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SIELANKA

An Idyll

BY
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TRANSLATED BY
VATSLAF A. HLASKO and THOS. H. BULLICK



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SIELANKA.

An Idyll.

In the woods, in the deep woods, was an open glade in which stood the house of the forester Stephan. The house was built of logs packed with moss, and the roof was thatched with straw; hard by the house stood two outbuildings; in front of it was a piece of fenced-in ground, and an old well with a long, crooked sweep; the water in the well was covered with a green vegetation at the edges.

Opposite the windows grew sunflowers and wild hollyhocks, high, stately, and covered with blossoms as if with a swarm of gorgeous butterflies; between the sunflowers there peeped the red heads of the poppy; around the hollyhocks entwined sweet peas with pink blossoms and morning-glories; close to the ground grew nasturtiums, marigolds, primroses, and asters, pale because they were shaded from the sunlight by the leaves of the hollyhocks and sunflowers.

The fenced ground on either side of the pathway leading to the house was planted with vegetables—carrots, beets, and

cabbage; further off in a separate fenced-in lot there waved with each breath of wind the tender blue flower of the flax; still beyond could be seen the dark green of the potato patch; the rest of the clearing was checkered with the variegated shades of the different cereals that ran to the edge of the lake which touched the glade on one side.

Near to the house a few trees were growing. Some were cherry trees, and one was a birch, with long, slender branches which swayed in the wind, and with every breeze its leaves touched the dilapidated moss-covered straw thatch of the roof; when the stronger gusts of wind bent its boughs to the wall, and pressed its twigs and the waves of leaves against the roof, it would seem as if the tree loved the house and embraced it.

In this tree the sparrows made their home; the rustling of the leaves and twigs commingled with the chirp and joyous noise of the birds; in the eaves of the house the doves had built their nests, and the place was filled with their speech, cooing and calling to each other, entreating and discussing as is customary between doves, these noisy and talkative people.

At times it happened that they were startled by some unknown cause; then around the house was heard a loud flapping, the air was filled with the whirl of wings and a multitude of white-feathered breasts; you could hear tumult, noise and excited cries—the whole flock flew out suddenly, circled round the house, now near, now far off. Sometimes they melted in the blue, sometimes their white feathers reflected the sunlight, again they hung over the house, undulating in the air, and alighting at last like a downfall of snowflakes on the gray straw of the roof.

If this occurred in the rosy morning or in the splendor of the red setting sun, then in the glory of the air these doves were not white, but tinted pink, and settled on the roof and birch tree as flames or scattered rose leaves.

At twilight, when the sun had hidden itself beyond the woods, this cooing under the roof and chirping in the birch tree became gradually quiet. The sparrows and the doves shook the dew from their wings and prepared to sleep; sometimes one of them gave voice once more, but more rarely, more softly, more drowsily, and then all was silent—the dusk was falling from the heavens upon the earth. The house, cherry trees, and birch were losing their form, mingling together, melting, and veiled in a mist which rose from the lake.

Around the glade, as far as the eye could reach, there stretched the wall of dark pine trees and thick undergrowth. This wall was broken in one place by a wide dividing line, which reached to the edge of the lake. The lake was a very large one, the opposite side was nearly lost to view, and in the mist could be hardly discerned the red roof and steeple of a church, and the black line of the woods closing the horizon beyond the church.

The pines were looking from the high sandy banks upon their reflection in the lake as if in a mirror, and it seemed as if there was another forest in the water; and when the trees were swaying on the earth they were also swaying in the water, and when they quivered on the earth they seemed to quiver in the water; as they stood in the still air motionless, then every needle of the pines was painted distinctly on the smooth, unruffled surface, and the straight trunks of the trees standing like rows of pillars reaching afar off into infinity. In the middle of the lake the water in the daytime reflected the sun, and in the morning and the evening the glories of its rising and its setting; at night the moon and stars; and it seemed to be as deep as the dome of the sky above us is high, beyond the sun, moon, and stars.

In the house dwelt the forester, named Stephan, and his daughter, Kasya, a maiden of sixteen. Kasya was the light of the household, as bright and fresh as the morning. She was brought up in great innocence and in the fear of God. Her uncle, who was now dead, and who was a poor but devout man, the organist of the neighboring church, had taught her to read her prayer book, and her education was perfected by her communing with nature. The bees taught her to work, the doves taught her purity, the happy sparrows to speak joyfully to her father, the quiet water taught her peace, the serenity of the sky taught her contemplation, the matin-bell of the distant church called her to devotion, and the universal good in all nature, which reflected the love of God, sank deep into her soul.

Therefore the father and Kasya led a peaceful and happy life, surrounded by the silence and solitude of the woods.

One noon, before Ascension Day, Stephan came home to his dinner. He had visited a large tract of the forest, so he arrived weary, having returned through the thickets of the swamp. Kasya placed the dinner on the table, and after they had finished and she had fed the dog and washed the dishes, she said:

“Papa.”

“What is it?”

“I shall go into the woods.”

“Go, go,” adding jestingly, “and let some wolf or wild beast devour you.”

“I shall go and gather herbs. To-morrow is Ascension Day and they will be needed in the church.”

“If so, you can go.”

She covered her head with a yellow kerchief embroidered with blue flowers, and looking for her basket she began singing:

“The falcon came flying, the falcon came grey.”

The old man began to grumble: “If you were as fond of working as you are of singing.”

Kasya, who was standing on her tiptoes to look on a shelf, turned her head to her father, laughed merrily, and showing her white teeth, sang again as if to tease him:

"He hoots in the woods and the cuckoo's his prey."

"You would be glad yourself to be a cuckoo until a falcon came," said the old man. "Perhaps 'tis falcon who is at the turpentine works? but this is folly. You can't earn a piece of bread by singing."

Kasya again sang:

"Hoot not thou, my falcon, unhappy thy quest,
In the depths of the lake thy cuckoo doth rest."

Then she said:

"Wilt thou decorate the room with the evergreens for to-morrow? I shall return in time to milk the cows, but they should be brought from the pasture."

She found her basket, kissed her father, and went out. Old Stephan got his unfinished fishing-net, and seated himself on a bench outside the door. He gathered his twine, and half-closing one eye he tried to thread his netting needle; after several attempts he succeeded and began to work.

From time to time he watched Kasya. She was walking on the left side of the lake; against the background of the sandy banks she stood out in relief as if in a picture. Her white waist and red striped skirt and yellow kerchief glistened in the sunlight like a variegated flower. Though it was spring the heat was unbearable. After she had gone about half a mile she turned aside and disappeared into the woods. The afternoon hours were hot in the sun, but in the shade of the trees it was quite cool. Kasya pressed forward, suddenly stopped, smiled, and blushed like a rose.

In front of her in the pathway stood a youth about eighteen years of age.

This youth was the turpentine worker, from the edge of the woods, who was now on his way to visit Stephan.

"The Lord be praised!" said he.

"Forever and ever," answered she, and in her confusion she covered her face with her apron, peeping shyly out of a corner of it and smiling at her companion.

"Kasya," said he.

"What is it, John?"

"Is your father at home?"

"He is."

The turpentine worker, poor fellow, perhaps desired to speak of something else beside the father, but somehow he was frightened and unconsciously inquired for him; then he became silent and waited for Kasya to speak to him first. She stood confused, twisting the corners of her apron.

At last she spoke.

"John?"

"What is it, Kasya?"

"Does the turpentine works smoke to-day?" She also wished to speak of something else.

"Why should it not? The turpentine works never stop. I left lame Frank there; but dost thou wish to go there?"

"No, I go to gather plants."

"I will go with thee, and on our return, if thou dost not chase me away, I will come to thy house."

"Why should I chase thee away?"

"If thou dost like me thou wilt not chase me away, and if thou dost not, then thou wilt. Tell me, Kasya, dost thou like me?"

"Fate, my fate," and Kasya covered her face with her hands. "What can I say to thee? I like thee, John, very much I like thee," she whispered faintly.

Then before he could reply she uncovered her blushing face and cried out, "Let us go and gather plants; let us hurry."

And so went they, John and Kasya. The radiance of love surrounded them, but these simple children of nature dared not speak of it. They felt it, although they knew not what they felt; they were embarrassed but happy. Never before had the forest sung so wonderfully over their heads, never was the wind so sweet and caressing, never at any time had the noises of the forest, the rustling of the breeze in the trees, the voices of the birds, the echoes of the woods, seemed to merge into such an angelic choir, so sweet and grand, as at this moment, full of unconscious happiness.

Oh, holy power of love! how good an angel of light thou art, how rosy an aureole in the dusk, how bright a rainbow on the cloud of human tears!

Meanwhile, in the woods resounded echoes from pine to pine, the barking of the dog, Burek, who had escaped from the house and ran on the pathway after Kasya. He came panting heavily, and with great joy he jumped with his big paws on Kasya and John, and looked from one to the other with his wise and mild eyes, as if wishing to say:

“I see that you love one another; this is good.”

He wagged his tail and ran quickly ahead of them, then circled round to them, then stopped, barked once more with joy, and rushed into the woods, looking back from time to time on the boy and girl.

Kasya put her hand to her forehead, and looking upward upon the bright sun between the leaves she said:

“Just think, the sun is two hours beyond noontime and we have not yet gathered any plants. Go thou, John, to the left side and I shall go the right, and let us begin. We should hasten, for the dear Lord’s sake.”

They separated and went into the woods, but not far from one another and in a parallel direction, so that they could see each other. Among the ferns between the pine trees could be seen fluttering the vari-colored skirt and yellow kerchief of Kasya. The slender, supple maiden seemed to float amid the berry-laden bushes, mosses and ferns. You would say it was some fairy *wila* or *rusalka* of the woods; every moment she stooped and stood erect again, and so, further and further, passing the pine trees, she entered deeper into the forest as some spritely nymph.

Sometimes the thick growth of young hemlocks and cedars would conceal her from view, then John stopped, and putting his hand to his mouth would shout, “Halloo! Halloo!”

Kasya heard it; she stopped with a smile, and pretending that she did not see him, answered in a high, silvery voice:

“John!”

The echo answers:

“John! John!”

Meanwhile Burek had espied a squirrel up a tree, and, standing before it looking upward, barked. The squirrel sitting on a branch covered herself with her tail in a mocking manner, lifted her forepaws to her mouth and rubbed her nose, seemed to play with her forefingers, make grimaces, and laugh at the anger of Burek. Kasya, seeing it, laughed with a resounding, silvery tone, and so did John, and so the woods were filled with the sound of human voices, echoes, laughter and sunny joy.

Sometimes there was a deep silence, and then the woods seemed to speak; the breeze struck the fronds of the ferns, which emitted a sharp sound; the trunks of the pines swayed and creaked, and there was silence again.

Then could be heard the measured strokes of the woodpecker. It seemed as if some one kept knock—knocking at a door, and you could even expect that some mysterious voice would ask:

“Who is there?”

Again, the wood thrush was whistling with a sweet voice; the golden-crowned hammer plumed his feathers. In the thicket the pheasants clucked and the bright green humming birds flitted between the leaves; sometimes on the top of the pine tree a crow, hiding itself from the heat of the sun, lazily flapped its wings.

On this afternoon the weather was most clear, the sky was cloudless, and above the green canopy of the leaves there spread out the blue dome of the heavens—immense, limitless, transparently gray-tinted on the sides and deep blue above. In the sky stood the great golden sun; the space was flooded with light; the air was bright and serene, and far-off objects stood out distinctly, their forms clearly defined. From the height of heaven the eye of the great Creator embraced the whole earth; in the fields the grain bowed to Him with a golden wave, rustled the heavy heads of the wheat, and the delicate tasseled oats trembled like a cluster of tiny bells. In the air, filled with brightness here and there, floated the spring thread of the spider’s web, blue from the azure of the sky and golden from the sun, as if a veritable thread from the loom of the Mother of God.

In the vales between the fields of the waving grain stood dark-green meadows; here and there were crystal springs, around whose edges the grass was greener still; the whole meadows were sprinkled with yellow buttercups and dandelions which struck the eye with a profusion of golden brightness. In the wet places there thrived cypress trees, which had an air of coldness and moisture.

In the woods among the pine trees there were now both heat and silence. It seemed as if a dreamy stillness enveloped the whole world. Not a breath of wind stirred; the trees, grain, and grass were motionless. The leaves hung on the trees as if rocked to sleep; the birds had ceased their noises, and the moment of rest had come. But this rest seemed to come from an ineffable sweetness, and all nature seemed to meditate. Only the great expanse of heaven seemed to smile, and somewhere, high in the unknowable depths of its blue, the great and beneficent God was glad with the gladness of the fields, the woods, the meadows, and the waters.

Kasya and John were still busy in the woods collecting herbs, laughing gleefully and speaking to each other joyfully. Man is as artless as a bird; he will sing when he can, for this is his nature. John now began to sing a simple and touching song.

As Kasya and John sang in unison the last refrain of the song ended mournfully, and as if in accompaniment the echo repeated it in the dark depths of the woods; the pines gave resonance as the words ran between their trunks and died away in the far distance like a sigh, less distinct, light, ethereal; then silence.

Later Kasya sang a more cheerful song, beginning with the words:

“I shall become a ring of gold now.”

This is a good song. A willful young girl quarrels with her lover and enumerates the means she intends to use to escape from him. But it is useless. When she says that she will be a golden ring and will roll away on the road, he says that he will quickly see and recover her. When she wants to be a golden fish in the water he sings to her of the silken net; when she wants to be a wild fowl on the lake he appears before her as a hunter. At last the poor maiden, seeing she is unable to hide herself from him on the earth, sings:

“I shall become a star in heaven,
Light to earth by will be given.
My love to thee I shall not render,
Nor my sweet will to thee surrender.”

But the undaunted youth answers:

“Then shall I pray to the saint’s grace
That the star may fall from its heavenly place.
Thy love to me thou then wilt render,
And thy sweet will to me surrender.”

The maiden, seeing there is no refuge either in heaven or on earth for her, accepts the view of Providence and sings:

“I see, I see, fate’s decree doth bind me;
Where’er I hide, thou sure wilt find me.
My love to thee I must now render,
And my sweet will to thee surrender.”

John, turning to Kasya, said:

“Do you understand?”

“What, John?”

He began to sing:

“Thy love to me thou must now render,
And thy sweet will to me surrender.”

Kasya was troubled, and laughed loudly to cover her confusion; and wishing to speak, she said:

“I have gathered a large lot of plants; it would be well to dip them in water, for in this heat they will wither.”

Verily the heat was great; the wind had entirely ceased. In the woods, though in the shade, the air vibrated with moist heat, the pines exuding a strong, resinous odor. The delicate, golden-tinted face of Kasya was touched with perspiration, and her blue eyes showed traces of weariness. She removed the kerchief from her head, and began to fan herself. John, taking the basket from her, said:

“Here, Kasya, stand two aspen trees, and between them a spring. Come, let us drink.”

Both went. After a short interval they noticed that the ground of the forest began to slope here. Among the trees, instead of bushes, ferns and dry mosses, there was a green, damp turf, then one aspen tree, then another, and after them whole rows. They entered into this dark, humid retreat, where the rays of the sun, passing through the leaves, took on their color and reflected on the human face a pale green light. John and Kasya descended lower and lower into the shadows and dampness; a chilliness breathed upon them, refreshing after the heat of the woods; and in a moment, between the rows of the aspen trees, they espied in the black turf a deep stream of water winding its way under and through canes and bushy thickets, and interspersed with the large, round leaves of the water-lilies, which we call “*nenufars*,” and by the peasants are called “white flowers.”

Beautiful was this spot, quiet, secluded, shady, even somewhat sombre and solemn. The transparent stream of water wound its way between the trees. The *nenufars*, touched by the light movement of the water, swayed gently backward and forward, leaning toward each other as if kissing. Above their broad leaves, lying like shields on the surface of the water, swarmed indigo-colored insects with wide, translucent, sibilant wings, so delicate and fragile that they are justly called water-sprites. Black butterflies, with white-edged, mournful wings, rested on the sharp, slender tops of the tamarack. On the dark turf blossomed blue forget-me-nots. On the edge of the stream grew some alder trees, and under the bushes peeped out heads of the lily-of-the-valley, bluebells and honeysuckles. The white heads of the *biedrzenica* hung over the waters; the silvery threads of the *strojka* spread out upon the current of the stream and weaved themselves into thin and long strands; besides—seclusion—a wild spot, forgotten by men, peaceful, peopled only with the world of birds, flowers and insects.

In such places generally dwell nymphs, *rusalki*, and other bad or good forest sprites. Kasya, who was in advance, stood first on the banks of the stream and looked upon the water in which was reflected her graceful form. She verily appeared as one of those beautiful forest spirits as they are seen sometimes by the woodsmen or lumber men who float on their rafts down the rivers through the woods. She had no covering upon her head, and the wind gently played with her locks and ruffled her ray-like hair. Sunburned she was, blond-haired, and her eyes, as blue as turquoise, were as laughing as her lips. Besides, she was a divinely tall, slender, and fairy-like maiden. No one could swear, if she was suddenly startled, that she would not jump into the water—would not dissolve into mist—into rainbow rays—would not

turn quickly into a water-lily or *kalina* tree, which, when robbed of its flowers, remonstrates with a voice so human, yet recalling the sigh of the forest:

“Don’t touch me.”

Kasya, bending over the water so that her tresses fell on her shoulders, turned toward John and said:

“How shall we drink?”

“As birds,” answered John, pointing to some silver pheasants on the opposite side of the stream.

John, who knew how to help himself better than the birds, plucked a large leaf from a tree, and, making a funnel out of it, filled it with water and gave it to Kasya.

They both drank, then Kasya gathered some forget-me-nots, and John with his knife made a flute from the willow bark, on which, when he had finished, he began to play the air which the shepherds play in the eventide on the meadows. The soft notes floated away with ineffable tenderness in this secluded spot. Shortly he removed the flute and listened intently as if to catch an echo returning from the aspen trees, and it seemed that the clear stream, the dark aspen trees, and the birds hidden in the canes listened to these notes with him.

All became silent, but shortly, as if in answer—as if a challenge—came the first faint note of the nightingale, followed by a stronger trill. The nightingale wanted to sing—it challenged the flute.

Now he began to sing. All nature was listening to this divine singer. The lilies lifted their heads above the water; the forget-me-nots pressed closer together; the canes ceased to rustle; no bird dared to peep except an unwise and absent-minded cuckoo, who with her silent wing alighted near by on a dry bough, lifted her head, widely opened her beak, and foolishly called aloud:

“Cuckoo! cuckoo!”

Afterward it seemed as if she was ashamed of her outbreak, and she quietly subsided.

Vainly Kasya, who stood on the edge of the stream with the forget-me-nots in her hand, turned to the side from whence came the voice of the cuckoo and queried:

“Cuckoo, blue-gray cuckoo, how long shall I live?”

The cuckoo answered not.

“Cuckoo, shall I be rich?”

The cuckoo was silent.

Then John: “Cuckoo, gray cuckoo, how soon will I wed?”

The cuckoo replied not.

“She cares not to answer us,” said John; “let us return to the forest.”

On returning they found the large stone by which they had placed the basket and bunches of herbs. Kasya, seating herself beside it, began to weave garlands, and John helped her. Burek lay near them, stretched his hairy forepaws, lolled out his tongue and breathed heavily from fatigue, looking carefully around to see if he could not spy some living thing to chase and enjoy his own noise. But everything in the woods was quiet. The sun was traveling toward the west, and through the leaves and the needles of the pines shot his rays, becoming more and more red, covering the ground of the woods in places with great golden circles. The air was dry; in the west were spreading great shafts of golden light, which flooded all like an ocean of molten gold and amber. The wondrous beauties of the peaceful, warm spring evening were glowing in the sky. In the woods the daily work was gradually ceasing. The noise of the woodpecker had stopped; black and bronzed ants returned in rows to their hills, which were red in the rays of the setting sun. Some carried in their mouths pine needles and some insects. Among the herbs here and there circled small forest bees, humming joyfully as they completed their last load of the sweet flower-dust. From the fissures in the bark of the trees came gloomy and blind millers; in the streams of the golden light circled swarms of midgets and gnats scarcely visible to the eye; mosquitoes began their mournful song. On the trees the birds were choosing their places for the night; a yellow bird was softly whistling; the crows flapped their wings, crowding all on one tree and quarreling about the best places. But these voices were more and more rare, and became fainter; gradually all ceased, and the silence was interrupted by the evening breeze playing among the trees. The poplar tree tried to lift her bluish-green leaves upward; the king-oak murmured softly; the leaves of the birch tree slightly moved—silence.

Now the sky became more red; in the east the horizon became dark blue, and all the voices of the woods merged into a chorus, solemn, deep and immense. Thus the forest sings its evening song of praise, and says its prayers before it sleeps; tree speaks to tree of the glory of God, and you would say that it spoke with a human voice.

Only very innocent souls understand this great and blessed speech. Only very innocent hearts hear and understand when the first chorus of the parent oaks begins its strain:

“Rejoice, O sister pines, and be glad. The Lord hath given a warm and peaceful day, and now above the earth He makes the starry night. Great is the Lord, and mighty, powerful and good is He, so let there be glory to Him upon the heights, upon the waters, upon the lands, and upon the air.”

And the pines pondered a moment upon the words of the oaks, and then they raised their voices together, saying:

“Now, O Lord, to thy great glory, we, as censers, offer to Thee the incense of our sweet-smelling balsam, strong, resinous and fragrant. ‘Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.’”

Then the birches said:

“Thy evening brightness illumines the heavens, O Lord! and in Thy splendors our small leaves golden are and burning. Now with our golden leaves we sing to Thee, O Lord, and our delicate twigs play as the strings of the harp, O good Father of ours!”

Again the sorrowing cypress said:

“Upon our sad foreheads, exhausted with the heat, softly falls the evening dew. Praise be to Thee, O Lord; brothers and sisters rejoice, because there falls the cooling dew.”

Amid this chorus of trees the aspen alone trembles and is afraid; for it gave the wood for the Cross of the Saviour of the world; at times it faintly groans:

“O Lord, have mercy upon me. Have mercy upon me, O Lord.”

Again, sometimes, when the oaks and pines cease for a moment, there rises from under their feet a faint, modest voice, low as the murmur of insects, silent as silence itself, which says:

“A small berry am I, O Lord, and hidden in the moss. But Thou wilt hear, discern and love me; though small, devout am I, and sing Thy glory.”

Thus every evening prays the forest, and these orchestral sounds rise at every sunset from earth to heaven—and float high, high, reaching where there is no creature, where there is nothing only the silvery dust and the milky way of the stars, and above the stars—God.

At this moment the sun hides his radiant head in the far-distant seas; the farmer turns upward his plowshares and hastens to his cottage. From the pastures return the bellowing herds; the sheep raise clouds of the golden dust. The twilight falls; in the village creek the well sweeps; later the windows shine, and from the distance comes the barking of the dogs.

The sun had not gone beyond the woods when Kasya had seated herself under the mossy stone to weave her garlands. Its rays were thrown upon her face, broken by the shadows of the leaves and twigs. The work did not proceed rapidly, for Kasya was tired from heat and running in the woods. Her sunburnt hands moved slowly at her work. The warm breeze kissed her temples and face, and the voices of the forest lulled her to sleep. Her large eyes became heavy and drowsy; her eyelashes began to close slowly; she leaned her head against the stone, opened her eyes once more as a child looking upon the divine beauty of the world; then the noise of the trees, the rows of the stumps, the ground full of pine needles, and the skies that could be seen between the branches all became indistinct, darkened, dissolved, disappeared—and she smiled and slept. Her head was hidden in a soft shade, but the covering of her breast shone all rosy and purple. Her soft breathing lifted her bosom gently; so wonderful and beautiful she looked in this quiet sleep in the evening rays that John looked upon her as if upon the image of a saint, glorious with gold, and colored as the rainbow.

Kasya’s hands were clinging yet to the unfinished garland of herbs. She slept with a sleep light and sweet, for she smiled through her dreams as a child who speaks with the angels. Perhaps she verily conversed with angels, for pure she was as a child, and had dedicated her whole day to the service of God by gathering and weaving the garlands for His temple.

John was sitting by her side, but he did not sleep. His simple breast could not contain the feelings that arose there; he felt as if his soul had got wings and was preparing to fly away to the realms of heaven. He knew not what was happening to him, and he only raised his eyes to the skies and was motionless; you would say that love had transfigured him.

Kasya slumbered on, and for a long time they both remained there. Meanwhile the dusk came. The remnants of the purple light fought with the darkness. The interior of the woods deepened—became dumb. From the canes of the lake near the glade with its cottage came the buzzing of a night beetle.

Suddenly on the other side of the lake from the church rang out the Angelus bell. Its tones floated on the wings of the evening breeze over the face of the quiet waters, clear, resonant, and distinct. It called the faithful to prayer, and also proclaimed: “Rest! Enough of work and the heat of the day,” spoke the bell. “Wrap yourself to sleep in the wing of God. Come, come ye weary to Him—in Him is joy! Here is peace! here gladness! here sleep! here sleep! here sleep!”

John took off his hat at the sound of the bell, Kasya shook the sleep from her eyes, and said:

“The bell rings.”

“For the Angel of the Lord.”

Both kneeled near by the mossy stone as if before an altar. Kasya began to pray with a low, soft voice:

“The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,”

“And she conceived by the Holy Ghost,” answered John.

“Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; may it be done to me according to Thy word.”

Thus kneeling, prayed these children of God. The silent summer lightning shone from the east to the west, and upon its light flew down from heaven a radiant host of winged angels, and hovered above their heads. Then they blended with the angels and were themselves as if angels, for upon earth there were no two souls more bright, more pure, more innocent.

ORSO.

The last days of autumn in Anaheim, a town situated in Southern California, are days of joy and celebration. The grape gathering is finished and the town is crowded with the vineyard hands. There is nothing more picturesque than the sight of these people, composed partly of a sprinkling of Mexicans, but mainly of Cahuilla Indians, who come from the wild mountains of San Bernardino to earn some money by gathering grapes. They scatter through the streets and market places, called lolas, where they sleep in tents or under the roof of the sky, which is always clear at this time of the year. This beautiful city, surrounded with its growths of eucalyptus, olive, castor, and pepper trees, is filled with the noisy confusion of a fair, which strangely contrasts with the deep and solemn silence of the plains, covered with cacti, just beyond the vineyards. In the evening, when the sun hides his radiant head in the depths of the ocean, and upon the rosy sky are seen in its light the equally rosy-tinted wings of the wild geese, ducks, pelicans and cranes, descending by the thousands from the mountains to the ocean, then in the town the lights are lit and the evening amusements begin. The negro minstrels play on bones, and by the campfires can be heard the picking of the banjo; the Mexicans dance on an out-spread poncha their favorite bolero; Indians join in the dance, holding in their teeth long white sticks of kiotte, or beating time with their hands, and exclaiming, “E viva;” the fires, fed with redwood, crackle as they blaze, sending up clouds of bright sparks, and by its reflection can be seen the dancing figures, and around them the local settlers with their comely wives and sisters watching the scene.

The day on which the juice from the last bunch of grapes is trampled out by the feet of the Indians is generally celebrated by the advent of Hirsch’s Circus, from Los Angeles. The proprietor of the circus is a German, and besides owns a menagerie composed of monkeys, jaguars, pumas, African lions, one elephant, and several parrots, childish with age—“*The greatest attraction of the world.*” The Cahuilla will give his last peso, if he has not spent it on drink, to see not only wild animals—for these abound in the San Bernardino Mountains—but to see the circus girls, athletes, clowns, and all its wonders, which seem to him as “a great medicine”—that is, magical feats, impossible of accomplishment except by the aid of supernatural powers.

Mr. Hirsch, the proprietor of the circus, would be very angry with any one who would dare to say that his circus only attracted Mexicans, Indians, and Chinese. Certainly not; the arrival of the circus brings hither not only the people of the town and vicinity, but even those of the neighboring towns of Westminster, Orange, and Los Nietos. Orange Street is crowded with buggies and wagons of divers shapes, so that it is difficult to get through. The whole world of settlers come as one man. Young, bright girls, with their hair prettily banged over their eyes, sitting on the front seats, drive some of these vehicles, and gracefully upset passing pedestrians, chatter and show their white teeth; the Spanish señoritas from Los Nietos cover you with their warm, ardent glances from under their lace mantillas; the married women from the country, dressed in their latest and best fashions, lean with pride on the arms of the sunburned farmers, who are dressed in old hats, jean pants, and flannel shirts, fastened with hook and eye, and without neckties.

All these people meet and greet each other, gossip, and the women inspect with critical eye the dresses of their neighbors, to see if they are “very fashionable.”

Among the buggies are some covered with flowers, which look like huge bouquets; the young men, mounted on mustangs, bend from their high Mexican saddles and peer under the hats of the young girls; the half-wild horses, frightened by the noise and confusion, look here and there with their bloodshot eyes, curvet, rear, and try to unseat their riders, but the cool riders seem to pay no attention to them.

They all speak of “the greatest attraction,” which was about to excel everything that had been seen before. Truly the flaming posters announced genuine wonders. The proprietor, Hirsch, that renowned “artist of the whip,” will in the arena give a contest with a fierce, untamed African lion. The lion, according to the programme, springs upon the proprietor, whose only defense is his whip. This simple weapon in his hands (according to the programme) will change itself into a fiery sword and shield. The end of this whip will sting as a rattlesnake, flash as lightning, shoot as a thunderbolt, and keep at a proper distance the enraged monster, who vainly roars and tries to jump on the artist. This is not the end yet: sixteen-year-old Orso, an “American Hercules,” born of a white father and Indian mother, will carry around six people, three on each shoulder; besides this, the management offers one hundred dollars to any man, regardless of color, who can throw Orso in a wrestling match. A rumor arose in Anaheim that from the mountains of San Bernardino comes for this purpose the “Grizzly Killer,” a hunter who was celebrated for his bravery and strength, and who, since California was settled, was the first man who attacked these great bears single-handed and armed only with a knife. It is the probable victory of the “Grizzly Killer” over the sixteen-year-old athlete of the circus that highly excites the minds of the males of Anaheim, because if Orso, who until now, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, had overthrown the strongest Americans, will be defeated, great glory will cover all California. The feminine minds are not less excited by the following number of the programme: Orso will carry, on a pole thirty feet high, a small fairy, the “Wonder of the World,” of which the poster says that she is the most beautiful girl that ever lived on this earth since the beginning of the “Christian Era.” Though she is only thirteen years of age, the management also offers one hundred dollars to every maiden, “without regard to color of skin,” who will dare to compete and wrest the palm of beauty from this “Aerial Angel.” The maidens of Anaheim, both great and small, make grimaces on reading this, and say that it would not be ladylike to enter such a contest. Nevertheless they gladly surrender the comfort of their rocking chairs rather than miss the show and the chance of seeing their childish rival, in whose beauty, in comparison with the sisters Bimpa, for

instance, none of them believed. The two sisters Bimpa, the elder Refugio, and the younger Mercedes, sitting gracefully in a handsome buggy, are now reading the posters; their faces show no trace of emotion, though they feel that the eyes of Anaheim are on them, as if supplicating them to save the honor of the whole county, and with a patriotic pride, founded upon the conviction that there is none more beautiful than these two California flowers in all the mountains and cañons of the whole world. Oh, beautiful indeed are the sisters Refugio and Mercedes! Not in vain does the pure Castilian blood flow in their veins, to which their mother constantly refers, showing her disdain for all colored races, as well as for the Americans.

The figures of the sisters are slender, subtle, and full of mysterious grace, quiet, and so luxurious that they greatly impress all young men who come near them. From Donnas Refugio and Mercedes exhales a charm as the fragrance from the magnolia and the lily. Their faces are delicate, complexions transparent with a slight rosy tint, as if illumed with the dawn; the eyes dark and dreamy, sweet, innocent, and tender in their glances. Wrapped in muslin rebosos, they sit in their buggy adorned with flowers, pure and innocent, unconscious of their own beauty. Anaheim looked upon them, devoured them with its eyes, was proud of them, and loved them. Who then is this "Jenny," that can win victory over these? "Truly," the *Saturday Review* wrote, "when little Jenny had climbed to the top of the mast, resting on the powerful shoulders of Orso, and from this eminence, suspended above the earth, in danger of death, she outstretched her arms and poised like a butterfly, the circus became silent and all eyes and hearts followed with trembling the movements of this wonderful child. That he who saw her on the mast or on a horse," concluded the *Saturday Review*, "will never forget her, because the greatest painter in the world, even Mr. Harvey, of San Francisco, who decorated the Palace Hotel, could paint nothing equal to it."

The youths of Anaheim who were enamored by the Misses Bimpa were skeptical of this, and affirmed that it was a "humbug," but this question will be settled in the evening. Meanwhile, the commotion around the circus is increasing each moment. From among the long, low wooden buildings surrounding the canvas circus there comes the roar of the lions and elephant; the parrots, fastened to rings hanging to the huts, fill the air with their cries and whistles; the monkeys swing suspended by their tails or mock the public, who are kept at a distance by a rope fence. At last, from the main inclosure the procession emerges for the purpose of whetting and astonishing the curiosity of the public to a greater extent. The procession is headed by a gaudy band-wagon, drawn by six prancing horses with fine harness, and feathers on their heads. The riders on the saddles are in the costume of French postilions. On the other wagons come cages of lions, and in every cage is seated a lady with an olive branch in her hand. Then follows an elephant, covered with a carpet, and a tower on its back, which contains several men arrayed as East Indian hunters. The band is playing, the drums are beating, the lions are roaring, the whips are cracking; in a word, this cavalcade moves forward with great noise and uproar. But this is not all: behind the elephant there follows a machine on wheels, with a locomotive pipe, somewhat resembling an organ, which, blown by steam, emits the most discordant yells and whistles intended for the national "Yankee Doodle." The Americans cry "Hurrah!" the Germans, "Hoch!" the Mexicans, "E viva!" and the Cahuillas howl for joy.

The crowds follow the procession, the place around the circus becomes deserted, the parrots cease their chatter, and the monkeys their gymnastics. But "the greatest attractions" do not take part in the procession. The "incomparable artist of the whip," the manager, the "unconquerable Orso," and the "Aërial Angel, Jenny," are all absent. All this is preserved for the evening so as to attract the crowds.

The manager is somewhere in one of the wooden buildings, or looks into the ticket seller's van, where he pretends to be angry. Orso and Jenny are in the ring practicing some of their feats. Under its canvas roof reigns dust and silence. In the distance, where the seats are arranged, it is totally dark; the greatest part of the light falls through the roof on the ring, with its sand and sawdust covering. With the help of the gray light which filters through the canvas can be seen a horse standing near the parapet. The big horse feels very lonely, whisks the flies with his tail, and often sways his head. Gradually the eye, becoming accustomed to the dim light, discerns other objects—for instance: the mast upon which Orso carries Jenny, the hoops pasted with paper for her to jump through. All these lie on the ground without order, and the half-lighted arena and nearly dark benches give an impression of a deserted building with battened windows. The terrace of seats, only here and there broken with a stray glimmer of light, look like ruins. The horse, standing with drooping head, does not enliven the picture.

Where are Orso and Jenny? One of the rays of light that stream through an aperture of the canvas, in which floats the golden dust, falls on a row of distant seats. This body of light, undulating with the swaying canvas, at last falls upon a group composed of Orso and Jenny.

Orso sits on top of the bench, and near to him is Jenny. Her beautiful childish face leans against the arm of the athlete and her hand rests on his neck. The eyes of the girl are lifted upward, as if listening intently to the words of her companion, who bends over her, moving his head at times, apparently explaining something.

Leaning as they are against each other, you might take them for a pair of lovers, but for the fact that the girl's uplifted eyes express strong attention and intense thought, rather than any romantic feeling, and that her legs, which are covered with pink fleshings, and her feet in slippers, sway to and fro with a childish abandon. Her figure has just begun to blossom into maidenhood. In everything Jenny is still a child, but so charming and beautiful that, without reflecting upon the ability of Mr. Harvey, who decorated the Palace Hotel, of San Francisco, it would be difficult even for him to imagine anything to equal her. Her delicate face is simply angelic; her large, sad blue eyes have a deep, sweet and confiding expression; her dark eyebrows are penciled with unequaled purity on her forehead, white and reposeful as if in deep thought, and the bright, silky hair, somewhat tossed, throws a shadow on it, of which, not only Master Harvey, but a certain other painter, named Rembrandt, would not have been ashamed. The girl at once reminds you of Cinderella and Gretchen, and the leaning posture which she now maintains suggests timidity and the need of protection.

Her posture, which strongly reminds you of those of Greuz, contrasts strangely with her circus attire, composed of a short, white muslin skirt, embroidered with small silver stars, and pink tights. Sitting in a golden beam of light with the dark, deep background, she looks like some sunny and transparent vision, and her slender form contrasts with the

square and sturdy figure of the youth.

Orso, who is dressed in pink tights, appears from afar as if he were naked, and the same ray of light distinctly reveals his immense shoulders, rounded chest, small waist, and legs too short in proportion to the trunk.

His powerful form seems as if it were hewn out with an ax. He has all the features of a circus athlete, but so magnified that they make him noticeable; besides, his face is not handsome. Sometimes, when he raises his head, you can see his face, the lines of which are regular, perhaps too regular, and somewhat rigid, as if carved from marble. The low forehead, with the hair falling on it, like the mane of a horse, straight and black, inherited from his squaw mother, gives to his face a gloomy and threatening expression. He has a similarity to both the bull and the bear, and he personifies a terrible and somewhat evil force. He is not of a good disposition.

When Jenny passes by the horses, those gentle creatures turn their heads and look at her with intelligent eyes, and neigh and whinny, as if wishing to say: "How do you do, darling?" while at the sight of Orso they shudder with fear. He is a reticent and gloomy youth. Mr. Hirsch's negroes, who are his hostlers, clowns, minstrels, and rope-walkers, do not like Orso and tease him as much as they dare, and because he is half-Indian they think nothing of him, and plague and mock him. Truly, the manager, who offers the hundred dollars to any one who can defeat him, does not risk much; he dislikes and fears him, as the tamer of the wild animals fears a lion, and whips him on the slightest provocation.

Mr. Hirsch feels that, if he does not keep the youth in subjection by constantly beating him, he will be beaten himself, and he follows the principle of the Creole woman, who considered beating a punishment, and no beating a reward.

Such was Orso. Recently he began to be less sullen, because little Jenny had a good influence over him. It happened about a year ago that when Orso, who was then the attendant of the wild animals, was cleaning the cage of the puma, the beast put its paws through the bars of the cage and wounded his head severely. Then he entered the cage, and after a terrible fight between them, he alone remained alive. But he was so badly hurt that he fainted from loss of blood. He was ill a long time, which was greatly aggravated by a severe whipping which the manager gave him for breaking the spine of the puma.

When he was ill Jenny took great care of him, and dressed his wounds, and when she had leisure, read the Bible to him. That is a "good book" which speaks of love, of forgiveness, of mercy—in a word, of things that are never mentioned in Mr. Hirsch's circus. Orso, listening to this book, pondered long in his Indian head and at last came to the conclusion that if it would be as good in the circus as in this book, perhaps he would not be so bad. He thought also that then he would not be beaten so often, and some one would be found who would love him. But who? Not negroes and not Mr. Hirsch; little Jenny, whose voice sounded as sweetly in his ears as the voice of the mavis, might be the one.

One evening, under the influence of this thought, he began to weep and kiss the small hands of Jenny, and from this time on he loved her very much. During the performance in the evening, when Jenny was riding a horse, he was always in the ring and carefully watching over her to prevent any accident. When he held the paper hoops for her to jump through he smiled on her; when to the sound of the music he balanced her on the top of the high mast, and the audience was hushed with fright, he felt uneasy himself. He knew very well if she should fall that no one from the "good book" would be left in the circus; he never removed his eyes from her, and the evident caution and anxiety expressed in his movements added to the terror of the people. Then, when recalled into the ring by the storm of applause, they would run in together, he would push her forward, as if deserving of all the praise, and murmur from joy. This reticent youth spoke only to Jenny, and to her alone he opened his mind. He hated the circus and Mr. Hirsch, who was entirely different from the people in the "good book." Something always attracted him to the edge of the horizon, to the woods and plains. When the circus troupe in their constant wanderings chanced to pass through wild, lonely spots, he heard voices awakening the instincts of a captive wolf, who sees the woods and plains for the first time. This propensity he inherited not only from his mother, but also from his father, who had been a frontiersman. He shared all his hopes with Jenny, and often narrated to her how fully and untrammelled live the people of the plains. Most of this he guessed or gleaned from the hunters of the prairies, who came to the circus with wild animals which they had captured for the menagerie, or to try their prowess for the hundred-dollar prize.

Little Jenny listened to these Indian visions, opening widely her blue eyes and falling into deep reveries. For Orso never spoke of going alone to the desert; she was always with him, and it was very good for them there. Every day they saw something new; they possessed all they needed, and it seemed right to make all their plans carefully.

So now they sit in this beam of light, talking to each other, instead of practicing and attempting new feats. The horse stands in the ring and feels lonely. Jenny leans on Orso's arm, thoughtfully contemplating and looking with wistful, wondering eyes into the dim space, swinging her feet like a child and musing—how it will be on the plains, and asking questions from Orso.

"How do they live there?" says she, raising her eyes to the face of her friend.

"There is plenty of oaks. They take an ax and build a house."

"Well," says Jenny, "but until the house is built?"

"It is always warm there. The 'Grizzly Killer' says it is very warm."

Jenny begins to swing her feet more lively, as if the warmth there has settled the question in her mind; but shortly she remembers that she has in the circus a dog and a cat, and that she would like to take them with her. She calls her dog Mister Dog and her cat Mister Cat.

"And will Mr. Dog and Mr. Cat go with us?"

"They will," answers Orso, looking pleased.

"Will we take with us the 'good book'?"

"We will," says Orso, still more pleased.

"Well," says the girl in her innocence, "Mr. Cat will catch birds for us; Mr. Dog will drive away bad people with his bark; you will be my husband and I will be your wife, and they will be our children."

Orso feels so happy that he cannot speak, and Jenny continues:

"There, there will be no Mr. Hirsch, no circus, we will not work, and basta! But no!" she adds a moment later, "the 'good book' says that we should work, and I sometimes will jump through one—through the two hoops, the three, the four hoops."

Jenny evidently does not imagine work under any other form than jumping through hoops.

Shortly she says again:

"Orso, will I indeed be always with you?"

"Yes, Jen, for I love you very much."

His face brightens as he says so, and becomes almost beautiful.

And yet he does not know himself how dear to him has become this small bright head.

He has nothing else in this world but her, and he watches her as the faithful dog guards his mistress. By her fragile side he looks like Hercules, but he is unconscious of this.

"Jen," says he after a moment, "listen to what I tell you."

Jenny, who shortly before had got up to look at the horse, now turns and, kneeling down before Orso, puts her two elbows on his knees, crosses her arms and, resting her chin on her wrists, uplifts her face and is all attention.

At this moment, to the consternation of the children, the "artist of the whip" enters the ring in a very bad humor, because his trial with a lion had entirely failed.

This lion, who was bald from old age, desired only to be let alone, had no inclination to attack the "artist," and hid himself from the lash of the whip in a far corner of the cage. The manager thought with despair that if this loyal disposition remained with the lion until the evening the contest with the whip would be a failure; for to fight a lion who slinks away needs no more art than to eat a lobster from his tail. The bad temper of the proprietor became still worse when he learned from the ticket seller that he was disposing of no seats in the "gods;" that the Cahuillas evidently had spent all their money that they had earned in the vineyards for drinks, and that they came to his window and offered their blankets, marked "U. S.," or their wives, especially the old ones, in exchange for tickets of admission. The lack of money among the Cahuillas was no small loss for the "artist of the whip;" for he counted on a "crowded house," and if the seats in the "gods" were not sold no "crowded house" was obtainable; therefore the manager wished at this moment that all the Indians had but one back, and that he might give an exhibition of his skill with the whip on that one back, in the presence of all Anaheim. Thus he felt as he entered the ring, and seeing the horse standing idle under the parapet, he felt like jumping with anger. Where are Orso and Jenny? Shading his eyes with his hand he looked all around the circus, and observed in a bright beam, Orso, and Jenny kneeling before him with her elbows resting on his knees. At this sight he let the lash of his whip trail on the ground.

"Orso!"

If lightning had struck in the midst of the children they could not have been more startled. Orso jumped to his feet and descended in the passageway between the benches with the hasty movement of an animal who comes to his master at his call; behind him followed Jenny with eyes wide open from fright, and clutching the benches as she passed them.

Orso, on entering the ring, stopped by the parapet, gloomy and silent, the gray light from above bringing into relief his Herculean trunk upon its short legs.

"Nearer," cried out the manager in a hoarse voice; meanwhile the lash of his long whip moved upon the sand with a threatening motion, like the tail of a tiger watching his approaching prey.

Orso advanced several steps, and for a few minutes they looked into each other's eyes. The manager's face resembled that of the tamer who enters the cage, intending to subdue a dangerous animal, and at the same time watches it.

His rage overcame his caution. His legs, incased in elk riding breeches and high boots, pranced under him with anger. Perhaps it was not the idleness alone of the children which increased his rage. Jenny, from above, looked at both of them like a frightened hare watching two lynxes.

"Hoodlum! dog catcher, thou cur!" hissed the manager.

The whip with the velocity of lightning whistled through the air in a circle, hissed and struck. Orso winced and howled a little, and stepped toward the manager, but the second stroke stopped him at once, then the third, fourth—tenth. The contest had begun, although there was no audience. The uplifted hand of the "great artist" scarcely moved, but his wrist revolved, as if a part of some machinery, and, with each revolution, the sharp point of the lash stung the skin of Orso. It seemed as if the whip, or rather its poisonous fang, filled the whole space between the athlete and the manager, who in his increasing excitement reached the genuine enthusiasm of the artist. The "master" simply

improvised. The cracking end flashing in the air twice had written down its bloody trace on the bare neck of the athlete. Orso was silent in this dance. At every cut he stepped one step forward and the manager one step backward. In this way they circled the arena, and at last the manager backed out of the ring as a conqueror from the cage, and disappeared through the entrance to the stables, still as the conqueror. As he left his eye fell on Jenny.

"Get on your horse," he cried; "I will settle with you later."

His voice had scarcely ceased before her white skirt flashed in the air, and in a moment she was on the back of the horse. The manager had disappeared, and the horse began to gallop around the ring, occasionally striking the side with its hoofs.

"Hep! Hep!" agitatedly said Jenny to the horse with her childish voice: "Hep! hep!" but this "hep, hep," was at the same time a sob. The horse increased his speed, clattering with his hoofs as he leaned more and more to the center. The girl, standing on the pad with her feet close together, seemed scarcely to touch it with the ends of her toes; her bare rosy arms rose and fell as she maintained her balance; her hair and light muslin dress floated behind her supple figure, which looked like a bird circling in the air.

"Hep! hep!" she kept exclaiming. Meanwhile her eyes were filled with tears, and to see she had to raise her head; the movement of the horse made her dizzy; the terrace of seats and the ring seemed to revolve around her; she wavered once, twice, and then fell down into the arms of Orso.

"Oh! Orso, poor Orso!" cried the child.

"What's the matter, Jen? why do you cry? I don't feel the pain, I don't feel it."

Jenny threw both her arms around his neck and began to kiss his cheeks. Her whole body trembled, and she sobbed convulsively.

"Orso, oh, Orso," she sobbed, for she could not speak, and her arms clung closer to his neck. She could not have cried more if she had been beaten herself. So, in the end, he began to pet and console her. Forgetting his own pain he took her in his arms and pressed her to his heart, and his nerves being excited by the beating, he now felt for the first time that he loved her more than the dog loved his mistress. He breathed heavily, and his lips panted out the words:

"I feel no pain. When you are with me, I am happy, Jenny, Jenny!"

When this was transpiring the manager was walking in the stables, foaming with rage. His heart was filled with jealousy. He saw the girl on her knees before Orso; recently this beautiful child had awakened the lower instincts in him, but as yet undeveloped, and now he fancied that she and Orso loved each other, and he felt revengeful, and had a wild desire to punish her—to whip her soundly. This desire he could not resist. Shortly he called to her.

She at once left Orso, and in a moment had disappeared in the dark entrance to the stables. Orso stood stupefied, and instead of following her he walked with unsteady steps to a bench, and, seating himself, began to breathe heavily.

When the girl entered the stables she could see nothing, as it was much darker there than in the ring. Yet, fearing that she would be suspected of having delayed her coming, she cried out in a faint voice:

"I am here, master, I am here."

At the same moment the hand of the manager caught hers, and he hoarsely said:

"Come!"

If he had shown anger or badly scolded her she would have felt less frightened than at this silence with which he led her to the circus wardrobe. She hung back, resisting him, and repeating quickly:

"Oh, dear Mr. Hirsch, forgive me! forgive me!"

But forcibly he dragged her to the long room where they stored their costumes, and turned the key in the door.

Jenny fell down on her knees. With uplifted eyes and folded hands, trembling as a leaf, the tears streaming down her cheeks, she tried to arouse his mercy; in answer to her supplications, he took from the wall a wire whip, and said:

"Lie down."

With despair she flung herself at his feet, nearly dying from fright. Every nerve of her body quivered; but vainly she pressed her pallid lips to his polished boots. Her alarm and pleading seemed to arouse the demon in him more than ever. Grasping her roughly, he threw her violently on a heap of dresses, and in an instant, after trying to stop the kicking of her feet, he began beating her cruelly.

"Orso! Orso!" she shouted.

About this moment the door shook on its hinges, rattled, creaked and gave way, and half of it, pushed in with a tremendous force, fell with a crash upon the ground.

In this opening stood Orso.

The wire whip fell from the hand of the manager, and his face became deadly pale, because Orso looked ferocious. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips covered with foam, his head inclined to one side like a bull's, and his whole body was crouched and gathered, as if ready to spring.

“Get out!” cried the manager, trying to hide his fear behind a show of authority.

The pent-up dam was already broken. Orso, who was usually as obedient to every motion as a dog, this time did not move, but leaning his head still more to one side, he moved slowly and threateningly toward the “artist of the whip,” his iron muscles taut as whipcords.

“Help! help!” cried the manager.

They heard him.

Four brawny negroes from the stables ran in through the broken door and fell upon Orso. A terrible fight ensued, upon which the manager looked with chattering teeth. For a long time you could see nothing but a tangled mass of dark bodies wrestling with convulsive movements, rolling on the ground in a writhing heap; in the silence which followed sometimes was heard a groan, a snort, loud short breathing, the gritting of teeth.

In a moment one of the negroes, as if by a superhuman force, was sent from this formless mass, whirling headlong through the air, and fell at the feet of the manager, striking his skull with great force on the ground; soon a second flew out; then from the center of this turbulent group Orso’s body alone arose, covered with blood and looking more terrible than before. His knees were still pressing heavily on the breasts of the two fainting negroes. He arose to his feet and moved toward the manager.

Hirsch closed his eyes.

The next moment he felt that his feet had left the ground, that he was flying through the air—then he felt nothing; his whole body was dashed with monstrous force into the remaining half of the door, and he fell to the earth unconscious.

Orso wiped his face, and, coming over to Jenny, said:

“Let us go.”

He took her by the hand and they went.

The whole town was following the circus procession and the steam calliope, playing “Yankee Doodle,” and the place around the circus was deserted. The parrots only, swinging in their hoops, filled the air with their cries. Hand in hand, Orso and Jenny went forward; from the end of the street could be seen the immense plains, covered with cacti. Silently they passed by the houses, shaded by the eucalyptus trees; then they passed the slaughter-houses, around which had gathered thousands of small black birds with red-tipped wings. They jumped over the large irrigation ditches, entered into an orange grove, and on emerging from it found themselves among the cacti.

This was the desert.

As far as the eye could reach these prickly plants rose higher and higher; thick leaves growing from other leaves obstructed the path, sometimes catching on Jenny’s dress. In places they grew to such a great height that the children seemed to be as much lost here as if they were in the woods, and no one could find them there. So they kept threading their way through them, now to the right and then to the left, but careful always to go from the town. Sometimes between the cacti they could see on the horizon the blue mountains of Santa Ana. They went to the mountains. The heat was great. Gray-colored locusts chirped in the cacti; the sun’s rays poured down upon the earth in streams; the dried-up earth was covered with a network of cracks; the stiff leaves of the cacti seemed to soften from the heat, and the flowers were languid and half-wilted. The children proceeded, silent and thoughtful. But all that surrounded them was so new that they surrendered themselves to their impressions, and for the moment forgot even their weariness. Jenny’s eyes ran from one bunch of cacti to another; again she looked to the farther clusters, saying to her friend:

“Is this the wilderness, Orso?”

But the desert did not appear to be deserted. From the farther clumps came the calling of the male quail, and around sounded the different murmurs of clucking, of twittering, of the ruffling of feathers: in a word, the divers voices of the small inhabitants of the plains. Sometimes there flew up a whole covey of quail; the gaudy-topped pheasants scattered on their approach; the black squirrels dived into their holes; the rabbits disappeared in all directions; the gophers were sitting on their hind legs beside their holes, looking like fat German farmers standing in their doorway.

After resting an hour the children proceeded on their journey. Jenny soon felt thirsty. Orso, in whom had awakened his Indian inventive faculties, began to pluck cactus fruits. They were in abundance, and grew together with the flowers on the same leaves. In plucking them they pricked their fingers with the sharp points, but the fruit was luscious. Their sweet and acid flavor quenched at once their thirst and appeased their hunger. The prairies fed the children as a mother; thus strengthened they could proceed further. The cacti arose higher, and you could say that they grew on the head of one another. The ground on which they walked ascended gradually and continuously. Looking backward once more they saw Anaheim, dissolving in the distance and looking like a grove of trees upon the low plains. Not a trace of the circus could be distinguished. They still pressed steadily onward to the mountains, which now became more distinct in the distance. The surroundings assumed another phase. Between the cacti appeared different bushes and even trees; the wooded portion of the foothills of Santa Ana had commenced. Orso broke one of the saplings, and, clearing off its branches, made a cudgel of it, which, in his hands, would prove a terrible weapon. His Indian instincts whispered to him that in the mountains it was better to be provided, even with a stick, than to go unarmed, especially now that the sun had lowered itself into the west. Its great fiery shield had rolled down far beyond Anaheim, into the blue ocean. After a while it disappeared, and in the west there gleamed red, golden, and orange lights, similar to ribbons and gauzy veils, stretched over the whole sky. The mountains uplifted themselves in this glow; the cacti assumed different fantastical shapes, resembling people and animals. Jenny felt tired and sleepy, but they still hastened to the mountains, although

they knew not why. Soon they saw rocks, and on reaching them they discovered a stream; they drank some water and continued along its course. The rocks, which were at first broken and scattered, then changed into a solid wall, which became higher and higher, and soon they entered into a cañon.

The rosy lights died away; deeper and deeper dusk enveloped the earth. In places immense vines reached from one side of the cañon to the other, covering it like a roof, and making it dark and uncanny. On the mountain side, above them, could be heard the voices of the swaying and creaking forest trees. Orso implied that now they were in the depths of the wilderness, where certainly there were many wild animals. From time to time his ear detected suspicious sounds, and when night fell he distinctly heard the hoarse mewing of the lynxes, the roar of the pumas, and the melancholy howling of the coyotes.

"Are you afraid, Jen?" asked Orso.

"No," replied the girl.

But she was already very tired, and could proceed no farther, so Orso took her in his arms and carried her. He went forward with the hope that he would reach the house of some squatter, or should meet some Mexican campers. Once or twice it seemed to him that he saw the gleam of some wild animal's eyes. Then with one hand he pressed Jenny, who had now fallen asleep, to his breast, and with the other he grasped his stick. He was very tired himself; notwithstanding his great strength Jenny began to prove heavy to him, especially as he carried her on his left arm; the right one he wished to have free for defense. Occasionally he stopped to regain his breath and then continued on. Suddenly he paused and listened intently. It seemed to him as if he heard the echoes of the small bells which the settlers tie for the night to the neck of their cows and goats. Rushing forward, he soon reached a bend in the stream. The sound of the bells became more distinct, and joined with them in the distance was heard the barking of a dog. Then Orso was sure that he was nearing some settlement. It was high time that he did, for he was exhausted by the events of the day, and his strength had begun to fail him. On turning another bend he saw a light; as he moved forward his quick eyes discerned a campfire, a dog, evidently tied to a stump, tearing and barking, and at last the figure of a man seated by the fire.

"God send that this may be a man from the 'good book'!" thought he.

Then he resolved to awaken Jenny.

"Jen!" called he, "awake, we shall eat."

"What is it?" asked the girl; "where are we?"

"In the wilderness."

She was now wide awake.

"What light is that?"

"A man lives there; we shall eat."

Poor Orso was very hungry.

Meanwhile they were nearing the fire. The dog barked more violently, and the old man, sitting by the fire, shaded his eyes and peered into the gloom. Shortly he said:

"Who is there?"

"It is us," answered Jenny in her delicate voice, "and we are very hungry."

"Come nearer," said the old man.

Emerging from behind a great rock, which had partly concealed them, they both stood in the light of the fire, holding each other's hands. The old man looked at them with astonishment, and involuntarily exclaimed:

"What is that?"

For he saw a sight which, in the sparsely populated mountains of Santa Ana, would astonish any one. Orso and Jenny were dressed in their circus attire. The beautiful girl, clothed in pink tights and short white skirt, appearing so suddenly before him, looked in the firelight like some fairy sylph. Behind her stood the youth with his powerful figure, covered also with pink fleshings, through which you could see his muscles standing out like knots on the oak.

The old squatter gazed at them with wide-open eyes.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

The girl, relying more on her own eloquence than on that of Orso, began to speak.

"We are from the circus, kind sir! Mr. Hirsch beat Orso very much and then wanted to beat me, but Orso did not let him, and fought Mr. Hirsch and four negroes, and then we ran off on the plains, and went a long distance through the cacti, and Orso carried me; then we came here and are very hungry."

The face of the old man softened and brightened as he listened to her story, and he looked with a fatherly interest on this charming child, who spoke with great haste, as if she wished to tell all in one breath.

“What is your name, little one?” he asked.

“Jenny.”

“Welcome, Jenny! and you, Orso! people rarely come here. Come to me, Jenny.”

Without hesitation the little girl put her arms around the neck of the old man and kissed him warmly. He appeared to her to be some one from the “good book.”

“Will Mr. Hirsch find us here?” she said, as she took her lips from his face.

“If he comes he will find a bullet here,” replied the old man; then added, “you said that you wanted to eat?”

“Oh, yes, very much.”

The squatter, raking in the ashes of the fire, took out a fine leg of venison, the pleasant odor of which filled the air. Then they sat down to eat.

The night was gorgeous; the moon came out high in the heavens above the cañon; in the thicket the mavis began to sing sweetly; the fire burned brightly, and Orso was so filled with joy that he chanted with gladness. Both he and the girl ate heartily. The old man had no appetite; he looked upon little Jenny, and, for some unknown cause, his eyes were filled with tears.

Perhaps he had been once a father, or, perhaps, he so rarely saw people in these deserted mountains.

Since then these three lived together.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIELANKA: AN IDYLL ***

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