheeks again, but they were marble-white and cold."

"There she rests," said the young man, pointing to the wall, where two marble tablets were in sight, one large, one small; on one was a large cross, on the other a small one; then the date. On the smaller tablet one year more than on the larger, and that was all the inscription.

"Why is there neither name nor inscription?" asked Magdalene, stunned.

"There are two of them, mother and child."

"And why are their names not on the tablets?"

"They had no names."

"I do not understand you."

"You ought not to. It is a sad story. They too loved one another, more passionately than we. They too suffered, still more than we. They too were disturbed by your father in their love. Shame was to him preferable to a son-in-law. His daughter died the day her child was born, and was buried here; a year later the child followed; and when they brought her here to bury her beside her mother and opened the church door, your father stumbled over the body of his daughter; the unhappy girl had been buried in a trance, had wakened, struggled to the church door, found it locked, and so perished pitifully at its threshold."

"Frightful!" stammered the maiden, shuddering, and glancing with a look of terror at the two tablets.

"That is why there are no names inscribed. Since then, Grazian Likovay never has this church door locked."

"Let us hurry away from here," said the maiden, trembling. "Will you come here next Sunday about midnight?"

"I will come; but you must hurry away now."

They parted with a pressure of the hand.

Father Peter had to pass through the hiding-place behind the altar picture, which with all its demons resumed its place. For some time the face of Saint Anthony was surrounded with a halo of light from the torch of the departing monk. The small bell in the tower rang again, for it was connected by hidden clock-work with the secret passage-way. Formerly, when the castle had been held by the Hussites, this bell rung, by its secret clock-work, had given warning when any one was approaching from Madocsany. When the bell stopped ringing, the altar picture was again in darkness. It was two minutes past midnight; outside the cock crowed. The maiden, as she went toward the church door, looked timidly before and behind to see if her sister Sophie were present; outside a still greater terror waited. One bear lay across the threshold asleep. She needed only to summon all her courage and climb over him; but the other was awake, grimly gnawing a bone that he could not crush in his teeth. "Help me, God," sighed the maiden, and ran past the creature, throwing her honey-cakes as she went. The wild beasts let her pass unharmed, but it would have been better for her had they torn her to pieces, then would she have been a beautiful martyr and saint in Paradise.

CHAPTER VII.

VENUS AND HER SON.

Idalia was the baptismal name of the Lady of Madocsany; her other name was Venus. This name is often found in calendars even at the present day, and was quite customary in this part of the country. With this name at her baptism, a fatal ban was pronounced upon her. The Lady did not know that she had inherited not only the beauty of the goddess, but also her nature too. When she loved, she loved with mad passion, and when she ceased to love, she hated in the same way, and her hate was deadly. "Venus armicida." Her passion never cooled. It only changed its flame, but always burned in one way or another. She had married early the man of her choice, a handsome hero when he married her, a broken-down old man when he left her a widow, though the number of years between was only eight. It was said he had drunk himself to death. Perhaps there was a magic drink mingled with his wine.

Idalia had so thrown herself into the Olympic life her name justified that she had her little son baptized Cupid. The poor Slavic priest was made to believe that this was only the childish name for Cupa, who was known to be a national saint and martyr. In one house lived Venus and Cupid. The lady cherished her son with truly animal love; everything was allowed him. She never let him out of her sight even in her love adventures. The child could remember several such instances when they had galloped off three in the saddle,—the knight, the child, and the mother. Lady Idalia had run away from her husband, but every time had cajoled her way back. Tihamer Csorbai was the last object of her passion, and because this remained unanswered, she had been most furious. She destroyed every hindrance between the two. Blood must flow to separate Tihamer from his first beloved. Idalia's husband must sink into his grave that Tihamer might be more closely united to her, and now the whole plan had been made futile; she had found Tihamer again, but as Father Peter. The man she had adored was now a permanent guest within her house, but farther from her than ever before. Not earthly hands, but heavenly fields, separated them; and how many projects of insurrection did her heated brain plan against hated Heaven. In the warm, starlit nights of summer, from the room of the monk below, rang forth the mournful psalms with which he stormed Heaven. At the same time, the lady sat in her balcony and struck her harp and sang enticing songs, telling all the secrets of a passion-torn soul. The song was intended for a confession of love. Did Father Peter hear? He must have heard them. Is every feeling in his heart turned to stone that he cannot feel nor awake?

"Sit down on the edge of my bed, Father Peter," whispered the child, uneasily tossing about on his sleepless couch "I have something to say to you. Either the devils or the good spirits brought you here."

"Why do you say that, my child?"

"Before you came, my mother was very fond of me; she always called me, 'my diamond,' 'my ruby,' 'my saint,' 'my little dove,' or 'my little angel.' When she took me in her lap, she kissed me to the very finger tips; whatever I asked her for, she gave me at once, or if she did not, I pulled her hair, and then she would laugh and kiss me again. She never looked cross at me, but now that you are here, I am of no further value to her. I am no more her 'diamond' or 'golden treasure;' when she looks at me, she makes such a face that I have to run away. If I ask my prettiest for something, she puts out her tongue at me. If I make the smallest mistake, she whips me with rods and threatens me with the lash. If I try to kiss her, she spits like a cat. This makes me think that the devils brought you here."

The monk answered nothing, but stroked the boy's head with his hands, and the child prattled on.

"But when I stop to think how good you are to me, that you won't let my mother abuse me, that you make excuses for me when she scolds me, that you take the lash right out of her hand; when I make a mistake, you don't tell her anything about it; when she gets angry with me, you soothe her with gentle words; that you never hurt me, never get angry at me, always entreat me kindly, and warn me gently; then I think it must be the good spirits brought you to this house."

The monk took the boy's cold hands in his and warmed them.

"Now, day before yesterday, I begged her so prettily to take me up in her lap, because my head hurt me very badly, and if she would just kiss it once the pain would go right away, she scolded me for it. She said my head pained me because I ate so many unripe peaches and honeycakes, and she took away the honeycake that you brought me,—would not let me taste it even, but threw it to the little dog Joli,—how could I help crying? That made her very angry, and she made a face at me like those she makes at her maid when she pulls her hair, or at the haiduk when he pours the sauce over her gown; and when I knelt before her, begging her not to be angry, she took a large buckle out of her cap and threatened me with it, and then she hissed at me through her teeth, 'You bastard! Oh, if you were not in the world!' I was afraid she would murder me. I begged her to put that cruel thing back into her hair. 'You'd better pray God, or you'll go the way of the Cseiteburg children. Go, get the Fool to tell you why the dead weep nights in the Cseiteburg.' So to-night, when I went to bed, while you were singing psalms in the next room, I begged the Fool to tell me the story of the Cseiteburg children, until he finally consented, and told me."

The child still trembled under the impression of the story, and his teeth chattered.

"Now come close to me, so that nobody can hear. I don't dare say it out loud. Now then! Once

upon a time, there lived in the Cseiteburg a beautiful lady, a widow who had two little children just my age, twins that came into the world together, and always played together. The beautiful lady fell in love with a handsome knight who came often to the castle, and whom she wished to marry. Once the knight said to her, he would like to marry her if there were not 'four eyes in the way.' The beautiful woman thought he must mean the four eyes of her two children, and that he would not marry her because there were these two children of her first marriage. So she called Mistress Dorko, the old nurse of the children, and said to her 'Take these two pins,' and with that she drew two long gold pins out of her cap, 'and go lead the children out to play in the forest; when they have played enough, and grow weary, put them to sleep in your lap and thrust these long pins through their temples. The handsome knight shall not say that there are "four eyes in the way" of our love.' The bad old Dorko did as her lady commanded. She took the two little boys out into the wood to play, waited until they had grown tired, then took them in her lap and told them about the fairy Helen until they fell asleep: then she drew out both the big pins and stuck one of them through the head of one of the boys. The other boy woke at his cry, and when he saw what old Dorko had done to his brother, he began to cry and beg her not to stick the pin through him. He promised her a cloak with buckles, horses, carriage, and a piece of land, if she would spare him. He promised her the whole of Cseiteburg, as soon as he inherited it. But the wicked nurse could not be moved by his tears and prayers, she pierced the second one through with the big gold pin, and then she left them in the depths of the forest, covered with dry leaves; the cuckoos sounded their funeral knell, and the nightingale sang their death dirge. The same day came the handsome knight to the beautiful lady in the castle. And the beautiful lady said to him, full of joy, "'The four eyes" are no longer in our way, the two children lie out there covered with leaves, the cuckoo has tolled them to the grave, the nightingales have sung for them. Now you can make me your wife.' The handsome knight was beside himself at these words. 'Alas, beautiful lady, beautiful widow! I did not mean "the four eyes" of the children, but our own four eyes were in the way of our love.' And thereupon he fled out of the castle, and never came back again. Since then, the ghosts weep all night long at Cseiteburg. This is true, isn't it, Father Peter?"

"A foolish story, sprung from a Fool's brain. Don't believe it, my little one."

"But I do believe it, for I've seen the beautiful lady myself. Her eyes rolled so wildly, she drew her lips together, she gnashed her teeth, and her hair streamed down her back, and as her cap fell back, she seized the pin in her hand—and I almost felt its point in my temples!"

"Don't think of it any more. Don't give way to your fancies."

The child seized the monk's hand in both of his:

"You won't leave me, will you? You won't let anything happen?"

"Don't be afraid, my son; I will stay with you always, no one shall do you any harm. I will take care of you, and protect you."

"But why do you not love her, then? My two eyes are not in your way. How often have we fled from this house together on horseback, my mother and I with a knight; she never would let me go from her side. And then when we came back in a carriage, she fairly wore me out with her kisses, called me her sweet child, and when we came back to my father, she would hold me out, and I must beg him in his anger not to draw his sword against her. I caressed his cheeks, that he might be cajoled into forgiving. I never failed her, and why is she angry with me? Why? Because you do not love her. Do love her. Throw off your monk's cowl. Marry my mother. Be my real father. Do as she demands. Love her! Love her! Then will she be as sweet as honey, and as beautiful as a fairy. But when she does not love, she is as bitter as gall and as hateful as a witch."

Father Peter quieted the child in his wild imaginations, until he fell asleep again.

The sound of a harp and passionate songs of love floated through the night air. Father Peter left the child's room with agitated feelings, and hurried along the corridors to the balcony where Idalia confided her heart's sorrow to the forest and the stars. The sound of his step aroused the lady from her dreams. She looked at him in surprise as he approached. Father Peter took her by the hand, and drew her into the room. Idalia's heart began to beat violently. She thought that the hand which he now laid on her shoulder would draw her to his breast, until now ice, now melted by the volcanic glow of her love.

"Kneel down," said the priest, "Confess your sin at once."

"What sin? You know all," murmured the woman, while she sank down under the iron pressure of his hand.

"Your past that as yet has no name—what you carry about in your heart—that monster must be stifled while it still exists only as a thought. What is this thought of yours?"

The woman was silent for a time, meditating contradiction and crafty evasion, but at length she yielded and said in a whisper, "I intended to kill my child."

"Cursed be the heart in which such a thought could arise."

"If my heart is the mother of this monster, yours is the father; such devils result when fire and frost come together."

"Are you mindful of God and the future life?"

"Don't speak to me of God or of the future life! When I go there, and see God face to face, I shall say: I am the one—I did it! Hadst Thou given me cold blood, I might have been a frog, but thou gavest me warm blood, and I became a human being. Hadst Thou created me man, I might have been a Cain; Thou hast made me a woman, and I have become an Eve. In this way didst Thou fashion my woman's heart; it was Thou that didst create my passions, that didst make my eye a magnet, that didst give my lips their charm; it is Thou that dost send thoughts to the wakeful, and dreams to the sleeping; and now wilt Thou condemn Thy own creation unheard? If Thou art my Creator, Thou didst create me thus; if Thou art all-knowing, Thou knewest this before."

"Woman, blaspheme not God!"

"Is then truth blasphemy of God? What is my crime,—that I love you? What then are you in the sight of God, that you are surrounded by such enkindling darts? Are you His archangel—His cherub? Turn not away from me; I am not going to reproach you—not you, nor the saints, nor God. It was not Satan taught me all this. I have read the great book that you call Holy Scriptures through from beginning to end. I have tried to find a place in it which counts the love of woman as a sin, but I have found none such. It was only a human being who could hit upon the unnatural thought that there were human beings who could not love. Let the cowl cover the man who could impose such a covering—whose heart dared not beat under it. Is not such an act a sin against God? Is not this the murder of a human being—this slow killing of one in the likeness of God? Does the poisoner do anything worse when he gives his victims the means of passing away slowly? Have not other men discovered the antidote for it? You do not know this perhaps. See! As easy as it is to put on this sable cowl, this shroud for a living body, just so easy is it to strip it off. Do not flee! Stay here—listen to me. I might have a sin to confess. I promise you I will not kill, but I will call back into life a dead man, and that is indeed a sin heavy enough. You are this dead man. I have mourned you hundreds of times. Allow me to call you forth from your cold tomb by my tears. Listen to me. We will go from here right to Transylvania, where the Hungarian belief flourishes. We will go out to the Protestant church. Many are doing it already, you know. A third of the land is Protestant; I am sure they cannot all go to Hell. Nobody can persecute us there. See! I have two iron chests full of treasure; there we can live like lords in luxury and splendor, such as you were accustomed to before you gave over your lands to the Jesuits. We'll snap our fingers at the world. Or, if it pleases you better to be poor and God-fearing, I am willing. I will go with you to the poorest village, where there is a tower with a weather-vane; there you shall become a Calvinist preacher, a rector, or a Levite; I will be your faithful wife; will wash and weave, spin flax, and endure misery; I will become God-fearing, my lips shall forget to scold and curse, and shall learn to sing psalms. If I should become quarrelsome, you may beat me, shut me up, and make me fast, and I will be always faithful to you; only throw aside this cloak of death."

The temptation was strong. When passion and sorrow blend together in one flame, then perhaps the heart of a dead man may withstand. But the youth was protected by his talisman—that other face on the other side of the Waag. The monk's cowl alone would not have protected his heart against these darts; his ascetic vows, the sacred oil, would have been a weak safeguard against the charm of this Circe. But the loving, suffering face of the maid of Mitosin stood between them like Heaven. The sunbeam smites in vain on the summit of the Alps, for this is already in Heaven, and Heaven is cold. Tihamer had left his heart before the altar in Mitosin,—it was not to be found.

"Return, poor sinner," he said with the gentleness of a confessor, "God will pardon your rebellious thoughts, and will set you free from this evil spirit that has possessed you. Learn to pray."

"I will not learn to pray!" cried the woman excitedly. "When you read the liturgy at mass, I always say to myself: It is not true! It is not true! It is not true! When you sing the hymn of praise to the Holy Mother, I murmur to myself, Love me, and not the Virgin Mother; You are my life! you are my death! you are my devil! you are my idol! if you wish to make me blessed, make me blessed here below, and in the future I will be condemned in your stead."

"Then let your condemnation begin here below," said Father Peter, aroused from his monastic calm. "For if it is true that you can love a man to the extent of despising the whole world and renouncing the blessedness of Heaven, then indeed will it be the torments of Hell for you to see the man you love passing daily before you like the vision of one dead, like a ghost in the clear daylight, like a phantom in a living body—to see him, and to say to yourself, 'You put to death this man, you threw this shroud over him, you closed the grave upon him, and neither violence nor prayer nor the magic of Hell can wake him up again!' It was you who killed me. I am your victim. I am the ghost that pursues you. I am your judgment from God!"

Idalia shuddered convulsively as she lay on the ground, and bit her bare arms.

"When I was sent here to you," continued Father Peter, "I begged the Prior to send me into the desert of Arabia among the wild Druses rather than to your house: he left me only one choice, I might go as servant of the Holy Inquisition in Spain, or come here. I made my choice. I preferred to endure torture rather than to torture others. But believe me, he who endures the touch of hot oil does not suffer such torment as I do when your hot breath touches me; and the Spanish boot does not so crush the bones of the victim, as my heart is crushed under your accursed passion; and yet I came here although I knew that you would pursue me with this frightful love of yours: and I shall stay here, although I know that you will very soon torture me to death with your still more frightful hatred. Your house is my torture-chamber—I am here to suffer to the end."

Idalia fell lifeless upon the cold marble.

"May God pardon you," whispered the youth, "I pardon you. May you be able to pardon yourself."

With that he raised her up from the floor, held her firmly with his strong hands by the shoulder, and so compelled her to remain seated and look him in the eye.

"Finally, rest assured that I will accomplish what I was sent here for; your son will I guard, protect, and train to good. Let no one venture to do him any harm. The Fool I shall drive from his side, and shall no longer suffer him to poison the child's dreams with his frightful tales. You have cast him off. I will adopt him; and from this time he shall be my son, and shall never again come near you. I am prepared to have you deal with his spiritual father as you did with his father in the flesh."

With these words, he let go his grasp and withdrew. Idalia stood for some time like a living statue in her white gown, while her flowing hair enveloped her bare arms. Then she shuddered and dragged herself to the wall, like a wild beast fatally shot; there she found a support on which she laid her head—it was cold marble, the base of the statue of her dead husband. The cold stone cooled her, perhaps,—the fever that throbbed in her temples.

Father Peter went back to his lonely quarters, and found the child still resting quietly as he had left him. The child was sleeping sweetly and smiling in his dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BISHOP'S WEDDING.

In those days, it happened in Hungary that a Bishop married: it was such an extraordinary thing since the introduction of celibacy, that we look in vain in all chronicles for its parallel. Emerich Thurzo, Bishop of Neutra, was the one to whom this marvel happened. The story is perpetuated on parchment, in marble, and in the memory of man. In the Hungarian highlands, throughout the length of the Waag valley, the story is still told. Emerich Thurzo was the last scion of a famous old race who had given the country many generals and palatines. The family estates were equal to a small kingdom. With the Bishop, the mighty family might have died out, but this was regarded such a calamity that the Pope came to the rescue and issued a bull in due form; not a simple brief under the fisherman's ring, the customary seal for a brief, but a document with the seal hanging which shows the crest of the papacy, for this was an act of indulgence; this seal, moreover, was attached by a red and gold silken cord. By virtue of this bull, Bishop Thurzo was freed from the duty of celibacy; he was permitted to marry and to become Lutheran in his relations to his wife, while he held all his Catholic offices and benefices. Chronicle and tradition record that the Bishop made royal use of this dispensation; through a whole year continued the festivities of his marriage with the beautiful Christina Nyary. One can still see the great hall at Bittse which the Bishop had built for the celebration of his marriage. The castle is still uninjured; the main entrance adorned with armorial bearings in bas-relief, and the colonnades running round the building, decorated with representations of all the known heroes, in giant proportions. The hall for the wedding ceremony, in its length and breadth, hardly fell short of the proportions of a modern ball-room: midway on one side is still to be seen the entrance which led to the sleeping apartments, a stately portal, with four slender Corinthian columns; on these columns was a profusion of Eastern ornament, fruits, green foliage, grapes, richly gilded, and resplendent in many-colored enamel. The front of the portal shows the family escutcheons in gold letters, and between the two is a Latin proverb for the encouragement of lovers, "Amandum juxta regulans." Through the heavy brocade hangings of the brilliant entrance, the guests saw the fortunate Bishop vanish with his fortunate bride, while they remained to drink to the health of the two with noisy revelry. So it went on, until one fine day, the fortunate father brought his new-born son in his arms to show him to the guests about the table. He had kept his guests with him from the marriage day to the day of baptism. There was a lord for you! That was a prelate! Through a whole year the festivities lasted. How did it happen that the people did not weary of them? Why, the groups of guests changed constantly. No well-ordered prosperous man can leave his house and home for a whole year, so there was a series of guests following each other in unbroken succession. In those days, when one went to a wedding, he took his entire household; for how could he leave his children behind? Lackeys and haiduks, equerries, coachmen and footmen, Court fool, nurse, and governess, priest and scribe, all came with their master, and before all went a heavy wagon with the baggage of the women. And there were as many kinds of musicians as there were guests. The Polish lords brought their famous trumpeters; those from Transylvania brought their gypsies; the Moravians their fiddlers; and the Nyians their bagpipers.

One band relieved another at banquet and dance; meantime the young people who became weary of the pleasures of the table first, withdrew to one end of the long hall for the "torch-dance," or the "cushion-dance," while still the servants at the other end continued to carry in the succession of dishes to the feast; if you wish to count the courses there is still the portly kitchen record. Here rang out the joyous conversation, interspersed with the Latin epithalamium of some impromptu poet, or the fescennine verses of a German minnesinger. At one side, the married women had their pleasure; young mothers whose children became restless withdrew here to quiet them; another table in an alcove at the side was opened for the young girls who feasted

here in the presence of their holy director, and through the noise and tumult of the men, their joyous girlish voices rang out in Vivas to the noble lord and lady who sat at the head of the main table. In the shadow of a vaulted recess, the monks and lay brothers were assembled, who had crowded from all foreign parts at the report that a bishop in Hungary was celebrating his marriage. Every kind of priest was here; Capuchins, Jesuits, Paulists, Carmelites, White Canons, and the tonsured Franciscans, with wooden sandals on their bare feet. All sat together and drank "in honorem domini et dominæ." They were the most steadfast guests in respect to the hours and days. The only change in their company was that it constantly increased. Besides these, there was one other guest who remained from the very beginning of this long marriage feast, together with his whole family, and this was Grazian, Lord of Mitosin Castle. He had brought his beautiful daughter with him. The ladies whispered at one side that Lord Grazian stayed so long in the hope of forming an alliance between the beautiful Magdalene and some young lord. "Oh, no indeed!" said others, "there is no care for her. She has already a valiant bridegroom, the Pole, Lord Berezowski." At this there was a great outburst of laughter. "If the dear Lord had not made Adam better looking than he is, Mother Eve would never have picked that much-talked-of apple from the tree."

The old fool showed no hesitancy about thrusting himself into the circle of young dancers, and shunning the table of drinkers; and yet he longed for a drink; but his mouth watered still more for a kiss from the beautiful Magdalene, and this he might so easily have, if it would only occur to her to invite him to the cushion-dance. But for this he might wait until the day of judgment.

This is the way they danced the cushion-dance, as our elders will recollect. A small silken cushion was put in the hand of the handsomest stateliest dancer, who laid it in the centre of the circle on the floor, and danced around it to the music, at first alone; then he took up the cushion and laid it at the feet of a lady whom he had chosen according to his fancy, knelt down on it and remained a suppliant until she released him with a kiss: then the two danced hand in hand around the cushion: and then it was the lady's turn to lay it before a dancer in the circle and kneel down waiting for a kiss. And through the whole evening the fairy chain of sweet kisses was woven on and on. The old Berezowski thrust his wine-befuddled face into the circle and waited, hoping that he might please some one; but not one of the worthy widows wished him for a partner; and so long as no lady invited him to dance, he had no right to lay the cushion down before his fair white betrothed, and to imprint a red mark on that snowy countenance with his bristly face. It was as if the whole company had taken an oath that no one should offer him the cushion, and the ladies laughed heartily evening after evening to see Lord Grazian with his gouty foot, and Lord Berezowski with his squinting eyes, unwearingly watch the cushion-dance. But in reality, both were keeping watch of something quite different.

The beautiful Idalia seemed entirely changed since that severe lesson. She acted as any one would who was entirely broken-hearted and resigned. One hardly recognized her. She was gentle and condescending to every one; and the mistakes of her household were hardly noted, while formerly her eye was wont to spy out everything and rebuke it at once with voice and hand. She went every day to mass, sat quietly under the great carved canopy of the family pew and performed her devotions. What it all meant nobody knew, except, perhaps, Father Peter. Then, too, the condition of the Jesuit monastery had been recently much improved; one gift followed another. One Sunday, the castle lady surprised the Father with a magnificent altar covering, and it was reported that she had embroidered it with her own hands. The young nobleman, Cupid, had also become a new creature under Father Peter's hands. One could hear him studying out of his books in a clear tone of voice, instead of singing wanton songs. He no longer wandered through the village with dozens of dogs, setting them on the poor people; but went about hand in hand with his instructor in the best behaved way, and replied to the "Praised be Jesus Christ" of the people, with a pious "Forever and ever, Amen." He spent his pocket-money on the poor, and Sunday mornings served as acolyte without his old trick of mixing sulphur in the incense; instead of abusive words, he now uttered Latin sentences, and kissed the hands of elderly people in a most mannerly way; and all this was Father Peter's work. It was set down to his credit by the directors of the convent, and information was even sent to the Provincial Father, of the wonderfully blessed activity of this newly created father.

The Lady Idalia had for some time ceased to storm her lost idol with her passion, and had entrusted her little son entirely to his care. Mother and son saw each other now only at table. This unaccountable change had occurred at the same time of the Bishop's feast. The entire noble family of Mitosin had gone to Bittse and remained. Father Peter had from that time no further occasion to seek the subterranean passage; night and day nothing took him from his pupil, who since his tutor had withdrawn the fools and had accustomed him to an orderly way of living instead of his former extravagances, now enjoyed regular sleep such as children are wont to have, who, when they waken, find their heads in the very place where they laid them down, and who sleep with a laugh on their lips.

Father Peter was somewhat troubled in conscience at the great care that he was devoting to his pupil, since he knew that at the bottom there was a certain selfishness, as it was very agreeable to him not to have Hirsko, the Fool, sleep any more in the boy's room. Hirsko kept long vigils; he never closed an eye until he could see the bottom of his pitcher. Now, Father Peter did not have to wait for that; Sunday nights belonged entirely to him. As soon as he had quieted Cupid, he could hurry to the entrance of the vaulted passage, and there stay for a long time beside his inconsolable beloved, who was at once his bride and his widow. These charming meetings by night, Likovay's journey to Thurzo's wedding had brought to an end. The departure had occurred

so unexpectedly that there was no time for the two lovers to agree what should be done. By carrier pigeons, they had communicated with each other briefly, but since the departure, there had been no messages by the pigeons from Mitosin. It was only through the talkative Fool that Father Peter learned whither the family had gone,—to the wedding of the Bishop! It was said that this would last a whole year long, and would occasion so many other weddings that the carnival might be prolonged until the vintage.

So many marriageable young women were among the guests, it was very probable they would all leave as brides; for even the melancholy Magdalene a suitor waited there—the rich Berezowski. Father Peter sighed deeply—if he could only see her, just once more! How dared a monk sigh for such a forbidden pleasure! Even then the punishment was hurrying toward him. While his heart unceasingly throbbled at the thought that he might even yet be permitted to behold the countenance of his beloved, gently radiant as the moonlight itself, quite unexpectedly this command came from his lady, which conformed to his wishes, yet he could find little pleasure in it. One day,—the Thurzo wedding feast had then lasted two months,—Idalia said to him, "Father Peter, all the world have paid their respects at Bittse, at the wedding of the Bishop; we alone have not. The Bishop is related to me on my mother's side, and furthermore he is my godfather. He may be annoyed at us with good reason for not showing ourselves there; now I have in my jewel casket a string of real pearls that will be very becoming to the throat of the young lady: let us take them to her as a bridal present and stay at the castle until we are driven away. You shall go with the boy; it will be well for him to see a little of such splendor and magnificence as he never shall behold again." And so that fell to Father Peter's lot for which he had sighed so longingly. But he could not take pleasure in the news: it filled him, on the contrary, with horror. At Emerich Thurzo's wedding, he must meet again that world which he had put behind him, and in which only a few years ago he had been so intimate—so much at home. It is true, the countless sufferings he had endured since then might have changed his looks somewhat; and then, too, there was the long beard that he had not worn as knight, and if he drew the hood of his cowl down, half his face was covered. Besides, who would pay any attention to a holy monk, who draws into a corner, and is in nobody's way? The fine ladies who had known him formerly would gather away their trains lest they should touch his cowl; but there would be one there who knew him, at all events. Alas, if by any traitorous change of countenance Magdalene should betray her recognition! Their eyes must not meet.

However, there was no escape. Father Peter must accompany his lady to Bittse—to the famous wedding-feast. She, too, took her whole household with her. She had to drag about her household as she did her gowns and jewels; her only son, of course, must not leave her side, for that is the richest jewel of a Hungarian woman. The other ladies took their children with them, and she received the greatest glory whose son could best recite his good wishes to the bride, which he had learned from the court master.

The wedding guests arrived safely at Bittse. At that time, such a journey lasted fully six days in the stern cold, and in the short winter days of fog. When the guests from Madocsany arrived at the Castle of Bittse, it was already late in the evening. The first night was given to rest, after the hardships of the journey. The next day, the Lady Idalia, with her son and Father Peter, paid their respects to the noble couple. Emerich Thurzo had an astounding memory; as soon as he heard Father Peter's name, he at once expressed his surprise that he did not recollect that he had as bishop confirmed a monk of that name, and, of course, Madocsany belonged to his diocese. Father Peter replied that he had received his confirmation from the Provincial of his order; in this way, he drew down upon himself the high displeasure of the Hungarian magnate, the Bishop. The Provincials of the Jesuit order assumed many privileges of the Prelates, and even some papal prerogatives. From that moment, Father Peter in the Castle of Bittse was a marked man. However, this was agreeable to him, for no one molested him with offerings of friendly attentions. He could even sit at the table without any exchange of good wishes, for the Jesuit brotherhood was looked at askance by the other orders. Only one human being stood by him—the young Cupid. He never left him. However wild and boisterous he had been in the days when his mother spoiled him, he had now become equally shy and timid; ever since those visions of terror which the threats of his mother and the stories of the Fool had brought upon his mind. And yet what an ungovernable child he had been only a year ago! When he and his mother stayed at an entertainment, the dissolute lords used to teach him all kinds of knavish verses and songs, and then when the ladies joined them, some one would say, "Now, little Cupid, say a little verse, or sing a pretty song." And the little fellow would hardly wait to be asked, but spring up on the table and recite what he had learned; and the ladies would blush to the very roots of their hair; some would laugh, but the more prudish would go away. And then the Lady Idalia would take the little rascal in her lap and reward him with kisses. But now all this was over. Since Father Peter had become his tutor, the little Cupid knew no more wanton songs. On the contrary, he had become so shy that no promises or threats would make him recite the little rhyme of greeting that he used to say at home. The Lady Idalia comforted herself with the thought that in the course of time there would yet be opportunity. There were many children of his age among the guests of the castle, and as soon as he became acquainted with them he would regain his former liveliness and courage. But he did not play with the other children. When he met a boy of his own age, he would ask him, "Does your mother threaten to kill you?" He would have absolutely nothing to do with the little girls. The year before, he had played wildly with them and called each one his little wife. But now when one of them he used to know offered him candy, he said, "Is there any poison in it?"

The Lady Idalia was the gayest of the gay. Her widow's veil had been long since cast aside, and

there was nothing to prevent her joining in the dance. Nobody was bored in her company. She knew how to shape her conversation, and often made Thurzo himself laugh at her telling hits. Evenings, when she entered the drawing room in magnificent attire, at once she had her court of knights about her, among whom more than one whose hair was already turning gray, would not have been sorry to join his widowed state to hers. But one group of guests always conspicuously drew aside when the Lady Idalia appeared—these were the Mitosins. If Idalia took her place at the table where Lord Grazian was sitting, he would whisper to his daughter, and she would rise and go elsewhere; after a time, Lord Grazian would follow; soon the Pole; and then the entire retinue. But Idalia never ceased trying to annoy them. Her high spirits never rose higher than when she looked into the angry eyes of Lord Grazian, or when she coquettishly tormented the aged suitor until his face became as red as a boiled crab.

One evening, the flower of the company turned to the dance, and the gypsies of Transylvania were playing. Thurzo and his wife were still present, and took pleasure in the enjoyment of their guests. The sound of revelry grew louder and louder. The men sang drinking songs, the ladies chattered, and the monks in their corner sang an edifying hymn. The old Berezowski as usual was on the outer edge of the circle of dancers; in the mazurka and the torch-dance, where it was only necessary to stamp and shout, he had his part; but in the cushion dance, where the kisses came, he failed as usual. And yet he could have devoured the beautiful Magdalene with his eyes. Two pair of eyes were watching him; one from the table of the monks, where sat a young priest, with downcast head supported on his hands; from beneath his cowl low drawn, his eyes looked out eagerly into this world of pleasure. On his lap lay the head of a sleeping child, on the table before him stood a large mug, from which he sipped now and then, more to moisten his parched lips and throat than to cloud his mind. The other pair of eyes belonged to the Lady Idalia. Even when she was whirling in the dance, she never let Berezowski out of her sight; she followed the longing looks that he cast at Magdalene; she cast glances at Father Peter, half-concealed in his corner; and Lord Grazian, who was ready to burst with rage, caught the scornful lightning of her glance. She knew how to read the hearts of all four, and it was her diabolical pleasure to drop into the hearts of all four her various poisons, one kind for one, and another for another; here, frenzy, there deadly fear, and still again, rage and jealousy. To one, contempt; to another, despair; to a third, shame and disgrace; and to a fourth, unquenchable, diabolical fire.

Father Peter held his hand screening his eyes as he watched the handsome youths leading the ladies of their heart to the dance. In many dances a kiss is the forfeit. Who has any suspicious thoughts of the innocent kiss of a maiden? In those times, certainly, it was merely a joke in all honor. He was not jealous of any one of the stately crowd of young knights, but the blood boiled in his veins when he saw how the old rake, destined to be her bridegroom, watched the slender figure floating past him, light as a gentle dream. Gentle though she was, yet she knew how to evade his embraces. If he were only her partner, what a blow he would give that eager old sinner! The young fop took no care whatever of his lady. And what miserable dancers they are too! When he led the dance it was quite different—he would like to show them, if it were not for the cowl.

Thus far he had been so fortunate in avoiding the throng of guests that he had not once met Magdalene. Even if he had come directly in her path, she might not have recognized him, for she rarely raised her eyes unless addressed.

The cushion dance came next. To a monotonous melody, the silken cushion passed from hand to hand accompanied by an exchange of kisses. The cushion came at last into Idalia's hands. She must have been awaiting it for some time for the young dancers were in the habit of gaining a kiss from their heart's desire. She had to wait until it was the turn of a young man, still free, who saw in her only a beautiful woman. Idalia paid the forfeit to the man at her feet; and now it was the order of the dance that she should come into the middle of the circle and dance alone while she passed in review, the dancers circling about her, until she made her choice. Idalia laughed silently to herself; she cast a glance full of bewitching coquetry at Berezowski, then swaying gracefully in the dance, she glided towards him and laid the cushion at his feet, then the circle broke up, and the chosen man was left alone. Berezowski reddened to the ears for joy; his eyes beamed, but they did not seek the beautiful face of the woman who knelt before him, but the pallid face of his betrothed, who stood opposite; in anticipation of the two kisses, he parted his whiskers carefully. The first kiss would only set him free, it was the second which would seal a bond. Magdalene understood the glance, and her face crimsoned to her very hair. Father Peter clenched the silver cup in his hand until the wine spilled on the table. "Quid habes?" called out his brother priest at the table. But just as Berezowski bent over to kiss Idalia, Grazian Likovay sprang between the two and rudely dragged the Pole back. "Hold," he cried, "my future son-in-law shall not kiss this woman here." Idalia sprang passionately to her feet and pressed her two hands to her head. "That you—! I am as much of a lady as you are a gentleman."

"Without doubt," he replied, "you are a widow who has killed your husband, and now has taken into your house your paramour, disguised as a monk. There he sits, holding the boy in his lap to accustom him to his fatherhood. Or is it not true that the Jesuit there is your lover?" and with that he sprang to the table of the monks and dragged Father Peter's cowl from his head. "Now, then, who is this priest? Is it not Tihamer Csorbai? The lover of this beautiful woman, and in a monk's cowl?"

The whole hall rang with loud laughter and outcries. Everybody recognized at once Tihamer Csorbai, who had vanished and been generally reported dead. He was anything but dead. He had simply entered the service of a beautiful woman. Father Peter stood in the midst of this crowd of

screaming guests; with his right hand he seized the bench on which he leaned. If rage overpowers here is a death blow and a broken skull.

"Peter," rang out the powerful voice of Emerich the Bishop, "are you a monk or a knight?"

The youth's arm sank, he bowed his head. "I am a monk."

"Then withdraw. Woe unto those who excite strife!"

The rest of the monks considered that the command had been given. Unfastening the cords about their waists, they began to scourge the despised guest from the hall, with scorn and curses in a confusion of Greek and Latin. Father Peter took no thought except that the boy should receive none of the blows; he wrapped him in his cowl and hurried away from the company. He did not give himself time to see what happened later. He did not see how the pale face of Magdalene tried to rush to him. Why? Perhaps to shield him, and perhaps to share his shame. But her father seized her rudely and dragged her back to the arms of Berezowski,—*"There is your place."*

The beautiful fury, with teeth shining, advanced to Grazian; her red hair broke loose from her cap, on which the jewelled pins shook with her tremor of rage. "Well, Grazian Likovay, you shall pay me for this night! Once already have I aimed my dagger at your heart, and this time be sure it shall be to your death!" And with that, she dashed out of the hall, pushing everything aside that did not give way before her. As she passed by Thurzo and his wife, she said defiantly. "My best thanks to my lord and his lady for their hospitality. You are not one hair better than others." And she snapped her fingers contemptuously, and went on her way. That same night, though late, she left the Castle of Bittse with her entire retinue. She travelled by torch-light through the fierce winter night resounding with the cries of hungry wolves.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEMPTATION.

The carriages, set on runners, were too heavy to go rapidly over the bad mountain roads. At the first station, the caravan was overtaken by a sledge in pursuit; this did not stop at their carriages, but passed them by. In the sledge sat Grazian, and the figure enveloped in furs beside him was of course his daughter. Idalia looked out of the windows of her carriage: "Good morning, lovely lady," called out Lord Grazian, in an excess of spirits, "I will go ahead as quartermaster." His meaning was too clear. Idalia's travelling party was large, and could only make four or five German miles a day, so that Grazian going in advance "as quartermaster" would take for himself the accommodations in the large castles, which she was counting on for herself and her retinue. An open hospitality still prevailed in that country, and travellers found in every castle an open gate, good beds, and abundant table, with a cordial welcome from the master of the house. But the accommodations in the villages were quite different. The servants with their horses were provided with straw, and the family themselves were cramped into a low, small room, with floor of earth, and lighted by a miserable candle, while their fare was coarse bread and cheese. The little sledge going ahead closed every castle against Idalia and her party, by spreading the news of this great scandal that had fallen upon the widow. On the way back, Idalia could not stay with any of her acquaintances. She must stay outside, bag and baggage in her carriage at the end of the village, or must pass her night in the forest, in the small hut of some cheese dealer. Through the long winter night, this noble lady must lie on the straw, wrapped in her travelling cloak, with the priest and the sleeping child. There they were like two comrades who fall asleep quarrelling, and wake up quarrelling.

"In spite of your shame, *you* can sleep? They said to your face that as a priest you were a fraud, as a knight you were a failure; neither priest nor knight. How they disgraced us in the presence of so many people! Like a hunchback, they threw it in my face that you were my lover, and you stood there like a pillar of salt and did not say that it was true or untrue. I looked at you just to see what you would do; whether you would take counsel of your heart. You looked about you; the dancers' swords were together in a corner; perhaps you would seize me, cast your cowl from you and say, 'It is true, I am Tihamer Csorbai, and that woman there is my wife, and he who dares come between us is a dead man.' You did not do so. On the contrary, you gazed toward Heaven. I waited patiently to see if you would say, 'I am Father Peter, I am a priest, and on my priestly oath I say she is free from my love,—if she were as free from other sins, she might be counted among the saints.' But this too you did not do. You dropped your head when the Bishop called out at you. And you submitted when the other monks struck at you with their scourges. Oh, how detestable you were! If you really had been my lover, I would have spit at you—in your face—yes, right in your face! Behind your back, they said that you were not worthy of the name of priest, that you were no priest and never had been one, and even if you had, they would have driven you out; you were a timid, cowardly soldier who endured the scourge because he feared the sword. What will you do now? Will you creep behind the cross that Christ Himself may drive you away? Will you let them beat this monk's cowl of yours from town to town? Do your vows require you to bring your priesthood into disgrace, and become a stone of offence at sight of which every one stands aside, even if they are in the height of the dance; and at sight of whom the common people will flee from the church when they see you at the altar?"

And then again:

"Can you sleep? Why not? It is an easy thing for a man to choke down disgrace. But I am a woman, and I am lying on scorpions. In the presence of the noblest of the land you made me an object of scorn to the whole world. There will be the report of it everywhere. The beggar-student will sing my story from window to window. Peddlers will carry from village to village the story of Father Peter and the Lady of Madocsany, and hawk it about for two denarii, pictures thrown in. What a disgrace! You can hide yourself away under your cowl, that is a good place for you! But where shall I hide myself? How can I endure the glance of people—that constant blow in the face? Where shall I shut myself in, so that no human being can find me? Where shall I lose myself, so that even I cannot find me? How shall I live or die on these thorns? What's that to you—do you say? Ha ha! You say God has punished me, and you are satisfied. You drawl out your prayers and fall asleep over them."

And then again:

"Are you awake? The cock is crowing, the day is dawning at last. The night is long for those who cannot close their eyes. Why do you avoid talking with me? I despise you from the bottom of my heart. If you were as great a jewel as you are a piece of clay, I would not reach out my hand to take you up. Keep your love for the angels, or for Beelzebub, it is all one to me. All I ask from you is my honor. If you are a man of honor, if you are a Christian, you must know what your duty is. The offence was an open one, and it must be openly satisfied. Listen to me, and then consider at your leisure. You and I will go over to the Protestant church. We will go to Saros-Patak, or to Klausenburg, and there this can take place without delay. The six weeks' instruction is superfluous. We will marry. I need nothing more except your name—the name still honored. You surely do not want all the world to call me Mrs. Father Peter. You are not Emerich Thurzo; his wife can be called Mrs. Bishop, night or day, but Mrs. Monk—no one can say that by daylight. The price for my torn veil is the cap of Mrs. Tihamer Csorbai. Beyond that, I do not care whether you love me, or do not love me, or whether you love another. You can go away, when you cannot stand it any longer, or you can stay. It does not matter to me what you answer; my decision is made; in defiance of the Bishop, I am going to be a Calvinist; and I am going to marry a second time, if not you, then somebody else; but it is fitting that I should recover my honor by the man by whom I lost it. But I will not beseech you any longer. Do not be afraid that I shall crawl after you on my hands and knees. Two words can separate us; if you say, 'No, No,' then I say, 'Nor I, either,' and you shall never enter my gate again. To the threshold you may come, and I will count out to you your money, and then we will never breathe the same air again."

Father Peter was terrified at these words. If Idalia drove him out of the castle, then he could have no further meetings with Magdalene, for the only entrance to the subterranean passage was from the castle; and in his brain important plans were forming; he must without fail speak with Magdalene. She will come to the familiar place and expect him Sunday nights.

"What you have said is serious, and requires time for consideration. Give me two Sundays that I may take counsel with the one who guides my fate."

Idalia thought that Father Peter referred to the wise Counsellor of all, but he really meant Magdalene.

"Very well, I will wait two Sundays, but then you are to give me a definite answer."

"Yes."

"An answer that swerves neither to right nor left."

"It shall be either wise or foolish. Whatever it is, it shall be that wholly."

"By your monk's vows?"

"I vow it on my word of honor as a knight."

At this the lady began to weep violently, and her sobs awakened the sleeping boy.

"Why do you weep, mother?" he asked in fear.

Idalia pressed him to her heart. "I am weeping for you, my poor little orphan, my only treasure, my angel;" and with each tender name, she covered the child's cheek with kisses and tears while she pressed him close to her throbbing heart.

"Does he love me already,—my father?" stammered the child, nestling closer to his mother. "He loves you surely, for you kiss and embrace me again."

"We shall soon find out," Idalia whispered in his ear, and sighed deeply.

Soon the whispering ceased. Father Peter heard the deep breathing of mother and child, and the loud beating of his own heart.

Outside the cock crowed for the third time. Was it not Peter's cock,—the first Peter?

CHAPTER X.

THE FEAST.

The next day, they reached Madocsany, and the second day after, the feast began. They had hardly time to get rested. In truth, the feast began. The beautiful Lady of Madocsany did not close her gates, as she had said she should do, on the way home: she did not try to find any thick veil for her head to cover her face before the eyes of the world. The one expression, "On my word as a knight", had kindled a new glow in her heart. What was the world to her now! Whoever did not respect her, she did not respect. Contempt for contempt. The people of the castle did not go abroad, but they broached their casks, spread their tables, and summoned the pipers; and where there are spread tables, good wine, and fair women, there are guests in plenty. It is true, it was a mere revel. Not one personage of note. Perhaps the same drunken set that frequented the Mitosin Castle when there were feasts there; if so, no one could afford to reproach his neighbor. At Mitosin they criticised the Lady of Madocsany, and at Madocsany the Lord of Mitosin. They flattered both, and drank to the health of the one who owned the wine; and Father Peter tarried with them in the interval. He no longer spent his nights in singing psalms, but listened to the reckless conversation of this motley crowd. No one counted it against him that he had been driven from the Castle at Bittse; here it is no disgrace, quite the contrary, to be the beloved of a beautiful woman, the more glorious because it was unlawful; they clapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and admitted him as their companion. And he had to accept this quietly, and realize that there was something still more disgraceful than to be despised by men of position, and that was to be honored by the worthless. So he spent every evening with them; every evening, the side of the castle toward the Waag was lighted up, so that the household at Mitosin could see what a great feast it was. In their sledging parties on the frozen Waag, with sound of bells and bright torches, music, and crack of whip, they passed so near Mitosin Castle that their voices floated up to the windows of Lord Grazian Likovay. What sport! Father Peter took his part. "A lucky dog! he knew when to lay down his cowl," they said to his face.

In his sleeping room he was alone: for since their return from the Bittse wedding, the mother had kept her child with her. She no longer urged him to study, and all his days were spent in playing. As soon as Father Peter was alone in his room, he drank a pitcher of water, and poured another over his head, to wash away all traces left on his face by the revellers' kisses. Then he knelt down before his bed, and struggled with serious thoughts; his brow on his folded hands. The old man was aroused in him, the defiant,—the man of hot, passionate love; the devil of pride was struggling to break the fetters of his vow. Already he felt a loathing for the cowl he wore. His soul was no longer oppressed by the weight of a great guilt. The insult of the father had released him from the blood-money for the son.

Friday before this, a message had come from the Jesuit monastery to the lady of the castle, to the effect that she should not serve her guests any meat that day, and that she should send back Peter, who must be brought before an ecclesiastical court for his sins of conduct. The widow sent back in reply a letter and a purse. In the letter she said: "I send you back, not one, but a thousand Peters;" and in the purse were a thousand gold pieces stamped for the emperor Peter. And the fathers made answer: "Also serve the fish."

Tihamer Csorbai had a horror of Father Peter. He could not find his faith again. Every dream misled him: and there were dreams that his waking moments carried on,—fabulous treasures, for which the waking man had only to stretch out his hand to hold what he had seen in the dreams of sleep.

During these few days, Idalia was not recognizable. For days at a time, she would not leave her sitting-room, but worked there with her maids like a simple peasant girl who prepares her trousseau. She stayed at the banquet only long enough to eat and drink, and then vanish. This great tumult was only to defy the world. She herself played the coy maiden, who waits for her wooer, and whispers to her mother, "There is a suitor in the house." If by chance she met Father Peter, she drew back before him.

Sunday morning, the company scattered to the four winds. "Six days shalt thou eat and drink, but the seventh is holy—" so it stands written. When the bells for early mass rang, Idalia dressed herself for church, and took her jewelled prayer-book in her hand. But first she summoned Father Peter.

"I am going to church. Perhaps for the last time to the Roman church. Do not come to-day; leave me alone. Meantime, take care of my only treasure." And then she covered Cupid's cheek with kisses, and went to church.

"Do you see how fond my mother is of me?" said Cupid, throwing his arms about Father Peter's neck. "Since we have come back she is so fond of me. That's because you're fond of her, I know, for she whispered it in my ear. You're not Father Peter, but Tihamer. Nights, she says this name over and over, and then she hugs and kisses me. Once I asked her who Tihamer was; at that she turned red, and laughing loudly, covered my mouth; then she took me up on her lap and kissed me. 'Wouldn't it be fine if you had to say Papa-Tihamer?' That means you. I know; you need not try to make believe to me,—you're no monk; I knew that when you threw the ball at the Fool's head. Do you know what my mother and her four maids are working at in her quarters? Come, I'll show you, there's nobody there. They're all gone to church." And the child dragged Father Peter into his mother's innermost room, where he had never been before. It was a marvel of convenience and elegance. Cupid ran to a richly carved wardrobe, which he opened. In it hung a rich travelling cloak trimmed with rosettes, and large buttons, lace, and gold embroidery.

"That's what they've been sewing and embroidering. And do you know who is to have this for a present? Why, it's for Tihamer, and nobody else. They told me not to tell anybody, but I'll just tell you. To-day is Sunday and to-night, when you go to bed, you'll find on your bed these clothes, and riding boots, and a gold sword. Yes, you can try them all on and see if they fit."

Father Peter looked around him. He thought he caught sight of the tempting countenance of a grinning demon behind him, and this urged him a step farther.

"Yes, and I know something more," Cupid went on. "From to-day on, every night down in the summer house, there'll be two horses saddled, and the key is left in the rear gate. I heard her arrange it all with the gate-keeper. For you know the monks down there keep watch over our gate day and night, so that if Father Peter should once try to escape from here, they could pursue him and catch him and throw him down into a deep dungeon, because he tried to run away. But if you two slip out through the garden gate some night, on those good horses, with me tucked under the cloak of one of you, then the monks may follow, but they will never overtake us."

Cupid's shafts all went home. All these preparations fitted so well into the framework of those dreams which the monk pursued day and night, when they did not pursue him. The entire plan of flight was completed; all one had to do was to adopt it. All obstacles were removed. The monk who flees with a woman may be arrested in any village, bound and brought back; but when a distinguished couple, on richly caparisoned horses, dash along, who would stop them?

"But you're not going to leave me, I'll tell you that beforehand," Cupid ran on. "There's a little fox-skin ready for me too, and little boots bordered with rabbit; don't be afraid, Mamma won't leave me behind. She takes me up on her lap now, just as she used to when I was a little boy, and as we are in the picture. Would you like to see the picture? I'll show it to you. It isn't everybody can see it at any time. It's shut up, but I know just how to press the springs, so it will open." He was then in front of the carved work which divided as he pressed a spring. When the picture came in sight, it lighted up the whole room, it was of such radiant beauty. It was an Italian masterpiece—Venus and Cupid, the veritable goddess of the myth, with the magic charms of beauty, in the act of bathing her child; her eyes were turned toward the spectator, languishingly, roguishly, seductively; a companion piece to the Venus of Correggio. The monk held his hands before his eyes,—he was dazzled.

"Shut it up," he ordered the boy.

"You're not afraid of it, are you, that it will hurt you?"

Father Peter hurried out of Idalia's room. At the door, he met the lady. His eyes betrayed the struggle of his soul. Idalia was gracious, and acted as if she had noticed nothing. She looked down.

"I have just come from church, Father. I have sinned, and wish to confess."

Father Peter looked at her in astonishment.

"Yes, I have sinned in the church, and now I have come for you to shrive me. I sinned at the altar when I was praying. I prayed God: 'I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast not prevented me from doing what I vowed to do, and that was to rob Thine altar of one whom my heart loves. I thank Thee that Thou hast sent upon us shame and disgrace to drive him away from Thy holy offices. I beg Thee, I pray Thee, grant me to hurry him away with me to destruction. Close the gates of Heaven against us. Grant that I may make him a heretic and a denier of the saints. Grant me to lead this saint out of the number of Thy believers; send me Thy evil angel to aid me in this work of mine.' This was my prayer at the altar named in honor of Ignatius Loyola, while they were singing the Dominus vobiscum. It was a sin, Father, I smite my breast and own it was a sin, I kneel before you; do you absolve me?"

Father Peter took the hand of the penitent and raised her. His tongue could with difficulty shape the words, "I absolve you."

"You do absolve me!" cried the woman, and pressed passionately the hand that he, unthinking, had left in hers. "Then you have absolved me, and I bind you to it."

Then she hurried in triumph from the room, leaving him alone. From the inner room rang out the laugh of Venus and Cupid. To be sure, the picture was still open, and probably it was at that they laughed.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDERGROUND.

All day, it was evident from the features and actions of Father Peter that he was the prey of unusual excitement. He would draw himself together with a shiver as often as he met the triumphant glance of Idalia. The lady of the castle considered the victory certain. These confused looks, this stammering, this awkward manner, she regarded as the dying convulsions of this man's conscience. One blow more, and his pride, his vows, would be killed. At the evening meal,

the three were alone together. After the long visit of their guests, this was quite unusual; but such an undisturbed family circle is usually very agreeable. Then husband and wife say to each other, "Our guests were dear to us, but now that they are gone, they are still dearer."

After the meal was over, Idalia sent the household to rest, and had the child put to sleep in her own room; the two were alone together. The lady took her harp and sang; she sang of Heaven, of Paradise, and of love; but Father Peter's soul was not with her. The great clock struck eleven. Father Peter seemed to be sitting on hot coals; he arose, and did not wait for the conclusion of the song, although a touching one.

"Good-night."

"What,—going so soon?" asked Idalia, astounded.

"It will soon be morning."

"I thought that with the morrow, Sunday would be over, and you would answer my question."

"This is the first Sunday, and I asked for two."

The lady knit her brows.

"And do you need so much time to settle your accounts with those above?"

—"And with those below."

Father Peter had involuntarily spoken the truth. The consuming flame of suspicion blazed up in the soul of this woman. In the presence of such love-charms, such fascination, such unconcealed passion, it is impossible for a man to persist in marble insensibility unless he loves another. Such deathlike calm is only possible to one who lives in another world, and is there blessed. She forced her countenance into a gentle smile.

"Very well, I wish you a restful night. But I have one favor to ask,—that you take my little boy back into your room; since he has been sleeping with me the bad dreams have returned. You know better how to manage him; let him spend the night with you."

Father Peter's features betrayed the uneasiness that had taken possession of him. This demand of the lady would only delay his meeting with Magdalene.

"Very well, I will take the child with me," he said with enforced calm.

"I will bring him to you myself at once," replied the lady. Idalia hurried to her room, and awakened Cupid, who was asleep in a small bed beside hers. The child awoke in terror.

"What's the matter—are you going to kill me?"

"No, indeed, my darling, my angel, how could I!"

"But your face looks just as it did when you threatened to put the pin through my head."

"You've been dreaming. Come, my dear, to-day you are to sleep with your father, with Father Peter."

"Beside Tihamer? Call him here. He can come to me, more easily than I can go to him."

"You must mind me, if you don't wish to make me angry, and be cast off."

At that Cupid began to cry. When a child wakens out of his first sleep and sobs himself half dead, sleep cannot be coaxed back in less than two hours; and this Idalia knew perfectly well.

"Listen to me, my little boy, you are a dear little boy, and I am your loving mother, and always will be if you mind me. I will give you everything that you want. But if you don't do as I say, I'll torment you, and let you go hungry, and dress you in rags. Now you are a clever little boy, and you know perfectly well that Father Peter is not what he pretends to be. The question is whether he deals with the good spirits, or with the bad. Only a good little boy like you can find that out. See, I'll give you a little silver whistle that you can hide out of sight. Now come into Father Peter's room. As soon as you have lain down, shut your eyes, and open your mouth, and act as if you were already asleep; draw a deep breath and leave your mouth open: meantime, notice carefully what Father Peter begins to do when he thinks you are asleep; if he leaves the room, slipping out carefully, dressed in his cowl, and does not go through the door where I should see him, or through the main entrance hall where the watchman would stop him, but lets himself out of a window, down by a trellis where the vines grow, then as soon as he is a little way off, blow this silver whistle; I will be near by, and hear you, and then I will come and we will find out whether Father Peter works with good or bad spirits. Have you understood me?"

"Yes," said the child, "and it shall be all right."

Curiosity was stronger in the child than fear. The thought that in keeping watch as his mother bade him, he was to find out Father Peter's secrets, pleased Cupid very much.

"Carry me there," he said, "and don't worry. I'll find out about him."

When Idalia had given the child to Father Peter, and he had gone to his room, she concealed herself behind the secret door of a niche in the corridor; such as were to be found in many places

in the thick castle walls. She had hardly waited half an hour when there was a shrill whistle. She hurried to the boy's room. Cupid sat up in bed; on his features could be read a mingled expression of astonishment, fear, and mischievous delight.

"You can come now," he said.

"Keep quiet," said his mother.

"He won't hear me, he's not there."

"Where is he, then?"

"He has gone underground,—to Hell."

"Tell me what you have seen."

"I did as you told me. While I was still saying my prayers, I began to yawn, and before we reached the Amen I was lying on my back on the bed and snoring. Father Peter sank down on his knees beside my bed and finished the prayer: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.' And with that he struck his hand on his breast, and sighed deeply several times. At last he rose, his whole body shook as if he had swallowed down a bitter medicine; then he struck his head against the wall, and there was such a noise that I thought his skull would go to pieces; then he bent over me, listened to my breathing, and covered me carefully; then he went to his own room and shut the door behind him. Before, he always left the door open to hear me wake. I got up quietly and slipped to the door to watch what he was doing. When he caught sight of the gaily embroidered clothes lying spread out on his bed, how his eyes shone! He did not hesitate long,—quickly threw off his soutane and sandals, and put on the cloak, the laced stockings, and the spurs—what a fine young man he was! You ought to have seen him! And then when he had put on his sword, he drew it from the scabbard, and struck a few stray blows into the air; oh, how bright his face was! Nobody would have said it was Father Peter. I thought he was going to surprise you—that he was dressing himself to make you a visit; but he did nothing of the kind; he brought out a dark lantern and lighted the candle in it, and shut the cover down: then he put his monk's cowl over his knight's suit, and covered his fur-trimmed cap with its hood. Then he was Father Peter again. What he did then, I could not see, for he went to the window, but I heard the window creak, and I heard the vines rattle against the wall. I went to my window and looked out; it was dark; Father Peter hid his lantern under his cowl; but I could see this much, that he went toward the chapel of Saint Nepomeck, that is in the corner of the garden near the wall; you know, it is that saint that every peasant takes his hat off before, and we cannot play with our balls or our tops near him, for if we should accidentally hit the saint, a great curse would come on us, because this saint preserves us and all the villages from floods; he is a great saint, isn't he?"

"Who cares what kind of a saint he is! Tell me quickly what happened."

"Well, Father Peter went to the chapel, and threw his arms around Saint Nepomeck. 'See, see,' I thought, 'The monk and the stone saint are kissing each other;' instead of that, he pushed the statue of the saint to the ground and stood in its place. 'What now,' I thought, 'is Father Peter going to be Nepomeck?' No, for he began to sink down into the ground and when he had gone quite out of sight, the statue of Nepomeck got up by itself and took its old place. But why do you look at me that way, are you going to kill me? How ugly you look all of a sudden. Have I said anything bad?"

Idalia struck the child on the head. "Curses on you for what you have said." And even her voice sounded different—like the rattling of chains. This speech, this look and the blow filled the child with such terror that he crawled under the bed, and did not venture forth until he saw that he was alone; then he was afraid of the loneliness, and began to howl and cry. "Mother, mother, don't leave me alone; the souls of the departed come and wail, and try to carry me off!" But nobody came. Suddenly, there appeared on the ceiling a ray of light as if somebody were going through the garden with a lantern. Cupid crawled out from under the bed, and went to the window to call out to this person in the garden. It was the figure of a woman in black, her hair covered with a black veil, and with a dark lantern in her hand. By the light of this lantern, the child could see that it was his mother. He saw her go directly to the chapel of Saint Nepomeck. She too stepped up to the statue and threw her arms about its head, and the statue dropped down quietly. Idalia now in her turn took the place of the statue and vanished into the earth: the statue raised itself again.

"My mother too has gone down to Hell!" whispered the child, trembling, and sank down on his knees in terror. "Father in Heaven do not be angry at me, I will never again leave off the end of my prayer. 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.'"

Six steps led from the statue of Nepomeck down into the earth, the seventh step was movable and turned on a pivot; if you stood on one end of this, the statue above raised itself, but if you stood on the other end, it sank gently down. The builders of this subterranean passage had chosen well the guardian of their secret. The place where stood the statue honored by all, was protected from investigation; it was not possible that in this vicinity any one could be found who would venture to overturn the sacred Nepomeck.

Lady Idalia had wrapped herself in a black cloak, and placed two pistols in her belt, and she carefully concealed the dark lantern. The mole-hole of the Hussites yawned before her! A long, dark, black defile, the more gruesome since it did not run straight but round about; the entire

tunnel so like a catacomb, was vaulted, hewn out of the hard quartz. The walls were already as black as a scaffold, with the underground mould, which had so covered everything over that objects lying on the ground could hardly be recognized. And on this mould-covered floor were traces of steps,—fresh distinct traces of steps going and coming. One could see the imprint of the five nails in the monk's sandals, evidently he had been there often before; the freshest imprints, however, were of the spurred boots of a knight. Idalia followed these hastily. She feared neither the underground darkness nor all the terrors of the invisible world, which in their collected form bear the name of Night, great black mass—what she carried in her bosom was still blacker than this darkness.

At a turn of the tunnel, she saw moving before her a light, at a distance of perhaps two hundred feet; it was the gleam of a torch that he had evidently lighted here in the tunnel from his lantern, to see his way better. Now when a man carries a torch in his hand, he is so blinded by it that he does not see if some one comes behind him, especially if this somebody is wrapped up in a black cloak, keeps in the dark, and conceals her dark lantern. Idalia could approach so near the form striding on before her that she was in a position to recognize it. It was Father Peter in his cowl, but with spurred boots. He went rapidly, but Idalia went more rapidly, and almost overtook him.

The tunnel was long, with side passages opening into it, here and there. Feminine curiosity compelled Idalia to cast a glance into each one of these caverns; here she could use the full light of her lantern. One of these caverns might have been a wine-cellar; there were still some casks there; from this she concluded that there must be a still wider exit; for through the narrow opening by the statue of Nepomeck, one could not roll in such casks. A side passage led into a large, roomy hall, where in one corner were to be seen the remains of a wooden staging; what might have been here once?—a secret church for Hussite gatherings—or a court—or even a place of execution? This higher ceiling was not covered over with mould, but with a glistening dampness. In another corridor were heaped up rusty old weapons and armor. In a dome-shaped cavern was a cask on end, of a bright green; when she lighted it up with her lantern, she saw that the cask was entirely covered over with copperplate, and the green was from the verdigris; out of the bung-hole of the cask hung a long twisted cord. "Suppose I were to set fire to this cord, what would result?" Idalia asked herself, and hurried on her way. Suddenly the figure before her stood still. An oaken door with bands of iron closed the tunnel; here the tunnel was walled with brick, and the threshold of the door was of hewn stone; the masculine figure placed his torch in an iron ring on the wall and approached the door. This was made fast by a lock with a secret combination, such as are used in closing cellars and underground doors; such locks, even when they are rusty, can be opened by those who know their secret, but if a man does not know this secret, he cannot open it in a lifetime. An iron pole, notched on the inside, runs through the iron rings; on the outside of the rings are engraved all kinds of letters; and the man who knows the word which is the key to the opening of the lock, will turn these ten rings until this name appears. Then are found on the inside of the rings the spaces in their order, and the notched pole can easily be drawn out, otherwise, one might turn these rings until the day of judgment and not succeed with the lock. The secret of this lock Father Peter had learned from the YAW DEREVOCSID EHT, and at every one of his underground visits he had made fast the lock. While he was busy opening the lock Idalia looked around her. Near by the door were two side passages opposite each other; she must conceal herself in one of them to keep better watch; she chose the right one, because this lay in the shadow, while the light of the torch shone into the other. It needed a self-control beyond woman's powers not to utter a shriek as she threw the light of her lantern into the cavern she entered. It was a square room, black with smoke, with wall of cement: it might once have been a sleeping room, for there were beds and benches; and in all the resting places lay the forms of women, some as if asleep, others still in convulsive attitudes crouching in the corners or leaning against the walls; one sat at the table, with her head resting on her hands, and a Bible open before her. She was reading while the others listened; one crouched under the table with a rosary in her hand,—she was a Catholic—all were richly dressed and their gowns were covered with lace and gold and silver embroideries; and yet their garments were decayed and those that wore them were skeletons. The fair blond hair of the one reading seemed to have grown even after death, for the floor all about her was quite covered. These were the women spoken of in the mystic book, who here await the resurrection. Evidently they too had come here to explore the secret of the strange lock when their provisions had failed them, and here they had miserably perished. On the wall above each figure was cut her name, her religion, and the day of her death. On the table lay a handsome enameled watch; by this they had reckoned how many days this long night here below had endured. Nobody had inscribed the name of the last. It was a maiden, with a maiden's wreath on her head,—perhaps she had been stolen from the altar.

Idalia stood looking at this abode of death. It seemed to her as if all the skulls, with their eye sockets staring into eternal nothingness, grinned at her, as if they would say to her, "We have waited for you. Now you have come; you too are one of us." Should she flee this place, turn back home and throw herself in penitent prayer before the statue of the Virgin Mother of God? Was it a dream that she saw here? And what she felt—the anguish, the revenge, the terror—was all this only a dream? Do such feelings come in waking moments? The creaking of the door recalled her consciousness. She looked out, and what she saw gave back all her kindling rage.

Father Peter had laid aside his monk's cowl, and stood there in knightly costume, like a bridegroom ready for the marriage altar. He was proud and handsome! The noble fearlessness of the man was mirrored in his countenance. Ah, in this guise he belongs to another! He is hers only in that hateful, hideous, coarse cowl, which she contemptuously pushed aside with her foot, as he stepped through the door to close it behind him. So the jealous woman stamped her foot upon

this deceitful cover of hypocrisy. "You cloak of lies! You sacred mask! Pious costume of a comedian! Chrysalis of a golden butterfly! The chrysalis is fixed to my tree, but the butterfly flies to the flower of another. Shame, curse and ruin upon you, and upon him who has worn you and shall wear you again!" And at each curse, she stamped again upon the cowl. Then she opened carefully the door. She set the lantern on the floor. The distance before her now was not great, for the straight corridor with brick walls extended about a hundred feet farther. By the light of the lantern in the hand of the man before her, she could press forward with sure step—there was no hindrance in her way.

At the end of the corridor, the knight stepped aside into a recess, and as he disappeared, there shone forth a dull light on the opposite wall, which indicated that a door had been left open, and that the wanderer had reached his goal. Quietly, she too slipped into this place; the opening was the frame of Saint Anthony's picture; she looked through and saw the interior of the chapel before her. Who was in the chapel? A knight and a maiden. What are they doing in the chapel? They stand in close embrace. The listening woman had heard no outcry through the stillness of the night. Evidently the maiden was not surprised; she had surely been waiting for him. They might have agreed long ago to meet here at this hour, and that was why the monk was in such haste. The kiss lasted long. Perhaps only a minute by the watch, but a thousand years of torment to the jealous watcher. This endless time sufficed for her inflamed imagination to paint the picture of the previous moments. Yes, without doubt, here waited for him this maiden with mourning, despairing, broken heart. She waited for her former lover in monk's cowl, who now laid aside the vows that forbade his heart to beat. She waited for the disgraced, scourged monk; perhaps with the firm resolution, that they would together mourn all this sorrow which is without relief here below, and then together abandon this world in which they have nothing more to seek.

But when instead of the humble priest, she saw step forth from the frame the handsome knight of old, she forgot at once that a church arched over her, and that a crypt was beneath her feet: she forgot that she had come here to weep, to pray, to prepare herself for death,—and threw herself into the arms of her fascinating lover.

All this the feverish fancy of the jealous watcher saw during the eternity of that kiss. And when they separated, and she saw their expressions, they were those of the blessed. How is it when one looks out from the gateway of Hell at the smile of the Blessed? She played with the trigger of her pistol. How easily she could kill them both. But the cup of bitterness, too, must be drained in swallows, as well as that of pleasure. Perhaps she can yet offer this cup to another and say, "My Lord, I drink to your health!" Such a festivity should not pass without the drinking of healths. But first she must watch through to the end what they were doing, and hear through to the end what they were saying.

The knight looked about him, and then seized the maiden by the hand. "Come away from here," he said in a hurried whisper. "What I am going to say, the church and sacred picture must not hear."

The maiden drew back. "For Heaven's sake, what can you have to say to me of that kind?"

The listener must leave her place quickly, for she must reach the oak door before the lovers stepped through the recess of the altar picture into the passage, otherwise the light of the torch shining in when they opened the door would betray that somebody had been watching for them; and then must they kill her, and she did not wish to lose her life so cheaply. She had closed the door before the maiden had allowed herself to be persuaded to follow her lover. Idalia concealed herself again in the room of the beautiful women of old. She leaned against one of the eternal sleepers, concealed her face in her veil, and hid the lantern under her dark cloak. Soon she heard the creak of the door, gliding steps, and the clink of spurs.

"I tremble," said the maiden.

"What do you fear when I am with you?"

"Everything, and myself."

"I will defend you against the whole world."

"And against myself?"

"Do you not love me still?"

"Because I do love thee, I fear for myself."

"If you do love me, you will come with me."

"Whither?"

"Out into the world where I shall lead you."

"But you are a priest!"

"No longer. In the same way that I could put on the monk's cowl, I can lay it off again. That blow on the cheek that I received is the expiation for the sword stroke that I gave."

"And your vows?"

"God will not count this against me, and as for man, I care not. *I have read the Holy Scriptures*

through to the end, and nowhere in them can be found that to love is a sin, and that to renounce love is a sacrifice pleasing to God. This monstrous idea is an invention of man."

One of the many occupants of the room of the dead stirred at these words, for she heard her own words—repeated to another. This was the fruit they bore!

"Listen, something moves in that room over there!"

"Don't look that way," said Tihamer.

"Who's there?"

"Noble ladies who have been asleep for two hundred years." Magdalene took his lantern, and threw its light timidly into the dark space.

"What a frightful sight—skeletons in bridal attire!"

"Leave the place."

"One of them has her head covered with a veil."

"Perhaps it is a widow; under the veil is a death's skull."

"It seems to me as if it moved."

"Only your imagination."

"There's a light shines through her cloak."

"Decayed bones do sometimes shed a light."

The knight drew the maiden away from the sight. It is true that sometimes a light does shine through decayed bones and a death skull does see and hear. The maiden in her terror burst into tears. The youth encouraged her tenderly as he took her in his arms.

"Listen to me, my Heaven, my all of happiness; we have no other choice except this passage under the earth, or that other to Heaven. For I cannot return to my monastery, and I will not be condemned to the temptations of my tormenting devil."

("His tormenting devil! that's what I am," whispered the figure under the veil.)

"And what fate awaits you?" continued the knight; "—to be chained to a beast—to be sacrificed more horribly than if you were offered up to a bloodthirsty idol!"

"No, no! Death rather!"

"My plan is for you to live and be happy."

"Did you not promise me to take me to a convent?"

"I thought then that I too should end my days in woe; but now I know that I am not yet a consecrated priest. Bishop Thurzo told me so to my face, and reprimanded me for usurping the name of Father. But even if I were a consecrated priest, I should still be free to change my fate. If I become a Protestant, no vow binds me any longer. *We will go to Transylvania, and adopt the Hungarian faith; you know ever so many belong to this faith, just, pious, God-fearing people; a third of the population of the country is Protestant. God will not punish us either for this.*"

("Ah, he learned that too from me; how well he remembers!")

"We will go to distant lands, where no one has ever heard our name. *I will buy an estate where we can live in comfort. I may become as rich as I please; look in this niche here; here are treasures heaped up that we need only to take; all is mine.* It was left me as an inheritance by the one who hid it here in former days. I have the proof in writing. The treasure is doubly mine; on the casks of gold and silver are inscribed my family arms; the Hussites of old stole it from our castle Lietava. It is my inheritance, see there!" The knight threw the light of his torch into this niche of the wall; the maiden's eyes were blinded by the sight of the treasure heaped up there.

"I can take as much of it as my shoulders can carry off."

But the maiden said sadly, "I have no desire for the treasure. Who knows what curse is resting there!"

"I too am willing to renounce it. Then we will go away poor, *and we will journey to some poor little village, whose church tower is surmounted with a weather-vane; you shall be the wife of a poor Calvinist pastor, and take care of your own kitchen and vegetable garden.* A thatched roof shall be our shelter, and happiness shall dwell within."

("These words, too, did I put into his mouth.")

"How beautiful it would be," sighed the maiden, "if it were not a dream!"

"All can be real, if you will but say yes."

"Ah, do not tempt me! Already have I gone so far that I can no longer cast a stone at any sinful woman. I am the most sinful of all. I have allowed myself to be overpersuaded—not by you so much as by my own heart—at night, and Sunday night too—when all good people are asleep, to

steal out of the house, God's house, the church I chose for a meeting place with you! I have drawn the veil over my face in the presence of men, and drawn it aside in the presence of the saints. I am more sinful than the Lady of Madocsany, for I do what she only meditates. I come here under the cloak of innocence."

"I swear to you, you are more holy than the saints there on the wall. If your soul condemns you because you only half-love, quiet it by saying that you love me wholly."

"What would you have me do?"

"Follow me now,—this very moment. The way of escape is open. *In the summer-house of Madocsany Castle are two horses saddled, the key is in the rear gate*; we can escape unnoticed. When the morning dawns, and our escape is discovered, we shall be beyond the mountains."

("My own plan of flight.")

"Leave me, for Heaven's sake, tempt me not. A week to consider."

"No, no!"

"One day then at least, to consider this whole plan of yours. If I am to turn aside from God and all the saints, let me at least finish weeping in their presence; let me tell them why it is I love you more than Heaven."

("Ah, you too know that? And yet you did not learn it from me!")

"Let me go back for a day—just for one day—I must take leave of the memory of my mother, must beg her gentle picture for forgiveness, must collect my few relics, set free my poor little dove, and once more kiss the hand that has so often abased me, but that I still bless. I cannot go with you until I have kissed my father's hand for the last time."

"Very well, it shall be so; but promise me that you will come again to-morrow."

"By my eternal happiness, I will come."

"And follow me out into the world?"

"God pardon me for what I am doing!"

"And so I let you go. God be with you."

And he kissed the maiden's brow.

"Accompany me with your light back into the church; now that I am sinful, I am afraid of the darkness of the church."

Both went back through the door into the passage way, and the door closed behind them. Idalia came out of her hiding-place—the bones of the widow—! She shook the mould off her cloak. She came near letting loose the hot lava of her passion. In the ring of the closed door hung the ring of the secret lock: the name that served as key was Hieronymus. She had only to put the iron pole across the door, shake up the rings, and then pound with her fist on the heavy door, and cry,—"I wish you a pleasant journey, you turtle-doves! You can go out past the two bears, and that third one, your father. I send kind greetings to all three." But she knew how to control herself; it should not be done this way. To-morrow is yet to come, and that shall be the *dies iræ*. She had nothing more to say. She caught up her lantern, and ran hastily back, so hastily that she slipped several times on the damp ground. When she had run about a thousand feet, she looked back. She did not see the torch-light coming near her. Naturally they must take leave of each other, and that required time.

It was still the dead of night when she reached the end of the passage-way. Saint Nepomeck stood aside for her, and then took his place again. Idalia hurried up the secret stairway to Father Peter's room.

The child in his fear had fallen asleep on the bearskin in front of the bed. The mother laid him on the bed and covered him over, and he did not awaken. Then she looked out of the window to wait until the saint's statue came down again. It was a good half hour before the figure of Father Peter appeared from underground. So then their parting must have lasted half an hour. He had escaped through the window; through the window he must come back. She waited until he began to climb up the trellis-work; then wrapped her sleeping child in her cloak and carried him to her own room. Father Peter should not speak with him again.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ICE-BLOCKED FLOOD.

This night was not for sleep. Idalia went from room to room with the death-wound at her heart. She did not herself know what she was looking for. She stopped before her mirror and gazed at herself for some time. Her deep sorrow, her restless passion, had made her face still more

beautiful. The tears shining in her eyes lent a peculiar charm to her features. "You lie. I am not beautiful! I am a demon—the demon that pursues him!" The mirror then said to her, "You are hideous." Now she knew what she must do. She sat down to write a letter.

"To his Lordship, Grazian Likovay.

Honored Lord: If you would know whose lover Father Peter really is, keep watch to-night and when you hear the bells ring at midnight,—those bells that you think are rung by spirits, since they have no cord—then, instead of covering up your head in fear, arise and go with your servants into the ghost-haunted chapel; there you shall learn which one of us has cause to go begging for his lost honor. What I have said, I have said—to-night after midnight. If you take warning, well and good; if not, also good. It matters not to me whether you accept it, or whether you do not. You will repent if you listen to me: you will repent still more if you do not.

I remain, your respectful servant,

The widow of Franz Karponay."

She sealed the letter with her own crest. Meantime, it had been gradually growing light. She sent for the Fool.

"Hirsko," she said, "Can one cross the Waag?"

"Hare and hounds can; but man could hardly do it."

"Why not?"

"Because during the night, the ice began to move, and if it has not caught fast on the island, it must be going right merrily."

"Would you dare cross over with this letter?"

"If I had two heads, and could lose one there and leave the other here, I do not say but that I would undertake it."

"Listen, Hirsko; I'll give you a new suit from head to foot, if you'll take this letter through. If you return, you shall have wine enough for a lifetime."

"And if I go to the bottom, I shall have water enough for a lifetime."

"Just try it. It's not so very dangerous. See this purse, it's full of money; that too is yours, if you succeed."

The Fool shook his big head. He was not ready to accept her proposition that he should "just try it, for he could float like a pumpkin."

"Now listen, Hirsko; I know that you have always been in love with me. If you carry this letter over and come back, I'll be your wife."

At this the Fool gave a bound, and then began tugging with both hands at his shoe strings.

"Tira li! You're not joking, just give me a kiss."

Idalia offered her lips to the monster. He hurried out of the room with the letter, down to the Waag, striding along with a six-foot pole. Idalia stationed herself at the balcony window and watched her messenger. The ice had already begun to move on the Waag; single fields of it floated down the centre of the stream, and giant cakes were heaped one above another; only a Fool would undertake such a task. The messenger's figure disappeared at times behind the barricades and then reappeared: now and then, he broke in, and worked his way out again with his pole. After an hour's struggle in the very face of Providence, he reached the other shore.

"He's well over," said Idalia, and left the window. For Hirsko it was hardly well; for Lord Grazian, when he had read the letter, in his first outburst of anger, had him bound and scourged to the full value of a woman's kiss. But the arrow had not missed its mark; it clung fast by the barb to his heart.—

Now Idalia can go to breakfast. Father Peter was already there; his face showed no change.

"I did not find the boy in his bed this morning," he said good-naturedly.

"No, naturally not," she said, with a suppressed laugh. "After you had laid him down, put him to sleep, and closed the door between the two rooms, he awoke, and becoming frightened to find himself alone, ran to me, and he is asleep still."

Father Peter made an effort to appear calm. The lady continued pertly: "Shall I guess why you closed the door between the two rooms? You found in your room a new suit of clothes, and did not wish the child to see you try them on."

There was a whirring sound in Father Peter's head. It was dangerous to say that he had not done so, for perhaps the lady would send for the garments and see that there were traces of mud on the boots. He had to answer the question with a smile. "Yes, you are right."

"Well, how do they fit?"

"That's for another to say."

"And when shall she say it?"

"When I answer your late questions."

"And when shall I get that answer?"

"To-morrow."

The lady clapped her hands with a laugh. "Ha, ha! To-morrow. So you won't keep me waiting a week. Not until next Sunday? To-morrow I shall learn whether you are Father Peter or Tihamer Csorbai! To-morrow, even to-morrow!"

And with that she jumped up and danced the cushion dance, singing enchantingly as she danced. Then she threw the cap from her head at the feet of the man, and knelt on her cap, as on a cushion.

If Tihamer Csorbai had entered into the joke and set free with a kiss the woman on her knees before him, then would she have plunged a poisoned dagger into his heart, and the other woman, at least, would have been saved. But nothing of the kind entered into the knight's thoughts. The woman rose without a kiss, and danced and danced, until she danced herself out of the room. No expression on her face betrayed what was raging in her soul. She went to her room to waken her boy. She was tenderness itself. Young Cupid complained of the frightful dreams he had had in the night. He saw first Father Peter and then his mother push Saint Nepomeck aside and follow each other down to hell.

"You little goose, you ate too much plum-cake last evening."

"But I did not dream this, I saw it with my own eyes. I was in Father Peter's room."

"Oh, you darling, you were with me all night long. I could not cover you up often enough, you kicked about so."

"Where's my little silver whistle?"

"Your little silver whistle! Dear soul, you left that in the land of dreams."

"I am still cold. I am all of a tremble."

"You are feverish, sweetheart; stay in bed to-day, and I'll bring your playthings to you, and make you a nice tea that will make you well again."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE GHOST'S HOUR.

Grazian Likovay read the letter through two and three times, and could not understand it. There is nothing more difficult than putting an idea into an empty head. Then he had to call Master Mathias to his help.

"See this letter! A fool wrote it, a fool brought it, and only a fool can understand it."

"It's plain enough to me."

"How so? How so?"

"You've not forgotten, have you, the disgrace you brought on Father Peter at the Bittse wedding-feast? I was there myself. I saw it, and I remember the face you tore the cowl from; it was exactly Tihamer Csorbai's face."

"I hit him a blow that told, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did; but a wound of that kind is not forgotten, especially when it falls on a wound that is not yet scarred over. Now you know Tihamer Csorbai is the rejected suitor of your daughter Magdalene, and that we live so near each other that the two castles stare each other in the eye."

"Then you think the letter is about Magdalene?"

"I am sure there is no other woman in the household. But if all these beautiful women, young and old, hanging in these frames, were living, Tihamer would still give his heart to Magdalene alone. For if a handsome woman were all he asked, he would have had it right there in Madocsany, and he need not have made any pilgrimages for her."

"But just look out of the window. Do you see how the ice is crashing out of the river? When the fool came over, the ice had just begun to move; but now heavy blocks of it are rolling along. See, the huts along the bank have been swept away, and the ice has cut off thick tree trunks like a razor. Do you think a human being could cross the river to-night?"

"Gracious Lord, I have read in the Bible that Peter trod the water with bare feet, and that was a sea. Whatever is in the Bible, as a good Lutheran, I must believe."

"But that was in old times, and it was Saint Peter; he could do anything. To-day is To-day."

"All I know, gracious Lord, is that a priest can do a good deal, a lover can do more, and when you get both in one, he can do everything."

"We must talk it over with Berezowski." The old suitor, since his return from the wedding feast at Bittse, had been staying at Mitosin Castle. It was understood that he should wed the beautiful Magdalene, and take her to his house in Galicia. The license was all ready. The only reason that the marriage had not yet taken place was that father-in-law and son-in-law kept the bottle going from hand to hand until morning, and then the lover had to be dragged off to bed by his hands and feet, and neither a fire alarm nor a murderer's stroke could have roused him from his bed. Afternoons, this bigot Lord would not enter into any churchly ceremony, and so the wedding was put off from day to day; and the wedding feast was secretly consumed by the guests in advance.

To-day too they shook and pulled the bridegroom elect; they roared in his ear; but to all their attempts, his only reply was a movement of the hand to brush away a fly, or of the foot, as aimed at a dog; and then he slept on steadily.

"Wait," said Lord Grazian, "I have an idea. I will question the girl." And he went in search of his daughter. He found Magdalene at an open window.

"Well, my child, you must have hot blood to open the window in such ice-cold weather as this."

"I am giving my doves their freedom. They will have nobody to feed them, if I go away to-day or to-morrow."

"So you know that you are to be married to-day or to-morrow."

"Yes, I know, dear father."

"And you have stopped tearing your hair out and bursting into tears, and crying out, 'I'd rather die a hundred times than marry him!'"

"I will not weep again in your presence, my father."

"Your nature is entirely changed. Has this been since the Bittse wedding feast? When I tore the cowl from the head of your former lover, and you learned that he was now the lover of a beautiful woman—that changed you, did it?"

"That was a frightful moment, father."

"And you do not love the priest?"

"I swear to you, dear father, that I do not love the priest."

"That would be dreadful. I don't know what I should do with you if you dared even to dream of that. But what's this little bag for?"

"I am going to put some little relics in it, that I have kept of my poor mother's; the small medallion with her miniature, a lock of her hair, woven into a flower, and a little silver cross that I used to wear when I was a child. All are to go with me when I am far, far from here."

"You have changed entirely and become a good daughter. I shall live to give you my blessing."

"Oh, do give me your blessing, if only one word," entreated the girl, as she knelt before her father. "Just let me kiss your hand once, and then lay it on my head."

Grazian let the girl draw his hand to her lips.

"Only say that you forgive me all the sorrow I have caused you against my will."

Her entreaty deceived Grazian's sleepy mind.

"That's good, I am not angry with you," he growled out, and with his hand stroked the head of his daughter, kneeling before him; it was meant for something like a blessing. "But now you must consider yourself ready, for the priest is here. To-night we must go to bed early, and get up betimes to-morrow, for to-morrow shall be the wedding."

Then Lord Grazian went back to the room where he had left Master Mathias.

"You're on the wrong track, young man," he said; "I have just shrived the girl. She really is entirely changed. She does not cry at all when I talk about her wedding, and I told her that to-morrow was to be the day. She said, 'Very well,' and kissed my hand very prettily."

"Then that's the very best proof that she has something else in mind. She has said good-bye because she intends to go away to-night with her lover before the wedding to-morrow. That is why she consented so readily. I know women better than that."

"All the devils of Hell! Suppose that should be so! I will eat fire and drink poison if that's true. Wake that Pole up, even if he is half-dead. One can't manage a thing of this kind alone. Rouse the household."

"We will do just the opposite. If we give the alarm, they too will learn it and be on their guard. Instead of that, let everybody drink until he cannot waken himself, and we will drug the bears. There is some secret connection with the church—those bells at midnight, and the ghost in the lighted church that your lordship himself has seen and heard,—all that does not happen without the help of man. There is something underneath it all. Just leave the whole matter to me, my Lord; by evening, I will map out such a campaign as to catch Beelzebub himself if he is in the business."

Until evening there were whispered consultations throughout Mitosin Castle, but the women were kept out of the secret. While Magdalene was at supper, the church was filled with Berezowski's armed servants. The bridegroom, in a violent passion, insisted that he would be present himself. As twilight came on, Berezowski slipped into the chapel, and concealed himself there with his armed followers in the crypt. They had a cask of beer and a checker board to make the time pass more rapidly. When it was hardly dark, Grazian gave orders for all to go to their night's rest, for the next morning they must rub their eyes open early, for there was to be a wedding in the house. The whole night through, not a soul must stir, and cellars and store-houses were to be kept locked. At evening, the students sang the Maiden's song before the windows of the bride's room, and then all the lights in the castle went out. There was as deep a quiet as if no one were awake; only the cracking of the ice on the Waag sounded on the still night.

When the great castle clock struck midnight, Magdalene arose, put on her gown, fastened to her girdle the little bag with its relics, and slipped noiselessly down the stairway to the little gate in the rear that led to the bear den. She looked about her, but the bears were not to be seen. After Candlemas, the bears begin their winter sleep, when the weather outside is raw. The bears did not cross her path. Fearlessly she went to the church-door. From there she breathed one last farewell to the castle of her fathers, that she was to leave forever, and then entered the door. As before, the moonlight fell upon the church, and lighted up the pierced saints, the nameless gravestones, and the altar picture in its carved frame. Now had she reason to fear, for she had learned what those saints suffered from the darts that pierced them. She had learned who slept under nameless gravestones, and the names of those terrible forms that frightened and misled the hermit in the picture.

If her deliverer, if her lover, would only come sooner! The owls in the tower hooted more than ever. Suddenly the bell rang and the altar picture shone brightly. Her lover was near. What a wonderful altar picture that was that appeared in the place of Saint Anthony,—a Saint Ladislaus! This was a genuine Hungarian saint, not one tortured to death by heathen, but one who struck the heathen down! Now he came down from the altar frame to comfort the kneeling maiden.

"It is well that you hurried: to-morrow they are to take me away to Poland. You might never more have seen me."

"Let us hasten, my love."

"Just wait a moment until I offer one last prayer at my brother's grave."

"Let me add mine."

And so the two went and knelt before the monument of the murdered brother, and hand in hand offered their prayer.

"Amen," and "Amen." The girl kissed the bust carved in stone. "You forgive me, do you not, dear brother?" she said.

"How could I help forgiving you, my dear sister?" rang out a hoarse voice from the depths, and with that the crypt door opened, and out plunged Berezowski's armed force, and at their head the wronged bridegroom with drawn sword. In the hand of Tihamer Csorbai too, the sword suddenly flashed.

"Well, if you are no priest, I'll kill you on the spot," roared Berezowski, raising his weapon for a heavy stroke; but Tihamer advanced and struck him under the shoulder, so that his arm dropped. Berezowski himself fell back on the floor without seeing the end of the struggle.

"Back underground again, you cowards!" shouted Tihamer, dealing deadly blows at his assailants, who withdrew before his terrible anger toward the crypt door. Just then, the church door opened and in rushed Grazian's household of servants with torches and weapons; he himself carried only his crutch in his hand.

"Here monk," he cried, "stand, parson, you Father Peter, tempter! You shall be beaten down with a stick." And he rushed blindly toward him with his crutch raised. Magdalene threw herself between the two.

"By all the saints! Father! Tihamer! Do not harm each other, trample rather on me!"

"Out of the way!" growled her father, and with his foot he pushed aside the maiden kneeling before him. Luckily for him, one of his own company had thrown himself in the way, and received on his head the heavy sabre cut that Tihamer had intended for the father. Two more servants fell fatally wounded under the knight's grim strokes, and then his sword broke off at the hilt. But this miserable pack of menials did not conquer him: it was true he had no sword, but on the altar were great candelabra in copper. He seized one of those, and struck such blows right and left that soon his way was free before him. Whoever laid hold of him was glad to let him go again.

With one leap he was on the altar: already was he in the altar frame, and behind him lay the secret passage; he had only to open the oaken door and push the bolt, and he was saved. But as he cast a glance from the altar down to the church below, bright with the red light of the torches, he saw a sight that held him riveted fast to the spot: he saw Grazian Likovay seize Magdalene's long streaming hair, and drag the helpless maiden to the church door.

This robbed him wholly of his senses; rage stifled every human thought in his soul. He was now nothing but a wild beast—a lion robbed of his lioness; roaring with anger, he sprang with one bound from the altar to the floor; each hand was armed with the heavy candelabra, and with these as clubs he threw himself on the pack of servants, crushing everything before him in the way of human bones. Like Hercules in his Nessus-shirt, he raged through the midst of the servants and forced his way to the church door where Grazian was dragging his daughter by the hair. He overtook the old man, and dealt a heavy blow at his head, but Grazian caught it with his hand. Somebody from behind threw a cloak over Tihamer's head, another made a plunge at his feet, and soon he was overpowered, thrown down, and bound.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN'S REVENGE.

The ice on the Waag rolled more and more mightily! Not within the memory of the oldest inhabitant had it ever been so dangerous before. The icy flood crowded through the brook of Madocsany to the mill-dam, easily broken through, and then it might have found its way to the castle wall.

"See," said little Cupid to his mother, "Why did you push Saint Nepomeck out of his place, you and Father Peter? Now Saint Nepomeck is paying you for it."

"Oh, you've been dreaming."

"No, I saw it! I am still trembling at it."

"If you are trembling, then you have fever. Go back to bed, and don't look out of the window. I'll send Hirsko to tell you a story."

(Yes, Hirsko, who knows where he is now?)

"No, send me Father Peter instead, he'll tell me the truth."

"Very well then, Father Peter."

Since dawn, Idalia had been fully ten times to Father Peter's sitting-room to see if he was at home; but neither he nor his handsome cloak was to be seen. Through the opened window whistled the wind. The lady went out on to her glass-covered balcony and looked in astonishment at the great ice sea which the Waag had changed the valley into, for the time; a sea through the centre of which flowed a swift current, while its borders were of ice barricades, rising mountain high. The four tin-roofed towers of Mitosin Castle were resplendent in the morning sunshine. Suddenly it seemed to her that a black spot detached itself from the opposite bank and made its way through the ice stream. Soon she could see through the glass that it was a boat with five men. What might this boat be bringing? There need be no fear of five men. Here were five and twenty servants, hunters and haiduks already, and all armed with guns and halberds. The men in the boat were making a truly perilous attempt; the masses of ice threatened every moment to sink the boat. Often they jumped out to pull it through the ice blocks. At one moment a giant slab of ice rose and then suddenly plunged down, almost destroying them all, like so many water rats. A man must have a deeply fixed purpose to go to Madocsany such a day. Who could it be? There were four in the crew, it was apparent from a distance. The fifth was so wrapped in his bearskin that he was not recognizable. At last they came in safety to the mill-dam. Then the crew sprang out of their boat, dragged it up on the ice, fastened it to a willow; and now the fifth person, all wrapped in his bearskin, rose and climbed up on the bank. Then Idalia recognized him at a glance—he limped. It was the lord of the neighboring estate. Grazian Likovay was approaching,—her foe in whose heart she had now turned her knife for the second time. But he comes alone—what has he in mind? Was the old bear looking up his former foe, to throttle her, like a wild-cat? The bear would find by experience that the wild cat had claws she knew how to use.

The Lady Idalia wore a long Russian cloak, bordered with fur, and in the broad sleeves was carefully concealed a poisoned dagger, which must by a single scratch inevitably send down to death the strongest man.

At the same time, the haiduks entered the next room as a reserve force, and the steward and manager stood ready to strike down the first man who tried to injure their lady. Unnecessary prudence. Grazian Likovay had come without weapons; he could not have used any, had he had it; for his right arm was in a sling, and his hand was bandaged. Father Peter's last blow with the candelabra had been aimed at his head, but Likovay caught it with his hand, and so maimed it. The left hand was occupied with the crutch and his cap, now removed.

With downcast head and humble soul, dragging the lame foot, Grazian came into the presence of

the Lady, and addressed her in a voice like that of a beggar at the door.

"Humbled to the dust, I come, my Lady, to you, a poor, dead, buried old man. I acknowledge that I have been defeated, maimed, destroyed. I also recognize that I deserved it. I was the guilty one. I was the fool. When disgrace reached to the very tower of my own house, I sought it in your cellar. I accused you of a shame that was my daily bread. You were right. May this give you comfort."

"What have you done? I hope that you have not been killing or murdering."

"Oh, don't be frightened. I know how sensitive your heart is. You would have mourned if the wild, foolish Grazian Likovay, in consequence of a good word from you, in consequence of a truly friendly warning worthy of a kinsman and a neighbor, had throttled one after the other, both man and maiden. No, he has not done so; on the contrary, it is we who have been mowed down."

"By Father Peter?"

"Yes, by Father Peter, but in the form of Tihamer Csorbai. He is a valiant knight. First, he all but killed my intended son-in-law, the good Berezowski, and then he crippled two of my brave haiduks, and when his sword broke, seized the church candlesticks and dealt us blows. I received one, I beg you to look at it." And with that he took the bloody bandage off his hand.

Idalia was horrified; she wished to help Grazian bind it up again, but he would not allow it.

"Don't trouble yourself, gracious Lady, with my teeth and my left hand I can bind it up somehow."

"And what became of Father Peter?" urged the lady.

"He finally succumbed; 'many geese are the death of even a boar!'"

"Do you mean that he was killed?"

"No, not killed. I told you already that I did not kill anybody. I am a gentle, pious man. Neither I, nor anybody else at my command, will kill Father Peter."

"Then what will become of him?"

"I'll take care of that; but not a hair of his head shall be touched; I promise you that in advance. I swear to you, even, that he shall outlive me."

"What is to be done with your daughter?"

"Oh, you need have no concern on her account, gracious Lady, I have not killed her either. Neither have I shut her up in a dungeon, nor even once scourged her. I have become a good, inoffensive man."

"What have you done, then? Have you forgiven her?"

"I have not only released her from punishment, but I have even let her go. I let her go, just as I once promised her, if she should ever again presume to meet Tihamer Csorbai."

"You have not lost your senses, I hope."

"Must you know at once what I promised her? Very well, I promised her that I would set her in a boat, and would push her, boat and all, into the Waag, and then she might, in God's name, float whichever way the water carried her. Just at present, the Waag offers a fine opportunity for such a boat-ride."

"Is it possible that you have really done this?"

"It is, indeed. If you had listened in the stilly night, a little after midnight, you might have heard for a long time her cries for help, in the pauses of the crashing of the ice floes. I could not bear them, because the wind was blowing in the opposite direction, and the ice splitting sounded too loud."

"You are a monster!"

"Oh, no indeed! I am a humble crawling worm of the dust. I am a halting cripple. I am an uprooted, decayed willow. But why do I complain to you of my sorrow? I did not come through the icy flood to find Hell itself, to bewail my misery to you here in Madocsany Castle. I will not cause you one unpleasant hour in this way. I come, however, on a very important matter, which I wish to settle to-day between us. I wish to sell you the Mitosin estate."

"What's that?"

"The entire Mitosin estate. Castle and everything, including all the stock. I wish to sell it to you for all time. Your worthy husband once wanted to buy it of me, when I was in need of money, because of my son's debts. Your husband offered me then sixty thousand dollars and thirty thousand ducats, but I did not consent. I preferred to sell the beautiful fertile property of Alfald, my wife's dowry, but the Mitosin Castle of my ancestors I would not set a price on for my neighbor; my pride would not allow it. Now I have no more pride, I am humbled to the dust. The disgrace which has fallen upon my house has been seen by hundreds, has been talked of by hundreds; it is impossible for me to stay longer in this vicinity. I must go forth into a country where nobody understands our language,—to Wallachia or Little Russia. That is why I offer you

my estate. If you will pay the sum your husband offered, I shall accept with joyful thanks. If you wish to pay less, I shall not protest against it. I wish to flee from my possessions, and therefore I will sell them at any price, just as a dying man tries to sell his mattress to get money to buy his coffin."

Idalia raised her head proudly. The ornaments on her cap glittered; thus does the demon of satisfied revenge exalt his horns; the Bittse day was avenged, richly avenged with interest, and interest on interest. Her torn veil had been paid for with a whole shroud. They had wished to drive her hence, and now it was they who must flee. Now would she exult in her triumph.

"Well, noble Grazian Likovay, if you wish to sell your Mitosin estate forever, I will pay you the price for it that my poor departed husband offered. The gold is at hand; I am not accustomed to put it out at interest; you can have it when you please."

"Then, at once; for to-morrow at this time no living soul shall speak with me in the owl-nest of Mitosin. So then, at once,—that is what brought me here. I have ready with me the contract that your husband sent me, in two copies. We have only to fill in the blanks left for the names and amounts, sign the contract, seal it, and have it witnessed. Have you any men here who understand writing?"

"Yes."

Idalia did not need to go far for them. In the adjoining room, her steward and manager were listening; both learned men, who understood Latin too; she could call them. Now she was ready to offer her guest an arm-chair, and even have a cushion put under his gouty feet. The two learned men took up the two copies of the sale and purchase and compared the contents. Then they wrote the names and the amounts of the dollars and ducats. Both parties added their names with the same pen, and imprinted the red seal.

"Perhaps I ought to have sealed mine in black," muttered Grazian through his teeth, "But who can tell?"

Then both witnesses signed and sealed the document: each one took his copy, and now it was time to pay the money. Idalia had gold and silver brought and placed on the great oaken table. All had been packed in casks, large and small, arranged to open at the top, and on each cask was written the amount within.

"Do you require us to count the money, or weigh it out?" asked the Lady of Madocsany.

"We will neither count it, nor weigh it; whoever put it in knew how to count it, I am sure. And now I think everything is in order. Why should any one wish to deceive me, who is neither my friend nor my relative. There, boys, is a little drink-money for your trouble. And now close up the casks."

And with that he put his left hand into a cask, not one of silver, but of gold, and tossed a handful of it into the witnesses' caps, as they lay on the floor.

"The trade is done, gracious Lady. Now I give you the key of my castle. I shall spend the night at my agent's. By to-morrow morning, the Waag will be firm; my lame foot feels in advance that it is going to be very cold. You and your people can drive across in sledges, enter my towered hen-roost, and give your own invitations to a house-warming. Store-house and cellar are full. Now I ask one favor of you. Be so kind as to have your servants carry these casks to my boat for me. I will go ahead and wait for them there."

"But surely you will seal the casks with your own signet."

"What's the use of such care? These people will not deceive me, they are not relatives of mine. They are entire strangers, who have never received a favor from me. I can trust them."

"At your own risk."

"Now then, gracious Lady, let us shake hands for the last time. I regret that I cannot offer you my right hand. Now we can part in peace; neither one of us owes the other anything more in this world." And he offered Idalia his left hand. "What account we may have to settle with each other in the world below, Beelzebub will tell us, I suppose." With that he pushed her hand aside violently, took his crutch in his left hand, clapped his cap on his bald head, and without a word, limped out of the room and did not look around until he had reached his boat.

Twelve haiduks carried the casks of money to his boat; were they all there or not? Nobody counted. Anything more?

Then Likovay seated himself in the stern of his boat, and said to his boatmen, "Push off."

The boat moved still more slowly than before; but what wonder, when it was heavier by the hundredweight of silver and gold?

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAVE OF GOLD.

Grazian Likovay's gouty leg really was a good weather-prophet; they had hardly reached the middle of the Waag when the ice crowded around them, and the boat was held firm amid the blocks. One of the crew, at the peril of his life, had to cross the ice cakes to the shore, arouse the people of the castle, and return to the boat with a long rope. By clinging to this rope, Grazian and the crew, with the casks of gold, were brought to shore. Here the lord of the castle was met by Master Mathias with a troica on runners. The casks were put in, and Lord Grazian seated himself on the driver's seat, with Master Mathias beside him to guide the three horses.

"Knock the top out of one of the casks, my good friend, and pay the whole household their wages for a year. The treasurer, legal adviser, and general manager have been paid already and their goods packed up; within an hour every living thing will be gone from here. Every one I find staying behind will be shot down; you alone may stay with me."

"I beg your pardon for contradicting you," said Master Mathias, "but everybody knows already how much gold we brought back from Madocsany, and there is cause to fear that we shall be robbed if we stay alone."

"Don't worry. We'll put the whole troica into the church for the night, and nobody can force his way in there. As soon as the moon rises, we'll make ready the horses, take our seats in the carriage, and drive out into the wide world toward Galicia. We have money enough, and can live there like lords."

"But you know one cannot live by gold and silver alone; we must have something to eat."

"That has all been prepared for. In the agent's house, we shall get our evening meal, and provisions for the journey; here's the key. There you'll find some choice Tokay; we will carouse on that to-day and take what is left with us. Now get the sledge into the church."

This was done. The horses were put into the sacristy, because from their unguarded stable they could be easily driven away. One cask of gold was left outside, and with this Master Mathias paid the whole retinue a year's wages; then showed them all outside the gate and locked it behind them. After that nobody else could get into the castle, for the keys were already at Madocsany. The cask was still not entirely empty.

"What shall I do with the rest?" asked Master Mathias.

"Put the money in your pockets, you may need it on your way."

Master Mathias did not wait to be told twice.

"No, don't kiss my hand, faithful fellow, I do not deserve it. But listen. You are master of a thousand arts, and so I suppose you understand masonry; bring your tools here into the church."

Master Mathias obeyed. He brought the mortar, the trowel, and the smoothing board.

"Now pick up your tools and follow me."

Grazian led Master Mathias through the opening of the altar frame, (the picture had been cast aside) into the secret passage-way; then to the heavy iron door, which when opened from outside set the church bells ringing. This door opened into the long passage-way, and at its very beginning were two side passages. In front of one of these side passages had been unloaded a pile of bricks. Lord Grazian threw a light into the dark space.

"See!"

"What a frightful place," said Master Mathias, with his teeth chattering. "What kind of women are those?"

"Bones of women, as you see."

"How did they get here?"

"They know best how they got here, but how to get away from here was what they did not know. And yet they tried in every way, as you see. Here they tried to break through the wall; with knives they pulled out two and three rows of bricks, and then grew weary of the work and gave it up. The wall is six feet through here."

"Yes, fully."

"Now then, do you know what these bricks here are for? You are to wall up the opening of this other space."

"I can do that easily."

"But first swear to me as a good Lutheran, on the Holy Gospels, that you will never in this life tell one word of what you have seen and heard in this place to any living soul."

With that he drew from his pocket a small Bible, and required Master Mathias to put his hand on the Bible and repeat the oath after him.

"Now to your work."

Out of the depths of the recess there sounded forth a sorrowful song:

"De profundis ad te clamavi, Domine——"

"Who is that?" whispered Master Mathias with a shudder.

"Take your torch and look at him."

Master Mathias threw the light of the torch into the dark space. Then he saw Father Peter in his monk's cowl, bound, and in an upright position. All around him were heaped up gold and silver and jewels that held him fixed. His cowl was drawn down over his face, so that it could not be seen.

"Father Peter!" whispered Master Mathias, turning to Lord Grazian.

"The Devil is in you that you guessed it! Yes, it really is Father Peter."

"Who brought him here?"

"I did, with my crooked leg, and my crushed hand."

"So then he has not been killed."

"You heard him sing."

"And you wish me to wall him in?"

"Not wholly. Leave a hole in the wall, about the size of the head of a small cask, so that he shall not suffocate."

"And who shall bring him food when we leave this country?"

"A raven of the Prophet Elias. Anything that is in the Bible is true: if it happened once that a raven brought bread to a hungry prophet, it can happen twice. Now to your work. You have begun this work, and you must finish it. Do it good-naturedly, my faithful friend, or else I'll shoot you in the head and then this one after you."

Master Mathias was all in a cold perspiration, and went to work.

"While you are doing this, I will take a little walk in this underground paradise."

And Lord Grazian took his lantern on his maimed right arm and limped off through the dark, winding underground passage, counting his steps as he went. When he had counted five hundred and forty steps, he found himself in front of that cavern where the great cask stood, all covered over with green. He raised the cover; under this was a thick layer of wax that he bored through with his knife. The cask contained what he had supposed at the first glance—gunpowder.

He gathered up a little of the dust and scattered it over his torch, it blazed up; the gunpowder had been kept dry through these centuries under its layer of wax. Then he unbuttoned his coat, and brought out a long cotton fuse which he had wound around his waist a number of times. With his left hand and his teeth, he fastened this fuse to this match hanging at the bunghole of the cask; then he walked back, drawing the fuse after him—it was just five hundred and forty yards long. When he came to the end, he lighted the fuse, and noted by his watch how long it took to burn one yard—just one minute. How many hours are there in five hundred and forty minutes? That was too much for his head; Master Mathias would tell him.

When he returned, the wall was done, and Master Mathias was busy smoothing it off around the open space. It was strange that Grazian had not thought of this—what if Father Peter so walled up had made an arrangement with Master Mathias, during Grazian's absence, and by entreaties, threats and promises, persuaded him to make known his fate; or had he thought of this? Was that the purpose of the fuse, or was it for something quite different?

"Are you through, my good friend? Tell me how many times sixty goes in five hundred and forty?"

"Six times nine make fifty-four, so nine times."

"Quite right. Six times nine makes fifty-four. The table of ones was more than I could ever get. Yes, nine times—that is quite enough. Now I too shall be ready soon. Do you go to the agent's house, make a good fire on the hearth, spread the table, and prepare our supper. I will stay here a little longer to take leave of my son."

When the major-domo had gone, Grazian went back into the church. He lifted the casks of money from the carriage and rolled them along the passage-way to the space just walled in. When they were all piled up together, he stuck his hand in the opening:

"Greetings, my beloved son-in-law, Father Peter; how do you fare on your wedding day? You have won a beautiful bride, I must acknowledge. You shall not say you led hence my only daughter with only what she had on her back. I will be a generous father and give her her inheritance from both father and mother. Was ever father-in-law so good as I?"

Then he opened one of the casks and laid it with his left hand on his wounded right arm. He smothered the pain that this caused him and shook the silver shower of dollars down into the cavern; he did the same with all the casks that contained silver money.

"This was your portion from her mother; now comes the dowry from her father."

And he brought forth the casks full of gold, and poured their costly contents over the head of his son-in-law. The heaps of money came up to the victim's shoulders, only his head was still free.

"Miserere, mei Domine——" resounded from the lips of the man buried alive in gold.

"Ha, ha," laughed Lord Grazian, "so you want a song. Shall I sing you one? How do you like this: 'Gemitus mortis,—dolores inferni—circumdedederunt me. Perhaps you like this better:—'Yesterday I went to town and heard the matins read. Now the priest who read the matins has become my lover'—You don't want any more of that, then here's one: 'In paradisum ne ducant te angeli—Kyrie eleison'—ha ha ha!"

Then he seized his torch and hobbled off through the passage, continuing to mix popular songs with litany.

That diabolical laughter was the last sound of the night in this subterranean cavern.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FEAST OF DEATH.

This Master Mathias was a very clever man—more clever than all the rest.

"I have been made the receiver of a secret, so strong that it will eat its way through the walls that hold it. It's true I have sworn on the Gospel that I will not betray it to anybody; but how can Lord Grazian believe me altogether, when he does not believe the Gospel? I am inclined to think he would have much more confidence in a dead man. And how easy it is to make a dead man out of a living one! Just a taste of meat with something good on it—one swallow of a carefully prepared drink—and then a peaceful good night. One does not need to defend himself against a dead man."

Master Mathias thought of this while he cut the meat that he found in the house, set the wine on the table and wiped off the plates. He had thought out a plan. In the house there was still one living creature, a hunting dog; he called him in, gave him some meat and bread; and the dog swallowed all. Then he gave him a bowl of wine; the dog drank this too, and nothing happened. So then neither drink nor food contained any poison that would kill instantly, and later—why he would watch carefully my Lord Grazian's hands.

He had to wait some time for him to finish putting away the gold, then suddenly the ghostly bell rang out, a sign that some one was near the door of the underground passage. Lord Grazian staggered out of the church. The bears were not in the garden any more, their hides were hanging on the hedge; their master had had them skinned the day before, as a reward for their faithless watching.

"The ghosts have been ringing again," growled out Master Mathias, as Lord Grazian entered.

"Never mind, they have done it for the last time," said Lord Grazian, sitting down at the table. His feet were encased in large, high Polish boots, in the legs of which were all kinds of tools; out of one he brought a knife in a silver case and his two-tined fork. A real lord never puts a stranger's table-silver to his mouth. Out of the other leg he brought a gold drinking cup in tortoise-shell case, the "bratina" that can be drained at one swallow.

"Now, my good servant, prepare yours, and prepare mine; you see I have but one arm."

Master and servant sat down opposite each other, and ate from one dish. The master had good reason to be hungry, for he had not tasted a mouthful since early morning. The dog went from one to the other, wagging his tail; neither food nor drink seemed to have hurt him any.

"Now then, my good fellow, let us both drink out of this 'bratina'; first I and then you. Do you see that is the advantage of a 'bratina', because the master of the house cannot poison his guests, as is the custom with foreigners. For with us the cup goes round, and all drink from one cup,—first of all the master."

Lord Grazian filled the cup and drained it off—

"To your health, my faithful servant!"

Then he passed the cup, and Master Mathias too drained it.

"To your health, my beloved master!"

Then followed in turn the customary toasts. "To the health of the happy bride!" "May God give long life to the brave bridegroom!" "Long life to the beautiful Lady of Madocsany!" And so the cup went back and forth with toasts to friends and foes until there was nothing left to be said.

Meantime the moon had risen and shone through the window. The Lord Grazian said to Master Mathias:

"Why, my good fellow, you have a married daughter."

"True, she lives in Tepla, poor soul. Yes, over there."

"How many children has she?"

"Six."

"You have not drunk to their health yet, have you?"

"On my soul, no."

"Don't drink any more, my dear fellow, you've drunk enough already. And that not only for to-day, but for your whole life. You are a dead man already, and so am I. This 'bratina' that we have been drinking out of, was poisoned with an Italian poison that goes by the clock. You have two hours left to live. So get yourself together and go on your way; the ice is firm, you can go over to Tepla to your daughter. Then you can go to bed, send for a priest, and make your will, and you will at least have somebody to close your eyes."

That was the end of the comedy.

Master Mathias sprang up in terror, his hair on end. He began already to feel the pangs of approaching death. With a curse he dashed out of the room, leaving behind his bag of gold, and goaded by torture, rushed out through the castle gate over the ice-covered Waag.

Lord Grazian filled his beaker again and again with wine; and drank and drank—all sole alone. In his heart he offered toasts to all who had received good from him and returned evil, and then again to those who had done him favors, returned only by evil. Every cup was a new draught of poison, though so compounded that it acted slowly. Lord Grazian must make haste, for he wished to fulfil his word made to the Lady of Madocsany—"I swear to you that Father Peter shall live longer than I."

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL IS OVER.

Idalia could not sleep that night. Satisfied revenge brings no sweet sleep! Frightful visions chased through her brain, in which the distorted faces of her disgraced victims haunted her. There is a maiden in a boat that the ice flood sweeps along, her cry is borne on the wind; and that man?—it is the one to whom Idalia has prayed, whom she has lost, and now she would give him over to neither man nor devil.

The beautiful woman had many stately rooms, and yet there was not space enough for her. Long since had she wept through them all. Back and forth she went to the balcony and blew her breath on the panes in warm rings through which she could look out at the Waag. A great waste field of ice stretched out before her, reaching from Mitosin Castle to Madocsany; the moon lighted up a landscape still as death; about three o'clock in the morning, as she gazed out from her balcony over the wide waste, like a mad woman, it suddenly seemed to her as if a black spot moved over there and came nearer and nearer the castle; as it came nearer, it proved to be the figure of a man; the nearer it approached, stumbling among the ice blocks, the more evident became its purpose to come straight to the castle. It was somebody from Mitosin! Idalia wakened her people and gave orders to carry out a stretcher and help the man who was with difficulty struggling through the ice, and bring him to the castle. This man was Master Mathias. When brought before Idalia, his face was hardly recognizable, it was so blue with frost and pain, and its features were so distorted.

"I came from Mitosin," he gasped out, sinking down upon the bearskin before the fire where they had laid him.

"Bring him a cup of warm wine," ordered the lady.

"No, no! no more wine," he groaned, "leave us alone. I have had enough of that."

When left alone with the lady of the castle, he wrung her hands and sank upon his knees.

"For God's sake, save me, most gracious Lady, I entreat you!"

"What ails you?"

"The Lord of Mitosin has poisoned me and himself too. May God punish him for it. Help me, or I must die."

"How can I help you?"

"Don't begrudge me that. You know very well I have been poisoned by a drinking cup, although there was no poison to be seen in it. They say that when you poisoned your husband, you did the same thing: you drank from the same cup with him, so as not to excite his suspicions, and drank the poison; but after he died, you went aside and took the antidote. You lived and he died."

"You're mad!"

"No, I am not. Give me the antidote. You know the secret. If you set me free, I'll tell you a secret you will not be sorry to hear."

"What secret is that?"

"The secret where Father Peter is now."

At this name, the lady sprang toward Master Mathias, raised him up from the bearskin, and laid him on a couch.

"What, you know where he is! Is he still alive?"

"Yes, he is, and no harm has been done yet!"

"Where is he?"

"Give me the antidote quickly."

"No, no; there is time yet. I must have the secret first, there is no escape for you until then."

Large drops of sweat stood out on the brow of the tortured man.

"My master made me promise on the Holy Gospels that I would not betray it to any body. I shall go to Hell for this."

"You'll go there anyway. The question is whether you will go sooner or later. If you tell me what you know, the devils will have to wait for you; if you keep it to yourself, you'll have to go at once. Speak at once or die."

"You'll surely give me the medicine?"

"Yes, there you have it now. While you were speaking, I dropped it into your mouth. I carry it with me always in the stone of my ring. See how green it is, gleaming in the darkness; if I should give you all of it, you would live a hundred years longer."

The poor fellow in the agony of death told all. When he spoke of the chamber of the dead, and of the cavern of treasure, Idalia was convinced that he spoke the truth. No one who had not been there and seen them could know of these places.

"Good," she said, "now take this. Go home to Tepla to your daughter, and say nothing of what you know."

But what the beautiful lady really gave Master Mathias was anything but an antidote; it was a still more active poison, so there should be no time for him to communicate his secret to a third.

When Master Mathias had dragged himself to Tepla to his daughter's house, his tongue hardly moved in his throat, and he could only stammer: "Father Peter—walled in—under-ground—with treasures—in Mitosin—still alive—I am undone." More he could not say; by the time the priest came, he was already dead.

Idalia was left alone with the secret she had extorted. Suddenly her old passion blazed up again to its full height like a column of fire. Her beloved was still alive; he was only buried, walled in deep underground,—abandoned by God and man, left to the company of the corpses, with no sound save those of the silent night; robbed of his loved one, betrayed in despair, with nobody to expect but grim death. What if somebody should go down to him in this frightful grave, and should look at him through that small opening; would not such a countenance seem like that of an angel looking down from Heaven? Would he not look upon her as a goddess who should bring him up from the depths of the grave into God's world again? Would it be possible for him not to yield to the force of that love which opens graves even, and will not leave him to God or the devil?

She did not hesitate long, but threw her black cloak around her shoulders, placed a dagger and a sword at her belt, and looked for a strong axe: "It will be convenient," she thought, "to break through the heavy walls." She lighted her lantern, and stole out of the castle.

Toward morning, a thick fog had settled over the place, so that nobody saw which way she went. In fact nobody ever knew which way she had gone.

About six o'clock that morning, the whole country was aroused by a frightful underground explosion convulsing the earth. Towers fell, castles rocked, the Jesuit monastery fell in, and Mitosin Chapel was reduced to a heap of stones.

Those who were awake at the time maintained that they saw a giant column rise up from the middle of the Waag and blaze on high. The clouds of smoke were visible for some time through the fog, and seemed like an army of darkness. The broken ice began to heave and roll violently, not only forward, but in all directions, overspreading the valley and sweeping away before it villages and forests.

After the flood had subsided and the Waag returned to its bed, evil traces were left behind in thick layers of round pebbles; for the Waag is not like those friendly rivers which when they

overflow cover the earth with a fertile deposit.

In the excitement over the disturbance of the elements, people forgot the frightful family history that had just been enacted in the two castles. A few days later, relatives of the Likovay family found the body of Lord Grazian in the agent's quarters of the castle. The swollen flood had not forced its way there; but not one stone upon another was left of the little church. The devastating explosion had opened a way through this for the streaming flood of waters, whose irresistible current ground stone and wood to powder.

The same fate met the statue of Nepomeck at Madocsany. The Hussite passage was filled with stones, and the flood took its path from there over the country.

It was not for a long, long time that the members of the Likovay family began to inquire what had become of the treasure that Lord Grazian had received from the Lady of Madocsany for his estate; but never a trace of it was found.

And the whole of this story, from beginning to end, is a true story. The dates are kept in the family archives: and on the lips of the people the name of Father Peter still lives. The place is often visited by earthquakes, and at such times they say, "Father Peter has turned over in his grave." And every time that Mitosin Castle and estate is transferred to a new purchaser, it is stipulated in the contract, that if the buried treasure is found, it shall be given back to its rightful owners. But the people say that the treasure will never be found, until Father Peter has been set free from his living grave; and this may be true.

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