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Author: Gottfried Keller

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SELDWYLA FOLKS

THREE SINGULAR TALES

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THREE SINGULAR TALES

BY

THE SWISS POET

GOTTFRIED KELLER

TRANSLATIONS BY

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND, Ph.D.

NEW YORK

BRENTANO'S

PUBLISHERS

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PREFACE

Gottfried Keller may fitly be called the greatest narrative writer that Switzerland has ever produced. Born July 19, 1819, near Zurich, he was reared in direst poverty. By dint of the hardest labor and by practicing the utmost frugality, his father was barely able to provide bread for wife and children. But in the midst of this penury the genius of his young son Gottfried expanded. As a mere child he gave already unmistakable evidence of being a dreamer, a thinker, a philosopher, a "fabulist," an artist. Just able to write, the little boy forever scribbled poems and fanciful tales, made rapid sketches with pencil and pen, portraits, caricatures, landscapes. At the village school he imbibed knowledge like a sponge. Soon the gnarled old schoolmaster, half peasant, half teacher, looked aghast at his little scholar: he had no more to teach him. Generous friends sent

the youth to Munich, there to study art. For at that time his desire was to become a great painter. Desperately and with fiery energy the young fellow devoted himself to study, and his attainments were considerable. They would fully have sufficed for a career as a mediocre portrait painter. But his very excess of zeal led to surfeit, to exhaustion, to a period of lethargy. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." This fit of listlessness lasted even for some time after Gottfried's return home. All effort with him slackened.

Patrons finally intervened. With their aid he went to Heidelberg, and for two full years, 1848-1850, he there pursued literary and historical research. The historian, Hettner, took great interest in the young Swiss. Next he went to Berlin, and during the ensuing five years he wrote and studied in a desultory manner there. Great attention was paid him by Goethe's intimate friend, Varnhagen von Ense, and the latter's wife, the "seeress," Rahel, who drew the shy young man into their wide literary circle, comprising for two decades the *beaux esprits* of the capital. But his bluntness of speech, his sturdy Swiss republicanism, often gave offense.

For that was one of the remarkable points about Gottfried Keller: despite his long residence on German soil and the flattering reception accorded him by the intellectual *élite* there, he remained a thorough democrat, an uncompromising friend of the plain people, a fearless champion of Swiss free government, a hater of tyranny in any form, a despiser of monarchs and their favors. Among his poems, later collected into a bulky tome, there are many that breathe defiance to royalty by "divine grace."

Much of this sentiment of anti-monarchism has crept into his first great work, the "Gruener Heinrich." This, a sort of autobiography in guise of a big novel, alive with adventure as well as thoughts on men and things, he first published from 1854 to 1855, but it was afterward recast in characteristic fashion, 1879-1881. In a manner of speaking, his "Gruener Heinrich" is also a confession of faith. There are many didactic passages in it; the whole book, in fact, breathes the convictions of its author. This is still more the case with the last great work from Keller's pen, "Martin Salander," where the frequent political and social precepts interwoven into the text of the story form, from the purely artistic viewpoint, a serious blemish.

It is generally conceded that Keller's masterpiece is "Seldwyla Folks" ("Die Leute von Seldwyla"), which appeared in two sections, the first of these in 1856, the second in 1874. From this group of weird, fantastic tales the three forming the contents of this book are taken. About the origin of the title Keller himself has written in his inimitably oracular and whimsical style. The name and the town itself are wholly fictitious. They represent a sort of collective traits of a number of ancient, unprogressive Swiss towns, left head over heels in medievalism, in outworn customs, with some peculiar features exclusively their own. Each tale is a jewel cut and polished, a distinctive literary entity, something that may not be duplicated elsewhere in the whole realm of letters, with a full flavor of its own. Where, for instance, in the literature of any tongue, is to be found a humorous-sarcastic story of the raciness of "The Three Decent Combmakers"?

From 1861 to 1878 Keller filled, to the eminent satisfaction of his countrymen, the important and remunerative office of "Staatsschreiber," one that combined the duties of secretary of state with those of custodian of documents and librarian for his native canton, which was offered him in direct recognition of his literary merits. As such he utilized for a cycle of semi-historical tales some of the most curious records in his keeping, which are embalmed in his "Zurich Stories" (Zuericher Novellen), 1877. In the year after that he retired from office, and in 1882 appeared "The Epigram" (Das Sinngedicht), in 1883 his "Seven Legends," based on some of the Lives of the Saints, singularly humanized and modernized, and in 1886 finally "Martin Salander," an intensely patriotic and peculiarly Helvetian novel. He was also a master of the short story, a sadly neglected field in Teutonic literature.

Meanwhile, wherever German was understood or spoken the writings of Gottfried Keller had found intense appreciation, at first slowly, then more rapidly, and eminent German critics and authors, such as Theodore Storm, Berthold Auerbach, F. Th. Vischer and others, had pronounced themselves ardent admirers of his. But in 1890 he died, after a lingering illness.

The question may well be asked how it is that the literary lifework of such a man as Gottfried Keller has for so many years been denied the most sincere form of homage, that of translation, by the whole non-German-speaking world. There may be additional reasons for this seeming neglect, but I believe the chief one lies in the fact of the unusual difficulty of the task. To cast the thoughts and conceits of an individualistic writer into another vehicle of speech is in itself no easy matter. But in the case of Gottfried Keller it is especially so. For the man, as I took pains to point out, was a Swiss, not by any manner of means a German. And not only is the subject matter of his lyrical and epical output strongly tinged with Helvetism, but his very language as well. The Swiss-German vernacular is more than a mere dialect; it is almost a tongue of its own. On all but on the few solemn and formal occasions of life the Swiss expresses himself in what he terms "Schwyzer-Dütsch," which is indeed scarcely understood by persons habituated to German proper, and even when the Swiss author perforce drops into the latter he uses so many peculiarly Helvetian terms and modes of speech, so many archaic saws, his whole method of handling the language is so different that to reshape what he says into another tongue without doing violence to the spirit, the soul, the flavor and thus marring the translation irretrievably and doing gross injustice to the original becomes doubly hard.

I can only say that I have done in this respect what was humanly possible. What the final

result has turned out to be is for the court of last resort, for the final arbiter, the reader, to say.

W. V. S.

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THE THREE DECENT COMBMAKERS

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The people of Seldwyla have furnished proof that a whole townful of the unjust or frivolous may, after all, continue for ages to exist despite changes of time and traffic; the three combmakers, though, demonstrate as clearly that not even three decent human beings may manage to live for a long stretch under one roof without getting their backs up. And with decent, with just, is not by any means meant heavenly justice, nor even the natural justice of the human conscience, but rather that vacuous justice which from the Lord's Prayer has struck the plea: And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors! And this simply because they never contract any debts whatever and cannot stand the idea of debts. Indeed, also because they live to no one's harm, but also to no one's pleasure; because, true enough, they work and earn money, but will not spend a stuyver, and find in their laboring task some small profit but never any joy. Such soberly decent chaps do not smash window panes for the wicked fun of it, but neither do they ever light any lanterns of their own, and no enlightenment proceeds from them. They toil at all sorts of things, and one thing, to their minds, is as good as another, so long as no risk or danger be involved. But they prefer to settle in such places where there are many unjust in their sense. For if left to themselves, without any mingling with the said unjust, they would soon grind each other sorely, as do millstones which lack corn between. And if at any time some piece of ill-luck befalls them, they are greatly amazed and wail and whine as though their last hour had come, inasmuch as they, so they say, have never done harm to anyone. For they look upon this world of ours as a huge and well-organized police department in which nobody need fear any fine or punishment so long as he unfailingly sweeps his sidewalk, does not leave flowerpots standing loosely on his window sill and does not pour any water into the street.

Now in Seldwyla there was a combmaking establishment the owner of which habitually changed every fifth or sixth year, and this although it did fair business when taken proper care of. For the small traders and stand-keepers who attended the fairs in the neighborhood, obtained there their horn wares. Beside the horn rasps and files, the implements of various kinds, the most marvelous ornaments and back-combs of every description for the use of the village belles and servant maids were made there out of handsome transparent ox horns, and the rare skill of the

workmen (for, of course, the master never actually toiled himself) consisted in branding and searing the close counterfeit of the most artistically designed clouds of reddish brown tortoise shell, each according to his conceit and fancy, so that, when admiring these combs as the light played on their fantastic cumulations, it looked almost as though the most magnificent sunups and sundowns were concealed within the polished horn surface, rubicund gatherings of cloudlets, thunderstorms and tornadoes, as well as still other varicolored manifestations of the forces of Nature.

In the summertime, when these proud artisans loved to wander over the surface of the land and when they were scarce, they were treated with courtesy by the masters, and received good board and wages. But during the winter, at a time when they were looking for shelter and were plentiful, they had to be humble, had to turn out combs till their very pates smoked with the effort, and all for slender pay. During that inauspicious season the mistress of the house one day after another would put a big dish of sourkrout on the table, and the master himself would then say: "These are fish!" And if at such a time any fellow was rash enough to remark: "With your permission, this is sourkrout!" he was instantly handed his walking papers and had to issue forth into the dreary winter landscape. However, as soon as the meadows once more turned green and the roads became passable, they all said: "All the same, it's sourkrout!" and made up their bundle. For even in case the mistress instantly threw a boiled ham on top of the smoking sourkrout, and the master would murmur: "Goodness, I thought all along it was fish! But this time, surely, it is a ham!" nevertheless the workmen were not to be propitiated any longer. They longed for freedom and the open, as during the long winter all three of them had had to sleep in one bed and had grown thoroughly tired of each other because of the continual kicking of ribs and because of frozen and numbed bare sides. But it so happened that once a decent and gentle soul came that way, from out of the Saxon lands, and this good fellow complied with everything, worked as hard as any ant and was absolutely not to be frozen out, in such fashion that finally he became so to speak a part of the furnishings of the house and saw the owners changing several times, those years being somewhat more given to changes than of yore. Jobst (such was the creature's name) stretched himself in the bed as stiff as a ramrod and maintained his particular place next the wall, both winter and summer. He likewise willingly accepted the sourkrout for fish, and in the spring received with humble thanks a mouthful of the ham. His lesser wages he put aside as he did his larger ones. For he never spent anything; rather he saved every penny. He did not live like the other workmen: he never touched a drop of wine, did not associate with any of his own countrymen nor with other young fellows, but stood evenings under the house door and joked with the old women, lifted the heavy water pails upon their padded heads, at least when he chanced to be in good humor, and went to bed with the chickens, except at such times as he could do extra work against extra pay. Sundays he also toiled until late into the afternoon, no matter if the weather was fine. But do not assume that he did all this with pleasure and alacrity, as did John the merry Chandler in the well-known song. On the contrary, he was always cast-down and of ill-humor because of these voluntary abstentions from the amenities of life, and he was forever complaining about his hard lot. Come Sunday afternoon, however, Jobst went in all the disarray and filth of workaday, and with his clattering sabots across the lane and fetched from the laundress his clean shirt and his neatly ironed "dicky," his high linen collar or his better handkerchief, and proceeded to carry these things in his hands to his room, stepping the while with that rooster-like majesty which used to distinguish the prideful artisan of former days. For it belonged to their privileges, when walking attired in leather apron and heavy slippers, to observe a very peculiar stride, affected and as though they were floating in upper spheres. And of them all the highly instructed bookbinders, the jolly shoemakers and cobblers, and the rarer and queer-mannered combmakers excelled in these mannerisms. But arrived in his little chamber Jobst once more took thought to himself, ruminating and seriously reflecting as to whether it was really worth while to don the clean shirt and the snowy "dicky." For with all his gentleness and moral decency he was, after all, somewhat of a swinish fellow, and thus doubts arose in his penurious little soul as to the advisability of the whole proceeding, and as to whether the soiled linen would not do just as well for another week or so, in which latter case he would simply remain at home and work a little more. Then he would sit down with a sigh and begin anew, teeth clenched and mien fierce, cutting into the horn, or else he would transmute the horn into pseudo-tortoise shell, in doing which, however, he never forgot his innate sobriety and want of imagination, so that he always put but the same odious three splotches into the smooth surface. For with him it was always thus that he would not use even the slightest trouble if he was not specially bidden to do so.

On the other hand, if his resolution ripened into the actual taking of a walk, he spent first one or two hours painfully adorning himself, next he took his dapper little cane and stalked stiffly towards the gate of the town, and there he would stand around humbly and tediously and would carry on stupid gossip with others of the same ilk, some of those who did not know any more than himself how to kill time pleasantly, perhaps ancient and decrepit Seldwylians who had neither money nor gumption to find their way into the gay tavern. With such godforsaken old fossils he was in the habit of placing himself in front of a house in process of construction, or near a field in seed, before an apple tree injured in the last storm, or perhaps next to a new yarn factory, and then he would discuss with an infinitude of detail these things, the need of them, their cost, about the hopes entertained as to the next crop, and about the actual condition of the fields, of all of which he would know no more than the man in the moon. In fact, he did not care whether he did or not; the main thing with him was that time thus slipped away in what to him appeared the cheapest and the pleasantest manner. And thus it came about that these, the old and decrepit Seldwylians, only spoke of him as the "well-mannered and sensible Saxon," for they themselves

understood not a whit more than he himself. When the people of Seldwyla founded a large brewery on shares, hoping therefrom for huge business in their town, and when the extensive foundation walls emerged from the ground, Jobst used to make it his task of boring into the soil thereabouts with his cane, talking like an expert and showing the keenest interest in the progress of the work, for all the world as if he were the most assiduous toper himself and as if the success or non-success of the enterprise were a matter of life and death with him. "No indeed," he would then exclaim in his lisping voice, "this is a shplendid undertakking. Only, the devil of it is it costs so mooch monnee! So mooch monnee! It's a pity! And here, this here vault ought really to be a leetle, yoost a leetle bit deeper, and this wall a leetle bit thicker." And the other idiots sided with him and said he knew all about it.

However, for all his enthusiasm he never failed to show up in time for his Sunday supper. For that was indeed the sole chagrin he inflicted on the mistress at home that he never missed a meal, Sunday or any other day. The other workmen would go to the tavern with their comrades and friends, dance, play cards and amuse themselves. But not so Jobst. On his account alone the master's wife was forced to remain at home Sundays, or else to provide his lonesome supper. And then, after chewing as long as he could his portion of bread and sausage or cold meat, he would spend another considerable while pawing over his slender possessions, fingering them as though they were the treasures of Aladdin, with bated breath, and then he would retire to his strictly virtuous couch. That according to his notions had been an enjoyable, a roystering Sunday.

But with all his humble, decent and inconspicuous ways, Jobst was not lacking in a species of inner, hidden irony, as though in his own peculiar way he were making fun of the world with its vanity and its foolishness. Indeed he seemed even to have strong doubts as to the grandeur and worth of things in general, and to be conscious of harboring within his own soul plans far more momentous and stirring. On Sundays, notably when delivering his expert opinions on creation as a whole, he often showed a face alive with superior, with almost owlish wisdom. It was plainly to be seen in his pinched features how he carried within his inmost ken plans of immense importance, plans compared with which the doings of the others, after all, were but as child's play. The great, the overwhelmingly great plan he cherished day and night and which had been all these years his loadstar, ever since he had first appeared in Seldwyla, amounted indeed to this: To save his wages until there would be a sum sufficient to present himself some fine morning, on an occasion when the business would be once more for sale, with the money in his hand and purchase it, himself at last becoming owner and master.

This darling hope lay at the bottom of all his scheming and contriving, as he had not failed to notice how an industrious and abstemious man could not fail to flourish in Seldwyla. He, to be sure, was such a man, one who went his own quiet way and who was bound to profit from the carelessness of the people thereabouts without falling into the same errors as these. And once master and owner of the establishment, it would not be difficult for him to acquire citizenship and then, he calculated, he would spend the remainder of his life more sensibly and economically than any previous citizen of Seldwyla had ever done, not bothering the slightest about anything which was not likely to increase his wealth, not spending a penny, but accumulating more and more money, watching all the time his chances among the spendthrifts of the town. This plan was indeed as simple as it was sensible and well-considered, especially as he had begun to realize it, in his own slow but sure way, for a number of years past. For he had already saved up quite a neat little sum; this he had hidden away securely, and with things going on as they had hitherto, it was but a question of time when his scheme would attain full fruition.

But there was one point about his plan which seemed to brand it as almost inhuman. That was the fact that Jobst had conceived it at all, that is, in Seldwyla, for nothing in his heart really inclined him to Seldwyla, and nothing compelled him to remain there. He cared not a fig really either for the town or its inhabitants, either for the political condition of the country or its manners and customs. All this was as indifferent to him as was his own native land, and which latter he did not even care to ever see again. In a hundred other places of the world he might have equally well succeeded with his diligence and his habits. However, he had discarded all sense of free choice, and with his grossly grasping senses he had seized upon the first tendril of hope that offered, in order to keep hold and suck himself through it full of wealth and vigor. The saying, it is true, is: "Where I fare well, there is my home," and this may be true enough in the case of those who can really show some good and sufficient reasons why they love their new country and who of their free and conscious will went out into the wide world in order to achieve success and to return as men of weight, or of those who escape unfortunate conditions at home and, obeying a strong tendency, join the modern migration across the seas; or of those who somewhere have found better and truer friends than at home, or who discovered conditions abroad that suited their ideals and secret hopes better or who became bound by stronger ties abroad. And this new home in any case, this second home where they found things more to their taste and where they succeeded well, they necessarily must care for, so long as there they are treated humanely and fairly. Jobst, however, scarcely knew where he was; the institutions and customs of the Swiss he was unable to understand, and he merely said sometimes: "Why, yes, the Swiss are strong on politics. Maybe that's good, so long as one likes it. But I don't, and where I'm from nobody ever bothered about political things."

The customs of the Seldwylians he hated, and he felt afraid of their noisy demonstrations when they organized a political procession or had mass meetings. At such times he sat in the rear of the workshop and feared bloody riots and murder growing out of it all. But nevertheless it

remained his sole object and his great secret to stay on in Seldwyla until the end of his days. Such just and decent persons like him you will find scattered all over the earth, and where they are for no better reason than that it just so happened they got hold without trouble of their own of one of these sucking tubes guaranteeing a satisfactory income. And this they do steadily, giving no thought the while to the land of their birth, but without loving their new home, without a glance to right or left, and thus resembling not so much a freeman as one of those lower organisms, odd animalculae or vegetable seeds, which by the whims of wind or water are accidentally carried to the spot where they flourish.

Thus Jobst had lived year after year in Seldwyla, slowly but constantly adding to his secret store which he had buried under the tiles of his chamber floor. No tailor could boast of having earned anything through him, for he still possessed the same Sunday coat in which he had arrived in town, and the garment was still in the same condition. Neither had any shoemaker done any work for him in Seldwyla, for the soles of his boots were still intact. The year, after all, has but fifty-two Sundays, and only the half of these were utilized by him for a walk. Nobody, in fact, had been the better for his stay in town; as soon as he received his wages the money went to the hiding-place mentioned, and even when he went off on his Sunday excursions he never put a coin in his pocket, so as to foil any temptation for spending. When hucksters or old women came to the shop with goods or fruit, with cherries, plums or pears, it was amusing to watch Jobst, who tenderly felt of the quality of the fruit, entered into discussions with the vendors, thus leading these to indulge false and extravagant hopes, only to be disappointed. He would, however, advise his comrades as to how to make the most of their purchases, how to bake their apples in the oven, to peel them or to stew them, without ever asking for or receiving one mouthful himself. But though nobody ever saw the color of his money, neither did they ever hear him swear, show any anger, demand anything not strictly within his rights, or give vent to ill-humor. He was the very essence of pacifism. He carefully avoided quarrels or argument, and he did not even make a wry face when anyone, as happened frequently, would play tricks on him. And while indeed eaten up constantly with curiosity as to the issue of every kind of gossip, disputes or wrangling he had come to know about, since these furnished him with one of his chief amusements, and while he would keep a strict account and inquire in a mild way about them and the right and wrong in each case, the while the other workmen were indulging in their rude brawls or tavern orgies, he nevertheless was mighty careful never to interfere or to take a decided part for or against. In short, he was a most curious medley of truly heroic wisdom and persistence, coupled with a gentle but pronounced want of heart and feeling.

At one time he had been for many weeks the sole workman in the establishment, and he had flourished under these circumstances like a green bay tree. Nights especially he rejoiced in the exclusive tenancy of the big, wide bed. He made full use of his opportunities, and went through incredible contortions while stretching his lank limbs in the bed. He in a manner trebled his person, changing his posture ceaselessly, and indulged in the hallucination that, as usual, there were three of them and he were urgently requested by the other two not to stand on ceremony and to take things easy. The third one being himself, he voluptuously complied with the invitation, wrapped himself completely in the feather bed, or else straddled his legs, lay across the full width of the couch, or in the harmless exuberance of delight would even turn a decent somersault or two.

But alas! the day came when he, already indulging in some such innocent capers, after having retired early, suddenly saw a strange workman sedately enter the chamber, being led thither by the mistress of the house. Jobst was just lying in measureless comfort with his head at the foot of the bed, his not quite immaculate feet on the pillows, when this happened. The stranger unfastened his heavy knapsack from his back, stood it in a corner, and then, without loss of time, began to undress, since he felt very tired. Jobst quick as a flash assumed the proper position in bed and stretched himself along his accustomed spot next to the wall. While doing this the thought rushed through his head: "Surely he'll soon clear out again, since it is summertime and fine weather for roaming about."

This hope on further consideration took firm root, and with sundry sighs and grunts lulled him to sleep. He dreamt, though, of a speedy resumption of the kicking and rowing in bed, and a nightmare woke him in the middle of the night, an evil omen. He was amazed, however, when dawn came, and he had felt neither pokes in the ribs, nor had been feloniously deprived of his share of the covering. Not only that; the new arrival, although a Bavarian, was inordinately polite, peaceable and well-behaved, for all the world like a counterpart of his own self. This unheard-of fact cost Jobst his calmness of mind. He could not drive the misgivings thus engendered from his head. And while the two were dressing in the dim light of early morning, he scrutinized his new fellow-worker closely. It seemed a singular case to him. He observed that this new man, like himself, was no longer quite young, but cleanly and decent in speech and manners. The Bavarian on his part with words well-set and sober inquired of Jobst about the circumstances of life in Seldwyla, just about in the same way in which he himself would have done it. As soon as this became apparent to him, Jobst grew secretive and kept to himself the simplest and most harmless things, opining that, of course, the Bavarian must have some occult motive in coming to this town. To ascertain this secret now became the prime object with him. That there was a deep secret he never had the slightest doubt. Why else should this man, just like himself, be such a gentle, smooth-spoken and experienced sort? Only by the theory of his harboring a deep-laid scheme, of being a designing person, could he explain matters to himself. And thus began a kind of silent, never-sleeping warfare between these two. Each did his best to find out the "secret" of

the other; but it was all done with the greatest precaution, in words of double meaning, by amiable subterfuges and in peaceable ways. Neither ever gave a clear answer to any question, but yet after the lapse of but a few hours each of the pair was firmly convinced that the other was in all essential respects his own double. And when in the course of the day Fridolin, the Bavarian, several times visited the chamber and busied himself with something, Jobst seized upon the first chance to go there likewise at a moment when the other was fully occupied with his work, and hurriedly made a search of Fridolin's personal property. However, he discovered nothing but almost precisely the same articles owned by himself, down to a small wooden needle case, except that here he found it in the shape of a fish, while his own bore a sportive resemblance to a baby; and, further, in lieu of a somewhat dilapidated conversational grammar for popular use in which Jobst sometimes studied French, the Bavarian could boast of a neatly bound copy of a book entitled "The cold and the hot Vat, an indispensable Handbook for Dyers." And in it there was a penciled note on the margin: "Pledge for three Stuyvers which the Nassau man borrowed of me." From this Jobst judged that he was dealing with somebody who knew how to take care of his own, and thinking so instinctively cast searching glances along the floor. Soon, too, he noticed a tile which seemed to have recently been removed. And sure enough, when he took this out, he found the man's treasure, folded and wrapped in the half of an old handkerchief tightly wound about with tough twine, almost as heavy as his own, although his was encased in an old sock. Trembling with excitement he replaced the tile in its yawning hole, trembling at the thought of such admirable foresight and wise economy in the case of another, a rival, a competitor. He flew down the stairs, and in the workshop he set to as if it depended on his exertions to provide the entire world with combs for generations to come. And the Bavarian did the same, as if Heaven itself must also be combed. During the ensuing week each found full confirmation of his first suspicion. For if Jobst was industrious and frugal, Fridolin was active and abstemious, and with the same regretful sighs at the difficulty of these virtues. And when Jobst was serene and sapient, Fridolin was jocular and knowing. If the one was humble, the other was even more so. When Jobst showed himself sly or ironical, the other was sarcastic and almost astute. And if Jobst made a face betraying his peaceful disposition, his double succeeded in putting on an air of incomparable asininity.

The whole was not so much a race between the two as it was the simple exercise of conscious mastery in all these arts. Each was fully permeated with the conviction that the other would excel him if not constantly on the watch. Neither disdained imitating the other. Each of them was forever on the lookout to perfect himself, taking the other as a model in any traits which he himself might yet lack or be deficient in. And with all that they looked most of the time as though each was perfectly incapable of seeing through the other. Thus they resembled two doughty heroes who behave towards each other with knightly courtesy and even assist one another until the moment shall arrive when they begin to hack away at each other.

However, after the lapse of this week a third came, a Suabian, by name Dietrich, whereat the two in silence rejoiced, as at a jolly foil against which their own greatness of soul could best be measured and compared. And they intended to place the poor little Suabian between their own selves, to make the contrast between him and their own patent virtues all the more striking, about as in the case of two stately lions with a tiny monkey between, with whom they might deign to play.

But who can describe their astonishment when they observed that the Suabian behaved precisely in the same manner as themselves, and when the recognition of a kindred soul took place by the identical processes as had been the case before. The same adroit system of standing sentinel over each other was repeated. But with this signal difference, that now it was a triangular game, whereby not only they themselves altered somewhat their own attitude, but the third man his also, and that they all three finally stood towards each other in distinctly different positions.

This became first apparent on the night of his arrival when they took him between themselves in bed. The Suabian demonstrated his entire parity. Like a match he lay within the slim space, so perfectly poised and without the flicker of an eyelid that there actually remained a bit of room, of neutral territory, on either side. And the bed cover remained spread over the trio as tight and smooth as the wrapping paper over three herrings. He was evidently their match. The situation now commenced to be more serious, more complicated, and since all three now faced each other like the three corners of a triangle, and since no friendly or confidential relations were under these circumstances feasible between them, no armistice or courtly tournament, they got into a state of mind where they with malice aforethought, each in his own way and with his own weapons, gently and slily began to try ousting each other out of bed and house.

When the master of the house saw that these three queer customers would put up with anything, if only they were allowed to remain in his service, he first lowered their wages, and next gave them scanter fare. But this only led to an aggravation of diligence on their part, and that again enabled him to flood the whole surrounding district with his goods, and he got orders upon orders, so that he made a pile of money out of their cheap labor and possessed a veritable gold mine in them. He let out his leather belt around the loins by several holes and began to play quite an important part in the town, while all this time his foolish workmen slaved like beasts of burden in their dark and ill-ventilated shop at home, striving, each of them, to force the other two out of the race. Dietrich, the Suabian, although the youngest of them, proved of the same calibre as the other two. The only difference was that he as yet had scarcely any savings, inasmuch as he

had not yet traveled around much, having been a prentice until recently. This would have been an unfortunate obstacle for him in the race, for Jobst and Fridolin would have had greatly the start of him, if he as a Suabian had not been inventive in stratagem. For although Dietrich's heart, like that of the others, was wholly bare of any sinful or earthly passion, always excepting the one of persisting to remain in Seldwyla and nowhere else, and to reap all the advantages of that plan, he nevertheless bethought him of the trick of falling in love and to woo such a maiden as should possess about such a dowry in size as the respective treasures which the Saxon or the Bavarian had hidden under their tiles.

It was one of the better peculiarities of the Seldwyla folk that they were averse to wed unattractive or unamiable women just for the sake of a somewhat larger dowry. There was no very great temptation anyway, for wealthy heiresses there were none in their town, either pretty or homely ones, and thus they at least maintained their sturdy and manly independence even by disdaining the smaller mouthfuls, and preferred to unite themselves rather with goodlooking and merry girls, and thus lead for a few years with them at any rate a happy life. Hence it was not hard for the Suabian, spying about for a suitable partner, to find his way into the good graces of a virtuous maiden. She dwelt in the same street, and in conversation with old women he had soon ascertained that she possessed as her own undoubted property a mortgage of seven hundred florins. This maiden was Zues Buenzlin, the twenty-eight-year-old daughter of a washerwoman. She lived with her mother, but could freely dispose of this legacy from her deceased father. This valuable bit of paper she kept in a highly varnished trunk. There, too, she had the accumulated interest money, her baptismal certificate, her testimonial of confirmation, and a painted and gilt Easter egg; in addition to all this she preserved there half a dozen silver spoons, the Lord's Prayer printed in gold letters upon transparent glass, although she believed the material to be human skin, a cherry stone into which was carved the Passion of Christ, and a small box of ivory, lined with red satin, and in which were concealed a tiny mirror and a silver thimble; there was also in it another cherry stone in which you could hear clattering a diminutive set of ninepins, a nutshell in which a madonna became visible behind glass, a silver heart, in a hollow of which was a scent bottle, and a candy box fashioned out of dried lemon peel, on the cover of which was painted a strawberry, and in which there might be discovered a golden pin displayed on a couch of cotton wool representing a forget-me-not, and a locket showing on the inside a monument woven out of hair; lastly, a bundle of age-yellowed papers with recipes, secrets, and so forth; also a small flask of Cologne water, another holding stomach drops, a box of musk, another with marten excrements, and a small basket woven out of odoriferous grasses, another of beads and cloves, and then a small book bound in sky-blue silk and entitled "Golden Life Rules for the Maiden as Betrothed, Wife and Mother"; and a dream book, a letter writer, five or six love letters, and a lancet for use to let blood. This last piece came from a barber and assistant surgeon to whom she had once been engaged, and since she was a naturally skillful and very sensible person she had learned from her fiancé how to open a vein, to put on leeches, and similar things, and had even been able to shave him herself. But alas, he had proved an unworthy object of her affections, with whom she might easily have risked her temporal and heavenly welfare, and thus she had with saddened but wise resolution broken the engagement. Gifts were returned on both sides, with the exception of the lancet. This she kept in pawn as pledge for one florin and eight and forty stuyvers, which sum she on one occasion had lent him in cash. The unworthy one claimed, however, that she had no right to it since she had given him the money on the occasion of a ball, in order to defray joint expenses, and he added that she had eaten twice as much as himself. Thus it happened that he kept the florin and forty-eight stuyvers, while she kept the surgical appliance, with which Zues operated extensively among her female acquaintance and earned many a penny. But every time she used the instrument she could not help mentioning the low habits of him who had once stood so close to her and who had almost become her partner for life.

All these things were locked up in that trunk, and the trunk again was kept in a large walnut wardrobe, the key to which Zues had constantly in her pocket. As to her person, Zues had rather sparse reddish hair as well as clear pale-blue eyes; these now and then possessed some charm, and then would throw glances both wise and gentle. She owned an enormous store of clothes, but of these she only wore the oldest. However, she was always carefully and cleanly dressed, and just as neat was the appearance of her room. She was very industrious and helped her mother in her laundry work, ironing out the finer and more delicate fabrics and washing the lace caps and the jabots of the wealthier Seldwyla ladies, thus earning quite a bit. And it may be that it was due to this sort of activity that Zues always exhibited the peculiar stern and dignified bent of mind which women show when they are dealing with laundry work, especially with the work over the tub. For Zues never unbent at all until the ironing began. Then, it might be, a species of sedate cheerfulness would seize upon her, in her case, however, invariably spiced with words of wisdom. This sedate spirit, too, was recognizable in the chief decorative piece on the premises, namely, a garland of soap cakes, square, accurately gauged cakes, which encircled the large living room on shelves. The soap was thus exposed to the warm air currents in order to harden and become fitter for use. And it was Zues herself who always cut out the cakes by means of a brass wire. The wire had fastened to it at either end two small wooden knobs so one could seize them there for a more commodious cutting of the soft soap. But a fine pair of compasses used in dividing the soap in equal sections was also there. This instrument had been made for her and presented as a valued gift by a journeyman mechanician with whom she had at one time been as good as engaged. From him, too, came a gleaming small brass mortar for the pulverization of spices. This decorated the edge of her cupboard, right between the blue china tea can and the painted flower vase. For long such a dainty little mortar had been her special desire, and the attentive

mechanician was therefore extremely welcome when he appeared one afternoon on her birthday and likewise brought along something to put the mortar to its legitimate use: a boxful of cinnamon, lump sugar, cloves and pepper. The mortar itself he hung, before entering at the door, by one of its handles to his little finger, and with the pestle he started a gay tinkling, just like a bell, so that out of the adventure grew a jolly day of festivity. However, shortly afterwards the false scoundrel fled from the district, and was never heard of more. Besides that, his master even demanded the return of the mortar, since the fugitive had taken it from his shop, but had forgotten to pay for it. But Zues did not deliver up this valuable object. On the contrary, she went to law for its undisputed possession, and in court she defended her claim valiantly, basing her rights on the fact that she had washed, starched and ironed a set of "dickies" for the vanished lover. Those days, the days when she was forced to defend her rights to the mortar in open court, were the most conspicuous and painful of her whole life, since she with her deep feelings felt these things and more particularly her appearance in court for the sake of such delicate affairs much more keenly than others of a lighter disposition would have done. All the same she scored a victory and kept her mortar.

If, however, this neat soap gallery proclaimed her exact working tactics and her passion for toil, a row of books, arranged in orderly fashion on the window ledge, did honor to her religious and disciplined mind. These books were of a miscellaneous description, and she read and reread them studiously on Sundays. She still possessed all her school books, never having lost a single one of them. She also still carried in her head all her little stock of scholastic learning acquired at school; she knew the whole catechism by heart, as well as the contents of the grammar, of the arithmetic, of her geography book, of the collection of biblical stories, and of the various readers and spellers. Then she also owned some of the pretty tales by Christoph Schmid and the latter's short novelettes, with handsome verses at the end, at least a half dozen of sundry treasuries of poetry and gatherings of popular fairy tales, a number of almanacs full of specimens of homely wisdom and practical experience, several precise and remarkable prophecies of tremendous events to come, a guide for laying the cards, a book of edification for every day of the year intended for the use of thoughtful virgins, and an old and slightly damaged copy of Schiller's "The Robbers," which she slowly perused again and again, as often as she feared she might begin to forget this stirring drama. And each time she read it, the play appealed to her sentimental heart anew, so that she made constant references to it and commented in a highly praiseworthy manner on the various personages presented in it. And really all there was in these books she also retained in her memory, and understood exceedingly well how to speak about them and about many other things as well. When she felt cheerful and contented and did not have to hasten her labors too greatly, speech flowed continuously from her lips, and everything under the sun she knew how to judge and to put into its proper category. Young and old, high and low, learned and unlearned, they all were compelled to listen and to receive instruction from her. First, she would hear everybody out, meanwhile smilingly and sensibly straightening out the case in her wise little head. And then, having now perceived whither all these plaints or fears tended, she would solve the more or less knotty problem at a stroke. Sometimes she would speak so unctuously and elaborately on matters that irreverent criticasters had compared her to learned blind persons who have never had sight of the world and whose sole solace it is to hear themselves talk.

From the time she went to the town school and from her lessons of instruction before she was confirmed by the pastor, she had retained the habit of composing, from time to time, essays and exercises, and thus it was that she would, on quiet Sundays, laboriously write out the most marvelous compositions. One of her favorite methods in doing this was to seize upon some melodious title that she had heard of or read in the course of the week, and taking this, so to speak, as her text, would proceed to pile up from it the most wonderful conclusions and deductions, not infrequently culminating in very odd or nonsensical dicta. Page on page of this balderdash she would perpetrate, just as it issued from the convolutions of her silly brain. Such themes, for example, as "The Various Beneficent Uses of a Sickbed," "About Death," "About the Wholesomeness of Resignation," "About the Giant Size of the World," "About the Secrets of Life Eternal," "About Residence in the Country," "About Nature," "About Dreams," "About Love," "About Redemption and Christ," "Three Points in the Theory of Self-Justification," "Thoughts about Immortality," she often solved in her own easy way. Then she would read aloud to her friends and admirers these productions, and it was a supreme proof of her special regard and affection for her to present one or the other of them to a close friend. Such gifts, she insisted on, had to be placed within the pages of a Bible, that is, if the recipient happened to have one.

This leaning of Zues' nature towards religious ecstasy and contemplation had once gained her the profound and respectful affection of a young bookbinder, a man who read every book he bound and who was, besides, both ambitious and enthusiastic. Whenever he brought his bundle of soiled linen to Zues' mother, he deemed himself to be in paradise, for he swallowed greedily all of the maiden's thoughts, and her boldest figures of speech now and then, he shyly said, would remind him of things he had dared to think himself, but which he had never had the skill and the courage to frame into words. Bashfully and humbly he approached this talented virgin, who was by turns severe and eloquent, and she deigned to suffer this modest intercourse and held him in leading-strings for a whole year, not, however, without making the hopelessness of his suit plain to him, gently but determinedly. For inasmuch as he was nine years her junior, poor as a church mouse and awkward in gaining a living, men of his calling not being in clover in Seldwyla anyhow, since people there do not read much and, consequently, have few books to bind, she never for a moment hid from herself the impossibility of a union. She merely found it pleasant to

develop his mind and character and to furnish her own as a model to strive after. Her own powers of resignation were all the time for him to take pattern by, and so she embalmed his aspirations in an iridescent cloud of phrases. And he on his part would listen modestly, and once or twice find heart to risk a beautiful sentence himself. This she invariably answered by instantly killing his observation with a finer one. That year, when she calmly received the adoration of this youth, was reckoned by her the most ethereal and noblest of her existence, since it was not disturbed by a single breath from the lower and material spheres, and the young man during it bound anew all her books, and with infinite pains wrought night after night toward the ultimate completion of an artful and precious monument of his adoration for her. This was, to be plain, a huge Chinese temple of pasteboard, containing innumerable tiny compartments and secret receptacles, and which might be entirely taken apart and reconstructed on following carefully previous instructions. This miracle was pasted all over with the finest samples of varicolored and glazed paper, and everywhere ornamented with gilt borders. Minute mirrors inside colonnaded halls of state reflected the gay colors, and by removing one section of the structure or opening another one there were more mirrors and hidden pictures, nosegays of paper or loving couples. The curving or shelving roofs were everywhere hung with little bells. Even a small stand for a lady's watch was there, with hooks to hang it up on and with other hooks to trail a slender meandering chain through. Only up to now no watchmaker had yet offered a pretty watch or a chain to decorate this altar with. An enormous deal of trouble and skill had been wasted on this pasteboard temple, and its ground plan was just as correct as the work itself. And when this monument of a year passed jointly so pleasantly had been duly accepted, Zues Buenzlin encouraged the good bookbinder, doing violence to her own well-regulated heart, to tear himself away from the town and to set once more his staff for a wandering life. She pointed out with perfect justice that the whole world stood open to him, and she assured him that now, having schooled and ennobled his heart by improving his acquaintance with herself, happiness elsewhere would certainly be in store for him. She would never forget him and retire into solitude. And indeed, the young fellow was so much affected by these moral exhortations that he shed a few melancholy tears in passing the town gate on his way. His masterpiece, however, since stood on top of Zues' old-fashioned clothes press, daintily covered by a veil of green gauze, thus defying dust and profane gaze. She considered it so much of a sacred relic that she kept it intact and without even placing anything whatever into those many tiny recesses of the temple. In her memory he continued to live as "Emmanuel," although his real name had been Veit. And she told everyone with whom she discussed the case that Emmanuel alone had completely understood her inner self. This she said now that he was gone, but while he had been with her in the flesh she had been of different opinion, for she had rarely admitted to him that he was right, deeming it wiser to thus urge him on to higher and ever higher endeavor in his search of a perfect agreement of mind with his idol. Indeed, she had more than once intimated to him, at times when he hoped he had at last fully entered the arcana of her soul, that he was farther and farther from it.

But he, too, Veit-Emmanuel, played her a little trick. He had placed in a false bottom, in one of the diminutive apartments of his pasteboard fairy palace, the most touching of all love letters, bedewed with his tears, wherein he confessed his bitter grief at parting from her, his love, his worship and his sublime steadfastness, and in such passionate and sincere terms had he done this as only genuine feeling can find, even if it has lost itself in a cul-de-sac. Such touching, such moving things he had never said to her, simply because she never would give him the chance, having always interrupted him when he was on the point of doing so. But as she had not the slightest suspicion that any such document had been put away within the temple, she never found the missive and thus fate for once dealt justly and did not let a false beauty see that which she was not worthy of. And it was also a symbol that she it was who had not fathomed the somewhat silly, but devoted and sincere heart of the youth.

For a long while she had been praising the doings of the three combmakers, and had called them three decent and sensible men; for she had closely observed them. When, therefore, Dietrich, the Suabian, began to linger longer and longer in her dwelling when bringing or fetching his shirt, and to pay court to her, she treated him in a friendly manner and kept him near her for hours by means of her lofty conversation. And Dietrich talked back, of course, to please her, just as much as he could; and she was one of the kind that could stand more than a fair measure of laudation. Indeed, one might truthfully say that she liked it all the more the more spiced and peppered it was. When praising her wisdom and kindness, she kept still as a mouse, until there was no more of it, whereupon she would with heightened color pick up the thread where it had been dropped, and would touch up the painting in those spots where it seemed to require a trifle of additional color. And Dietrich had not been going back and forth in her house for any great length of time when she showed him that mortgage of hers, and he thereupon began to exude a quiet, sedate species of self-satisfaction, and began to behave toward his rivals with such stealth as though he had invented the perpetuum mobile. Jobst and Fridolin, however, soon unearthed his secret, and they were amazed at the depth of his dissimulation and at his cleverness. Jobst above all clutched his hair and tore out a good handful of it; for had he himself not been going to the same house for a long while, and had it ever occurred to him to look for anything there but his clean linen? Rather, he had hitherto almost hated the washerwomen because he had been forced to dig up a few stuyvers every week to pay them. Never had he thought of marriage, because he was unable to conceive of a wife under any other aspect than that of a being that wanted something out of him which he did not deem her due, and to expect

something from such a feminine creature that might be of advantage to him had never entered his thoughts, since he had confidence only in himself, and his calculations had so far never gone beyond the narrowest horizon, that of his secret. But now reflecting deep and serious he reached the determination to outdo this sly little Suabian, for if the latter should really succeed in getting hold of Dame Zues' seven hundred florins, he might become a keen competitor. The seven hundred florins, too, suddenly shone and glittered very differently, in the eyes both of the Saxon and of the Bavarian. Thus it was that Dietrich, the man of invention, had discovered a land which soon became the joint property of the three, and thus shared the hard lot of all discoverers, for the two others at once got on the same track and likewise became steady callers on Zues Buenzlin. She therefore saw herself surrounded by a whole court of decent and respectable combmakers. That she relished greatly; never before had she had a number of admirers at one time. It became a novel entertainment for her shrewd mind to handle these three with the greatest impartiality and skill, to keep them at all times within bounds and cool reason, and to thus influence them by frequent speeches in favor of the beauties of resignation and unselfishness until Heaven itself should by some act of intervention decide matters irrevocably.

As each of the three had confided to her his secret and his plans, she immediately made up her mind to render happy that one who really would attain his goal and become owner of the business. And in thus deciding in her own heart how she should proceed, she from that hour on deliberately excluded the Suabian, since he could not succeed except through and by her money. But while thus actually discarding the Suabian as a possible candidate for her hand, she reflected that, after all, he was the youngest, handsomest and most amiable of the trio, and thus she would spare for him many a token of regard and confidence, and lull him into the belief that his chances were the best. But while so doing, she knew how to arouse the jealousy of the other two, and thus spur them on to greater zeal. And so it came to pass that Dietrich, this poor Columbus who had first sighted and nearly taken possession of the pretty land, became nothing but a mere pawn in her game, nothing but the poor fool who unconsciously assisted in the angling for the real fish. Meanwhile all three of them assiduously wooed and courted the coy maiden, running a close race in the difficult art of showing all the time devotion, modesty and sense, while being kept by the bridle. She on her part was in her element, for she forever told them to be unselfish and to practice resignation. When the whole four now and then happened to be together, they made the impression of a singular conventicle where the queerest remarks were being expressed. And despite of all their timidity and humility it would happen once in a while that one of the three, suddenly dropping his hosannahs in praise of the rare gifts and virtues of the maiden, would plunge into a measure of self-laudation. At such moments it was edifying and truly touching to see Zues gently interrupt the rash one and chide him for his breach of good manners. She would then shame him by forcing him to listen to a homily on his rivals.

However, this was really a hard sort of life for the poor combmakers to lead. No matter how much ordinarily they had themselves under control, now that a woman had entered as a factor into their game, there would occur wholly novel spurts of jealousy, of fear, of misgiving, and of hope. What with a fury of work and increased economy, they almost killed themselves and certainly lost flesh. They became melancholy, and while before people--and especially before Zues--they endeavored hard to maintain the appearance of the utmost harmony, they scarcely spoke a word to each other when alone together at work or in their common sleeping chamber, lay down sighing in their joint bed, and dreamed of murder, albeit still resting quietly and immovably one next the other as so many sticks. One and the same dream hovered nightly over the trio, until really once it came to one of the sleepers, so that Jobst in his place by the wall turned over violently and kicked Dietrich. Dietrich avoided the kick and gave Jobst a hard push, and now there was among the three sleepy combmakers an outbreak of elemental wrath. The most tremendous row ensued in the bed, and for fully three minutes they treated each other to fearful lunges, kicks and pushes, so that all the six legs formed an inextricable tangle, until with a thundering crash they rolled out of bed and began to howl like savage beasts. Becoming fully awake they at first thought the devil were after them or else thieves had entered their room. Screaming they rose quickly. Jobst took his stand upon his tile; Fridolin planted himself firmly upon his own, and Dietrich did the like upon that tile beneath which his still rather slender savings reposed. And thus standing in a triangle, they worked their arms like flails and shouted their loudest: "Get out; get out!" until the master came rushing up from below and after a while quieted the three frenzied fellows. Trembling then with fear, shame and anger, they crept back into bed, and then, wide-awake, lay there mute until dawn came and forced them to rise.

However, the nocturnal spook had only been the prelude to something worse. For at breakfast the master let them know that for the time being he had no longer need of three journeymen, and that two of them would have to pack up their bundle. It appeared that they had defeated their own object by hurrying and hastening work, so that now there were more wares than the boss was able to dispose of, while on the other hand, he, the master, himself had taken advantage of the extreme mood for work his men had shown for months to lead on his part an opulent and disorderly life, spending nearly all his extra gains in riotous quips. Indeed, when the details of his doings became public it turned out that he had run into such an amount of debt that the load of it came well-nigh smothering him. Thus it came about that he, looking over his own situation, was unable to employ or support his three workmen, no matter how abstemious they were and how intent on his further profit. For consolation he told them that he was equally fond of all three of them and loath to tell either to go, wherefore he had made up his mind to leave it wholly to them which of the three should leave and which should stay. All they had to do, he remarked smilingly, was to agree among themselves upon that point.

But they were unable to come to a decision as to this. Rather they stood there pale as ghosts, and simpered timidly at each other. Then they became tremendously excited, since they clearly perceived that the most momentous hour of their existence was approaching. For they judged from the words of the master that he would not be able to continue the business much longer, and that, therefore, it would soon become an object of sale. The goal, then, each of them had striven for with such infinite patience and cunning seemed in sight, and to their heated fancy was already glittering and shining like a new Jerusalem. And now came this awful decree, and two of them would have to turn their backs upon the heavenly prospect. It was almost more than they could bear. After a very brief consultation and reflection all three of them went to see the master, and declared with tearful voices that rather than leave him they would stay on, even though they would have to work gratis. But then the master declared jovially that even in that case he had no further use for all the three. Two of them, he again assured them, would have to quit the house. They fell at his feet; they wrung their hands; they asked and implored him to let them stay on: only for another three months, for one month, for a fortnight. The master, however, after at first enjoying the humor of the situation, at last lost all patience. Besides, he was perfectly aware what their motive in all this pretended loyalty for him was, and that soured his temper. Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he did not hesitate to make them a proposition.

"Why," he smiled, "if you cannot agree among yourselves at all as to who is to remain and who to go, I will tell you how we will decide this matter. But that is absolutely the last proposal I shall make to you. To-morrow being Sunday, I shall pay your wages; you pack up your belongings, get ready to go forth and take your staffs. Then you will in all good faith and perfect harmony leave jointly, going out by whichever gate you may agree upon, and march on the highroad for another half-hour, no more, no less, and then stop. Then you will rest yourselves a trifle, and if you care to do so, you may even drink a shoppen or two. Having done so, you will all three of you turn once more and walk back to town, and whoever will then first ask me for work, him I will keep, but the other two must wander forth for good and all, wherever they might choose to go."

Hearing this cruel decision, they three fell once more at his feet and begged him most pitifully to have mercy on them and to desist from his plan. But the master, who by this time began to anticipate some rare fun in his wicked soul, was obstinate and would not listen to them, hardening himself. Suddenly the Suabian sprang up and ran out of the house like a man demented, across the street to Zues Buenzlin. Scarcely had Jobst and the Bavarian observed that, when they ceased to lament themselves and followed the youngest. Within a very brief space the three of them were seated in the dwelling of the frightened maiden.

Zues felt rather abashed and undecided by reason of the adventure taking such an unexpected turn. But she calmed herself, and viewing the matter from her own particular angle, she resolved to make her plans subservient to the master's odd conceit. In fact, she regarded this new aspect of affairs as a special dispensation of Providence. Touched and devout she fetched out one of her volumes, then with her needle at random pricked among the leaves, and when she opened the book at the spot, she found a passage that spoke of the persistent following of the righteous path. Next she made the three guests turn up passages blindfolded, and all that was found treated of walking along the narrow way, of advancing without looking backwards, in short, of nothing but running and racing. Thus, then, she decided, Heaven itself had prescribed the projected race for to-morrow. But since she was afraid that Dietrich, as being the youngest and the ablest in jumping, walking, and running, and thus most likely to win the palm if left without supervision, she made up her mind to go herself along with the three lovers, and to watch for an opportunity for bending or influencing possibly the outcome of this undertaking in accordance with her own secret desires. For she wished, as we must recall, one of the older men to be the victor, she did not care which of the two.

In furtherance of this plan she insisted that the three be quiet for a spell and cease slandering and berating each other, but rather summon themselves to acquiescence in God's will. She put on her judicial air and said:

"Know, my friends, that nothing happens here below without the direction and sometimes direct interference of Providence, and no matter if the plan of your master be unusual and singular, we must look upon it as ordered by higher powers than he, although it may be that he has not even an inkling of this. He is the dumb and unconscious instrument in the hands of the Ruler. Our peaceable and harmonious intercourse here has been too beautiful altogether to have been prolonged much farther. For, behold, all the good things in life are but transitory and pass away, and nothing is lasting but evil things, the loneliness of the soul and the persistence of sin, whereupon we feel impelled to consider all this and to try and grasp their meaning in this life and in the life to come. Hence, too, let us rather separate before the wicked demon of discord raises its head amongst us, and let us bid each other farewell, just as do the soft zephyrs of springtime when they swiftly move along high in the sky, and let us do this before the rough storms of autumn overtake us. I myself will accompany you on the first stage of your hard road, and will be the eyewitness of your trial race, so that you will start on it with a good courage and so that you know behind you a gentle propelling power, while victory winks from afar. But just as the victor will forbear to show a spirit of undue pride, those who have been defeated will not permit themselves to become despondent nor to load their souls with grief or wrath because of their lack of success in the venture. They will depart feeling affection for him who bears the palm, and will enshrine him and us in their inmost heart. They will fare forth into the wide world with joyous disposition. They must reflect on the fact that men have built cities galore that outshine in their

splendors and beauties Seldwyla by far. There is, for instance, a huge and memorable city wherein dwells the Father of all Christendom. And Paris, too, is quite a mighty town, where may be found innumerable souls and many fine palaces. And in Constantinople there rules the Sultan, of Turkish faith is he, and there is Lisbon, once destroyed by an earthquake, but since reconstructed finer than ever. Again we have Vienna, the capital of Austria and called the gay imperial city, and London is the wealthiest town of all, situated in Engelland, along a river the name of which is the Thames. Two millions of human beings, they say, have their habitation there. St. Petersburg, on the other hand, is the capital and imperial city of Russia, whereas Naples is the capital of the kingdom of the same name, near which is the Vesuvius, a high mountain forever breathing fire and smoke. On that mountain, according to the version of a credible witness, a lost soul once upon a time appeared to a ship's captain, as I have read in a curious book of travel, which soul belonged to John Smidt, who one hundred and fifty years ago was a godless man, and who now commissioned the said captain to visit his descendants in Engelland, so he might be redeemed. For look you, the entire mountain is the abode of the damned, as may also be read in the tract of the learned Peter Hasler where he discusses the probable entrance to hell. Many other cities there are indeed, whereof I will still mention Milan, and Venice, built wholly upon water, and Lyons, and Marseilles, and Strasbourg, and Cologne, and Amsterdam. Of Paris I have already spoken, but there is also Nuremberg, and Augsburg, and Frankfort, and Basle, and Berne, and Geneva, all of them handsome towns, and pretty Zurich, and besides all these still many more which I have neither leisure nor inclination to enumerate here. For everything has its limits, excepting the inventive genius of man, who goes everywhere and undertakes anything which seems to him useful. And if men are just everything prospereth with them; but if they are unjust they will perish like the grass of the fields and vanish like smoke. Many are called, but few are chosen. For all these reasons and because of others to which our duty and the virtue of a clear conscience oblige us, we will now submit ourselves to the voice of fate. Go forth, therefore, and prepare for the time of trial, and for the period of wandering, but do so as just and gentle beings, who bear their worth within themselves, no matter whither they may go, and whose staff will everywhere take root, who, no matter what their calling may be and no matter what business they may seize upon, are always in the right in saying to themselves; 'I have chosen the better part.'"

Of all this the combmakers really did not want to hear just then, but on the contrary insisted that Zues should select one of them and tell him to remain in Seldwyla, and each one of them in saying so only thought of himself. She, however, was careful to avoid a premature choice. On the contrary, she told them bluntly that they must obey her on pain of forfeiting her friendship forever. At once Jobst, the oldest of the three, skipped off, right into the house of their ex-master, and to perceive that and follow him in haste, was the work of an instant, since they were afraid that he might be planning something against them on the sly, and thus the trio acted all day long, whisking about like falling stars, hither and thither. They hated each other like three spiders in one web. Half the town witnessed this queer spectacle, observing the three strangely excited combmakers, they who until that day had always been so orderly and quiet. The ancient people of the town could not but feel that something evil, something tragic was underway, and they would nod and whisper to one another of their fears. Towards nightfall, however, the combmakers became tired and spent, without having reached any definite conclusion, and in that mood they retired and stretched out their limbs in the old bed, with chattering teeth and half-sick with impotent rage. One by one they crept beneath the covering, and there they lay, as though felled by the hand of death itself, with thoughts in turmoil and confusion, until at last sleep came like balm for their uproarious minds.

Jobst was first to waken, at early dawn, and he saw that spring was weaving its garlands and that the great orb was rising in the east, in a mass of cloudlets of dainty hue. The first rays of the sun were already penetrating the dusky chamber wherein he had been sleeping for the past six years. And while the room assuredly looked bare and unattractive enough, it seemed nevertheless a paradise to him, a paradise from which he was about to be driven thus unjustly and unfairly, it appeared to him. He let his eyes wander all over the walls, and counted on them the traces left by all the preceding journeymen that had been harbored under that roof. Here there was a dark stain from the one who was in the habit of rubbing against the wall his greasy pate; there another one had driven in a nail, on which he used to hang his long pipe, and, sure enough, a bit of scarlet tape still clung to the nail. How good and harmless had they all been, all those that had come and gone, while these fellows now, spread out their whole length next to him in bed, would not go. Next he fastened his glance upon the objects nearer his field of vision, those objects which he had noticed thousands of times before, on all those occasions when he had lain in bed in a contemplative mood, mornings, nights, or daytime, and when he had enjoyed in his own peculiar way the bliss of existence, free of cost and with a serene mind. There was, for example, a spot in the ceiling where the wet had damaged it. This spot had often set his imagination at work. It looked like the map of a whole country, with lakes and rivers and cities, and a group of grains of sand represented an isle of the blessed. Farther down a long bristle from the painter's brush attracted Jobst's wandering attention; for this bristle had been held back by the blue paint and was embedded in it. This phenomenon interested Jobst greatly, for it was his own handiwork. Last autumn he had accidentally discovered a small remnant of the azure paint, and to utilize it had proceeded to spread it over that portion of the ceiling nearest to him. But just beyond the bristle there was a very slight protuberance, almost like a chain of mountains, and this threw its shadow across the bristle over against the isle of the blessed. About this rise in the scenery he had been brooding and speculating the whole of the past winter, because it seemed to him that it had not been there formerly.

And as he now cast searching glances for this protuberance and could not find it despite all his pains, he thought he must suddenly have gone daft when instead of it he discovered a tiny bare spot on the wall. On the other hand he noticed that the small bluish mountain itself was moving. Amazed beyond measure at this miracle, Jobst quickly sat up and watched the cerulean wonder march steadily on: the conviction dawned on him that the prodigy was nothing but a bedbug; his logical deduction then was that he must have unawares applied a coat of paint to this insect, at a time in its life when it was already in a state of coma. But now the little creature had been reawakened under the warming influence of the spring sun, had started on a tour of adventure, and was actually and bravely ascending the steep pathway on the wall, ready for business, without in the least minding its blue back and Jobst's astonishment. Jobst watched the meanderings of the dear little thing with concentrated interest. So long as it cut across the blue paint it was barely visible; but now it issued forth into the region beyond, traversing first a few remaining splotches of paint, and next wandering diligently among the darker districts. With softened feelings Jobst sank back into his pillows. Generally rather indifferent to quips of mere fancy, this time sentiment struggled uppermost. He took the enterprising bedbug as an omen for himself. He, too, must be wandering forth again, seeking new pastures. And thankfully and resignedly he thought of this insect as a model for himself to strive after. In this frame of mind he resolved to put a good face on the matter and to bow to the unavoidable. He meant to start at once. Indulging these wise reflections his natural wisdom and forethought slowly came back to him, however, and resuming his train of deliberations he at last concluded that there might not be any necessity for clearing out at all. By reassuming his habitual modesty and resignation and submitting in that spirit to the trial at hand, it might come to pass, after all, that he would overcome his rivals. Softly and slowly, therefore, he now rose, and began to arrange his belongings; but above all he dug up his hidden treasure and started to pack it away, lowest in his knapsack. While thus engaged the others also awoke. And when they observed Jobst packing up his things in that matter-of-fact, unobtrusive manner, they grew more and more astonished, and this feeling increased when Jobst spoke to them in a conciliatory tone and wished them a good morning. More than that, though, he did not say, but continued peaceably in his task. Instantly, however, not being able to explain to themselves his behavior, they began to suspect a ruse, a deep-laid scheme, and to imitate him. At the same time they closely watched him, curious to find out what he would do next.

It was ludicrous as well to observe the other two now exhuming their hoards quite openly from underneath their own tiles, and to put them away, without first counting them over, in their knapsacks. For they had known for long that each was aware of the secret of the others, and according to the old-fashioned honorable traditions of their guild not one of them suspected the others of theft. Each of them, in fact, was fully convinced that they would not be robbed. For it is an iron-clad custom among traveling journeymen, soldiers, and similar folk that nothing must be locked up and that there must be no suspicion of foul play.

In this way they at last were ready to start. The master paid each his wages, and handed them back their service booklets, wherein on the part of the town authorities and of the master himself there were inscribed the most satisfactory certificates as to good behavior and steadiness of conduct. A minute later they stood, in a state of soft melancholy, before the house door of Zues Buenzlin, each dressed in a long brown coat, with a duster above that, and their hats, albeit by no means new or fashionable, covered with a tight casing of oil cloth. Each carried a tiny van strapped to his knapsack to enable him, as soon as long-distance walking should start, to pull his heavy baggage with greater ease. The small wheels belonging to this contraption stood up high above their shoulders. Jobst was assisted in walking by a decent bamboo cane, Fridolin by a staff of ash painted all over with red and black stripes, and Dietrich by a fantastic baton around which were curling carved branches. But he was almost ashamed of this absurd and bragging thing, since it dated from the first days of his pilgrimage, a time when he had not yet attained to the sober view of life as since. Many neighbors and their children lined the way and wished these three serious-minded men godspeed.

But now Zues showed at the door, her mien even more solemn than usual, and at the head of the little procession she went on with the three courageously to beyond the town gate. In their honor she had donned some of her choicest finery. She wore a huge hat draped with broad yellow ribbons, a pink calico dress trimmed in a style of ten years ago, a black velvet scarf and shoes of red morocco with fringes. With this costume she also carried a reticule of green silk filled with dried pears and prunes, and had a small parasol in her other hand on top of which there could be seen an ivory ornament carved in the shape of a lyre. She had also hung around her fair neck the locket with the monument of hair, and in front of her chaste bosom had pinned on the gold forget-me-not, and wore white knit gloves. Dainty and pleasant she looked in this guise; her countenance was slightly flushed and her bosom heaved higher than its wont, and the departing combmakers scarcely were able to conceal their feelings of utter woe and sorrow at the prospect of losing her. For even their extreme situation, the lovely spring weather, and Zues' exquisite finery, or all of it together mingled with their sentiments of expectation and anxiety something of what habitually is denominated Love. Arrived beyond the town gate, though, the winsome maiden encouraged her three admirers to place their heavy knapsacks upon those tiny wheels and to pull their loads, so as not to tire themselves needlessly. This they did, and as they steadily began to climb the steep heights that rose just outside the town, it looked for all the world almost like a train of light mountain guns moving slowly upwards, in order to form a battery for attack. And when they had thus proceeded for half an hour they reached a pleasant hilltop, where they halted. A crossroad was there, and they sat down beneath a linden tree, in a semicircle, whence a

far view was obtainable across forests and lakes and villages. Zues brought out her reticule and handed to each one a handful of pears and prunes, in order to restore themselves. Thus they sat for quite a while, solemn and silent, merely causing a slight noise by the slow degustation of the sweet fruit.

Then Zues, throwing away a prune pit and drying her hands on the grass, drew breath and began to speak: "Dear friends," she said, "only see how beautiful and how big the world is, all around full of fine things and of human habitations! And yet I should wager that in this fateful hour there are nowhere else seated together four such decent and just souls as are seated here under this tree, four who are so sensible and so gentle in all their doings, so inclined to all useful and laborious exercises, so given to virtues like economy, peaceableness, and dutiful friendship. How many flowers are surrounding us here, of every kind, such as early spring produces, especially yellow cowslips, from which a wholesome and well-tasting tea may be prepared. But are these flowers, I ask you, as decent and as diligent, as economical and cautious, as apt to think correct and useful thoughts? No, indeed, they are ignorant and soulless things, and without benefiting themselves they waste time and opportunity, and no matter how nice they may look in a short time they turn into dead and useless hay, while we with our virtues are far superior to them and also do not yield to them in beauty of outward shape. For it was God who created us after His image and blew His divine breath into us. Ah, would it were possible to keep seated here in this spot for all eternity, in this paradise and in our present state of innocency. Indeed, my friends, it seems to me that we all of us at this hour are in a state of innocency, although ennobled by sinless consciousness and intelligence, for all four of us are able, God be praised, to read and write, and we have, each of us, likewise acquired a craft, a useful calling. For many things, I am aware, I have talent and skill, and would engage to do many things which even the most learned young lady would be unable to do, that is, if I were inclined to go outside of and beyond my proper station. But modesty and humility are the dearest virtues of a decent maiden, and it is enough for me to know that my intellectual gifts are not worthless nor despised by the judicious and those of a keener discernment. Many have before this wooed me, men who were not worthy of me, and now I see three just and decent bachelors assembled around me, each of whom is as worthy to win me as are the others. From this, my friends, you may measure and imagine how my own heart must long for a solution in view of this unheard-of abundance, and may each of you take pattern by me and think for the moment that he, too, were surrounded by three virgins, each equally lovely and worthy to be loved, and all three desirous to wed and possess him, and that on that account it might happen that he would be unable to make up his mind to incline to this or that one, and therefore at last unable to wed any. Only place yourselves in your thoughts in my stead: fancy that each of you were courted simultaneously by three Miss Buenzlins at once, and were thus seated around you the way we are seated here, dressed as I am, and of similarly alluring exterior, so that I in a manner of speaking would exist ninefold, and that they all were regarding you with love-lorn eyes, and were desiring to possess you with great strength of feeling. Can you do that?"

The three lovers ceased for a moment to chew their dried prunes, and made an attempt to follow the maiden's flight of fancy, their faces meanwhile assuming a peculiarly sheep-like cast. But after a while the Suabian, as the greatest thinker and inventor amongst them, seemed to grasp the idea, and said with a voluptuous grin: "Well, most beloved Miss Zues, if you have no objection, I should indeed like to see you hover around here not only threefold but a hundredfold, and to have you look at me with lovelorn eyes and to offer me a thousand kisses!"

"Nay, nay," Zues replied, rather put out by this, "do not talk in this unbecoming and extravagant style! What is entering your head, you overbold Dietrich? Not a hundredfold and not offering kisses, but only threefold and in a virtuous and honorable manner, so that no wrong may be done me!"

"Yes," now cried Jobst, brandishing a pear stalk and gesturing with it, "only threefold and behaving with the greatest chastity do I see the beloved Miss Buenzlin walking about me and greeting me while placing her hand on her heart. Your most devoted servant, thank you, thank you!" he said, smiling with great urbanity and bowing thrice in different directions as though he really perceived these hallucinations in the air around him. "Thus you should speak," rejoined Zues, with a seductive smirk. "If there really exists any difference between you three, it is you, after all, dear Jobst, who are the most gifted, or at least the most sensible."

Fridolin, the Bavarian, had not yet succeeded in conjuring up in his slower brain all these figments of imagination. But now seeing Jobst evidently scoring a hit, he was afraid that he was losing in favor, and so shouted in haste: "I also notice the lovely virgin, Miss Zues Buenzlin, perambulating right here in my vicinity and throwing voluptuous glances in my direction, while putting her hand on--"

"Fie, you Bavarian," shrieked Zues wrathfully, turning her face aside out of very shame. "Not another word! Where do you get the courage from to talk to me in such a tone of impure grossness, and to allow your fancy to indulge in such smuttiness? Fie, fie!"

The poor Bavarian felt abashed, reddened under this reproof, and looked about foolishly, not knowing what he had done amiss. For really his imagination had not been at work at all, and he had merely meant to repeat about what he had heard Jobst say a moment before and what the latter had been praised for. But now Zues once more turned and remarked: "And you, dear Dietrich, have you not yet been able to reshape that last observation of yours in a more modest

guise?"

"Indeed I have," the young man made answer, glad to be forgiven, "I now perceive you only in three different shapes, regarding me pleasantly but in a quite respectable manner, and offering me three white hands, on which I imprint three just as respectable kisses."

"Well, then, that is proper," remarked Zues, "and you, Fridolin, have you recovered from your fit of libertinism? Have you not yet calmed your rampageous blood, and are you now in condition to conceive of an image not so obscene?"

"Begging pardon," murmured Fridolin greatly crestfallen, "I also can now clearly recognize three maidens, each of whom has dried pears in her hand and offers them to me, not being quite at variance with me any longer. One of these is as handsome as the others, and to make a choice among them appears to me a hard matter indeed."

"Well said," remarked Zues, "and since you in your fancy are surrounded by no less than nine equally desirable persons, and nevertheless in spite of such delectable superabundance are suffering in your hearts from a lack of love, you may easily conceive of my own condition. And as you also saw how with modest and pure heart I know to tame my desires, I trust you will take me as a model and will vow here and now to further live in amity and to separate when the hour comes just as pleasantly and without a grudge, no matter how fate may deal with each one of you. Rise and come hither. Let each one of you place his hand in mine, and pledge himself to act just as I have indicated!"

"With perfect good faith," said Jobst in reply, "I at least will do precisely as you suggest!"

And the other two, not to be behindhand, likewise shouted: "And so will I!" and they all three pledged themselves as she had requested, secretly, of course, each with the proviso to run as hard towards the goal as he was able.

"Yes, indeed," Jobst once more interjected, "I at least will live up to my promise, for from my youth upwards I have unfailingly shown a conciliatory and equable disposition. Never in my life have I had a quarrel with anyone, and would never suffer to see an animal tortured. Wherever I have been I was on good terms with my fellows, and thus earned much praise because of my peaceful ways. And while I may say that I, too, understand many things passably well, and am usually held a sensible young man, at no time have I interfered with things that did not concern me, and have always done my duty with consideration for others. I can work just as hard as I choose without losing my health, since I am sound and strong and abstemious in my ways, and have still the best years before me. All the wives of my masters have said that I was a man in a thousand, a real treasure, and that it was easy to get along with me. Oh, indeed, Miss Buenzlin, I believe I could live with you as though in Heaven, in uninterrupted bliss."

"That would not be hard," broke in the Bavarian at this, "to live in concord and happiness with Miss Zues. I also would undertake to do the same. I am not a fool, either. My craft I understand as well as the best, and I know how to keep things in order without ever having to get excited about it. And although I also have dwelt in the largest cities and have earned good wages there, I have never got into trouble, and neither have I ever killed as much as a spider or thrown a brick at a mewling cat. I am temperate and easily pleased with my food, and am able to get along with very little indeed. With that I am in full health and of good temper and cheerful. I can stand much hardship without losing my bland mind, and my good conscience is an elixir that keeps me in excellent spirit. All animals love me and follow me, because they scent my kind heart, for with an unjust man they would not stay. A poodle dog once followed me for three entire days, on leaving the town of Ulm, and at last I was forced to leave it in charge of a peasant, since I as an humble journeyman combmaker could not afford to feed such a creature. When I was traveling through the Bohemian Forest stags and deer used to come within twenty paces of me, and would then stand and watch me. It is wonderful indeed how even such wild beasts know by instinct what kind of human beings they have to deal with."

"True," here sang out the Suabian. "Don't you see how this chaffinch has been fluttering around me this whole while, and how it is anxious to approach me? And that squirrel over there by the pine tree is constantly glancing towards me, and here again a small beetle is creeping up my leg and will not go away. Surely, it must be feeling comfortable with me, the tiny thing."

But now Zues grew jealous. Rather nettled, she spoke: "Animals all love me and like to stay with me. One of my birds remained with me for eight years, until unfortunately it died. Our cat is so fond of me that it forever purrs about me, and our neighbor's pigeons crowd about me every day when I scatter some crumbs for them on my window sill. Wonderful qualities animals have, anyway, each after its kind. The lion loves to follow in the footprints of kings and heroes, and the elephant accompanies the prince and the doughty warrior. The camel bears the merchant through the desert and keeps a store of fresh water in its belly for him. The dog again shares all the dangers with his owner and pitches himself headlong into the sea just to prove his devotion. The dolphin has a strong love for music and swims in the wake of vessels, while the eagle accompanies armies. The ape bears a strong resemblance to the human species and imitates everything he sees us do. The parrot understands our speech and converses with us just like any person of sense. Even the snakes may be tamed and then dance on the tip of their tails. The crocodile sheds human tears and is consequently in those parts esteemed and spared. The ostrich

may be saddled and ridden like a horse. The savage buffalo pulls the carriage of his human master, as the reindeer does the sledge of his. The unicorn furnishes man with snow-white ivory and the tortoise with its transparent bones--"

"Beg pardon," interrupted all the three combmakers together, "herein you are slightly in error, for ivory comes from the teeth of the elephant, and tortoise-shell combs are made out of the shell of that animal and not of the bones of the tortoise."

Zues colored deeply and rejoined: "That, I believe, remains to be proved. For you certainly have not seen of your own knowledge whence it is obtained, but only work up its pieces. I as a rule make no mistakes in matters of that kind. However, be that as it may, just let me finish. Not the animals alone have their peculiarities implanted by the hand of God, but even dead minerals that are dug out of the sides of mountains. The crystal is clear as glass, marble hard and full of veins, sometimes white and sometimes black. Amber possesses electric properties and attracts lightning; but in that case it burns and smells like incense. The magnet attracts iron; on slates one can write, but not upon diamonds, for these are hard as steel; the glazier, too, uses the diamond for cutting glass, because it is small and pointed. You see, dear friends, that I can also tell you a few things about minerals and animals. But as regards my relations with them I may say this: that the cat is a sly and cunning beast, and that is why it will attach itself only to persons possessing the same characteristics. The pigeon, however, is the symbol of innocence and simplicity of mind, and may only be the companion of those similarly constituted. And since it is certain that both cats and pigeons are attracted by me, the conclusion must be that I am at the same time sly and cunning, simple-minded and innocent. As Holy Writ says, Be wise like the serpent and simple like the dove! In this way we are able to understand both animals and our relations to them, and to learn a deal, if we only look at things in the right manner."

The poor combmakers had not dared to interrupt her more. Zues had got the better of them, and she went on for some time longer at the same rate, talking about all sorts of intellectual things, until their senses were in a whirl. But they admired Zues' spirit and her eloquence, although with all their admiration none of them deemed himself too humble to possess this jewel of a woman, especially as this ornament of a house came cheap and consisted merely in an eager and tireless tongue. Whether they themselves, after all, were worthy of this that they valued so highly, and whether they would be able to utilize this gift of hers, that class of idiot seldom inquires. They are more like children who reach out for anything that glitters, who lick off the vivid paint on a multicolored toy, and who put a mouth harmonica into their little jaw instead of being content with listening to its music. But while drinking in the high-flown phrases that dropped so mellifluously from her lips, the three of them goaded on their imagination more and more, sharpened their greed to own such a distinguished person, and the more heartless, idle and parrot-like Zues' chatter became, the more melancholy and depressed became her swains. At the same time they felt a terrific thirst in consequence of having swallowed so much of this dried fruit. Jobst and the Bavarian looked for and found in the near-by woods a spring, and filled their stomachs with cold water. But the Suabian had slyly taken along a flask of cherry brandy and water, and with this he now refreshed himself. His plan had been to thus gain an advantage over the others when making the race, for well he knew that the other two were too parsimonious to bring along a stimulant like that or to turn in at a tavern on the way.

This flask he now pulled out of his pocket, and while the others drank their water he offered it to Zues. She accepted it, emptied the flask half, and regarded Dietrich while she thanked him for the refreshment with such an affectionate glance that Dietrich felt more than recompensed and tremendously encouraged in his suit. He could not withstand the temptation to seize her hand courteously and to kiss the tips of her fingers. She on her part lightly touched his lips with her hand, and he made belief of snapping at it, whereupon she smirked falsely and pleasantly at him. Dietrich answered similarly. Then the two sat down on the ground close to each other, and once in a while would touch the soles of the other's shoe with his own, almost as though they were shaking hands with their feet. Zues was bending over slightly, and laid her hand on his shoulder, while Dietrich was on the very point of imitating this little sport when the Bavarian and the Saxon returned jointly, observed this philandering, and groaned and lost color both at the same time.

From the water they had drunk on top of all this dried fruit they had become uneasy, both of them, and now that they saw the playful pair indulging in their little game, everything seemed to turn around them. Cold sweat began to break out on their foreheads, and they nearly gave themselves up for lost. Zues, however, did not for an instant lose her self-possession, but turned to the two and said: "Come, friends, sit down a little while longer here with me, so that we may enjoy, perhaps for the last time, our harmony and our undisturbed friendship."

Jobst and Fridolin pressed up quickly, and sat down, stretching out their thin legs. Zues left her one hand in the Suabian's own, gave Jobst her other one, and touched with the soles of her shoes those of Fridolin, while she turned her face to one after the other, smiling most enchantingly. Thus there are skilled virtuosi who know how to play a number of instruments at once, who shake bells with their heads, blow the Pan's pipe with their mouths, touch the guitar with their hands, strike the cymbal with their knees, with the foot a triangle, and with the elbow a drum suspended from their backs.

But now she rose, smoothed out her dress very carefully, and said: "The hour has now come, I think, my friends, when you must get ready for your great race, the race which your master in his folly has imposed on you, but which we ourselves have agreed to regard as the disposition of a

higher power. Run this race with all the energy you can muster, but without enmity or rancor, and leave the crown of the victor willingly to him who has earned it."

And as if stung by a vicious wasp the three sprang up and stood up ready and eager on their legs. Thus they stood, and they were now to try and vanquish each other with the same legs with which until now they had made only slow and thoughtful steps. Not one of the three could even recall ever having used these legs jumping or running. The Suabian, perhaps, was most inclined for the venture. He even seemed to be impatient for the struggle, and an eager look was in his eyes. At that moment of severe crisis they three scanned each other's features closely; the sweat had gathered on their pale brows, and they breathed hard and spasmodically, as though they were already running at full tilt.

"Shake hands once more, in token of good feeling," said Zues. And they did so, but in so lifeless a manner that the three hands dropped to their sides as if made of lead.

"And are we really to start on this fool's errand?" asked Jobst in a voice thick with suppressed emotion, while wiping the perspiration from his forehead. Some single tears were slowly crawling down his hollow cheeks.

"Yes, indeed," chimed in the Bavarian, "are we actually to run and jump like apes on a rope?" and began to weep in good earnest.

"And you, most charming Miss Buenzlin," added Jobst, "how are you going to behave in the circumstances?"

"It behoves me," answered she and held her handkerchief to her eyes, "to keep silent, to suffer and to look on."

"But afterwards," put in the Suabian, with a sly smile, "afterwards. Miss Zues, when all is over?"

"Oh, Dietrich," she responded softly, "do you not know what the poet says: 'As Fate decides, so turns the heart of maid'?" And in introducing this quotation from Schiller she regarded him so temptingly aside that he again lifted up his long legs and shuffled them, feeling like starting off at once.

While the two rivals arranged their little vehicles on their wheels, and Dietrich did the same, she repeatedly touched him with her elbow, or else stepped on his foot. She also wiped the dust from his hat, but at the same time threw inviting glances towards the others, pretending to be highly amused at the Suabian's eagerness. But she did this without being observed by Dietrich.

And now all three of them drew deep breaths and sighed like so many furnaces. They looked all about them, took off their hats, fanned themselves and then once more put on their hats. For the last time they sniffed the air in all the directions of the compass, and tried to recover their breath. Zues herself felt deeply for them, and for very compassion shed sundry tears.

"Here," she then said, "are the last three prunes. Take each of you one in the mouth, that will refresh you. And now depart, and turn the folly of the wicked into the wisdom of the just! That which the wicked have invented for your confusion, now change into a work of self-denial and of serious enterprise, into the well-considered final act of good conduct maintained for years, and into a competitive race for virtue itself."

And she herself with her own fair hands shoved a dried prune between the cramped lips of each, and each of them at once began to gently chew the prune.

Jobst pressed his hand upon his stomach, exclaiming: "What must be, must be. Let us start, in the name of Heaven!"

And saying which and raising his staff, he began to stride ahead, knees strongly bent and nostrils high in air, dragging his little load after him. Scarcely had Fridolin seen that, when he, too, did the same, taking long steps, and without once looking behind him. Both of them could now be seen descending the hill and entering the dusty highway.

The Suabian was the last one to get away, and he was walking, without showing any great hurry, with Zues at his side, grinning in a self-satisfied way, as though he felt sure of victory, and as though he were willing, out of mere generosity, to grant a little start to his rivals, while Zues praised him for this supposed noble action and for his equanimity.

"Ah," she now sighed, "after all, it is a blessing to be sure of a firm support in life! Even where one is sufficiently gifted oneself with insight and cleverness and follows, besides, the path of rectitude, all the same it makes it much easier to walk through life on the arm of a tried friend."

"Quite right," the Suabian hastened to reply, and nudged her energetically with the elbow, while at the same time he watched his rivals so as not to let their start become too great. "Do you at last notice that, my dear Miss Zues? Are you becoming convinced? Have your eyes opened to the truth?"

"Oh, Dietrich, my dear Dietrich," and she sighed more strongly, "I often feel so very lonesome."

"Hop-hop," he now laughed light-heartedly, "that is where the shoe pinches? I thought so all along," and his heart began to leap like a hare in a cabbage patch.

"Oh, Dietrich," she again breathed low, and she pressed herself much tighter against the young man's side. He felt awkward, and the heart in his bosom grew big with pleasure, and joy began to fill it altogether. But at the same instant he made the discovery that his precursors had already vanished from his sight, they having turned a corner. At once he wanted to tear himself loose from Zues' arm and hasten after them. But Zues kept such a tight hold of him that he was unable to do so, and she grasped him so firmly that he thought she was going to faint.

"Dietrich," she whispered, and she made sheep's eyes at him, "don't leave me alone at this moment. I rely on you, you are my sole help! Please support me."

"The devil. Miss Zues," he murmured anxiously, "let me go, let me go, or else I shall miss this race, and then good-by to everything!"

"No, no, you must not leave me just now. I feel that I am becoming very ill!" Thus she lamented.

"I don't care, ill or not ill," he cried, and tore himself loose from her. He quickly climbed a rock whence he was able to overlook the whole highroad below. There they were, he saw the two runners far away, deep below towards the town. And then he made up his mind to a great spurt, but at the same moment once more looked back for Zues. Then he saw her, seated at the entrance to a shady wood path, and motioning to him with her lily hand. This was too much for him. Instead of hurrying down the hill, he hastened back to her. And when she saw him coming, she turned and went in deeper into the cool wood, all the time casting inviting glances at him, for her object was, of course, to draw him away from the race and cheat him out of his victory, make him lose and thus render his further stay in Seldwyla impossible.

But Dietrich, the Suabian, was, as pointed out before, of an inventive and resourceful turn. Thus it was that he, too, quickly made up his mind to alter his tactics, and to score victory not down there but up here. And thus things came to pass very much differently from what had been calculated on. For as soon as he had come up with her in a sheltered spot in the depth of the forest, he fell at her feet and overwhelmed her with the most ardent declarations of his love for her to which any combmaker ever gave expression. At first she made a great attempt to withstand his wooing, bade him be quiet and desist from his violent protestations, and to befool him a little while longer until all danger of his winning should be past. She let loose the torrent of her wisdom and learning, and tried to awe him. But the young Suabian was not to be caught with this chaff. Paying not the slightest regard to all these rhetorical fireworks, he let loose Heaven and Hell in his stormy suit, lavishing caresses and blandishments on the surprised maiden by which he finally stifled the voice of her severely attuned conscience, and his excited and ready wit furnished him with enough of love's ammunition to overcome all her scruples. His eloquence and his bold and ever persistent wheedling and dandling gave her not a second's respite nor leisure to reflect and deliberate. He first took possession of her hands and feet, to kiss and fondle them, despite her strenuous protests, and next he flattered her to the top of her bent, lauding both her bodily and mental charms to the very skies, until Zues was in a very paradise of self-glorification and satisfied vanity. Added to this was the solitude and the sense of security from curious and peering eyes in the leafy shade of the forest. Until at last Zues really lost the compass to which hitherto she had clung as her safe though rather selfish guide through life. She succumbed to all these allurements, not so much by reason of exalted sensualism, as because for the moment she was overcome and helpless against the stronger and more primitive passion of this young man. Her heart fluttered timidly up and down, and vainly attempted to find its former balance. Her thoughts were in a perfect storm of contradictions, and she was altogether like a poor impotent beetle turned over on its back and struggling to recover the use of its limbs. And thus it was that Dietrich vanquished her in every sense. She had tempted him into this impenetrable thicket in order to betray him like another Delilah, but had been quickly conquered by this despised Suabian. And this was not because she was so utterly love-sick as to lose her bearings but rather because she was in spite of all her fancied wisdom so short of vision as not to see beyond the tip of her own nose. Thus they remained together an hour or more in this delectable solitude, embraced ever anew, kissed one another a thousand times, thus realizing the vision of the Suabian not long before, and swore eternal faith and unending affection, and agreed most solemnly, no matter how the affair of the race should terminate, to marry and become man and wife.

In the meanwhile news of the curious undertaking of the three combmakers had spread throughout the town, and the master himself had not a little aided in this, for the whole matter appealed strongly to his sense of humor. And hence all the people of Seldwyla rejoiced in advance at the prospect of a spectacle so novel and unconventional. They were eager to see the three journeymen arrive out of breath and in complete disarray, and laughed heartily in anticipation of the fun they counted on. Gradually a vast throng had assembled outside the town gate, impatient to see the arrival. On both sides of the highroad the curious people were seated

at the edge of the trenches, just as if professional runners were expected. The small boys climbed into the tops of trees, while their elders sat on the grass and smoked their pipe, quite content that such an amusement had been provided for them. Even the dignitaries of Seldwyla had not scorned to put in their appearance, sat in the taverns by the wayside and discoursed of the chances of each of the three, and making a number of not inconsiderable wagers as to the final result. In those streets which the runners had to pass on their way to the goal all the windows had been thrown open, the wives had placed in their parlors on the window ledges pretty vari-colored cushions, to rest their arms upon, and had received numerous visits from the ladies of their acquaintance, so that coffee and cake was hospitably provided for them all, and even the maid servants were in a holiday mood, being sent to bakers and confectioners for goodies of every description with which to entertain the guests.

All of a sudden the little fellows keenly watching from out of their leafy domes dimly saw in the distance tiny dust clouds approaching, and they set up the cry: "Here they're coming! They're coming!" And indeed, not long thereafter were seen Jobst and Fridolin rushing past, each wrapped in his own hazy column of dust, in the middle of the road. With the one hand they were pulling their valises on wheels each by himself, these rattling over the cobblestones with a noise like drumbeats, and with the other they held on tight to their heavy hats, these having slid down their necks, and their long dusters and coats were flying in the breeze. Both of the rivals were covered thickly with dust, almost unrecognizable; they had their mouths wide open and were yapping for breath; they saw and heard nothing that transpired around them, and thick tears were slowly rolling down their faces, there being no time to wipe them away, and these tears had dug paths in criss-cross fashion in the grime on their countenances.

They came close upon each other, but the Bavarian was just about half a horse's length ahead. A terrific shouting and laughter was set up by the audience, and this droned in the ears of the racers as they sped on in insane haste. Everybody got up and crowded along the sidewalk, and there were cries raised: "That's it, that's it! Run, Saxon, defend yourself: don't let the Bavarian have it all his own way! One of the three has already given in--there are but two of them left."

The gentlemen who were standing on the tables and chairs in the gardens and roadhouses laughed fit to split their sides. Their roars sounded across the highway and streets, and woke the echoes, and the affair was turned into a popular festival. Small boys and the entire rabble of the town followed densely in the wake of the two, and this mob stirred up thick volumes of biting dust, so that the racers were almost stifled before they arrived at the near goal. The whole immense cloud rolled towards the town gate, and even women and girls ran along, and mingled their high, squeaking voices with those of the male ruffians. Now they had almost reached the old town gate, the two towers of which were lined with the curious who were waving their caps and hats. The two were still running, foaming at the mouth, eyes starting out of sockets, running like two run-away horses, without sense or mind, their hearts full of fear and torture. Suddenly one of the little street boys knelt down on Jobst's small vehicle, and had Jost pull him along, the crowd howling with appreciation of the joke. Jobst turned and pleaded with the youngster to get off, even struck at him with his staff. But the blows did not reach the urchin, who merely grinned at him. With that Fridolin gained on Jobst, and as Jobst noticed this, he threw his staff between the other's feet, so that Fridolin stumbled and fell. But as Jobst attempted to pass him, the Bavarian pulled him by the tail of his coat, and by the aid of that got again on his feet. Jobst struck him upon his hands like a maniac, and shouted: "Let go! Let go!" But Fridolin did not let go, and so Jobst seized him also by the coat tail, and thus both had hold of each other, and were slowly making their way into the gateway, once in a while attempting to get rid of the other by venturing on a bound. They wept, sobbed and howled like babies, shouted in the agony of their grief and fear: "My God, let go!" "For the love of Heaven, let go!" "Let go, you devil; you must let go!" Between whiles each struck hard blows at the other's hands, but with all that they advanced a little all the time. Their hats and staffs had been lost in the scuffle, and ahead of them and behind them the hooting mob was accompanying them, their escort growing more turbulent and violent each minute. All the windows were occupied by the ladies of Seldwyla, and they threw, so to speak, their silvery laughter into this avalanche of noise, and all were agreed that for years past there had not been such a ludicrous scene as this.

As a matter of fact, this crazy free show was so much to the taste of the whole town that nobody took the trouble to point out to the two rivals their ultimate goal, the house of their old master. They themselves, these two, did not see it. Indeed, they did not see anything more. They reached their goal and did not perceive it, but went past and hurried crazily on, on and on, always escorted by the shouts and yells of the mob, fighting each other, their faces drawn and pinched as though in death, on and on, until they reached the other end of the little town and so through the second gate out into the open once more. The master himself had stood at the window of his house, laughing and greatly amused, and after patiently waiting for another hour for the victor in the strange tournament, he had been on the point of leaving the house and joining some of his cronies at the tavern, when Zues and Dietrich quietly and unobtrusively entered.

For Zues had meanwhile been busy with her thoughts, combining, after her wont, this and that. And thus she had reached the conclusion that in all likelihood the master combmaker would be willing to sell his business outright on a cash basis, since he could not continue it himself much longer. For that purpose Zues herself was ready to give up her interest-bearing mortgage, which together with the slender savings of Dietrich would doubtless suffice and thus they two

would remain victors and could laugh at the other two. This plan, together with their intention to marry, they told the astonished master about, and he, readily seeing that thus he could cheat his creditors and by concluding the bargain quickly would also get possession of a considerable sum of money to do with as he pleased, was glad of the opportunity thus afforded him. Quickly, therefore, the two parties were in agreement as to the terms, and before the sun went down Zues became the lawful owner of the business and her promised husband the tenant of the house in which the business was being conducted. Thus it was Zues, without indeed having intended or suspected it in the morning, who was tied down and conquered by the quickwitted Suabian.

Half dead with shame, exhaustion and anger, Jobst and Fridolin meanwhile lay in the inn to which they had been taken when picked up limp and spent in the open field. To separate the two rivals, thirsting for each other's blood and maddened from the whole crazy adventure, had been no light task. The whole of Seldwyla now, having in their peculiar reckless way already forgotten the immediate cause of the whole turmoil, was now celebrating and making a night of it. In many houses there was dancing, and in the taverns there was much drinking and singing and noise, just as on the greatest Seldwyla holidays. For the people of Seldwyla never required much urging to enjoy themselves to the top of their bent. When the two poor devils saw how their own superior cunning with which they had counted on making a good haul had, on the contrary, only served these careless people in all their folly to make a feast of it, how they themselves had been the immediate cause of their own downfall, and had made a laughingstock of themselves for all the world, they thought their hearts would break. For they had managed not only to defeat the wise and patient plans of so many years, but had also lost forever the reputation of being shrewd men themselves.

Jobst as the oldest of the three and having spent in Seldwyla full seven years, was wholly overwhelmed and dazed by the collapse of all his secret hopes, and quite unable to reconstruct a new world after having lost the one of his dreams. Utterly dejected he left his sleepless pillow before daybreak, wandered away from town and crept to the very spot where the day before they and Zues had sat under the linden tree, and there he hanged himself to one of the lowest branches. When the Bavarian, but an hour later, passed there on his way into strange parts, such a fit of fright seized him that he ran off like a lunatic, altered completely his whole ways, and later on was heard to have become a dissolute spendthrift, who never saved a penny, and who was in the habit of cursing God and men, being no one's friend any more.

Dietrich the Suabian alone remained one of the Decent and Just, and stayed on in the little town. But he had little good of it, for Zues left him nothing to say, and ruled him strictly, never allowing him to have his way in anything. On the contrary, she continued to consider herself the sole source of all wisdom and success.

DIETEGEN

DIETEGEN

To the north of those hills and woods where Seldwyla nestles, there flourished as late as the end of the fifteenth century the town of Ruechenstein, lying in the cool shade, whereas her rival Seldwyla basked in the full glare of the midday sun. Gray and forbidding looked the massed body of its towers and strong walls, and upstanding and just were its councilmen and citizens, but severe and morose also, and their chief employment consisted in the execution of their prerogatives as an independent city, in the exercise of law and justice, the issuing of mandates and decrees, of impeachments and committals. The greatest source of their pride was the fact that there had been conferred on them the exercise and enforcement of the power over life and death of all subject to their sway, and so eager and willing they were to sacrifice for this power their all, their privileges and their substance, as entrusted to them by Empire and supreme ruler, as other commonwealths were to achieve their liberty of conscience and the freedom of worship according to their faith.

On the rocky promontories all around their town wore conspicuous the emblems of their dread sovereignty. Such as tall gallows and scaffolds, sundry places of execution, showing the wheel where miscreants had their limbs broken, the stake where heretics or other evildoers were made to suffer, and their grim-faced town hall was hung full of iron chains with neck rings; steel cages were exhibited on the towers of the walls, and wooden drills wherein loose-tongued or wicked women were being stretched and turned, could be seen at almost every corner. Even by the shore of the dark-blue river which washed the walls of the town, sundry stations had been erected where malefactors could be drowned or ducked, with tied feet or in sacks, according to the finer discriminations of the decree of judgment.

Now it need not be supposed that because of all this the Ruechensteiners were iron men, robust and inspiring terror by their looks, such as one would be inclined to think from their favorite pastimes. That was indeed not the case. Rather were they people of ordinary, philistine appearance, with thin shanks and pot-bellies, their only distinctive mark being their yellow noses, the same noses with which the year around they used to besniff and watch each other. And nobody indeed would have guessed from the more than commonplace and scanty semblance of their whole physical being that their nerves were like ropes, such as were absolutely required not only to view all along the grewsome sights offered to them by their authorities in the putting to a shameful and lingering death of scores and scores of felons and other poor wretches condemned by their councilmen, but actually to enjoy the sight. These cruel instincts of theirs were not apparent on their faces; they were hidden away in their hearts.

Thus they kept spread like a dense net their judiciary powers over the dominion subject to their fierce rule, always eager for a chance to apply it. And indeed nowhere were there such singular crimes to punish as in this same Ruechenstein. Their inventive gift was fairly inexhaustible. It seemed almost as though their talent for discovering ever new and hitherto unheard-of crimes acted as a spur on sinners to commit the latest delinquencies threatened with penalties of the severest type. However, if despite all this at any time there was a lack of evildoers, the people of the town knew how to help themselves. For then they simply caught and punished the rascals of other towns. And it was only a man with a clear conscience who had the hardihood to cross at any time the territory of Ruechenstein. For when they heard of a crime committed, even if done far away from their own area, they would seize and hold the first landloper that came along, put him to the torture and make him confess his guilt. Not infrequently it would happen that such enforced confession related to a crime that, as later turned out, had only been based on hearsay, and had really never been done. But then it was too late. The supposed malefactor had been hung in chains on the gallows or otherwise disposed of, and could not be brought to life again. Of course, it was unavoidable that because of this inclination of the people of Ruechenstein they would often get into a more or less acrimonious controversy with other towns whose citizens they had thus overzealously dispatched, and they even had constantly pending a number of such cases before the Swiss federal council, and had to be sharply reprimanded, but that did not cure them.

By preference the people of Ruechenstein liked calm, sunny, pleasant weather when indulging in their favorite amusement of holding penal executions, burnings at the stake, and forcible drownings, and that is why on fine summer days there was always something of the kind going on there. The wanderer in a far-off field might then, keeping his eyes fastened on the greyish rock buttress high up on the horizon, notice not infrequently the flashing of the headsman's sword, the smoke pillar of the stake, or in the bed of the river something like the glittering leaping of a fish, which would usually mean the bobbing up and down of a witch undergoing the solemn test. And the word of God on a Sunday they would not have relished at all without at least one erring lovers' couple with straw wreaths before the altar and without the reading out of some sharpened moral mandates.

Other festivals, processions and public pleasures there were none; all such were prohibited by numerous mandates or ordinances.

It may easily be supposed that a town of that stripe could have no more distasteful neighbors than Seldwyla, and behind their woods, too, they would forever think up new methods of interfering with and annoying them. Any Seldwylian whom they caught on their own soil was seized and tortured to get at the facts regarding the latest breach of the peace or any other misdemeanor charged upon their neighbor's score. And on their account, to get even, the Seldwyla people made fast every man of Ruechenstein and, on their public market square, administered to him six choice blows with the rod, on the spot which they deemed specially adapted for that purpose. This, though, was as far as they ever went, for they had a prejudice against bloody spectacles, and amongst themselves never indulged in corporal punishments. But in addition to this mild chastisement they would also blacken the long nose of the culprit, and then they would let him run home. That was why there always were in Ruechenstein several specially disgruntled persons with noses dyed black that but slowly were recovering their pristine hue, and these naturally were particularly zealous in trying to unearth miscreants that could be dealt with severely and subjected to castigation or torture.

The Seldwylians on their part kept this black paint constantly ready in a huge iron pot, and upon this was limned the Ruechenstein town escutcheon, and they denominated this pot the "friendly neighbor." This and the huge paint brush belonging to it was always suspended under the arch of the gate fronting towards Ruechenstein. When this tincture had dried up or been used up it was renewed and the occasion utilized to get up a frolicsome procession ending with a gay

banquet, all with a view to rendering the neighbor ridiculous. And because of this at one time the latter became so wrathful that their whole town turned out, banners flying, to inflict punishment on the Seldwylians.

But these, informed of this intention, quickly issued forth and waylaid the Ruechenstein hosts, attacking them unawares. However, the Ruechensteiners had marching at the head of their column a dozen of graybearded and fierce-looking civic soldiers, with new ropes tied to the handles of their long swords, and these wore such an unholy mien as to scare the merry Seldwylian blades. The latter, in fact, began to back out, and they were on the point of losing the fight if a clever conceit had not saved them. For just for fun they had been carrying along the punitive pot of paint, etc., "the friendly neighbor," and instead of a banner the long paint brush. With quick intuition the bearer of the latter dipped his brush deeply into the dark liquid, bounded ahead of his comrades like a flash, and bedaubed the faces of the leading rank of foes a sable hue before these knew what he was about. So that all those in front, threatened immediately with this indelible paint, turned and fled, and that nobody of them all further felt like marching in the van of the host. With that the whole outfit began to sway, and a strange terror fell on them all, whereas the Seldwylians now, their courage restored, manfully went up against the men of Ruechenstein, pressing them back towards the rear, in the direction of their own town. With savage laughter the Seldwyla people took advantage of the occasion, and wherever their foes dared to defend themselves the dreaded paint brush came into instant action, handled with supreme skill by means of its long shaft, and in the mêlée there was indeed no lack of real heroism. For twice already the daring painters had been pierced by arrows and fallen to rise no more. But each time some other equally courageous fellow had sprung into the gap, and had treated the foe in the same ignominious manner.

In the end the Ruechensteiners were totally defeated, and they fled with their banner towards the clump of woods which led to their town, with the Seldwyla people on their heels. Barely were they able to find refuge in their town, and to close the gate thereof, and the latter, too, was painted all over by the pursuing foe with the black paint, together with its drawbridge, until the Ruechensteiners, somewhat recovered and collected again, threw potfuls of whitewash upon the heads of the uproarious painters.

But because a few Seldwylians of note who in the heat of combat had penetrated into the town and there been taken prisoner, and also about a dozen of the Ruechensteiners had likewise been seized and held by the victors, there was effected an armistice after the lapse of a few days. The prisoners were exchanged on both sides, and a regular peace was concluded, in which both sides gave way a bit. There had been fighting enough to suit them for a spell, and there was a desire for a mutual adjustment. So it came to pass that both sides made fair promises of future good behavior. The Seldwyla people bound themselves to give up the iron paint pot, and to abolish it forever, and the people of Ruechenstein solemnly relinquished all rights of seizure against Seldwylians out walking or strolling in the Ruechenstein territory, and all other privileges and prerogatives on either side were carefully weighed and mostly abolished.

To confirm this agreement a day was appointed, and as place of meeting was chosen the mountain clearing where the chief fight had occurred. From Ruechenstein came a few of the younger councilmen; for their elders had not succeeded in overcoming their strong feelings of reluctance to consort with their ancient foes on terms of quasi friendship. The Seldwyla people on their part showed up in goodly numbers, brought the "friendly neighbor," the heraldic paint pot, as well as a small cask of their choicest and oldest wine, grown on the municipal vineyards, with them, and also a number of their finest silver or gilt tankards and trenchers which belonged to their municipal treasure. In this way they nicely befooled the delegates from Ruechenstein, glad to escape for even a short spell the rigid regimen of their own town, and they were so charmed at this reception that they, instead of immediately returning after the consummation of their errand, allowed themselves to be inveigled in following the tempters to Seldwyla itself. There they were escorted to the town hall, where a grand feast was awaiting them. Beautiful ladies and maidens attended the occasion, and more and more tankards, beakers, and flagons were set up on the banqueting board, so that with the glitter and sheen of all this precious metal and the gleaming of all these bewitching eyes the poor Ruechensteiners clean forgot their original mission and became as gay as larks. They sang, since they knew no other tunes, one Latin psalm after another, while the Seldwylians on their part hummed wicked drinking songs, and finally they wound up in the midst of the noise by inviting their new Seldwyla friends to make a return visit to their own town, being most particular to include the Seldwyla ladies in the invitation, and promising them the most hospitable reception.

This invitation was accepted unanimously, amidst great enthusiasm on both sides, and when the delegates from Ruechenstein at last departed, they did so under the happiest auspices, smiling blissfully from all the choice wine under their belts, and deeming themselves conquerors of the handsome Seldwyla ladies besides, since a number of these, laughing and in rosy humor, gave them safe conduct as far as the gates of the city.

Of course, things took on a somewhat different hue when these jolly young councilmen of Ruechenstein on the following day awoke in their stern city and had to give an account of their stewardship and of the whole proceedings on the day previous. Little was wanting indeed, and they would have been incarcerated and subjected to ardent tests on the charge of having been bewitched. However, they themselves had also a right to speak with authority, and notwithstanding that the whole matter already seemed to them a mistake on their part, they

nevertheless stuck to their bargain, and strongly represented to their elder colleagues that the very honor of the city demanded a resplendent reception of the Seldwylian folks. Their views gained acceptance among a section of the citizens, especially when they described the magnificent table silver that had been brought out to honor them, and when they spoke of the handsome Seldwyla ladies and their gracefulness and beautiful attire. The men were of opinion that such ostentatious hospitality must not go unrebuked and unrivaled, and that it was necessary to reciprocate at the coming return visit of their ancient foes by a display of their own wealth, jeweled and precious tableware glittering in their own iron safes aplenty. The women again were itching to circumvent on such a favorable occasion the strict decrees against too profuse finery from which they had been suffering so long, and under the guise of civic patriotism to make a gaudy display of all their hidden trinkets and gorgeous silks. For in their coffers and lockers there was slumbering enough of costly stuffs to outshine the Seldwyla ladies tenfold, they thought. If that had not been the case they would surely long ago have rebelled against the severe sumptuary decrees in vogue and brought the regiment in power to its fall. Therefore, everything considered, the promise made by the Ruechenstein emissaries was formally approved, to the great grief of the elder and sterner members of the council.

To offset this piece of laxity they were unable to hinder these latter, the graybeards of the city, resolved, however, to enjoy another kind of spectacle on their own account, and thus they began to make their arrangements to have an execution performed on the very day when the Seldwyla people were to dwell within their walls, and thus to dampen at least, so far as they could, the unseemly spirit of merriment which otherwise would go unchecked. And so while the younger members of the council were busy with their preparations for the feast, the others quietly made arrangements for another show after their own heart, and for that purpose they selected a young, fatherless boy who was just then caught in the net of their barbarous laws. It was a very handsome boy of eleven, whose parents had both been engulfed in the recent wars, and who was being educated and taken care of by the town. That is to say, he had been put to board with the parish beadle, a conscienceless and pitiless scoundrel, and there the little fellow--a slender, vigorous and well-formed child enough--had been treated just like a domestic animal, the wife aiding her husband in the task. The boy had been named Dietegen, and this his baptismal name was all he really owned in the world. It was his sole piece of property, his past and his future. He was dressed in rags, and had never even had a holiday garment, so that if it had not been for his good looks he would have presented a miserable appearance. He had to sweep and dust, and to do all the tasks that usually fall to a maid servant, and whenever the beadle's wife did not happen to have anything to do for him in her own house she lent him out to women neighbors for a trifle, there to do anything that might be asked of him. They all thought him, in spite of his strength and skill to do any work demanded of him, a stupid fellow, and this because he obeyed silently all the orders he received and because he never remonstrated. Yet it was the truth that none of the women was able to look him in his fiery eyes for long, and these eyes would often wander about as keen as an eagle's.

Now several days before Dietegen had been sent on an errand to the cooper in order to fetch some vinegar for a lettuce salad that his foster parents wanted to prepare. Their vinegar the couple had been keeping for a long time customarily in a small jug, and this was almost black with age and had always been deemed cheap tin, having been bought many years ago by the mother of the beadle's wife for a couple of pennies from a peddler. But in reality the little jug was of silver. The cooper of whom the vinegar was to be purchased dwelt rather far, in a lonesome place near the city wall. As now the boy came walking along with his small vessel, an ancient Hebrew came past him with his bag, and threw a rapid glance at the curiously fashioned little jug, and stopped the boy with the request to be allowed to examine this vessel more closely. Dietegen handed it to him, and the Jew quickly and secretly scratched the surface of the vessel with his thumb nail, offering then to the astonished boy a pretty crossbow in exchange, and this he produced at once out of a bag made of moth-eaten otterskin, with a few bolts to boot. Boy-like, Dietegen at once seized the weapon and relinquished his small jug to the Jew, who then at once disappeared. Rejoicing in his good fortune the boy now began to aim and shoot at the small gate of the near-by door of a tower, and without being at all disturbed he continued this enticing sport, forgetting everything else, until dusk came and then moonlight, improving his aim steadily, and shooting by the bright light of the orb.

Meanwhile the beadle had also made a last inspection tour around the inside of the town walls, and had met with and held the Jew with his bag. Examining the latter he had with amazement recognized his own vinegar jug, and questioning the Jew the latter, in fear of his own neck, owned at once that it was of silver, and pretended that a young boy had forced it on him in lieu of a fine crossbow. Now the beadle ran and consulted a goldsmith, who on testing the vessel likewise pronounced it fine pure silver and of rarest workmanship. Thereupon the beadle and his wife, the latter now having joined him, became exceedingly angry, not only because they had had, without knowing it, for so many years such a valuable piece of property, but also because they had almost lost it.

The world to them seemed to be full of the grossest wrong; the child now appeared to them as their archenemy who had almost cheated them out of their eternal reward, the reward for their infinite merits and frugality. They suddenly pretended to have known for a long time that the small jug was of silver, and that it had always been so considered in their house. Cursing him bitterly they clamorously charged the little fellow with larceny, and while he, entirely unconscious of all this, was still engaged with his crossbow practice, and was hitting his goal

more and more often, two groups of searchers were already out looking for him. At the head of the one party was the beadle, while the woman, his wife, was heading the other. Thus they soon found him, still busily engaged with his bow and bolts, and unpleasantly wakened from his occupation when surrounded by the thief-takers. And now only he remembered his errand and at the same time the loss of the small vessel. But he believed he had made a good bargain, and handed the beadle smilingly his crossbow, in order to pacify him. Notwithstanding this he was instantly bound and gagged, carried off to jail, and then examined. He admitted at once having exchanged the little pitcher for the Jew's crossbow, and did not even attempt to defend himself.

The poor little child was condemned to the gallows, and the time of his death set for the very day when the Seldwylians were to visit the people of Ruechenstein.

And indeed they did appear on the appointed day, making a gorgeous procession, in luminous colors and rich finery, with their town trumpeter to lead them. They were, however, all armed with swords and daggers, although that did not hinder them from bringing along a dozen of their most fearless ladies. These rode in the centre of the cavalcade, charming and richly attired, and even a number of pretty children were with them, costumed in the colors of Seldwyla and bearing gifts.

The young councilmen of Ruechenstein, their new-won friends, rode out some little distance without the city gates to welcome them, and led them a bit crestfallen within. The strong entrance gate had had that ominous black paint scratched off as much as had been found feasible, had then been plentifully whitewashed and decorated with wreaths. But just within this gate the guests found the whole contingent of Ruechenstein's town mercenaries in rank and file, clad in full armor and looking like brawny warriors indeed. These escorted the guests, rattling and clanging in their iron harness, through the shady and rather dark streets, with fierce mien. The people of the town peered mute but curious out of their windows, as though their guests had been beings from another world. When one of the gay Seldwylians gazed upwards at the ladies leaning out of their windows, these would at once duck and disappear. Their menfolk, though, flattened the tips of their long noses against the greenish window panes, in order to observe as closely as possible the spectacle of bare female necks, such as the Seldwyla ladies offered.

Thus, then, the whole cavalcade finally reached the huge hall inside the town house, and that looked ornate but forbiddingly austere. Walls and ceiling were decorated entirely with black-tinted oak, here and there gilt. A long, long banqueting board was covered with beautiful linen, and woven into it were foliage, stags, huntsmen and dogs of green silk picked out with thin gold wire. Above this were further spread dainty napkins of snowy white damask, and these again on nearer sight exhibited patterns woven into them representing rather broadly joyous scenes from Roman and Greek mythology, such as would have been least expected in this grave concourse. Thickly grouped there stood on this festal table everything which at that time belonged to a gala meal, and what particularly claimed the attention of the Seldwyla observers was a number of truly magnificent pieces of tableware--some of them being in repoussé work, some round and some in relief, a glittering world of nymphs, fauns, nude demigods and heroes, with lovely feminine forms intermingled. Even the chief table ornament, a warship in solid silver, with sails spread and bellying in the breeze, otherwise very respectable and officially stiff, showed as its emblem a Galathea of the most opulent forms.

Along this table of enormous dimensions a number of the wives of councilors were slowly pacing to and fro, all of them dressed either in black or scarlet silks and satins, heavy lace covering bosom and neck up to the very chin. They did wear many gold chains, girdles and caps, encrusted with jewels in many cases, and on their fingers they had, over their gloves, priceless rings. And these ladies were not ugly to look at, but rather in most instances handsome and of regular features; many of them, too, showed a delicate complexion and their pretty oval cheeks were rosy. But nearly all had an unpleasant glance, severe and sour, so that it seemed doubtful whether they had ever smiled in their lives, save perhaps at nighttime after fooling their gullible husbands.

The mutual introductions were therefore not very cordial, and everybody seemed indeed glad when this ceremony was over and guests and hosts both sat down at table and the feelings of embarrassment could be concealed by the engrossing charms of eating and drinking. The Seldwylians were the first to recover their natural equanimity, and then there could be heard among them frequent outbursts of hilarity as they admired the dazzling table trappings. That indeed was to the liking of their hosts, and they were just on the point of starting a formal conversation on that topic, when the matter took a turn wholly unexpected by them. For the Seldwyla people, accustomed always to use their eyes, had quickly discovered the amorous and graceful topics which the weaver's art had embodied in the woof of this linen and the goldsmith's in the silver and goldware so liberally displayed before their eyes. After allowing, therefore, their ribald glances to dwell with a close scrutiny on the lustful scenes depicted here, many Seldwylians called the attention of their neighbors to it all, all smiles and good humor, and interpreted the true meaning of the scene in each instance, often naming Ovid or some other heathen author as the original source. Even the Seldwyla ladies did not refrain, but shared in this amusement of their husbands. The hosts at first were slow to understand this and were inclined to think it one of the childish tricks for which they were forever blaming their merry neighbors of Seldwyla, but as they finally likewise bent their glances on the things occasioning the outbursts of their guests, they were as though smitten with palsy. For it had never entered their minds before to look with attention at these table appointments, and had merely accepted, when

ordered by them, the exquisite products of the loom or of the goldsmith's skill as finished ware without ever bothering their heads further about it, and nothing had been further from them than to cast critical glances at the subjects represented by these artisans, and it was thus reserved for their gay guests from Seldwyla to sharpen their vision so to speak. Now when looking closer and closer, they perceived what pagan horrors they had chosen to ornament their own board with, and they were struck dumb with painful amazement. But what irked them still more was what they deemed the lack of tact and decorum on the part of their guests who, instead of purposely overlooking such an involuntary blunder of their hosts actually magnified it and drew it into the full glare of publicity. According to their way of thinking what the Seldwylians ought to have done under these peculiar circumstances was to praise and pay attention to the costliness of the stuff out of which these implements had been fashioned, and not to go beyond that. The Ruechensteiner grandees now were obliged to smile with faces as sour as vinegar when a Seldwylian neighbor would call their attention to an exquisitely wrought silver Leda and the Swan, or to a Europa on the back of her bull. Their wives, however, showed their displeasure more openly, blushed and paled by turns with wrath, and were just on the point of demonstratively leaving the banquet when the mournful sound of a bell quickly reassured them. For it was the poor sinners' bell of Ruechenstein. A dull and confused din in the streets gave notice that young Dietegen was now being led to his shameful death. All the company rose from the table, and hastened to the windows, the Ruechensteiners purposely making room for their guests to enable these to view the sad spectacle plainly, while they themselves stood in the rear, an insidious grin on their sallow features.

A priest, a hangman with his helper, some court officials, and a few armed attendants of the council went slowly past, and at their head walked Dietegen, barefooted and clad only in a white, black-edged delinquent shift, his hands tied in the back, and led by the hangman at a rope. His golden hair fell in a shower down his white neck, and confused and appealingly he looked aloft at the houses which he passed. Under the portal of the town hall stood the boys and girls from Seldwyla, who had, after the manner of children, left the table and the weary banquet, and had hastened into the open air. When the pitiful delinquent saw these pretty and happy children, the like he had never yet perceived before, he wanted to stop a moment and talk to them, while tears were streaming down his pale cheeks. But the executioner roughly pushed him on, so that the train passed on and had soon disappeared from view. The Seldwyla ladies lost color when they watched this scene, and their men were seized with a deep dismay, since they at no time loved to see sights of this kind. They felt out of spirits and not at home with their hosts after such an exhibition, and thus they soon yielded to the urging of their womenfolk, and as politely as they could took leave of their grim hosts. The people of Ruechenstein, on the other hand, were satisfied with the triumph they had scored against their volatile guests, and thereby rendered almost complaisant towards them, so that both sides parted amicably. The hosts even escorted their honored guests, as they put it, to the town gate, and were talkative, gallant towards the ladies, and courteous.

Outside the gate the Seldwyla cavalcade met the small group of hangmen and their assistants, who passed them morosely. Behind them there came a single helper pushing a small cart whereon lay, in a plain pine coffin, the young delinquent's body. Shy and bitten with curiosity to watch this number of brilliantly attired persons, this fellow stopped for a moment, and turned aside, in order to let the procession file past him. He was placing the loose lid of the bier in its proper place, it having almost slid off and exposed the sight of the hanged.

Among the children of Seldwyla there was a seven-year-old maid, bold, pretty and curly, who had never ceased to weep since seeing the poor boy being led to the gallows, and refused to be consoled. And as the train of Seldwylians now slowly swept on, the child at the moment she came up with the cart and coffin, quickly sprang towards it, stood on its large wheel, and threw off the lid, so that the lifeless Dietegen lay exposed to view. At that moment he opened his eyes and drew a breath. For in the confusion of that day he had not been hanged according to traditional rules, and had been taken off the gallows too early, because his executioners were in a great hurry in the hope of returning to town in time to get some of the remnants of the feast. The bold little girl loudly exclaimed, "He is still alive! He is still alive!"

At once the women of Seldwyla surrounded the bier, and when they saw indeed the handsome pale boy move about and give signs of life, they took possession of him, removed him from the cart, and fully recalled him to this world by rubbing his stiffened joints, sprinkling him with water, making him swallow some wine, and using all their endeavors in other ways. The men indeed also gave their assistance, while the gentlemen of Ruechenstein stood by dazedly, and did not know what to say or do. When at last the boy again stood on his own feet, and gazed about him as though he had waked in paradise, he suddenly caught a glimpse of the hangman's assistant, and quite astounded that he, too, as he thought, had gone to heaven, he fled and squeezed in among the crowd of women. Touched and moved to tears, they begged with great earnestness of their stern neighbors to pardon the boy and to make them a gift of him, as a token of their new friendship. Their husbands joined in this petition, and finally, after a brief consultation amongst themselves, the Ruechensteiners yielded assent, saying that henceforth the youthful sinner was to be theirs. On this the pretty Seldwyla ladies and their young children rejoiced abundantly, and Dietegen went along with them just as he was, in his poor delinquent's shift.

It happened to be a fine mild summer evening, wherefore the Seldwyla folks, as soon as they

had reached the crest of the mountain and therewith also their own territory, resolved to amuse themselves here in this delightful grove, on their own account, and to recover from the frightful experience on their neighbors' ground. And this all the more because there now approached a numerous reënforcement from Seldwyla itself, full of curiosity to learn what their luck had been in Ruechenstein. Thus it came to pass that the musicians had to intone a merry tune and next a dance, and the goblets and tankards were filled with the wine they had brought along, and then circulated quite rapidly.

During all these scenes Dietegen let his eyes roam all around, and all who saw him perceived clearly that he was indeed nothing worse than an innocent and harmless child, a notion which his tale, when asked to state the facts, amply confirmed. The Seldwyla women could hardly get their fill of the sight, wove a wreath of wildflowers for him, and placed it on his young head, so that in his long and ample shift he looked almost like a little saint. He won their hearts, and at last they kissed him to their full content, and when he had thus passed through the concourse of rivaling femininity they began anew with their kissing.

But the little girl who really had saved Dietegen from a horrible and premature death did not at all approve of this proceeding. Quite wroth she suddenly placed herself between the boy and the woman who just that moment was on the point of kissing him, and took him by the hand, leading him to a group of other children. Then the whole company burst out laughing, saying: "That is quite right. Little Kuengolt clings to her property! And she has taste likewise. Only see how well she and the boy look alongside of each other!"

Kuengolt's father, however, the chief forester of the town, remarked: "I like the looks of that boy. He has eyes that speak truth and good sense. If you gentlemen have no objection, I will take him along for the time being, since I have but one child, and I will try and make an honest huntsman out of him."

This proposal met the unanimous approval of the Seldwylians, and thus Kuengolt, well contented, did not let the boy's hand slip out of her fingers more, but kept tight hold of it. And indeed, these two did make a very comely pair. The little girl also wore a wreath on her head and was clad in green and red, the town's colors. Hence they went at the head of the whole merry procession like a picture from fairyland, in the midst of the gay townspeople. And thus they all in the glow of sunset poured down the mountain side on their way homewards. Soon, however, the chief forester separated from the procession and went on with the children on side paths to his cosy residence, which lay not far from the city itself in the forest. A double row of tall trees led to the main entrance, and there the demure wife of the forester sat now, and saw with amazement the approach of the two children.

The household servants also gathered, and while the wife gave the two hungry children an abundant supper her husband related in detail the adventures of the boy. The latter was now completely exhausted, and with that he felt cold in his flimsy costume, and hence the question was put who would share overnight his bed with him. But the servant maids as well as the men anxiously avoided to answer. They dreaded as unlucky and impious close touch with any one who had just been hanging from the gallows. But Kuengolt cried: "Let him share my bed. It is large enough for both of us."

And when everybody was laughing at this, her mother said pleasantly: "You are quite right, my little daughter." And looking closely at the boy she added: "From the very first moment I saw the poor little chap enter the door a strange foreboding crept over me, as though a good angel were coming who will yet bring us a blessing. That much is certain, according to my idea: he will not be of evil to us all!"

With that she took the two children into the adjoining bedchamber, next to the large one, and put them to bed. Dietegen, who was so sleepy that he scarcely noticed what was going on around him, instinctively went through the motions for disrobing. But since he was already, in a manner of speaking, in his shirt, his drowsy motions made such a ludicrous impression, especially upon the little girl, that she, already under her blanket, could not help screaming with mirth: "Oh, just watch the comical shirtmannikin! He is always trying to take off his spenser and boots, and yet he hasn't any!" Her mother, too, had to smile and said to the boy: "In God's name, go to bed in your poor sinner's shift! My poor boy, that shift is quite new and really of good linen. Truly, these wicked people of Ruechenstein at least do their atrocities with a certain amount of decency."

In saying which she wrapped the two little ones up well in their blankets, and could not forbear to kiss both of them, so that Dietegen was really better off than he had ever been in his whole life. But his eyes were already tightly closed and his soul in deep sleep. "But now he has not said his prayers at all," whispered Kuengolt in sorrow. Her mother replied: "Then you will do it for both of you, my little daughter!" and left the two. And indeed, the girl now said the Lord's prayer twice, once for herself, once for her new bedfellow. And then quiet reigned in the little chamber.

Some time after midnight Dietegen woke up, because only now his neck had begun to pain him from the unfriendly rope of the hangman. The chamber was flooded with moonlight, but he was perfectly unable to recall where he was and how he had come there. Merely this he was conscious of, that he aside from his sore throat, was far better of! than ever before in his young life. The window stood open, a spring outside murmured softly, and the silver night blew

whisperingly through the tree tops; over them all the moon shone in gentle radiance. All this to him was wondrous, since he had never before seen the solitude of the forest, neither by day nor by night. He gazed sleepily, he listened, and finally he assumed a sitting posture. Then he perceived next to him on the couch little Kuengolt, the moon's beams playing right over her small face. She lay still, but was broad awake, since excitement and joy would not let her sleep. Because of that her eyes were opened to their full extent, and her mouth was smiling when Dietegen peered into her face.

"Why don't you sleep? You ought to sleep," said the girl. But he then complained of the pain at his throat. At once little Kuengolt weaved her tender arms around his neck and full of pity put her own cheeks against his. And really it soon seemed to him that his pain subsided under such sympathetic treatment. And then they began to chat in a low voice. Dietegen was asked to tell about himself. But he was reticent because there was not much to tell that was pleasant, and about the misery of his childhood he also was not able to say a great deal, since no contrasts were within his ken, with the single exception of that evening. Suddenly, however, he recalled his pleasant sport with the crossbow, which had slipped his mind before, and so he told the little girl all about the Jew, and how that one had been the cause of his imprisonment and unjust sentence, but also about how he had taken great delight in shooting with the crossbow, for over an hour, and how he now longed for just such a weapon.

"My father has crossbows and weapons of every type in plenty," commented Kuengolt breathlessly. "And you may start in to-morrow and shoot all you wish."

And then she set out to tell him about all the nice things in the house, and she included in these her own pretty knicknacks, locked up in a casket, especially two golden "rainbow" keys, a necklace of amber, a volume full of holy legends, illustrated with pictures showing saints in their beautiful vestments, and also a multicolored medallion in which sat a Mother of God clad in gold brocade and vermilion silk, and covered with a tiny round glass. Also, she enumerated further, she owned a silver-gilt spoon, with a quaintly turned handle, but with that she would be permitted to eat only when she was grown up and had a husband of her own. And when it came to her wedding she would get the bridal jewelry of her mother, together with her blue brocade dress, which was so thick and heavy that it stood up without any one being inside of it. Then she kept still a short while, but pressing her bedfellow more closely against her heart, she said in a very low voice: "Listen, Dietegen!"

"Well, what is it?" he answered.

"You must be my husband when we are big. For you belong to me. Will you, of your own free will?"

"Why, yes," he replied.

"Then you must shake hands on it," she remarked, in a peremptory voice. He did so, and after this binding promise the two children finally fell asleep and did not wake till the sun stood high in the heavens. For the kind mother had purposely refrained from rousing them, so that the poor boy should have a thorough rest.

But now at last she cautiously crept into the little chamber, bearing on her arm a complete boy's suit of clothing. Two years before her own son had been killed by the fall of an oak tree, and the clothes of this boy of hers, although he had been Dietegen's senior by a whole year, were likely to fit him, since he was just his size. And it was her lost boy's holiday attire, which in a saddened spirit she had preserved. Therefore she had risen with the sun, in order to remove from the doublet some gay ribbons ornamenting it, and to sew up the slits in the sleeves which let the silk lining peep forth. Her tears had flown anew in doing this labor, when she saw the scarlet silken lining that glinted from below the black jerkin gradually disappear from view, as jocund spring vanished in sorrow, and become of a piece with the black trunks. The tears were shed because of the death of her own dear boy, but a sweet consolation tinctured her soul since Fate now had sent her such a handsome, lovable little fellow, one who had been snatched, so to speak, out of Death's hard grasp, and whom she now could clothe in the habiliments of her own son. And it was not from haste or fear of the task that she left the gay silken lining under the sable outer covering, but on purpose, as the hidden fire of affection in her bosom moved her. For she was of those who mean better by their familiars than they dare show openly. If the new boy proved worthy of it, she vowed to herself, she would open the seams of the slits again, for his joy and pride. Anyway, on workadays Dietegen was to wear this suit but for a few days, until one of stronger and more suitable material should have been made for him to measure by the tailor, one that he could expose to rough usage during his ordinary occupations. But while she instructed the boy how to put on this fine suit of a kind to which he was quite unused, little Kuengolt had slipped out of bed, and in a spirit of childish mischief had got hold of the gallows shift, which she now put on and was stalking gravely in about the room, trailing its tail behind her on the floor. With that she kept her little hands folded behind her, as though they were tied by the hangman. Then she sang aloud: "I am a miserable sinner now, and even lack my hose, I trow." At this the kindly woman fell into a great affright, grew deadly pale, and said in a low, soft voice: "For our Savior's sake, who is teaching you such wicked jokes, my child?" And she seized the ominous shift from the little girl's hands, who smiled at this, but Dietegen took it, being wroth at the scene, and tore it into a score of pieces.

Now that the two children were dressed they were taken along for breakfast in the adjoining room. Early in the morning bread had been baked, and with the milk soup the little ones received each a fresh loaf of cummin seed bread, and in place of the one sweet roll which on ordinary days was specially baked for Kuengolt, there were two that day, and the little girl would have it that the boy received the larger of them. Dietegen ate without urging all that was offered him, just as though he had returned to his father's house after an enforced stay with evil strangers. But he was very still throughout, and he keenly observed everything around him: the pleasant mild woman who treated him like her own son, the sunny, light room, and the comfortable furniture with which it was fitted up. And after having eaten his breakfast with a good appetite, he continued these observations, noticing that the walls were wainscoted with smooth pine, and higher up decorated with painted wreaths and flowers, and that the leaded window panes showed the arms both of husband and wife. When he also carefully inspected the handsome closets and the sideboard with its load of shining vessels and tableware, he suddenly remembered the dingy silver jug that had almost brought him to his death, and the cheerless house of the beadle in Ruechenstein, and then, afraid that he should have to return there again, he asked with a tremor in his voice: "Must I now return home? But I don't know the way."

"There is no need of your knowing it," said the housewife, moved by his evident dread, and she stroked his smooth chin. "Have you not yet noticed that you are to remain with us? Go along with him now, my little Kuengolt, and show him the house and the woods, and everything else. But do not go too far away!"

Then Kuengolt took the boy by the hand, and first led him into the forester's armory where he kept his weapons. And there hung seven magnificent crossbows and arquebuses, and spears and javelins for the chase, hangers and dirks, and also the long sword of the master of the house which stood in the corner by itself. Dietegen examined all this, silently but with gleaming eyes, and Kuengolt mounted a chair to take down several of the finest crossbows from the wall, which she handed him so that he could look them over more at leisure, and he was delighted with these, for they showed ornaments inlaid in ivory or mother-of-pearl, daintily done by some expert artisan. The boy admired it all, in a silent sort of ecstasy, about as would a rather talented prentice in the studio of a great master painter while the latter might be absent from home. But Kuengolt's quick proposal to have him try his marksmanship outside in a meadow could not be realized at the time, because the bolts and arrows were locked away in a separate receptacle. But to make up for that she gave him a fine hunting spear to hold so that he should have a weapon of some kind to take along into the greenwoods. Near the house she showed him a hedged-in space full of deer and game, in which the town constantly kept its reserve of stock, so that at no time there should be lack of venison and other fine roasts for public or private banquets. The girl coaxed several roes and stags to come to her at the hedge, and this was astonishing to Dietegen, for so far he had seen such animals only when dead. With his spear, therefore, he stood attentive, his eyes fixed on these pretty denizens of the woods, and could not get his fill of watching them. Eagerly he held out his hand to fondle a finely antlered stag, and when the latter shyly bounded aside and leisurely trotted off, the boy scurried after him with a joyous halloo, and ran and jumped with the animal around in a wide circle. It was perhaps the first time in his life that he could use his young limbs in this way, and when he felt how his tendons stretched with the violent exercise and how he was able to race with the swift stag, the latter apparently taking as much pleasure in the sport as Dietegen himself, a feeling of untried strength and agility first woke within him.

But as they later on stepped into the domain of the deep forest, high up on the hill, the boy resumed once more his usual air of thoughtful quiet and deliberation. Up there mighty trees grew closer together, leaving hardly a fragment of sky to discover from below--tall pine and gnarled oak, spreading lindens, beeches, maple and spruce, all growing in a semidarkness where the sunlight seldom pierced. Red squirrels glided spectrelike from trunk to trunk, woodpeckers hammered incessantly for their fare, high up birds of prey shrilly pursued their quarry in the open, and a thousand forest mysteries were dimly at work. Below, in the dense underbrush, hares and foxes, deer and smaller game were waging war, and song birds twittered or warbled in a chorus of multiform sound. Kuengolt laughed and laughed because the boy knew nothing of all these secret doings in the forest, although he had grown up in a mountain fastness surrounded by the very life of the woods, but she at once began to explain to him these things of which he was so profoundly ignorant. She showed him the hawk and his nest, the cuckoo in his retreat, and the gay-clad woodpecker as he was just clambering up a thick trunk with bark promising him rich harvest. And about all these things he was highly amazed, and wondered that trees and bushes should bear so many names, and that each should differ from the next. For he had not even known the hazelnut bush or the whortleberry in their haunts. They came to a rushing brook, and disturbed by their steps, a snake made off into the water, and the girl seized the spear in the boy's hand and wanted to stick it into the rocky nook. But when Dietegen saw that she was going to blunt or break the edge of the finely tempered weapon, he at once took it out of her fingers, saying that she might damage the spear.

"That is well done," suddenly came the voice of the chief forester, his patron; "you will prove a help to me." With a gamekeeper he stood behind the two children. For the noise of the rushing water had drowned in their ears all other noise. The gamekeeper bore in his hand a woodcock, just shot, for the two had gone forth early in the morning. Dietegen was permitted to hang the stately bird to the tip of his spear, flinging it over his shoulder, so that the spread wings of the bird enveloped him, and the forester gazed with approval upon the handsome youngster, and

made up his mind to make an all-around woodsman of him.

Just now, though, he was to learn somewhat the difficult arts of reading and writing, and for that purpose was obliged to walk every day to town with the little girl; there in a convent and in a monastery the two were taught as much of these mysteries as seemed good for them. But his chief lessons Dietegen had from the little girl herself when coming and going from town, Kuengolt delighting in informing him as to all that was going on in the world, so far at least as she herself knew, and more particularly as to the ordinary things of life, as to which Dietegen had been left in deplorable ignorance by his former taskmaster, the beadle.

But the little instructress was in her way a ruthless practical joker, and followed a unique method of her own in teaching the boy. She exaggerated, distorted or plainly misstated the facts as to most things in talking to her pupil, and abused grossly the credulity and trustfulness of the boy, merely for her amusement, and she did this as to most things. In this she showed a wonderful gift of invention, an exuberant fancy of the rarest. When Dietegen then had accepted her fictions, and would perhaps express his wonder at them, she would shame him with the cool statement that not a single word had been true. She would scornfully blame him for believing such palpable untruths, and then, with a show of infinite wisdom, she would tell him the real facts. Then he would redden under her sarcastic remarks, and would endeavor to avoid her pitfalls, but only until she saw fit to make sport of him once more. However, in the course of time Dietegen's powers of judging facts began to widen, and he ceased to be so gullible, and this another boy who attempted to emulate Kuengolt's example found out to his sorrow. For Dietegen simply slapped his face when he came out with a particularly outrageous whopper.

Kuengolt, rather taken aback at witnessing this castigation, was curious to ascertain whether this wrath under given circumstances would also turn against herself. She made a test on the spot, feeding him with some of her choicest fairy tales. But from her he accepted everything without a murmur, and so she continued her peculiar method of instruction. At last, though, she discovered that he had acquired enough independence of thought and a large enough stock of knowledge to enable him to play with her himself. He would answer her inventions with counterinventions, and would argue from her nonsensical statements in such shrewd fashion as to turn her first doctrines into ridicule, and he would do this in perfect good-nature, proving the untenableness of her own theories. Then she came to the conclusion that it was time to give up her nonsense. But in place of that amusement she now indulged in another. Namely, she began to tyrannize over him most unmercifully. It grew so that it was almost worse than things had been with the beadle's wife. His servitude was deplorable. She made him fetch and carry during all his spare time. He had to haul and hoist and labor for her in a truly ridiculous manner. She constantly required his presence about her; he had to bring her water, shake the trees, dig in the garden, crack open nuts after getting them for her, hold her little basket, and even to brush and comb her hair she wanted to train him--only that is where he drew a line. But then he was scolded by her for refusing this, and when her mother took sides against her she became quite obstreperous with the latter as well.

But Dietegen did not pay her back in her own coin, never lost his patience with her, and was always equally submissive and indulgent with her. Her mother saw that with vast pleasure, and to reward him for his fine conduct she treated the boy like her own son, and gave him all those finer hints and that almost imperceptible guidance and advice which else are only saved for children of one's own, and by means of which children finally acquire without knowing it those habits and better manners which are commonly comprised under the name of a careful education. Of course, she herself gained in a way from this; for her own daughter thus acquired unconsciously many of her lessons, Dietegen being there as a sort of mirror of what was expected of her. Truly, it was almost comical how little Kuengolt in her restless temperament veered and shifted constantly between imitating her better model or else becoming jealous and wroth and scorning it for the time. On one occasion she became so excited as to stab at him with all her might with a sharp pair of scissors. But Dietegen caught her wrist quickly, and without hurting her or showing any anger he made her drop them. This little scene which her mother had espied from a hiding-place, moved the latter so strongly that she came forth, took the boy in her arms, and kissed him. Pale and excited the girl herself left the room with out a word. "Go, follow her, my son," whispered the mother, "and reconcile her. You are her good angel."

Dietegen did as bidden. He found her behind the house and under a lilac bush. She was weeping wildly and tearing her amber necklace, trying, in fact, to throttle herself by means of it, and stamping on the scattered beads on the ground. When Dietegen approached her and wanted to seize her hands, she cried with a great sob: "Nobody but I may kiss you. For you belong to me alone. You are mine, my property. I alone have freed you from that horrid coffin, in which without me you would have remained forever."

As the boy grew up marvelously, becoming handsomer and more manly with every day, the forester declared at breakfast one morning that the time was now ripe to take him along into the woods and let him learn the difficult craft of the huntsman. Thus he was taken from the side of Kuengolt, and spent now all his time, from dawn until nightfall, with the men, in forest, moor and heath. And now indeed his limbs began to stretch that it was a pleasure to watch him. Swift and limber like a stag, he obeyed each word or hint, and ran whither he was sent. Silent and docile, he was forever where wanted; carried weapons and tackle, gear and utensils, helped spread the nets, leaped across trenches and morass, and spied out the whereabouts of the game. Soon he knew the tracks of all the animals, knew how to imitate the call of the birds, and before any one

expected it, he had a young wildboar run into his spear. Now, too, the forester gave him a crossbow. With it he was every day, every hour almost, exercising his skill, aiming at the target, shooting at living objects as well. In a word, when Dietegen was but sixteen, he was already an expert woodsman who might be placed anywhere, and it would happen now and then that his patron sent him out with a number of his men to guard the municipal woods and head the chase.

Dietegen, therefore, might be seen not alone with the crossbow on his back, but also with pen and ink-horn in his girdle upon the mountain side, and with his keen watchful eyes and his unfailing memory he was a great help to his fosterfather. And since with every day he became more reliable and useful, the master forester learned to love him better all along, and used to say that the boy must in the end become a full-fledged, an honorable and martial citizen.

It could under these circumstances not be otherwise than that Dietegen on his part was devoted soul and body to the forester. For there is no attachment like that of the youth for the mature man of whom he knows that he is doing his best to teach him all the secrets of his craft, and whom he holds to be his unapproached model.

The chief forester was a man of about forty; tall and well-built, with broad shoulders and of handsome appearance and noble carriage. His hair of golden sheen was already lightly sprinkled with silver, but his complexion was ruddy, and his blue eyes shone frank, open and full of fire. In his younger days, too, he had been among the wildest and merriest of Seldwyla's choice spirits, and many were the quaint and original quips he had perpetrated at that time of his life. But when he had won his young wife, he altered instantly, and since then he had been the soberest and the most sensible man in the world. For his dear wife was of a most delicate habit, and of a kindness of heart that could not defend itself, and although by no means without a spirit and a wit of her own, she would have been unable to meet unkindness with a sharp tongue. A wife of ready wit and pugnacity would probably have spurred this naturally sprightly man on to further doings, but in contest with the graceful feebleness of this delicate wife of his he behaved like the truly strong. He watched over her as over the apple of his eye, did only those things which gave her pleasure, and after his busy day's work remained gladly at his own hearth.

At the most important festivities of the town only, three or four times a year, he went among the councilmen and other citizens, led them with his fresh vigor in deliberation and at the festive board, and after drinking one after the other of the great guzzlers under the table, he would, as the last of the doughty champions, rise upright from his seat, stride quietly out of the council chamber, and then with a jolly smile walk uphill to his forest home.

But the chief comedy would always come the next day. For then he would waken, after all, with a head that hummed like a beehive, and then he would rouse himself fully, half morosely, half with a leonine jovial humor that indeed had the dimensions of a lion when compared with the proverbial distemper of the average toper. Early he would then show up at breakfast, the sun shining with strength upon his naked scalp, and ignoring his symptoms, he would jest and make fun of himself and his achievements of the previous night. His wife, then, always hungering after her husband's humor, he being usually rather reticent, would then answer his sallies with a merry laughter, so bell-like and wholesouled as one would never have suspected in a being so demure as she. His children would laugh, also his gamekeepers and huntsmen, and lastly his servants. And in that way the whole day would pass. Everything that day would be done with a bright smile and a salvo of hearty laughter. And always the chief forester leading them all, handling his axe, lifting heavy weights, doing the work of three ordinary men. On such a day it was once that fire broke out in the town. High above burning roofs a poor old woman, in her frail wooden balcony, forgotten and disregarded, was shrilly crying and moaning for help from a fiery death, and above her shoulder her tame starling went through the drollest of antics, likewise claiming attention. Nobody could think of a way to save mistress and bird. The flames came nearer and ever nearer. But our chief forester climbed up to a protruding coping on a high wall facing the old woman's nook, a spot where he stood like a rock. Then with herculean strength he pulled up a long ladder to him, turned it over and balanced it neatly until it touched the window where the old hag was struggling for breath. He placed it securely within the opening, on the sill, and then he strode across it, firm and unafraid, back and forth, carrying the ancient woman safely across his shoulder, and the stuttering starling on his head, the greedily licking flames and the swirling clouds of smoke beneath his feet. And all this he did, not by any means in a heroic pose, as something dangerous or praiseworthy, but as though it were a harmless joke, smiling and laughing.

After a solid piece of work of that kind he would feast with his family in jolly style, dishing up the best the house afforded. And at such times he always was particularly tender to his wife, taking her on his knee, to the great amusement of the children, and dubbing her his "little whitebird," and his "swallow," and she, her arms clasped in pleasurable self-forgetfulness, would laughingly watch his antics.

On a day like that, too, he once arranged for a dance, it being the first of May. He had a musician fetched from town, and got likewise some merry young folks to increase the sport. And there was dancing aplenty on the smooth greensward in front of the house, right under the blooming trees, and dainty dancing it was. The chief forester opened the merriment with his smiling young wife, she in her modest finery and with her girlish shape. As they made the first steps, she looked over her shoulder at the youngsters, happy as could be, and tipping her foot on the green sod, impatient to be off. Just then Dietegen, who for much of the time past had kept to

the men entirely, threw a glance at Kuengolt, and lo! he saw that she also was growing up to be a handsome woman, as pretty a picture as her mother. Her features indeed strongly resembled those of her mother, small, regular and charming. But in her figure she took more after her father, for she was trimly built like a straight young pine, and although but fourteen her bosom was already rounded like that of a grown-up damsel. Golden curls fell in a shower down her back and hid the somewhat angular shoulderblades. She was clad all in green, wore around her neck her amber beads, and on her head, according to the fashion of those days, a wreath of rosebuds. Her eyes shone pleasantly and frankly from a guileless face, but once in a while they would flash wilfully and glide casually over the row of youths whose eyes hung on her youthful beauty, with a slightly critical bent, and at last rest for an instant on Dietegen, then turn away again. Dietegen looked as though hungering for recognition, but she only once more glanced back at him. But that glance seemed to have somewhat embarrassed her, for she stopped to arrange her hair, while he flushed deeply.

That indeed was the first time when they two felt they were no longer mere children. But a few minutes later they met and found themselves partners in a country dance, hand in hand. A new and sweet sensation pulsed through his veins, and this remained even after the ring of dancers had again been broken.

Kuengolt, however, had still the same feeling regarding him; she looked upon the youth as upon something all her own, as something belonging to her, and of which, therefore, one may be sure and need not guard closely. Only once in a while she would send a spying glance in his direction, and when accident would bring him into the close neighborhood of another maiden, there would also be Kuengolt watching him.

Thus innocent pleasure reigned until an advanced hour of the evening. The young people became as sprightly as new-fledged wood pigeons, and soon even excelled in their merry humor their bounteous host, and the latter on his part delighted to pleasure his amiable young wife, while soberly encouraging his youthful guests in amusing themselves. She, the wife, was serene and happy as sunlight in springtime. And she even became playful enough to call her brawny husband by intimate nicknames.

But harmless and decorous as all this was, it may be that the citizens of other towns where merriment was not the natural birthright, as in the case of the Seldwylians, would have deemed it a trifle beyond the proper limits. The spiced May wine which was served the guests had been mingled in its elements according to ancient usage, but just as in their joy itself there was a bit too much license, so also there was a trifle too much honey in the drink. The hands of the young girls lay perhaps somewhat too frequently upon the shoulders of the youths, and now and then, without meaning any harm, a couple would quickly kiss and part, and this without playing at blind man's buff, as do the philistines of our days under similar conditions. In short, what these young people of Seldwyla lacked in their diversion was the gift of attracting without seeming to; but with this gift, on the other hand, Dietegen, as a regulation Ruechensteiner, was plentifully endowed. For although he was already in love, he fled like fire from the fondling and caressing which with these Seldwyla couples was by now rather freely indulged in, and preferred to keep himself out of the danger line. All the bolder and provoking was Kuengolt who, in her childish ignorance and after the manner of half-grown girls, did not know how to control her affections, and who went to look up the frigid youth. She discovered him seated in the shadow of a group of darksome trees, and sat down beside him, seizing his hand and playfully twining his fingers. When he submitted to that and even, gently and almost in a fatherly way, spun her ringlets in his palm, the girl at once put her arms around his neck and caressed him with the innocence but also with the abandon of a child, whereas in truth it was already the maiden that spoke out of her. Dietegen, however, no longer a child, essayed to use his maturer judgment for both of them, and thus was strenuously trying to loosen her hold on him, when his fostermother, the chief forester's wife, came joyously running up to the bench, and noticed with particular pleasure how matters stood apparently.

"That is right," she cried, "that you, too, are of accord," and she embraced them both tightly. "I hope and trust, my dearest daughter, that you will love and cherish Dietegen with all your might. He is deserving indeed, my child, that he not only has found a new home in our house, but that you, too, will give him a home in your little heart. And you, dear Dietegen, will, I know, at all times be a true and faithful protector and guardian to my little Kuengolt. Never leave her out of your sight, for your eyes are keen and observant."

"He is nobody's but mine, and has been for long," said Kuengolt to this, and she kissed him boldly and lightly upon the cheek, half like a bride and half as a child caresses a kitten which belongs to it. But now the situation for the poor bashful youth, thus hemmed in between mother and daughter, became unbearable, and he flushed and awkwardly loosened their combined hold of him, stepping back a few paces to escape their blandishments. But Kuengolt, in her wilful mood, pursued him laughing, and when in his retreat from her he came into close proximity to the pretty mother, the latter jestingly caught him by the arm, saying: "Here he is, my little daughter, now come and hold him fast."

When thus entrapped anew by them, his heart beat excitedly, and while finding himself thus wooed, so to speak, by both feminine tempters, he at the same time felt intensely his lonesome condition in the world. The odd conceit overcame him that he was a lost soul shaken from the tree of life, which while cherished by soft hands, was nevertheless to be forever deprived of its

own existence and individuality, a state of mind which with callow youths thus beset may be more frequent than commonly supposed. Therefore, a prey to two conflicting emotions equally powerful, of which one necessarily excluded the other, his strong sense of personal freedom struggling within his breast with the new-born sentiment of tender regard, he stood mute and trembling, half in rebellion against the sudden intimate aggression of the two women, and half strongly inclined to draw the young girl into his arms and to overwhelm her with caresses. His Ruechenstein blood was against him. While he loved the mother with a wholesouled and most grateful devotion, her thoughtless encouragement of him to play a lover's part towards her daughter seemed to him strange and unbecoming. He looked upon himself as really Kuengolt's property, as truly belonging to her by reason of her having saved his forfeited life. But at the same time he felt himself seriously responsible for her moral conduct, for her maiden chastity and her correct manners, and when now Kuengolt strove to kiss him on the mouth, he said to her, in perfect good humor but withal in the tone of a crabbed schoolmaster: "You are really still too young for things of that kind. This is not suitable for your age."

At these words the girl paled with shame and annoyance. Without another syllable she turned away and joined once more the throng of merrymakers, where she danced and sprang about recklessly a few times, and then sat down a little distance away by herself, with a face that betrayed clearly how hurt she was at the rebuff.

The chief forester's wife smilingly stroked the strict young moralist's cheek, saying: "Well, well, you are certainly very strict. But the more faithfully you will one day take care of my child. Give me your promise never to desert her! Only don't forget, we Seldwyla folk are all of us rather gay and debonair, and it is possible that in being so we sometimes do not think enough of the future."

Dietegen's eyes grew wet, and he gave her his hand in solemn vow. Then she conducted him back to the others. But Kuengolt turned her back on him, and instead in real grief gazed into the mild May night.

He on his part now marveled at himself. Strange, now of a sudden this girl whom but a minute before he had misnomed a mere child, was old and grown-up enough to cause him, the moralizing youth, love pangs. For sad and confused he too stood now aside and felt still more ashamed than the girl herself.

"What ails you? Why do you look so sorrowful?" asked the forester, when he in the best humor in the world now approached the group. But Kuengolt at the question broke into passionate tears, and exclaimed before everybody: "He was a gift to me by the judges when he was really nothing but a poor lifeless corpse, and I have reawakened him to life. And therefore he has no right to sit in judgment on me, but rather I alone am his judge. And he must do everything I want, and when I love to kiss him it is his business to simply keep still and let me do it."

They all laughed at this odd statement, but the mother took Dietegen's hand and led him to the child, saying: "Come, make up with her and let her kiss you once more. Later on you, also, shall be her master, and shall do as you see fit in such matters."

Blushing deeply because of the many onlookers, Dietegen offered his mouth to the girl, and she seized him by his curls, quite in a frenzy, and kissed him hard, more in wrath than in love, and then, having once more thrown him a look that betrayed anger, she quickly turned on her heels and dashed away in such haste that her golden ringlets fluttered in the night air and in passing brushed his face.

But now the reluctant fire of love had also been kindled in his own young soul, and soon after he left the throng and went in search of rash Kuengolt, striding rapidly and gazing all about for her. At last he discovered her on the other side of the house where she sat dreamily at the well, and was playing with the amber beads of her necklace. Advancing quickly he seized both her hands, compressed them in his vigorous right, and then laid his left on her shoulder so that she shuddered, and said: "Listen, child, I shall not permit you to trifle with me. From to-day on you are just as much my own property as I am yours, and no other man shall have you living. Keep that in mind when some day you will be grown up."

"Oh, you big old man," she murmured slowly and smiled at him, but pallor had overspread her features. "You indeed are mine, but not I yours. However, you need not mind that, because I don't think I'll ever let you go!"

So saying she rose and went, without first looking at her old playfellow once more, over to the other side of the house.

But this was not all. The forester's wife caught a cold in the suddenly chilled air of this very May night, and an insidious disease grew out of it which carried her off within a few months. On her deathbed she grieved much about her husband and her child, and expressed great anxiety on their behalf. She also denied till her last breath the real cause of her illness and death, deeming it scarcely a fit thing for a housewife and a mother to thus go out of life merely because of a surfeit of riotous pleasure.

But while she thus lay lifeless in the house, all that had loved her mourned for her; indeed the

whole town did so, for she had not had a single enemy in the world. Her widowed husband wept at night in his bed, and at daytime he spoke never a word, but only from time to time stepped up to the coffin in which she lay so still and peaceful, looking and looking at his sweet partner, and then, shaking his head, slowly walking off again.

He had a heavy wreath of young pine twigs fashioned for her and placed it on the bier. Kuengolt heaped a perfect mountain of wildflowers on top of that, and thus the graceful form of the dead was borne down from the hillside to the church below, followed by the bereaved family and a crowd of relatives, friends and members of the household.

After the burial the chief forester took all the mourners to the tavern, where he had caused a bounteous meal in honor of the dead to be prepared, according to ancient custom. The roast venison for it, a capital roebuck, and two fine grouse, he had shot himself, grieving all the while at the loss he had sustained. And when the gorgeously feathered birds now appeared on the long board he minded him again of the dense grove of mighty oak and maple, high up on the mountain side, in which she had sat awaiting his return from the chase, and in which he, his heart full of love of her who now rested in the cool ground, had many a time been stalking the deer. The image of her stood before his thoughts like life itself. But yet he was not to be left long to brooding, for strict laws of custom called for his active services as host on this occasion. When the claret from France and the golden malmsey had been uncorked and poured into capacious goblets, and the heavy table been loaded with sweets and cakes that scented the precious spices from the Indies, the guests grew lively and clamorous, and he had to propose and answer many a toast, despite his sincere mourning, and the noise soon drowned the still voice within him. Life and death were twin brothers in those days of our forbears.

The forester was seated at table between Kuengolt and Dietegen, and these two because of his tall and broad-backed person were unable to catch a look of one another save by bending over or behind him, and this neither of them wished to do for decency's sake, for they were the only ones who among this crowd of buzzing guests remained sad and serious. Across the board from him sat a cousin, a lady of about thirty named Violande.

This lady indeed could not well be overlooked, for she wore a singular costume, one which did not seem fit for a person satisfied with her lot, a person living in happy circumstances, but rather one who is restless and hollow of heart. Yet she was handsome, and knew well how to impress people with her charms, but ever and anon something selfish and mendacious would flash out of her handsome eyes that destroyed all these efforts at enforced amiability.

When but fourteen she had already been in love with the forester, her cousin, merely because amongst those young men that came before her vision he was the best-looking and the tallest and strongest. He, however, had never noticed the preference shown for him. Indeed he had not given a thought to this overyoung cousin of his, since his serious choice lay altogether among the more adult persons of the other sex, and wavered among several of these. Full of envy and jealousy, this unmature cousin, though, was already so skilled in feminine intrigue as to be able to destroy the chances of two or three young women that the forester had looked upon with favor, using for that purpose that poisonous weapon, gossip and backbiting. Always when he was on the point of proposing to a beauty that had won his regard, this sly half-woman skillfully understood how to spread rumors calculated to entangle the two, fictitious words uttered by one or the other seeming to show mutual dislike, or something equally efficacious in bringing about a rupture. If her designs miscarried with him, why then she spun her threads so as to make the other believe that the swain was false or fickle, full of guile or not dependable. Thus it came to pass repeatedly that without his ever discovering the author the lady of his suit would suddenly swerve and leave him out in the cold, while another, of whom he had never thought in that connection, would as quickly show him her favor--all owing to the arts of this Macchiavell in petticoats. And then impatiently and disgustedly he would turn his back on both the willing and the unwilling and plunge once more for a spell into his easy bachelordom. In this way it was that, one after the other, all his wooings came to nought, until he at last happened to meet the mild and amiable lady that subsequently became his spouse. This one, though, kept hold of him, since she was just as guileless as he himself, and all the artifices and stratagems of the little witch were in vain. Yea, she never even noticed the other's cleverest schemes, simply because she kept her eyes all the time fixed upon him she loved. And indeed he too had been grateful to her for her singlemindedness, and held her all the years of their happy union as a jewel of rare price.

Violande, however, when she saw the man whose love she had aspired to married, after all, to another had not given up the frequent use of her talent for mischiefmaking, for fear she might get out of practice. The older she grew the more artistic became her endeavors in that line, but without success for herself, since she remained a spinster, and since even the men themselves whom by her wiles she had alienated from other women turned away from her as from a dangerous person, feeling in their hearts only contempt and hatred for her. Then it was she turned her face heavenwards, giving it out that she was on the point of entering a convent and becoming a nun. But she changed her mind in the last hour, and instead of a convent entered a house devoted to some holy order, but such a one as would permit her, in case the chance of becoming a wife should unexpectedly present itself to her, to leave it. Thus she disappeared for years from view, since she was in the habit of going from one town to another at short intervals, and nowhere feeling rested or contented. Suddenly, when the forester's wife was lying sick to

death, she reappeared again, in Seldwyla, and in worldly dress, and so it had come about that here she was as one of the guests at this funeral celebration, seated opposite the widower.

She put restraint on her restlessness, and now and then looked modest and almost childlike, and when the women rose and walked about in couples, the while the men remained seated at table drinking and talking, she went up to Kuengolt, kissed her on both cheeks, and made friends with her. The half-grown girl felt honored by these advances of a semi-clerical woman, one who had apparently great knowledge of the world and had been about a good deal, and so these two were at once involved in a long and intimate conversation, as though they had known each other all their lives. When the company broke up Kuengolt asked her father to invite Violande to his house, in order to manage the big household, a task for which she herself felt not equal and entirely too young and inexperienced. The forester whose mood at that moment was a curious compound of mourning and vinous elation, and whose thoughts still belonged altogether to his departed wife, raised no objection to this request, although he did not care much for his cousin and thought her a queer sort of person.

Thus in a day or two Violande made her formal entrance into the widower's house, and had sense enough to take the place of the dead wife at the hearth with judicious modesty and not without a spice of sentimentality, the reflection no doubt occurring to her that here she was at last, after long wanderings, where the desires of her first youth seemed at last on the point of being realized. Without undue elation she opened the closets and presses of her predecessor, examining in detail their contents: linen and homespun cloth piled up in orderly rows, and provisions of every kind arranged for instant or occasional use, such as preserved fruit, vegetables, mushrooms, stored away in carefully tied-up pots; many flitches of bacon and salted beef and pork, smoked hams and potted venison, and hundreds of bunches of flax hung up to dry under the ceilings of the roof. Her heart beat at a more lively gait when inspecting all these domestic riches speaking so eloquently of the forester's easy circumstances, and almost tenderly she handled these hundreds of vessels and receptacles, dreaming of a near housewifely future. And in this peaceable frame of mind she remained for a number of weeks. But then her old restlessness seized her again. It had to find a vent. And so she began to turn everything topsy-turvy, starting with the pots and kettles, each of which she assigned to a new place, mingling the big and little, shoving about the bolts of linen and cloth, entangling the flax carded and uncarded, and when she finally had done all this she had also managed to seriously interfere with human affairs in the house, upsetting them as much as she dared.

Since it was her design to become, after all, the forester's wife, so as to acquire a more dignified and assured position in life, it became clear to her that what above all would be necessary was to part permanently Kuengolt and Dietegen, as to whose inclination for each other she had soon satisfied herself. For she argued quite correctly that Dietegen, once he married Kuengolt, would doubtless become the forester's successor, and thus not only remain permanently in the house, but that in that case the forester himself, in view of his strong affection for the memory of his departed wife, would never wed again. But, she reasoned, if both the children in some way could be made to shun the house, it would be much more likely that the forester would marry again, feeling lonesome all by himself.

And as now, as she discovered, Kuengolt every day grew handsomer and more womanly, she took care to make the girl constantly conscious both of her own beauty and of the gifts of her mind, as well as to further develop in her an inborn leaning towards coquetry. To do the latter she skillfully manipulated Kuengolt's natural vanity, insinuating to her that every young man with whom she came in contact was smitten with her charms and a ready suitor for her hand and love, and this with such success that Kuengolt actually learned to look upon all the youths of her acquaintance solely from the point of view whether they readily acknowledged her preëminence in beauty and intellectual gifts or not, while by her shrewd maneuvers Violande on the other hand made every one of all these young men think that the girl's affections were centered wholly upon himself.

Another trick used by Violande with the same end in view was to cultivate social intercourse with a number of other young girls of marriageable age, who were frequently invited to the house for parties to which young men were encouraged to come, and under her guidance and leadership there was much courting and gallivanting going on at these meetings. Thus it came about that Kuengolt, when less than sixteen, had already assembled around her a circle of unquiet young people, each more or less an expert in playing the love game as a species of delightful sport.

In the pursuance of her one aim Violande, too, arranged all sorts of festivities, great and small, at the house, and there was mongering in scandal, stories more or less compromising this or that couple or individual, many quarrels and much noise and singing and music or dancing, and it was usually the most objectionable of the customary guests on these occasions that were also the boldest and most foolish, and at the same time the most difficult to get rid of.

All these things were not to Dietegen's taste. At first he was a mere onlooker, indifferent and still in the grasp of his sincere and deep mourning for the death of his fostermother, making a melancholy face which to a growing youth is not the most becoming. But when all these pleasure-mad young people were rather amused by a seriousness which seemed unsuitable to his age, and as Kuengolt herself took the same attitude towards him, the youth tried to revenge himself by awkward attempts at dignified silence. But these tactics were even less successful, and ended

one day with Dietegen's clearly perceiving that he among them all was out of tune. In fact, on one occasion he observed Kuengolt seated in the midst of a group of scornful youths all of whom were deriding him and she, instead of disapproving, evidently siding with them against him.

When Dietegen had experienced this, he turned silently away, and from that day on avoided the whole company. Anyway, he had now attained the age when vigorous youths begin to think of making strong men of themselves. Upon the holding upon which stood the forester's house there was, from time immemorial laid the duty of maintaining three or four fully equipped fighting men, and this obligation the forester himself had always carried out most scrupulously. With great pleasure he found that Dietegen, shot up straight and nimble, would soon fill the same fine armor in which he had once hoped to see his own son.

Thus Dietegen with other young gamekeepers and helpers on lengthy winter evenings went to fencing school, where he learned to make proper use of the shorter weapons, according to the methods of his home, and during the spring and summer seasons he spent many a Sunday or holiday upon spacious fields or forest clearings where the youths of the district learned to march in closed formations for hours at a stretch, and to attack, leaping broad trenches by the aid of their long spears, and in every other way to render their bodies supple, active and strong, or else, perhaps, to practice the new art of the musketeer whose weapon is loaded with powder and shot.

Since by all these changes mentioned above life in the forester's house altered greatly, and since particularly the feminine doings there disturbed him sadly, although he paid scant attention to the latter, it happened that he little by little acquired the habit of frequenting the taverns where his townsfellows met much oftener than had been the case during his married life. And while absenting himself from the childish folly practiced at his own house, he succumbed to the maturer folly of men, and it would happen now and then that he would carry his head like a heavy burden, but always upright, to his forest home as late as midnight or more.

Things went on in this way until, on a sunny St. John's Day, a network of events began to close in.

The forester himself went to town to the headquarters of his guild, where on that festive day all were summoned to attend the settlement of important affairs concerning the craft, to conclude with a great annual feast, and he intended to remain and join there in the carousal until the advance of night.

Dietegen on his part went to the sharpshooter's meeting place, intending to spend the whole long midsummer's day in perfecting himself as a marksman. The other assistants of the forester and his servants of the household also went their own way, the one to visit his relatives some distance across the country, another to the dance with his sweetheart, and the third to the holiday fair to buy himself cloth for a new coat and a pair of shoes.

So the women were sitting all by themselves in the house, not at all delighted with the rude manner in which the men had left them to their own devices, but yet eyeing every passer-by and peering out at the sunny landscape in the hope that some guests would show up and with their help a festivity of their own might be arranged.

As a suitable preparation for that or any contingency they began to bake spice cakes and prepare all sorts of sweets, and they brewed a huge bowlful of heady May wine flavored with honey and herbs, so as to be ready for either chance comers or to offer a night cup to the men returning home. Next they decked themselves in holiday finery, and ornamented head and bosom with flowers, while other young maidens, bidden to join them in a feminine festival time, one after the other also came from town, and even the very last and least of the serving maids belonging to the household was freshly attired to look her best.

Under broadspreading linden trees, right in front of the house, the table was set for a dainty meal, the westering sun sending his last golden rays like a benediction abroad over town and valley.

There the women now were seated about the table, relishing all the good things prepared for them, and soon the chorus of them were intoning folk-songs with melodious voices, songs telling in many stanzas of the delights and despair of love, songs like that of the two royal children, or "There dallied a knight with his maiden dear," and similar ones. All the tunes sounded the longing of love-lorn hearts, the faith kept or broken, the eternal drama of passion. Far out into the evening the sweet voices were carrying, alluring, inviting. The birds nesting up in the dense foliage of the linden trees, after being silenced for a spell, now joined in, rivaling their human competitors, and from over in the forest other feathered songsters assisted. But suddenly another band of choristers could be heard above the din. That new volume of sound came floating down the mountain side, a mingling of male voices with the more strident notes of fiddle and tabor pipes. A troop of youths had come from Ruechenstein, and this instant issued from the edge of the woods. Thus they came, striding along the path that led past the forester's home down to the valley, a number of musicians at their head. There was the son of the burgomaster of Ruechenstein, rather a madcap and therefore a great exception to the overwhelming majority of his townsfolk, who clearly dominated the noisy throng. Having left the university abroad, he had brought with him a few fellow-students after his own heart, among them being a couple of divinity students and a young and jolly monk, as well as Hans Schafuerli, the council scribe, or

secretary, of Ruechenstein, who was a scrawny, bent figure of a man, with a mighty hunchback and a long rapier. He was the last of the train, all walking singly because of the narrow path.

But when they set eyes on the row of singing ladies, their own music ceased, and they stood all there, listening attentively to the charming tune. However, the ladies likewise became mute, being surprised and wishful to see what now was going to happen. Violande alone retained her presence of mind, and stepped to the burgomaster's son, who in turn saluted her with elaborate courtesy, and telling her that he with his friends purposed to pay a flying and amusing visit to the merry neighboring town, in order to spend St. John's Day in a manner agreeable to them all. But, he continued, having had the good fortune to meet with these ladies in this unhoped-for way, they counted on the pleasure of a dance with them, if they might make so bold as to offer themselves as partners, in all honor and decency.

Within the space of a few minutes these formalities had been complied with, and the dance was in full swing on the floor of the big banqueting hall of the forester's house. Kuengolt led with the burgomaster's son, Violande with the jolly monk, and the other ladies with the young scholars. But the most expert and ardent dancer proved to be the hunchback scribe. And despite his crooked back this valiant devotee of the terpsichorean art understood marvelously well how to advance and retreat with his long shanks in the maze, these legs of his seeming to begin right below his chin.

But Kuengolt's humor was no joyous one, and when Violande whispered to her to aim at the conquest of the burgomaster's son, in order to become herself one day the mistress of Ruechenstein, she remained frigid and indifferent. But suddenly she perceived the herculean efforts of the artful hunchback, and this extraordinary sight restored her spirits, so that she laughed with all her heart. And she instantly demanded to dance with the crooked monster. Indeed it looked like a scene in a curious fairy tale, to see her graceful figure, clad in green and the head set off by a wreath of ruby roses, flitting to and fro in the arms of the ghastly scribe, his hump covered with vivid scarlet.

But swiftly her mind altered. From the scribe she flew into the arms of the monk, and from those into the keeping of the young students, so that within less than half an hour she had taken a turn or two with each one of the young strangers. All of these now centered their gaze upon the beautiful damsel, while the other young women present attempted in vain to recapture their partners.

Violande seeing the state of the case, quickly summoned all the couples to the table beneath the lindens, to rest there for a while and to be hospitably entertained. She placed the whole company most judiciously, each young man next a damsel, and Kuengolt beside the burgomaster's son.

But Kuengolt was tormented by a craving to see all these young men subject to her will and under the complete influence of her charms. She exclaimed that she herself wished to wait upon her guests, and hastened into the house to get more wine. There she quickly and surreptitiously found her way into Violande's chamber, where she rummaged in her clothes press. In an hour of mutual confidences Violande had shown her a small phial and told her that this contained a philtre, or love potion, called "Follow Me." Whoever should drink its contents when served by the hand of a woman, would inevitably become her slave and victim, being bound to follow her even to death's door. True, Violande had added, there was not contained in that potion any of the strong and dangerous poison denominated Hippomanes, brewed from the liquor obtained from the frontal excrescence of a first-born foal, but rather it came from the small bones of a green frog that had been placed upon an ants' nest and cleanly scraped and gnawed off by these insects, until ready for occult use. But all the same, Violande had stated, this preparation was potent enough to turn the heads of a half dozen of obstreperous men. She herself, Violande said, had obtained the philtre from a nun whose whilom lover had succumbed to the pest before the philtre had had time to work, so that she, the nun, had resigned herself to a convent life, and now Violande had possession of this sovereign remedy without knowing exactly what to do with it. For she did not dare to throw it away for fear of the unknown consequences.

This phial Kuengolt now found after some search, and poured its contents into the jug of wine she carried, and with a beating heart she hastened outside to her guests. She bade the youths all quaff their drink inasmuch as she would offer to them a new and sweet spice wine, and when serving out the contents of the jug she knew how to contrive matters in such wise that not a drop of the fluid remained. To accomplish this she had first evenly distributed wine into all the goblets, and afterwards poured something more into each man's, in every instance sending an alluring glance into the soul of every swain, so that the sorcery should have its full effect, as she thought.

But indeed the magical workings of the philtre really consisted in these impartially and enticingly subdivided glances of her roguish eye, so that the youths all vied, blind and selfish with passion, to gain her sole favor, as will always happen when a goal striven for by all in common lies temptingly there for the boldest and luckiest to achieve.

All the young men without exception participated in this love game, leaving their partners rudely to themselves, and the latter, feeling deeply the disgrace and humiliation of being outstripped by Kuengolt, paled with anger and disappointment, casting their eyes down and vainly trying to cover their defeat by a whispered conversation amongst themselves. Even the

monk suddenly abandoned a dusky serving maid whom but a moment before he had embraced tenderly, while the haughty scribe, the hunchback, with energetic steps crowded out the burgomaster's son who at that instant held Kuengolt's lovely hand in his own, caressing it subtly.

But Kuengolt showed no favors to any one in particular. Cold as an icicle she remained towards each and every one of her young guests, and like a smooth snake she glided about among them, with head and senses cool. And when she saw that thus she held them all in the hollow of her hand, she even attempted to reconcile anew the other women, speaking pleasantly to them and urging them to return to the table.

Darkness had fallen. The stars glinted high in the heavens, and the sickle of the new moon stood above the forest, but this gentle light now was wiped out by the gleaming and wavering flames of a huge St. John's bonfire that had been lighted up on the summit of a lone hill by the peasant population, visible from afar.

"Let us all go and look at this bonfire," cried Kuengolt. "The way to it is short and pleasant through the woods! But we must have it done as beseems us all--the women and girls first, and the young men in the rear."

And so it was done. Pitch torches lighted up the path for them, and song cheered the company.

Violande alone had remained behind as custodian of the house, but more especially to await the coming of the chief forester. For she, too, meant to make her catch that day. And she had not long to wait. He came in the roused mood of a toper, and with his senses only partly under control. When he saw the tables under the lindens before the house, he sat down and called for a sleeping draught at Violande's hands.

Without loss of time she went to do his bidding. But she also first disappeared into her own room to get the small vial containing the love potion which she meant to serve the man who had scorned her so far. However, her hasty search for it was fruitless. Neither did she discover it in Kuengolt's chamber, whither instant suspicion had driven her. For the truth was that that serving maid who had been carelessly pushed aside by the monk when Kuengolt had triumphed over her rivals, had picked it up on the stairs where it had been cast by the haughty girl.

But Violande lost no time in searching further. Instead she made his cup all the stronger and sweeter, and then she bent over the man of her choice while he slowly and rapturously emptied the tankard. Violande was dressed for the occasion. She wore over her skirt a tunic of pale gold, the edges and seams picked out in red, and allowing her delicate white skin to peep forth here and there. Her bosom heaved stormily and she showed a tenderly caressing humor. Thus she leaned on the table in close proximity to him.

"Ah indeed, cousin," said the forester, when accidentally he cast a glance in her direction, "how handsome you look to-night."

At these words she smiled happily and looked full at him with eyes that spoke eloquently, saying: "Do you indeed like my looks? Well, it has taken you a long time to find that out. If you only knew for how many years, in fact, ever since I was a child, I have cherished you in my heart."

That had a greater effect on the good man than any love potion made of frog's bones, and he seemed to see before his eyes dim recollections. Of a pretty girl child he dreamed, and now he saw her before him at his side, a matured beauty in the full development of her womanly charms, and it was as if she had come to him from a far distance, bringing to him unsolicited the splendid gift of her fine person. His generous heart became entangled with his excited senses, and reshaped and formulated all sorts of enticing images. Through his hazy brain in its vinous exaltation there floated a Violande who suddenly had been metamorphosed into a winsome being that, after all manner of sufferings, had been offered to his arms as something that to embrace and call his would not only make herself happy but would likewise entrust to his care a chaste and loving woman that would render himself happy once more. The memory of his dead wife paled for the nonce before this glittering picture.

He seized her hand, fondled her cheeks, and said: "We are not yet old, dear Cousin Violande! Will you become my wife?"

And since she left her hand in his grasp, and bent nearer to him, this time, seeing at last the realization of her ambition, actually glowing with her new-found bliss, he loosened the bridal ring of his wife from the handle of his dagger where since her death he had worn it, and placed the trinket on Violande's finger. She thereupon pressed her own face against the leonine and ruddy countenance of her middle-aged lover, and the two embraced tenderly and kissed under the whispering linden trees which were stirred by the night breeze. The shrewd man, ordinarily of such sound judgment, thought he had discovered the sovereign blessing of life itself.

At this moment Dietegen returned home, bearing his weapons in his hand. Since he went towards the house across the greensward, the fond couple did not hear his approach, and he saw with confusion and amazement the whole scene. Shamed and reddening, he retired as quietly as he could, so that they did not notice him, and he went around the whole house, in order to make

his entrance by the back door. But while still on his way he heard suddenly loud calling and noise as though someone were in peril and hot dispute. Without a moment's hesitation Dietegen hurried off in the direction of the hubbub. And soon he found the same company that had ere now left the house in the happiest humor in a terrible uproar.

It seemed that the young men, half-crazed by the strong wine and by jealousy of each other, on their way back from the St. John's bonfire, being now mingled with the young women, had begun to quarrel among themselves. From words they had come to daggers drawn, and more than one was bleeding from serious wounds. But just the very moment of his arrival he had seen the Ruechenstein scribe furiously attacking the burgomaster's son, and running him through with his long rapier. The victim, also with sword in hand, lay prone on the grass and was just giving up the ghost. The others, unaware of this, had seized each other by the throats, and the women were shrieking and calling loudly for help. Only Kuengolt stood there pale as death but watching the horrible scene with open mouth.

"Kuengolt, what is up here?" asked Dietegen, when he had made her out. She shuddered at his address, but looked as though relieved. However, he now vigorously began to interfere, and by dint of rough handling of some of the worst fire-eaters he soon succeeded in separating the struggling and cursing mass. Then he pointed to the dead youth on the ground, and that sobered them even more quickly than his remonstrances. Then they all stared like mutes upon the dead man and upon the grim hunchback, who seemed to have lost his wits completely.

In the meanwhile some peasants from the neighborhood as well as the homecoming gamekeepers from the forestry had appeared on the scene, and these bound securely the raging Schafuerli, the murderous scribe, and arrested the remainder of the Ruechensteiners.

And that was a bad morning that now followed. The forester was engaged to the wicked Violande, and his head buzzed unmercifully. One dead Ruechensteiner lay in the house, and the rest of them were kept in the dungeon. Before the noon hour had tolled a delegation from Ruechenstein, with the burgomaster himself, the father of the slain, at its head, had arrived in order to inquire carefully into the whole matter and to demand strict justice and punishment of the guilty.

But already the imprisoned secretary of the Ruechenstein council, the grim Schafuerli, knowing that his neck was in peril, had made a deposition in his tower in which he charged responsibility for the whole bad business upon the women of Seldwyla whom they had met on the previous day, and more especially upon Kuengolt, whom he accused of sorcery and black art.

That maid servant who had become disgruntled for a cause mentioned before had passed on the empty vial that had contained Violande's philtre, to the monk, and the latter had hastened to put it into the hands of the scribe, who now used it as a powerful weapon.

To the grave dismay of the Seldwylians the whole matter in the course of that first day even turned against the forester's daughter and against his household. Everybody in those days, and not alone in Seldwyla, firmly believed in sorcery and love potions, and the members of the Ruechenstein delegation behaved so menacingly and hinted at such terrible reprisals that the popularity and the respect in which the forester was held could not prevent the imprisonment of Kuengolt, especially as he was still severely suffering from his excesses of the previous day, and felt like one paralyzed.

She instantly made a full confession, being more dead than alive from terror, and Schafuerli and his boon companions were liberated. And then the Ruechensteiners made the formal demand to have the girl delivered up to them for adequate atonement, since she had injured a number of their townsfolk and caused the death of one of them. This, however, was not conceded to them, and then the Ruechensteiners departed in an angry mood, threatening dire reprisals. The body of the burgomaster's son they took along. But when later on they heard that the Seldwyla authorities had sentenced the girl but to a twelvemonth's mild incarceration, the ancient enmity which had slept for a number of years now reawakened, and it became a perilous adventure for any Seldwylian to be caught on Ruechenstein soil.

Now the town of Seldwyla counted as a fit penalty for misdeeds which according to their notions were reckoned among the lighter ones and which consequently required no severe treatment, not imprisonment proper but rather the awarding of the culprits to persons that became responsible for their further conduct. In the custody of such persons the culprits remained during the length of the sentence, and these custodians were held to employ them suitably and to feed and shelter them adequately. This mode of punishment was used most often with women or youthful persons. Thus, then, Kuengolt, too, was taken to one of the chambers of the town hall, and there she was to be auctioned off, at least her services and keep. And before that ceremony she had to submit to being publicly exhibited there.

The forester, whose sunny humor had altogether disappeared with these trials, said sighing to Dietegen that it was a hard thing for him to go to the town hall and watch there in behalf of his daughter, but somebody surely must be there of her family during these bitter hours.

Then Dietegen said: "I will go in your stead; that is, if I am good enough for it in your opinion."

His patron shook hands with him. "Yes, do it!" he said, "and I will thank you for it."

So Dietegen went where some of the councilmen were seated and a few persons willing to take charge of the prisoner. He had girded his sword around his loins, and had a manly and rugged air about him.

And when Kuengolt was led inside, white as chalk and deeply chagrined, and was to stand in front of the table, he swiftly pulled up a chair and made her sit down in it, he placing himself behind and putting his hand on the back of it. She had looked up at him surprised, and now sent him a glance fraught with a painful smile. But he apparently paid no heed looking straight on over her head, severe of mien.

The first who made a bid for her custody was the town piper, a drunkard, who had been sent by his poor wife in order to help increase their receipts a bit. This, she calculated, was all the more to be expected because Kuengolt would probably receive from her home all sorts of good things to eat, and these, she considered, they would secure wholly or in part.

"Do you want to go to the town piper's house?" Dietegen curtly asked the girl. After attentively regarding the red-nosed and half-drunken fellow, she said: "No." And the piper, with a blissful smile, remarked laughing: "Good, that suits me too," and toddled off on shaking legs.

Next an old furrier and capmaker made a bid, since he thought he could utilize Kuengolt very handily in sewing and making a goodly profit out of her services. But this man had a large sore on his thigh, and this he was greasing and plastering with salve all day long, and also a growth the size of a chicken's egg on the top of his pate, so that Kuengolt had already been afraid of him when she passed his shop as a child going to school. When, therefore, Dietegen put the query to her whether she was willing to go to his house, and the girl decidedly negatived that, the man went off loudly venting his spleen. He grumbled and growled like a bear whose honeycomb has been snatched away.

Now a money changer stepped up, one who was notorious both for his greed and usurious avarice and for his lewdness. But scarcely had that one leveled his red eyes upon her, and opened his wry mouth for a bid, when Dietegen motioned him off with a threatening gesture, even without asking the terrified girl herself.

And now there were left but a few more, decent and respectable citizens, people against whom nothing could be urged reasonably, and it was these between whom the final choice and decision lay. The smallest bid was made by the gravedigger of the cemetery next the town cathedral, a quiet and good man, who also possessed an excellent wife and, so he thought, a suitable place where to keep such a prisoner in safe custody, and who certainly had already had charge of several other prisoners before.

To this man, then, Kuengolt was given in charge, and was taken at once to his house which was situated between the cemetery and a side street. Dietegen went along in order to see how she would be housed. It turned out that her quarters would be an open, small antechamber of the house itself, immediately adjoining the graveyard and only separated from it by an iron fence. There, as it seemed, the sexton was in the habit of keeping his prisoners during the warm season of the year, while for the winter he simply admitted them into his own dwelling room, a slender chain fastening them to the tile stove.

But when Kuengolt found herself in her prison and was separated merely by a fence from the graves of the dead, moreover saw near by the old deadhouse filled with skulls and bones, she began to tremble and begged they would not leave her there all through the night. But the sexton's wife who was just dragging in a straw mattress and a blanket, and also hid the sight of the graves by suspending a curtain, answered that this request could not be listened to, and that her new abode would be wholesome for her moral welfare and as a means of repenting her sins. And she could not be shaken in this resolve.

But Dietegen replied: "Be quiet, Kuengolt, for I am not afraid of the dead or of any spook, and I will come here every night and keep watch in front of the iron fence until you, too, will no longer fear."

He said this, however, in an aside to her, so that the woman could not overhear it, and then he left for home. There he found the saddened forester who had just reached an understanding with Violande that they would not celebrate their wedding until after Kuengolt's release from prison and after the scandal created by the occurrence should have had time to blow over. During all their discussion of the matter Violande kept still as a mouse, glad that she as the prime author of the whole mischief should have escaped all the consequences, for the magical philtre had been hers, as we know.

When the early hours of evening were over and midnight approaching, Dietegen began to make good his promise. He started unobserved, took his sword and a flask of choice wine along, and climbed from the high slope down into the valley and so to town, and there he swung himself fearlessly over the graveyard wall, strode across the graves themselves, and at last stood in front of Kuengolt's new abode. She sat breathlessly and shaking with fright upon her straw mattress,

behind the curtain, and listened with freezing blood to every noise, even the slightest, that struck her ear. For even before this ghostly hour of twelve she had undergone several convulsions of dread and unreasoning fear. In the deadhouse, for instance, a cat had slyly climbed over the bones, and these had clattered somewhat. Then also the night wind had moved the bushes growing over the tombs, so that they made a weird noise, and the iron rooster that served as a weather vane on top of the church roof had creaked mysteriously, making an awful sound never heard in daytime. So that the girl was in a frenzy of terror.

When she therefore heard the steps nearing more and more, Kuengolt had a new fit of fright, and shook like a leaf. But when he stretched his hands through the iron bars of the fence and pushed back the curtain, so that the full moon lit up the whole dark space around her, and in a low voice called her name, she rose quickly, ran in his direction and stretched out both hands to him.

"Dietegen!" she exclaimed, and burst into tears, the first she had been able to shed since that ominous day; for until that hour she had lived as though smitten with paralysis, dazed and benumbed.

Dietegen, however, did not take her hand, but instead handed her the flask of wine, saying: "Here, take a mouthful! It will do you good."

So she drank, and also ate of the dainty wheaten bread of her father's house that he had brought along. And by and by her courage was restored, and when she clearly perceived that he had no mind to converse any more with her, she retired silently to her couch and cried without a stop, till at last she sank into a quiet sleep.

But he, the young man, in his narrow youthful ideas and in his inexperience of real life had made up his mind that she was a being turned completely to wickedness and evil, and one that was unable to do right. And he served as her sentinel during this and other nights, seating himself upon an ancient gravestone leaning against the wall solely out of regard for her departed mother and because she had saved his own life.

Kuengolt slept until sunrise, and when she awoke and looked about she observed that Dietegen had softly stolen away.

Thus one night after another passed, and he faithfully watched and guarded her, for he indeed held the belief that the place was not without danger for anyone without a good conscience and shaken with fear. But each time he brought her something of a relish along, and often he would ask her what she desired for herself, and he would carry out her wishes if at all justifiable.

He also came when it rained or stormed, missing not a single night, and on those nights when, according to the popular superstitions then universally held, the dead walked and which were considered particularly perilous to the living, he came all the more promptly.

Kuengolt on her part by and by managed to arrange things so that during the daytime she had her curtain drawn, in order, as she said, to conceal herself from the curious who went to the cemetery to spy on her, but in reality to sleep, for she preferred to remain awake at night, to keep her faithful sentinel in view all the time, and to ponder the things that had brought her there, and how he had conducted himself towards her these last few years. But Dietegen knew nothing of all this, believing her to be sound asleep.

She felt herself engrossed with a new and unexpected happiness, and while he diligently kept watch over her during the hours of darkness, she enjoyed his mere presence, and all her thinking was of him. She had no slightest suspicion that he judged her so harshly, and was living in hopes that she could reestablish her claim on him, seeing that he proved so faithful to her. Her father, however, did not share her dreams. He visited her at least once every week, and when she on these occasions nearly always shyly mentioned Dietegen's name, and he marked that she indeed had again turned to him in her thoughts, he would sigh and groan in spirit, because while also wishing for a union of those two, and feeling convinced that his fine foster son alone was able to again rehabilitate his daughter, it appeared highly improbable to him that Dietegen would wish to woo a witch that had been punished for her uncanny doings by his fellow citizens, and as it seemed to him, justly.

In the meantime another caller had put in an appearance with Kuengolt, no less a person than the secretary of the council of Ruechenstein himself.

This highly enterprising and venturesome hunchback was unable to forget the beautiful being on whose account he had committed murder. The blood coursed through his veins more rapidly than in those of a normally shaped fellow, and waking or sleeping her image did not lose its hold on him. His belief was that the image of this witch dwelt in his heart by virtue of her black art, and that it was shooting along within his blood vessels as does a frail boat in a powerful storm, all in a magical way.

The more he reflected the more convinced he became of this, and since he had daring enough and to spare, he finally made up his mind to seek alleviation of his tortures from the primal source, the witch herself. At the Capuchin monastery, where he had first gone for a ghostly cure, he had failed, and thus one moonless, dark night he started out, across the mountain and as far

as the cemetery where he knew her to be kept a captive.

Kuengolt heard his approaching steps. Since it was not yet the hour when Dietegen used to come, and also because these steps did not seem to be his, she took fright and hid behind the curtain. But Schafuerli now lighted a candle he had brought along, and thrust his hand with it through the aperture, searching the dark space with his eager eyes until he had finally discovered her crouched in a corner.

"Come here, witch maid," he muttered excitedly, "and give me both thine hands and that scarlet mouth of thine. For thou must quench the fire thou hast caused."

The girl was frightened beyond words. By his crooked shape she had recognized him in the dusky half-light, and the recollection of the sufferings this misshapen recreant had occasioned her, together with the repugnant presence of the man himself, drove her almost to madness. Powerless to utter a sound, she sank down trembling in every limb.

Seeing this, the bold knave began to shake the iron bars of her grate, and since it was by no means very strong but rather intended only for the keeping of less vigorous prisoners, it began to yield, and he was about to tear it out of its staples. But just that instant Dietegen arrived on the scene. To notice the whole proceeding and to seize the madman firmly by the shoulder was the work of a flash. The enraged scribe yelled like one possessed, and was for drawing his poniard. But Dietegen kept an iron hold on him, grasping his hands and wrestling with him until the humpback owned himself beaten. Then Dietegen was uncertain whether to hand the maddened creature over to the authorities or to let him go. Not knowing the circumstances of the case and unwilling to cause new complications for Kuengolt, he finally allowed the scribe to escape, warning him, however, on pain of death, not to return again to the place. Next Dietegen woke the sexton and induced him, since autumn with its cool nights was approaching, to afford shelter to his prisoner henceforth within his own dwelling, in order to avert repetition of a scene like the one of that night.

Therefore Kuengolt that very night was taken inside, and secured by a light chain to the foot of the stove. The latter was a trim structure built of green tiling and showing in raised outlines the biblical story of the creation of man and his fall from grace. At the four corners of this stove there stood the four greater prophets upon twisted pillars, and the whole of it formed a somewhat attractive monument. Against it and tied to it by her gyves Kuengolt now lay stretched out on a bench for her couch.

She was glad of having obtained a more sheltered spot, and more still of having been rescued out of the hands of this evil hunchback, and she ascribed the whole of Dietegen's efforts to his devoted feelings for her, and this despite the fact that he had not spoken a syllable to her through it all and had gone away immediately after the new arrangements had been effected.

When, however, Kuengolt had thus been installed in a more convenient place, a new admirer of her charms turned up in the person of a chaplain whose duties obliged him to attend to a number of small matters in the church building close by, and to whose obligations it also belonged to offer ghostly counsel and consolation to the sick or imprisoned. This young priest came, once Kuengolt was an inmate of the gravedigger's household, more and more frequently, not only to exorcise her and to expel from her soul all inclination towards magic, sorcery and witchcraft, but also to enjoy incidentally her rare feminine charms and beauty. He strenuously endeavored to dissuade her from using any more love philtres and similar means forbidden by the canons of the Church, but in doing so became thoroughly imbued with her physical attractions.

For of late, that is, since these trials had overtaken her, the maiden had wonderfully grown in beauty. She had become a more mature, slender and spiritualized being, albeit pallor had succeeded her former healthy complexion, and her eyes now shone with a gentle and lovely fire, encircled with a shadow of sadness.

Save for her being tied to the foot of the warm stove, she was being treated in every respect like a member of the sexton's family, among the members of which there were several children, and when the chaplain came to visit her, he was usually regaled with a tankard of ale or a flask of drinkable wine, these being supplied by the forester, Kuengolt's father. But whenever the reverend divine had sufficiently indulged in his admonishments, had partaken of the refreshment provided for him, and still remained behind, evidently to enjoy the society of the charming penitent, there would be some queer goings-on. For the chaplain would squeeze and caress the pretty hand of his spiritual daughter, would sigh and groan audibly, and then Kuengolt, comparing this sniffling priest in her thoughts with the stately and handsome Dietegen whom she considered in truth her lover, was prone to scoff at the inconspicuous Levite, but in a good-natured and gentle manner.

In this way it came about that Kuengolt, after displaying all day long her cheerful and somewhat sportive disposition, would be the declared favorite of the sexton's household in the evening, the big family table invariably being pushed over towards her where she perforce sat tied to the stove. So also it was on New Year's Eve, and the young priest was one of the company, so that the sexton, his wife and children, together with the chaplain, were seated near the prisoned girl, all of them munching walnuts and sweet honey cakes, and Kuengolt having just

laughed at something the priest had said, the latter meanwhile holding her hand, when Dietegen entered the room. He brought for his patron's daughter and his own whilom playmate some dainties from home. In coming he had yielded to the instinctive promptings of his heart, a mingling of pity, sympathy and affection, an unconscious longing for her company, and the desire had been strong within him to spend at least an hour that evening with her, this being the first time in her young life she had to pass away from home on a night like that.

But when he saw the merry scene and caught sight of the chaplain's caressing hand, his blood seemed to freeze within him, and he left her after just a couple of words in explanation of his mission, without any more ado. In going, perhaps unconsciously, Dietegen muttered as though to himself: "Forgotten is forgotten!"

Only now Kuengolt suddenly felt the full force and meaning of these words and of his previous devotion, and her heart seemed to stand still. Pale and faint she sank down on her bench at the stove, and the jolly gathering broke up. Even before the midnight bells tolled out the new year the light in the sexton's window was gone, and the girl was weeping bitter tears of sorrow.

From that night on she remained almost forgotten by the forester and his household. Great days were on the way. The Swiss federation was humming like a beehive with war's alarum. Those events were in the making which in history are known as the Burgundian War.

When spring had come and the great day of Grandison approached, the town of Seldwyla, too, like Ruechenstein and many others, sent her embattled citizens into the field, and it was for the forester as well as for Dietegen a happy release to be able to leave the disturbed harmony and comfort of the house and to step into the clear, rugged atmosphere of war.

With firm tread they both went along with their banner, though perhaps more silent than most, and joined with the other hurrying detachments the mighty battle array of the federated Swiss allies, coming most opportunely to the armed aid of the latter.

Like unto an iron garden stood the long square of the fighting men, and in its midst waved the standards and pennons of the cantons and towns there represented. In serried ranks they stood, many thousands of them, each in his independence and reliability again a world in himself; in fearlessness and will each could depend on his neighbor, and yet all of them together, after all, but a throng of fallible human beings.

There was the spendthrift and the light-hearted side by side with the curmudgeon and the cautious, each awaiting the hour of supreme sacrifice. The quarrelsome and the peaceable had to stay on with equal patience. He whose heart was heavy within his bosom was no more taciturn than the talkative and the braggart. The poor and indigent stood in equal pride next to the wealthy and domineering. Whole squares made up of neighbors ordinarily disagreeing were here one single unit. And envy or jealousy held spear or halberd as manfully and firmly as did generosity or reconciliation, and unjust as just aimed for the nonce both of them to fulfil the duty immediately urgent. Whoever had done with life and meant to sacrifice without regrets the mean remnant of it, was no more or less than the reckless red-cheeked youth upon whom his mother had built all her hope and in whom rested the future. The morose submitted without protest to the silly sallies of the jester or buffoon, and the latter on his part saw without ridicule the prosaic conceits of the small-souled philistine.

Next to the banner of Seldwyla was visible that of Ruechenstein, so that the serried ranks of the inimicable neighbors closely touched each other, and the forester who was leader of a section of his fellow citizens and formed the cornerstone of their whole formation, was the very neighbor of the council scribe of Ruechenstein, who on his part stood at the tail end of one of the ranks of his townsmen. But at this hour not one of them all seemed to recall reasons for differences or to remember the past. Dietegen was among the sharpshooters and "lost fellows," somewhat outside these regimental formations, and was already in the very heat of combat when the main body of the Swiss suddenly began to move and to plunge right into the midst of battle, in order to administer a stupendous defeat upon one of the most brilliant warrior-princes and his luxurious and splendid army, and to drive him to ignominous flight like a fabled king.

In the pressure of the hard-fought battle the forester with some of his gamekeepers had been separated by Burgundian cavalry from his banner and now fought his way through the latter, but only to encounter on the other side enemy foot soldiery. In meeting his new foe the doughty warrior set to work hewing and carving out for himself a roomy corner of his own, and he had already achieved this task when through this new opening a belated and spent cannon ball from the hosts of Charles the Bold came smashing and crushed the broad manly chest of the man, so that within another moment or two he had found in peace his eternal rest, and nothing more troubled him.

When Dietegen, sound and hearty, returned from the fight and from following the fleeing Burgundians, inquiring for his friend and father, he found his body after but a short search, and he buried him together with his trusty sword within the mighty roots of a far-spreading oak, not far from the battlefield on the edge of a grove.

Then he returned home with the remainder of the Swiss hosts, and because of his intrepidity and the ability shown by him during the campaign he was by the town authorities made

provisional chief forester, and was given the house that had been his home for so long as his new abode and to supervise the assistants. With the death of his dear old patron his household had been dissolved. His savings and accumulated wealth had vanished during the last few years preceding his death, owing to careless management, and now Kuengolt had nothing left in the world save her own self and the care of Dietegen, provided he was able to give it, for he himself was but poor. She sat day after day at her stove, leaning her cheeks against its tiles representing, in four or five groups that recurred around the whole surface, the loss of Paradise, the creation of Adam and of Eve, the Tree of Knowledge, and the expulsion at last from their blessed abode. When the girl's face ached from the rough imprint of these raised images, she shifted it by turning to the next series, always and always contemplating them, and between the intervals shedding tears over her lot. But even then she could sometimes not help laughing outright when her glance traveled to that scene showing the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. For by reason of the potter's inadvertence this picture had been so modelled as to give to Adam instead of a real navel on his abdomen, a round little button and this protuberance repeating itself twentyfold on the surface of the stove excited unfailingly her playful humor, though it also heightened her discomfort when leaning against it.

In the midst of her fit of laughter, however, at this harmless blunder poor Kuengolt was invariably overcome by the weight of her misery, which would constrict heart and throat alike, and this conflict of thought and impressions produced a keen physical pain, so that her eyes grew wet and her face would look like that of a person wanting to sneeze yet unable to. So that at last she avoided looking at all at this particular group.

Meanwhile the great battle of Murten had also been fought, and at the same time Kuengolt's term of imprisonment was ended. Dietegen had given instructions for herself and Violande to keep house provisionally at the forestry lodge. Violande of late had become rather modest, contrite and well-behaved, for to her feminine sense of pride it had been a great gratification that the late forester, although he had postponed the wedding indefinitely and perhaps unduly, yet had wooed her and proposed marriage. But Dietegen himself did not remain at home. On the contrary, he drifted back and forth at the various scenes of the great war that had not yet ended.

And it must be owned that he, too, during all these troublous times, was not without faults. The rude customs of war, combined with the ever gnawing grief of what he had lost of his one-time hopes, had molded him afresh, so that a certain savagery and relentlessness had crept into the very fibre of his being. He joined that throng of adventurous young lads who under the name of "The Giddy Life" had started out on their own behalf to force the town of Geneva to pay out that amount of ransom which in the peace treaty was specified as its share. Out of Burgundian booty that had fallen to him he had had luxurious garments fashioned for himself. Trailing behind the banner of the Wild Boar (token of the aforementioned wild brotherhood) he wore a magnificent surcoat of roseate Burgundian damask, and the cross of the Swiss Federation on chest and back was made of heavy argent stuff and trimmed with seed pearls. His broad velvet hat was all about covered by a load of waving ostrich plumes, taken from knightly plunder in camps stormed during the campaign. Poniard and sword were suspended from costly girdles ornamented with blood-red rubies or emeralds. And beside a ponderous musket he carried a long spear which he used to balance himself with when striding along. His broad shoulders and straight, sinewy body looked formidable when his hawk eyes peered forth under his beplumed hat at a cowardly braggart or in order to strike terror in controversy. He was fond those days of seizing perhaps a shrieking maid by her braids, glancing a moment at her startled face, and then letting her go again at a venture.

Dressed up in this gorgeous style he had also, before joining the companions of The Giddy Life, paid a short call at the forestry lodge of Seldwyla. He was the very image of a nobly descended, pure-blooded warrior, so bold and strong, elastic and sure of himself he seemed.

When Kuengolt saw him thus, receiving from him just one short cold smile in passing, such as stern war had fixed on his features, her eyes were dazzled. And while subsequently he was in foreign parts she loved nothing better than to ponder the past and to live over in her thoughts the happy days of her childhood. And almost at all times her recollection dwelt upon that hour up on the steep slope where the Seldwyla ladies had caressed and fondled little Dietegen, clad in nothing but his poor sinner's shift and just escaped from an ignominious death; how they had crowned him with wildflowers, and made him their darling. Then she would hasten up to the summit of that hill, and would scan the far horizon towards the Southwest where, as people said, that unconquerable throng of youths, with him amongst them, was doing deeds of valor.

But in that same mountainous landscape, bifurcated as it was by the Ruechenstein territorial limits, that ominous scribe, Schafuerli, was frequently roaming about. This man was still thirsting for revenge because of the injury done his soul and his reputation alike, as he deemed; for though he had escaped that time any penalty he was yet looked upon with disfavor by most of the Ruechenstein citizens on account of the homicide committed by him. He still lived in hopes, therefore, of making amends by capturing the "witch" and turning her over for expiation to the authorities of his home town. When then one day poor Kuengolt was seated carelessly upon the very boundary line stone, deep in her meditations, with her feet resting on Ruechenstein soil, the vengeful hunchback quickly stepped out from some bushes, and assisted by a municipal guard, took her prisoner and brought her securely bound to Ruechenstein itself. And there she had to submit a second time to a penal trial for having with her witchery caused the death, wholly unatoned according to their notions, of the burgomaster's son.

In Seldwyla there was, notably in those stirring war times, nobody who felt at all any obligation to interfere in her behalf, even if there had been much of a hope for her. Hence the rumor soon spread that Kuengolt's life would soon pay the forfeit.

And it was Violande, once false and wicked, who now alone began to bestir herself for the rescue of her young relative. Pity and repentance moved her to the resolve to go in search of the only human being from whom prompt aid might be expected. Thus she went off, being on her errand night and day, ever going in a southwesterly direction, in order to find that band of overbold adventurers yclept "The Giddy Life," with Dietegen in their midst, as she knew. And since rumor was at all times quite busy with that mettlesome brotherhood she soon found herself in the right neighborhood, and at last came across Dietegen himself, just as he was throwing dice for money and booty with some of his hardy companions in a tavern.

Violande at once let him know about the ill-starred excursion of Kuengolt and about the danger now threatening her on the part of the Ruechensteiners, and against her own expectation he listened attentively. But his reply was discouraging.

"I am powerless to do anything in this case," he remarked, rather coldly. "For this is a matter of law, and since the Seldwyla people themselves do not choose to intervene, I should not be able to find even ten trusty comrades-in-arms to follow me and help free the child."

Violande, though, with that special knowledge which she had acquired from her former experiences, interrupted him.

"There is no need of force in this case," quoth she. "The Ruechenstein people have from old a law which says that any woman sentenced to death may be saved by a man and delivered over to him if he is willing and able to wed her on the spot."

Dietegen gazed at Violande long and in amazement wearing the while his sneering soldier's smile.

At last he spoke.

"I am then to marry a sort of courtesan," he growled darkly, twirling his small moustache daintily and putting on an incredulous mien, while yet at the same time a look of tenderness beamed forth from his eyes.

"Do not say so," put in Violande, "for it is not so."

And bursting into tears she seized Dietegen's hand, and continued: "In so far as she is to blame it is my own fault. Let me here confess it, that I wished to separate you and her, for I wanted you two out of the house in order to marry the father. And that is why I led the child into all sorts of folly."

"But she ought not to have let you do so," exclaimed Dietegen. "Her parents indeed came of good stock and deserved respect, but she has gone astray."

"But I swear to you on my hope of salvation," cried Violande, "it is as if a cleansing fire had passed over her, and all that once disfigured her has been removed. She is good and true, and she is so much in love with you that she long ago would have died if you also had left this world like her father. Besides, have you quite forgotten what you owe her? Would you now stand here in front of me, strong and handsome, if she had not rescued you out of the hangman's coffin? And mind you too of Kuengolt's kind mother and of her excellent father, who have educated and loved you like their own son. And are you entitled to be judge over the failings of a frail woman? Have you yourself never done wrong? Have you never slain a man in battle when there was no need of it? Have you never laid in ashes the hut of a defenceless and poor person during these wars? And even though you have not done any of these things, have you always shown mercy where you might?"

At this earnest plea Dietegen reddened, and then said: "I will not owe anything I can pay off, and will leave no debts behind me. If it be as you say regarding this Ruechenstein legal custom, I will go and help the child and take her to my heart. May God then help me and her if she is no longer able to conduct herself properly!"

Then Dietegen gave a sum of money to Violande, who was quite exhausted from the fatigues of her journey, and who needed rest and nourishment to strengthen herself for her return home. But he himself, only seizing his weapons, started off instantly right across the country, and had no rest or sleep until he discerned the dark towers and walls of Ruechenstein rising before his eyes.

There they had not delayed matters. They had, after the lapse of a few days consumed with legal formalities, condemned Kuengolt, who had meanwhile been confined in an old tower, to death. But inasmuch as her father had been of blameless life and reputation and had, moreover, fallen as a hero battling for his country, the sentence was that she would, as a sign of unusual

mercy, be merely beheaded, instead of being brought from life to death by fire or the wheel, or by some other of their customary procedures.

Accordingly she was taken to the place of execution, just outside the great gate of the town, barefooted and clothed in nought but a delinquent's shift. All adown her back and neck floated her heavy golden strands of hair. Step for step she went her death path, in the midst of her tormentors, several times stumbling, but of good heart and steady courage, since she had quite submitted to her sad fate and had abandoned all hope of life or happiness.

"Thus luck may turn!" she was saying to herself, with a slight smile, but just then she was thinking again of Dietegen, and sweet tears rained down her cheeks. Memory came back to her of how he owed his vigorous life to her, and, so good and unselfish she had grown in adversity, she felt glad of it and kindly towards him.

Already she had been placed in the fatal chair and was, in a sense, thankful of the chance to renew her drooping strength before receiving the death stroke. For the last time she gazed ahead at the glories of the land, at the hazy chain of mountains and the darksome woods. Then the headsman tied up her eyes, and was on the point of cutting off the wealth of her hair, or as much of it as protruded from under the cloth. But he held his hand, for Dietegen was there, only a short distance away, shouting with all his strength and waving his spear and hat to draw attention. At the same time, though, to insure delay, he tore his musket from the shoulder and sent a shot over the executioner's head. Astonished and affrighted both judges and headsman stopped in their doings, and all around the spectators took firm hold of their weapons. But Dietegen did not hesitate. In a few bounds he had arrived at the place, and had climbed to the bloody scaffold, so that under his weight it nearly broke. Seizing Kuengolt in her chair by the hair and shoulder, since her hands were already fastened behind, he for a moment had to recover his breath before being able to speak.

The Ruechensteiners, as soon as assured that there was but a single man and that no murderous attack was intended, grew attentive and waited for further developments. When at last he had stated his business, the judges retired to take counsel.

Not only their own habit of always strictly conforming with customs firmly rooted in the past, but also the reputation enjoyed by Dietegen himself in those warlike days and his whole appearance and demeanor, were in favor of adjusting this matter according to his wishes, once the first annoyance at the unceremonious interruption of so solemn a spectacle as an execution had been overcome. Even the rancorous scribe, Hans Schafuerli, who had put in an appearance to make sure of the death of the witch, hid from the grim man of war, whose heavy hand he feared despite his ordinarily daring temper.

The same priest who a short while back had been praying for the poor delinquent, now was told to perform the wedding ceremony on the very scaffold itself. Kuengolt was untied, placed upon her swaying feet, and then asked whether she was willing to marry this man who sought her as his lawful wife, and to follow him through life.

Mute she looked up to him who, after the cloth had been removed from her eyes was the first object she saw again of this world that she had taken leave from a few moments before, and it seemed to her that it must all be a delicious dream. But in order to miss nothing even if it should only turn out a dream, she nodded, being still unable to speak, with great presence of mind, three or four times in rapid succession, in a ghost-like manner, so that the severe councilmen of Ruechenstein were touched, and to make quite sure she repeated her nodding another few times. And tremblingly Kuengolt was supported during the wedding ceremony by the same sinister men who had come to witness her shameful death. But she became his wife according to all the established forms of the Church.

And now, this done, she was handed over to Dietegen "with life and limb," as the phrase went, just as she was, without any later claim of dowry or recompense, damages, or excuse, against his payment of fees for the priest and of money for ten gallons of wine for headsman and assistants, as a wedding gift, and of three pounds of pennies for a new jerkin for the headsman.

After paying all this, Dietegen took his wife by the hand and left with her the place of execution.

Since he had to take her, however, just as she was, and she was not only barefooted but merely clad in her death shift, the season also being early and the weather chilly, she was suffering from this and unable to keep step with her husband. He lifted her, therefore, from the ground to his arms, pushed his hat back from his forehead, and then she put her arms around his neck, leaned her head against his, and immediately fell asleep, while he used his long spear as a staff in his other hand. Thus he walked swiftly along on the mountain path, all alone by himself, and he felt how in her sleep she was weeping softly, and how her breath grew less agitated. At last her tears ran along his own face, and then a strange illusion as though blessed bliss were baptising him anew came over him. And this rough, war-hardened man, for all his self-command, felt his own tears staining his ruddy bearded chin. His was the life he bore in his arms, and he held it as if God's whole world were in his keeping.

When they arrived on the spot where he himself, a small child, had sat among the women in

his scanty garb and where more recently poor Kuengolt had been taken prisoner, the March sun shone clear and warm, and he concluded to take a short rest. Dietegen sat down on the boundary stone, and let his burden slowly glide down on his knees. The first glance which she gave him, and the first poor words which she stammered, were proof to him that he not only had truly fulfilled a sacred duty towards her by what he had done, but that in addition he had undertaken another, an even more sacred one, namely, to conduct himself through life in such a manner as to be worthy of the happy lot that had fallen to him in becoming the husband of the charming creature at his side. And this he silently vowed to do.

The soil around the boundary stone was already thickly speckled with primroses and wild violets, the sky was cloudless, and not a sound broke the still air but the cheery song of the finches in the wood.

So they spoke no more for some time, but both breathed the soft air that filled their lungs with new hope and life, but at last they rose, and because from now on there was but the velvety moss-covered ground to traverse which led through the beeches down to the forestry lodge, Kuengolt was able to walk by his side. Suddenly she touched her golden hair, being afraid that it had been shorn by the headsman. But as she still found it unharmed, she halted for a moment, saying: "May I not have a little bridal wreath?" And she looked at her husband with a half-roguish smile.

He let his eyes roam all about him, and discovered a bunch of snowdrops in full bloom. Quickly he went and cut off enough of the flowers to weave into a coronet for his bride, and then he carefully placed it on her head, saying: "It is not much. It is out of fashion. But let this wreath be a token to us and all the world that our domestic honor will remain as spotless as these. Whoever by word or deed will harm it, let him pay the penalty!"

Then he kissed her once, firmly and with a look that boded ill to any disturber of his peace, right under the wreath, and she looked up at him, satisfied and with confidence, and then they two resumed again their walk.

The forestry lodge they found empty and deserted. The house servants had left it unguarded, partly from mourning Kuengolt whose death on the scaffold they had assumed as certain, partly from neglect of their duty. None of them returned under its roof that day. But Kuengolt and Dietegen did not miss them. She now with every minute recovered more and more from the numbing effects of her recent miseries, and to feel herself at last in truth the mistress of this house and clothed with wifely dignity poured balm into her soul. Like a squirrel she busied herself, hurried from chamber to chamber, from closet to closet, counting her treasures, investigating all. Soon she returned dressed in the splendid bridal costume of her mother, the one she had told Dietegen about that night when they, both small children, had shared the same cot on the night of his first arrival, and she shone like a queen in it. But next she set the table, using the linen which her mother had always reserved for festive occasions, and placed in platters and dishes on the snowy surface what she had been able to find in the house.

All by themselves, with no noise from the outside world to disturb them, they then sat down, she in her wreath, and he with weapons laid aside, and ate the simple meal prepared by her. And then they went to bed just as peacefully.

"Thus luck may turn!" she said, the second time that day, as she lay content by the side of her beloved. For after all there was a bit of roguishness left in her heart, despite all she had gone through.

Dietegen rose to be a man of great and generally acknowledged reputation as a warrior and military leader in those troubled days. He was not much better than others of his ilk in those times, but rather subject to similar failings. He became a doughty captain in the field, taking service with or against various countries and belligerents, according to what seemed to him good and where his own advantage lay. He hired mercenaries, earned gold and rich booty, and so he drifted from one war to another, conducted one campaign after the other, always fighting and seeing the horrors of warfare closely. And in so doing he did precisely what the first men of his country did in those warlike days, and he grew steadily in power and influence, and his word and his mailed fist were held in awe in all those parts.

But with his wife he lived in uninterrupted concord and affection, and the honor of his hearth was never questioned. And she bore him a number of strong and militant children, all endowed with the vigorous spirit alive in father and mother. And of their descendants there are flourishing even at this day a number in sundry countries, rich in substance and potency, in countries whither the warlike gifts of their forbears had blown them.

Violande on her part soon after Dietegen's and Kuengolt's union, which latter had been in such large part brought about by herself, retired to a veritable convent, and became a nun for good and all. To the children of the couple she sent quite often all sorts of goodies and tidbits. She also rather retained her habit of being interested in the great events of the day, and in influencing them by dint of feminine intrigues more or less. She liked to sit along with other guests of distinction, respected as a woman of shrewd and subtle mind and with a huge golden cross on

her bosom, on banquet days at Dietegen's house, and she would demurely advise Dietegen, now adorned not only with a long and majestic beard, but also with the heavy golden chain denoting knighthood, in matters of state. Her counsel would still flow as mellifluously as ever, and her politeness remained proverbial.

How Kuengolt looked at the beginning of the sixteenth century, after many years of happy married life, may still be studied from the painting of a great artist which hangs among others in a well-known collection and which is expressly designated as her portrait. One sees there a slim elegant patrician woman, the beautiful lineaments of the face bespeaking plainly deep seriousness and uncommon understanding, but tempered by a gentle and somewhat roguish humor.

She also died before old age had claimed her, like her mother in consequence of a chill. That was when her husband, in one of the campaigns for the possession of Milan, had perished and was buried in the cemetery next a small chapel in Lombardy. Kuengolt hastened there, intending to have a monument in his honor erected; but indeed she spent two long nights at his tomb, with a ceaseless rainstorm raging, thus contracting a fever that carried her off within a couple of days, and she thus lies next to her husband in Italian soil.

ROMEO AND JULIET OF THE VILLAGE

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Near the fine river which flows along half an hour's distance from Seldwyla, rises in a long stretch a headland which finally, itself carefully cultivated, is lost in the fertile plain. Some distance away at the foot of this rise there lies a village, to which belong many large farms, and across the hillock itself there were, years ago, three splendid holdings, like unto as many giant ribbons, side by side.

One sunny September morning two peasants were plowing on two of these vast fields, the two which stretched along the middle one. The middle one itself seemed to have lain fallow and waste for a long, long time, for it was thickly covered with stones, bowlders and tall weeds, and a multitude of winged insects were humming around and over it. The two peasants who on both sides of this huge wilderness were following their plows, were big, bony men of near forty, and at the first glance one could tell them as men of substance and well-regulated circumstances. They wore short breeches made of strong canvas, and every fold in these garments seemed to be carved out of rock. When they hit against some obstacle with their plow their coarse shirt sleeves would tremble slightly, while the closely shaved faces continued to look steadfastly into the sunlight ahead. Tranquilly they would go on accurately measuring the width of the furrow, and now and then looking around them if some unusual noise reached their ears. They would then peer attentively in the direction indicated, while all about them the country spread out measureless and peaceful. Sedately and with a certain unconscious grace they would set one foot before the other, slowly advancing, and neither of them ever spoke a word unless it was to briefly instruct the hired man who was leading the horses. Thus they resembled each other strongly from a distance; for they fitly represented the peculiar type of people of the district, and at first sight one might have distinguished them from each other only by this one fact that he on the one side wore the peaked fold of his white cap in front and the other had it hanging down his neck. But even this kept changing, since they were plowing in opposite directions; for when they arrived at the end of the new furrow up on high, and thus passed each other, the one who now strode against the strong east wind had his cap tip turned over until it sat in the back of the bull neck, while the second one, who had now the wind behind him, got the tip of his cap reversed. There was also a middling moment, so to speak, when both caps of shining white seemed to flare skywards like shimmering flames. Thus they plowed and plowed in restful diligence, and it was a fine sight in this still golden September weather to see them every short while passing each other on the summit of the hill, then easily and slowly drifting farther and farther apart, until both

disappeared like sinking stars beyond the curve of the rise, only to reappear a bit later in precisely the same fashion.

When they found a stone in their furrows they threw it on the fallow field between them, doing so leisurely and accurately, like men who have learnt by habit to gauge the correct distance. But this occurred rarely, for this waste field was apparently already loaded with about all the pebbles, bowlders and rocks to be discovered in the neighborhood.

In this quiet way the long forenoon was nearly spent when there approached from the village a tiny vehicle. So small it looked at first when it began to climb up the height that it seemed a toy. And indeed, it was just that in a sense, for it was a baby carriage, painted in vivid green, in which the children of the two plowers, a sturdy little youngster and a slip of a small girl, jointly brought the lunch for their parent's delectation. For each of the two fathers there lay a fine appetizing loaf in the cart, wrapped neatly in a clean napkin, a flask of cool wine, with glasses, and some smaller tidbits as well, all of which the tender farmer's wife had sent along for the hard-working husband. But there were other things as well in the little vehicle: apples and pears which the two children had picked up on the way and out of which they had taken a bite or so, and a wholly naked doll with only one leg and a face entirely soiled and besmeared, and which sat self-satisfied in this carriage like a dainty young lady and allowed herself to be transported in this way. This small vehicle after sundry difficulties and delays at last arrived in the shade of a high growth of underbrush which luxuriated there at the edge of the big field, and now it was time to take a look at the two drivers. One was a boy of seven, the other a little girl of five, both of them sound and healthy, and else there was nothing remarkable about them except that they had very fine eyes and the girl, besides, a rather tawny complexion and curly dark hair, and the expression of her little face was ardent and trustful.

The plowers meanwhile had also reached once more the top, given their horses a provender of clover, and left their plows in the half-done furrow; then as good neighbors they went to partake jointly of the tempting collation, and meeting there they gave greeting, for until that moment they had not yet spoken to each other on that day.

While they ate, slowly but with a keen appetite, and of their food also shared with the children, the latter not budging as long as there were eatables in sight, they allowed their glances to roam near and far, and their eyes rested on the town lying there spread out in its wreath of mountains, with its haze of shiny smoke. For the plentiful noonday meal which the Seldwylians prepared each and every day used to conjure up a silvery cloud of smoke surrounding the roofs and visible from afar, and this would float right along the sides of their mountains.

"These loafers at Seldwyla are again living on the fat of the land," said Manz, one of the two peasants, and Marti, the other, replied: "Yesterday a man called on me on account of these fallow fields."

"From the district council? Yes, he saw me too," rejoined Manz.

"Hm, and probably also said you might use the land and pay the rental to the council?"

"Yes, until it should have been decided whom the land belongs to and what is to be done with it. But I wouldn't think of it, with the land in the condition it's in, and told him they might sell the land and keep the money till the owner had been found, which probably will never be done. For, as we know, whatever is once in the hands of the custodian at Seldwyla, does not easily leave it again. Besides, the whole matter is rather involved, I've heard. But these Seldwyla folks would like nothing better than to receive every little while some money that they could spend in their foolish way. Of course, that they could also do with the sum received from a sale. However, we here would not be so stupid as to bid very high for it, and then at least we should know whom the land belongs to."

"Just what I think myself, and I said the same thing to the fellow."

They kept silent for a moment, and then Manz added: "A pity it is, all the same, that this fine soil is thus going to waste every year. I can scarce bear to see it. This has now been going on for a score of years, and nobody cares a rap about it, it seems, for here in the village there is really nobody who has any claim to it, nor does anybody know what has become of the children of that hornblower, the one who went to the dogs."

"Hm," muttered Marti, "that is as may be. When I have a look at the black fiddler, the one who is a vagrant for a spell, and then at other times plays the fiddle at dances, I could almost swear that he is a grandson of that hornblower, and who, of course, does not know that he is entitled to these fields. And what in the world could he do with them? To go on a month's spree, and then to be as badly off as before. Besides, what can one say for sure? After all, there is nothing to prove it."

"Indeed, yes, one might do harm by interfering," rejoined Manz. "As it is we have to do with our own affairs, and it takes trouble enough now to keep this hobo from acquiring home rights in our commune. All the time they want to burden us with that expense. But if his folks once have joined the stray sheep, let him keep to them and play his fiddle for a living. How can we really

know whether he is the hornblower's grandson or no? As far as I'm concerned, although I believe I can recognize the old fellow in his dark face, I say to myself: It is human to err, and the slightest scrap of a legal document, a bit of a baptismal record or something, would be to my mind better proof than ten sinful human faces."

"My opinion exactly," opined Marti, "although he says it is not his fault that he never was baptized. But are we to lug our baptismal fount around in the woods? No indeed. That stands immovable in the church, and on the other hand, to carry around the dead we have the stretcher which is always hanging from the wall. As it is, we are too many now in our village and shall soon need another schoolmaster."

With that the colloquy and the midday meal of the two peasants came to an end, and they now rose and prepared to finish the rest of their day's task. The two children, on the other hand, having vainly planned to drive home with their fathers, now pulled their little vehicle into the shade of the linden saplings close by, and next undertook a campaign of adventure and discovery into the vast wilderness of the waste fields. To them this wilderness was interminable, with its immense weeds, its overgrown flower stalks, and its huge piles of stone and rock. After wandering, hand in hand, for some time in the very center of this waste, and after having amused themselves in swinging their joined hands over the top of the giant thistles, they at last sat down in the shade of a perfect forest of weeds, and the little girl began to clothe her doll with the long leaves of some of these plants, so that the doll soon wore a beautiful habit of green, with fringed borders, while a solitary poppy blossom she had found was drawn over dolly's head as a brilliant bonnet, and this she tied fast with a grass blade for ribbon. Now the little doll looked exactly like a good fairy, especially after being further ornamented with a necklace and a girdle of small scarlet berries. Then she sat it down high in the cup on the stalk of the thistle, and for a minute or so the two jointly admired the strangely beautified dolly. The boy tired first of this and brought dolly down with a well-aimed pebble. But in that way dolly's finery got disordered, and the little girl undressed it quickly and set to anew to decorate her pet. But just when the doll had been disrobed and only wore the poppy flower on her head, the boy grasped the doll, and threw it high into the air. The girl, though, with loud plaints jumped to catch it, and the boy again caught it first and tossed it again and again, the little girl all the while vainly attempting to recover it. Quite a while this wild game lasted, but in the violent hands of the boy the flying doll now came to grief, and sustained a small fracture near the knee of her sole remaining limb. And from a small aperture some sawdust and bran began to escape. Hardly had he perceived that when he became quiet as a mouse, with open lips endeavoring eagerly to enlarge the little hole with his nails, in order to investigate the inside and find out whence the scattered bran came. The poor little girl, rendered suspicious by the boy's sudden silence, now squeezed up and noticed with terror his efforts.

"Just look!" shouted the boy and swung the doll's leg right before his playmate's nose, so that the bran spurted into her face. When she tried to recover her doll, and pleaded and shrieked, he sprang away with his prey, and did not desist before the whole leg had been emptied of its filling and hung, a mere hollow shell, from his hand. Then, to crown his misdeeds, he actually threw the remains of the doll away, and behaved in a rude and grossly indifferent manner when the little girl gathered up her treasure and put it weeping in her apron.

But she took it out after a while and gazed with tears at what was left. When she fathomed the full extent of the damage, she resumed weeping, and it was particularly the ruined leg that grieved her; indeed it hung just as limp and thin as the tail of a salamander. When she wept aloud for sorrow the sinner evinced evidently some qualms of conscience, and he stood stock-still, his features suffused with anxiety and repentance. When she became aware of this state of the case, she stopped crying and struck him several times with her doll, and he pretended that she hurt him and exclaimed in a natural manner: "Outch!" So naturally indeed did he do so that she was satisfied and now engaged with him in the great sport of further and complete destruction. Together they bored hole upon hole into the martyred body, and let the bran out everywhere. This bran they collected with great pains, deposited it on a big flat stone, and stirred it over and over to ascertain its mysterious properties.

The sole part of the doll still in its former state was the head, and thus of course it attracted the special attention of the two children. With great care they separated it from the trunk, and peered in amazement at its hollow interior. Seeing this great hollow the thought occurred to them to fill it up with the loose bran. With their tiny baby fingers they stuffed and stuffed by turns the bran into the empty space, and for the first time in its existence this head was filled with something. The boy, however, evidently deemed the task incomplete; probably it required some life, something moving, to satisfy him. So he caught a huge blue fly, and while he held it tight he instructed the little girl to let out the bran once more. Then he placed the fly into the hollow head, and stopped up the exit with a small bunch of grass. The two children held the head to their ears, and then put it solemnly upon a great rock. Since the head was still covered with the scarlet poppy, this receptacle of sound now closely resembled a soothsaying oracle, and the two listened with great respect to queer noises it emitted, in deep silence as if fairy tales were being told, holding each other close meanwhile. But every prophet awakens not only respect but also terror and ingratitude. The odd noises inside the hollow head aroused the human cruelty of the children, and jointly they resolved to bury it. They dug a shallow grave, and placed the head in it, without first obtaining the views of the imprisoned fly on it. Then they erected over the grave a monument of stone. But awe seized them at this instance, since they had buried

something living and conscious, and they went away from the scene of this pagan sacrifice. In a spot wholly overgrown with green herbs the little girl lay down on her back, being tired, and began singing, over and over again, a few simple words in a monotonous voice, and the little boy sat near and joined singing, and he, too, was so tired as almost to fall asleep. The sun shone right into the open mouth of the singing girl, illuminating her white little teeth, and rendered her scarlet lips semi-transparent. The boy saw these white teeth, and he held her head and curiously investigating them he said: "Guess how many teeth you have." The little girl reflected for a moment, and then she said at random: "A hundred!" "No," said the boy, "two and thirty." But he added: "Wait, I will count them!"

And he started to count them, and counted over and over, and it was at no time thirty-two, and so he resumed his count. The girl kept patient for a long time, but at last she got up and said: "Now I will count yours." And the boy lay down amongst the herbs, the little one above him, and she embraced his head, he opened wide his mouth, and she began to count: One, two, seven, five, two, one; for the little thing knew not yet how to count. The boy corrected her and instructed her how to go about it, and thus she also started again and again, and curiously enough it was precisely this little game that pleased them best of all that day. But at last the little girl sank down on the soft couch of herbs, and the two children fell asleep in the full glare of the noon sun.

Meanwhile the fathers had finished their job of plowing and had changed the stubble field into a brown plain, strongly scenting the earth. When at the end of the last furrow the helper of one of the two wanted to stop, his master shouted: "Why do you stop? Turn up another furrow!" "But we're done," said the helper. "Shut your mouth, and do what I tell you," replied the other. And they did turn once more and tore a big furrow right into the middle, the ownerless, field, so that weeds and stones flew about. But the peasant took no time to remove these. Probably he considered that there was ample time for that some other day. He was satisfied to do the thing for the nonce only in its main feature. Thus he went up the height softly, and when up on top and the delicious play of the wind now turned once more the tip of his white cap backwards, on the other side of the fallow field the second peasant was just plowing a similar furrow, the wind having also reversed the tip of his cap, and cut also a goodly furrow off from the same fallow field. Each of them saw, of course, what the other did, but neither seemed to do so, and thus they once more strode away one from the other, each falling star finally disappearing below the curve of the ground. Thus the woof of Fate spins its net around us, "and what he weaves no weaver knows."

One harvest after another went by and the two children grew steadily taller and handsomer, and the ownerless fields as steadily smaller between the two neighbors. With every new plowing the section between lost hither and thither one furrow, without there being a word said about it, and without a human eye apparently noting the misdeed. The stones and rocks became more and more compact and formed already a perfect and continuous ridge the whole length of the field, and the shrubs and weeds on it had already attained such an altitude that the two children, although they, too, had grown, could no longer see each other across them.

They no longer went to the field together, since ten-year-old Salomon, or Sali, as he was mostly called, now kept with the bigger boys or the men, and dusky Vreni,[1] though a fiery little thing, had already to place herself under the supervision of those of her sex, for fear of being laughed at as a tomboy. In spite of all that they improved the occasion of the harvest, when everybody was out in the fields, to climb once on top of the huge stony ridge, or breastworks, which ordinarily divided them, and to wage a toy war, pushing each other down from it, as the culmination of the battle. Even though they had no longer anything more to do with each other, this annual ceremony was maintained by them all the more carefully since the land of their fathers did not meet anywhere else.

However, now the fallow field was to be sold, after all, and the sum realized provisionally kept by the authorities. The day came at last, and the public sale took place on the spot itself. But beside Manz and Marti there were present only a few curious ones, since nobody but they felt like buying the odd piece of ground and cultivating it between the property of the two peasants. For although these two belonged among the best farmers of the village, and had done nothing but what two-thirds of the others would also have done under like circumstances, still now they were looked at askance because of it, and nobody wanted to be squeezed in between them in the diminished and orphaned field. For most men are so made as to be quite ready to commit a wrong which is more or less in vogue, especially if the circumstances of the case facilitate the wrong. But as soon as the wrong has been perpetrated by some one else, they are glad that it was not they who had been exposed to the temptation, and then they regard the guilty one almost as a warning example in regard to their own failings, and treat him with a delicate aversion as a sort of lightning rod of evil itself, as one marked by the gods themselves, while all the while their mouths are watering for the advantages thus accrued to him by means of his sin.

Manz and Marti were, therefore, the only ones who seriously bid on the ownerless land, and after a rather spirited contest, during which the price was driven up higher than had been supposed, it was Manz to whom it was awarded. The officials and the lookers-on soon drifted away, and the two neighbors who had been busy on their fields after the sale, met again, and Marti said: "I suppose you will now put your land, the old and the new, together, halve it, and

work it in that way? That, at least, is what I should have done if I had got the land."

"That indeed is what I mean to do," answered Manz, "for as one single field it would not be easy to manage. But there is another thing I want to say. I noticed the other day that you drove into the lower end of this field that has now become mine, and that you cut off quite a good-sized triangle. It may be you thought at the time that you yourself would soon own the whole of it and that then it would make no difference anyway. But since now it belongs to me, you will admit that I cannot and will not permit such a curtailment of my property rights, and you will not take it amiss if I again straighten out the right lines. Of course you will not. There need be no hard feelings on that score."

Marti, however, replied just as coolly: "Neither do I look for any trouble. For my opinion is you have purchased the field just as it is. We both examined it before the sale, and of course it has not changed within an hour or so."

"Nonsense," said Manz, "what was done formerly, under different conditions, we will not go into. But too much is too much, and everything has its limit, and must be adjusted according to reason in the end. These three fields have from of old been lying one next to the other just as though marked with the measuring tape. You may think it funny to put in such an unjustifiable objection or claim. We both of us would get a new nickname if I let you keep that crooked end of it without rhyme or reason. It must come back where it by right belongs."

But Marti only laughed and said: "All at once so afraid of what people may think? But then, it's easily arranged. I have no objection at all to such a crooked-shaped bit of land. If you don't like it, all right, we can straighten it out. But not on my side, I swear."

"Don't talk so strange," replied Manz with some heat. "Of course it will be straightened out, and that on your side. You can bet your bottom dollar on that."

"Well, we'll see about that," was Marti's parting remark, and the two men separated without even looking at each other. On the contrary, they gazed steadfastly in different directions, as if something of enormous interest were floating in the air which it was absolutely necessary to keep an eye on.

On the next day already Manz sent his hired boy, also a wench working for daily wage, and his own boy Sali out to the new field, to begin removing the weeds and wild growths, and to pile them up at certain places, so as to make the loading up and carting away of the crop of stones all the easier. This noted a change in his character, this sending the little boy, scarcely eleven, whom he had never before driven to hard work such as weeding, out to field labor, and this against the will of the mother. It seemed indeed, since he defended his order with solemn and high-sounding words, as if he wanted to daze his own better conscience. At any rate, the slight wrong thus done to his own flesh and blood in insisting on onerous and unfit labor, was but one of the consequences growing out of the original wrong done by him for years in regard to the field itself. One by one more wrong, more evil unfolded itself. The three meanwhile weeded away industriously on the long strip of ground, and hacked away at the queer plants that had been flourishing on the soil for so many years. And to the young people doing this hard work, albeit it taxed and tried their strength greatly, it really was something of an amusement, since it was no carefully graduated and scaled task, but rather a wild job of destruction. After piling all this vegetable refuse up in heaps and letting the sun dry it, it was set afire with great jubilation and noise, and when the murky flames shot up and broad swaths of smoke waved irregularly, the young people jumped and danced about like a band of wild Indians.

But this was the last festival on the ominous new field, and little Vreni, Marti's young daughter, also crept out and joined the revels. The unusual occasion and the spirit of rampant gaiety easily brought it about that the two playmates of yore once more came in contact and were happy and jolly at their bonfire. Other children, too, gathered, until there was quite a crowd of youthful, excited merrymakers assembled. But always it happened that, as soon as the two became separated in the throng, Vreni would rejoin Sali, or Sali Vreni. When it was she it was a treat to watch her face when she slipped her little hand in that of the boy, her animated features and her glowing eyes fairly brimming with pleasure. To both of them it seemed as though this glorious day could never end. Old Manz, though, came out toward evening, to see what had been accomplished, and despite the fact that their labor had been done well and as directed, he scolded at the childish jollification and drove the young people off his ground. Almost at the same time Marti visited his own section adjoining, and noticing his little daughter from afar, he whistled to her shrill and peremptory, and when she obeyed the summons in frightened haste he struck her harshly in the face without giving any reason. So that both little ones went home weeping and sad; yet they were both still so much children that they scarcely knew at this time why they were so sad or knew before why they felt so happy. As for the rudeness of their fathers they did not understand the underlying motive of it, and it did not touch their hearts.

During the next days the labor became harder and more strenuous, and some men had to be hired for it. For the task was this time to load and clean off the huge crop of stones along the entire length of the field.

There seemed to be no end to this work, and one would have said that all the stones in the world had been collected there. But Manz did not have the stones carted off entirely from the

field, but every load was taken to the triangular piece of ground in dispute, where it was dumped. It was dumped on the neatly plowed soil that Marti had toiled over. Manz had previously drawn a straight line as boundary, and now he loaded this spot down with all these thousands upon thousands of pebbles, rocks and bowlders which he and Marti had for whole decades thrown upon ownerless soil. The heap grew, and grew for days and weeks, until there was a mighty pyramid of stone which, as Manz felt convinced, his adversary would surely be loath to trouble with. Marti, in fact, had expected nothing of the kind. He had rather thought that Manz would go to work with his plow, as he used to do, and had therefore waited to see him appear in that part. And Marti did not hear of the rocky monument until almost completed. When he ran out in the full blast of his anger, and saw it all, he hastened home and fetched the village magistrate in order to protest against the accumulation of stones on "his" ground, and to have the small bit of ground officially declared as in litigation.

From that sinister day on the two peasants sued and countersued each other in court, and neither desisted until both were completely ruined.

The thinking of these two ordinarily shrewd and fair men became fundamentally wrong and fallacious. They were unable to view anything henceforth as unrelated with their quarrel. Their arguments fell short of the mark in everything. The most narrow sense of legality, of what was permitted and what not, filled the head of each of them, and neither was able to understand how the other could seize so entirely without reason or right this bit of soil, in itself so insignificant. In the case of Manz there was added a wonderful sense for symmetry and parallel lines, and he felt really and truly shortened in his rights by Martins insistence on retaining hold of a fragment of property laid out on different geometrical lines. But both tallied in their conceptions in this that the other must think him a veritable fool to try and get the better of him in this particular manner, in this impudent and unparalleled manner, since to make such an attempt at all was perhaps thinkable in the case of a mere nobody, of a man without reputation and substance, but surely not in the case of an upstanding, energetic and able man, of one who was both willing and able to take care of his interests. And it was this consideration above all that rankled and festered in the heart of each of the two once so friendly neighbors. Each felt himself hurt in his quaint sense of honor, and let himself go headlong in the rush of passion and of combativeness, without even attempting at any time to stop the resultant moral and material decay and ruin. Their two lives henceforth resembled the torture of two lost souls who, upon a narrow board, carried along a dark and fearsome river, yet deal tremendous blows at the air, seize upon each other and destroy each other finally, all in the false belief of having seized and trying to destroy their evil fate itself.

As their whole matter in dispute was in itself and on both sides not clean or lucid, they soon got into the hands of all sorts of swindlers and cutthroats, of pettifoggers and evil counselors, men who filled their imagination with glittering bubbles, containing no substance whatever. And especially it was the speculators and dishonest agents of Seldwyla who found this case one after their own heart, and soon each of the two litigants had a whole train of advisers, go-betweens and spies around him, fellows who in all sorts of crooked ways knew how to draw cash money out of them. For the quarrel for that tiny fragment of soil with the stone pyramid on top on which already a perfect forest of weeds, thistles and nettles had grown anew, was only the first stage in a labyrinth of errors that little by little changed the whole character and method of living for the two. It was singular, too, how in the case of two men of about fifty there could shoot up and become fixed an entire crop of new habits and morals, principles and hopes, all of a kind which were foreign to their former natures, how men who all their lives had been noted for their hard common-sense could become day-dreamers and gullible oafs.

And the more money they lost by all this the more they longed to acquire more, and the less they possessed the more persistently they endeavored to become rich and to shine before their fellows. Thus they easily allowed themselves to be hoodwinked by the clumsiest tricks, and year after year they would play in all the foreign lotteries of which Seldwyla agents were praising to them the splendid chances. But never so much as a dollar came their way in prizes. On the other hand, they forever heard of the big winnings in these lotteries made by others; they also were told that it had hung just by a hair that they would have done as well, and thus they were constantly bled by these leeches of their scantier and scantier means.

Now and then the rascally Seldwylians played a trick on the two deadly enemies which for its peculiar raciness was specially relished by them, the people of Seldwyla, that is. They would sell the two peasants sections of the same lottery tickets, so that Manz as well as Marti would build their hopes of a rich strike on precisely the same fallacious foundation, and also in the end would feel the same despondency from the same source. Half their time the two now spent in town, and there each had his headquarters in a miserable tavern. There they would indulge in foolish bragging and bluster, would drink too much and play the Lord Bountiful to loafers that would flatter the simpletons to the top of their bent, and all the while the dark doubt would assail them that they who in order not to be reckoned dunces had gone to law about a trifling object, had now really become just that and furthermore, were so reckoned by general consent.

The other half of the time they spent at home, morose and incapable of steady work or sober reflection. Habitually neglecting their farm labor, at times they tried to make up for that by undue haste, overworking their help and thus soon unable to retain any respectable men in their employ.

Thus things went from bad to worse little by little, and within less than ten years both of them were overburdened with debts, and stood like storks with one leg upon their farms, so that the slightest change might blow them over. But no matter how else they fared, the hatred between them grew more intense every day, since each looked upon the other as the cause of his misfortune, as his archenemy, as his foe without rhyme or reason, as the one being in the world whom the devil purposely had invented to ruin him. They spat out before each other when they saw the adversary approaching from afar. Nobody belonging to them was permitted to speak to wife, child or servants of the other, on pain of instant brutal punishment. Their wives behaved differently under these circumstances. Marti's wife, who came of good family and was of a fine disposition, did not long survive the rapid downfall of her house and family, sorrowed silently and died before her little daughter was fourteen. The wife of Manz, on the other hand, altered her whole character. Only for the worse, of course. And to do that all she needed to do was to aggravate some of her natural defects, let them go on, so to speak, without bridling them at all. Her passion for tidbits and sweets became boundless; her love of gossip deteriorated into a veritable craze, and she soon became unable to tell the truth about anything or anybody. She habitually spoke the very contrary of what was in her thoughts, cheated and deceived her own husband, and found keen pleasure in getting everybody by the ears. Her original frankness and her harmless delight in satisfying her feminine curiosity turned into evil intrigue and the inclination to make mischief between neighbors and friends. Instead of suffering patiently under the rudeness and changed habits of her husband, she fooled him and laughed behind his back in doing so. No matter if he now and then behaved with cruelty to her and his household, she did not care. She denied herself nothing, became more luxurious in her tastes as his money affairs grew steadily more involved, and fattened on the very misfortunes that were rapidly leading to complete ruin.

That with all that the two children fared any better was scarcely to be expected. While still mere human buds and incapable of meeting the harsh fate slowly preparing for them, they were done out of their youth and out of the hopes and advantages incident to their tender years. Vreni indeed was worse off in this respect than Sali, the boy, since her mother was dead and she was exposed in a wasted home to the tyranny of a father whose violent instincts found no check whatever. When sixteen Vreni had developed into a slender and charming young girl. Her hair of dark-brown naturally curled down to her flashing eyes; her swiftly coursing blood seemed to shimmer through the delicate oval of her dusky cheeks, and the scarlet of her dainty lips made a strikingly vivid contrast, so that everybody looked twice when she passed. And despite her sad bringing-up, an ardent love of life and an inextinguishable cheerfulness were trembling in every fibre of Vreni's being. Laughing and smiling at the least encouragement she forgot her troubles easily, and was always ready for a frolic and a romp if domestic weather permitted at all, that is, if her father did not hinder and torture her too cruelly. However, with all her lightheartedness and her buoyant temperament, the deepening shadows over the house inevitably enshrouded her all too often. She had to bear the brunt of her father's soured disposition, and she had hardly any help in trying to keep house for him after a fashion. On her young shoulders mainly rested the embarrassments of a home constantly threatened by importunate creditors and wild boon companions of her dissolute father. And not alone that. With the natural taste of her sex for a neat and clean appearance her father refused her nearly every means to gratify it. Thus she had great trouble to ornament her pretty person the way it deserved. But somehow she managed to do it, to possess always a becoming holiday attire, including even a couple of vividly colored kerchiefs that set off marvelously her darksome beauty. Full of youthful animation and gaiety she found it hard to mostly have to renounce all the social pleasures of her years; but at least this prevented her from falling into the opposite extreme. Besides, young as she was, she had witnessed the declining days and the death of her mother, and had been deeply impressed by it, so that this had acted as another restraint on her joyous disposition. It was almost a pathetic sight to observe how notwithstanding all these serious obstacles pretty Vreni instantly would respond to the calls of joy if the occasion was at all favorable, as a flower after drooping in a heavy rainstorm will raise its head at the first rays of the reappearing sun.

Sali was not faring quite so ill. He was a good-looking and vigorous young fellow who knew how to take care of himself and whose size and physical strength alone would have forbidden harsh bodily mistreatment. He saw, of course, how his parents were sliding down-hill more and more, and he seemed to remember a time when things had been otherwise. He even carried in his memory the picture of his father as that of an upstanding, determined, serious and energetic peasant, while now he saw before him all the while a man who was a gray-headed dolt, a quarrelsome fool, who with all his fits of impotent rage and all his brag and bluster was every hour more and more crawling backwards like a crawfish. But when these things displeased him and filled him with shame and sorrow, although he could not very well understand how it all had come about, the influence of his mother came to deaden this feeling and to fill him with an unjustified hope of improvement. She would flatter her son in the same extravagant and wholly unreasonable manner which had become her second nature in dealing with the new troubles that were gradually overcoming the whole family. For in order to lead her life of self-indulgence the more easily and to have one critical observer the less, and to make her son her partisan, but also as a vent for her love of display, she contrived to let her son have everything he had a desire for. She saw to it that he was always dressed with care, and entirely too expensively for the means of the family, and indulged him in his pleasures. He on his part accepted all that without much thought or gratitude, since he noticed at the same time how his mother was juggling with and tricking his father, and how she was continually telling untruths and vainly boasting. And while thus allowing his mother to spoil him without paying much attention to the process itself, no

great harm was yet done in his case, since he had so far not been much tainted by the vices and sins of mother or father. Indeed, in his youthful pride he had the strong wish to become, if possible, a man such as he recalled his own father once to have been, a man of substance and of rational and successful conduct of his life. Sali was really very much as his father knew himself to have been at his own age, and a queer remnant of respectability urged the father to treat his son well. In honoring him he seemed to honor his old self. Confused reminiscences at such times drifted through his beclouded soul, and they afforded him a species of subconscious delight. But although in this manner Sali escaped some of the natural consequences of the process of domestic decay which was going on around him, he was not able to genuinely enjoy his life and to make rational plans for an assured future. He felt well enough that he was resting on quicksand, that he was neither doing anything much to bring himself into a position of independence nor to look for any secured future; nor was he learning much towards that end in the broken-down household and on the neglected farm of his father. The work done there was done haphazard style, and no systematic and orderly effort was made to get things done in season. His best consolation, therefore, was to preserve his good reputation, to work with a will on the farm when he could, and to turn his eyes away from a threatening future.

The sole orders laid upon him by his father were to avoid any sort of intercourse with all that bore the name of Marti. All he knew about the matter personally was that Marti had done wrong to his father, and that in Marti's house precisely the same bitter enmity was felt towards the Manz family. Of the details involved in this state of affairs, of the manner in which the old-time good-neighborliness and friendship existing for so many years between the two families had been turned into hatred and scorn Sali knew nothing, these things having shaped themselves at a period of his life when his boyish brain had been unable to grasp their true meaning. He had perforce been content with the verdict of his father, obeying the latter's prohibition to further consort with the Marti people without attempting to ascertain the underlying causes of the quarrel. So far he had not found it difficult to do as his father told him, and he did not meddle in the least with the whole business. He made no effort to either see or avoid Marti and his daughter Vreni, and while he assumed that his father must be in the right of it, he was no active enemy of the Martis. Vreni, on her part, was differently constituted from the lad. Having to suffer much more than Sali at home and feeling more deeply than he, woman-fashion, her almost total isolation, she was not so ready to let a sentiment of declared enmity enter her young and untried heart. In fact, she rather believed herself scorned and despised by the much better clad and apparently also much more fortunate former playmate. It was, therefore, only from a feeling of embarrassment that she hid from him, and whenever he came near enough to perceive her, she fled from him. He indeed never troubled to glance at her. So it happened that Sali had not seen the girl near enough for a couple of years to know what she was like. He had no notion that she was now almost grown-up, and that she was distinctly beautiful. And yet, once in a while he would remember her as his little playmate, as the merry companion of his carefree boyhood, and when at his home the Martis were mentioned he instinctively wondered what had become of her and how she would look now. He certainly did not hate her. In his memory she lived in a shadowy sort of way as a rather attractive girl.

It was his father, Manz, now who first had to go under. He was no longer able to stave off his creditors and had to leave farm and house behind. That he, though somewhat of better means originally than his neighbor and foe, was first to collapse was owing to his wife, who had lived in quite an extravagant style, and then he, too, had a son who, after all, cost him something. Marti, as we know, had but a little daughter who was scarcely any expense to him. Manz did not know what else to do but to follow the advice of some Seldwyla patrons and move to town, there to turn mine host of an inn or low tavern. It is always a sad sight to see a former peasant of some substance, a man who has been leading for many years a life of unremitting toil, it is true, but also one of independence and usefulness, after growing old among his acres, seek refuge from ill-fortune in town, taking the small remnants of his belongings with him and open a poor, shabby resort, in order to play, as the last safety anchor, the amiable and seductive host, all the while feeling by no means in a holiday mood himself. When the Manz family then left their farm to take this desperate step, it was first apparent how poor they had already grown. For all the household goods that were loaded on a cart were in a deplorable state, defective and not repaired for many years. Nevertheless the wife put on her best finery, when seating herself on top of the crazy old vehicle, and made a face of such pride as though she already looked down upon her neighbors as would a city lady of taste and refinement, while all the while the villagers peeped from behind their hedges full of pity at the sorry show made by the exodus. For Mother Manz had settled it in her foolish noddle to turn the heads of all Seldwyla by her fine manners and her wheedling tongue, thinking that if her boorish husband did not understand how to handle and cajole the town folks, it was vastly different with herself who would soon show these Seldwyla people what an alluring hostess she would make at the head of a tavern or inn doing a rushing business.

Great was her disenchantment, however, when she actually set eyes on this inn vaunted so much in advance by her addled spirits. For it was located in a small side-street of a rather disreputable quarter of Seldwyla, and the inn itself was one in which the predecessor, one of several that had gone the same way, had just been forcibly ousted because of being unable to pay his debts. His Seldwyla patrons had, in fact, rented this mean public house for a few hundred dollars a year to Manz in consideration of the fact that the latter still had some small sums outstanding in town, and because they could find nobody else to take the place at a venture. They also sold him a few barrels of inferior wine as well as the fixtures which consisted in the main of a couple of dozen glasses and bottles, and of some rude and hacked pine tables and benches that

had once been painted a hue of deadly scarlet and were now reduced to a dingy brownish tint. Before the entrance door an iron hoop was clattering in the wind, and inside the hoop a tin hand was pouring out forever claret into a small shoppen vessel. Besides all these luxuries there was a sun-dried bunch of datura fastened above the door, all of which Manz had noted down in his lease. Knowing all this Manz was by no means so full of hopes and smiling humor as his spouse, but on the contrary whipped up his bony old horses, lent him by the new owner of his farm, with considerable foreboding. The last shabby helper he had had on his farm had left him several weeks before, and when he left the village on this his present errand he had not failed to note Marti who, full of grim joy and scorn, had busied himself with some trifling task along the road where his fallen foe had to pass. Manz saw it, cursed Marti, and held him to be the sole cause of his downfall. But Sali, as soon as the cart was fairly on the way, got down, speeded up his steps and reached the town along by-paths.

"Well, here we are," said Manz, when the cart had reached its destination. His wife was crestfallen when she noticed the dreary and unpropitious aspect of the place. The people of the neighborhood stepped in front of their housedoors to have a look at the new innkeeper, and when they saw the rustic appearance of the outfit and the miserable trappings, they put on their Seldwyla smile of superiority. Wrathfully Mother Manz climbed down from her high seat, and tears of anger were in her eyes as she quickly fled into the house, her limber tongue for once forsaking her. On that day at least she was no more seen below. For she herself was well aware of the sorry show made by her, and all the more as the tattered condition of her furniture could not be concealed from prying eyes when the various articles were now being unloaded. Her musty and torn beds, particularly, she felt ashamed of. Sali, too, shared her feelings, but he was obliged to help his father in unloading, and the two made quite a stir in the neighborhood with their rustic manners and speech, furnishing the curious children with food for laughter. These little folks, indeed, amused themselves abundantly that day at the expense of the "ragged peasant bankrupts." Inside the house, though, things looked still more desolate; the place, in fact, had more the looks of a robbers' roost than of an inn. The walls were of badly calsomined brick, damp with moisture, and beside the dark and poorly furnished guest room downstairs there were but a couple of bare and uninviting bedrooms, and everywhere their predecessor had left behind nothing but spider's webs, filth and dust.

That was the beginning of it, and thus it continued to the end. During the first few weeks indeed there came, especially in the evenings, a number of people anxious to see, out of sheer curiosity, "the peasant landlord," hoping there would be "some fun." But out of the landlord himself they could not get much of that, for Manz was stiff, unfriendly, and melancholy, and did not in the least know how to treat his guests, nor did he want to know. Slowly and awkwardly he would pour out the wine demanded, put it before the customer with a morose air, and then make an unsuccessful attempt to enter into some sort of conversation, but brought forth only some stammered commonplaces, whereupon he gave it up. All the more desperately did his wife endeavor to entertain her guests, and by her ludicrous and absurd behavior really managed, for a few days at least, to amuse people. But she did this in quite a different way from that intended by her. Mother Manz was rather corpulent, and she had from her own inventive brain composed a costume in which to wait on her guests and in which she believed herself to be simply irresistible. With a stout linen skirt she wore an old waist of green silk, a long cotton apron and a ridiculous broad collar around the neck. Out of her hair, no longer abundant, she had twisted corkscrew curls ornamenting her forehead, and in the back she had stuck a tall comb into her thin braids. Thus made up she mincingly danced on the tips of her toes before the particular guest to be entranced, pointed her mouth in a laughable manner, which she thought was "sweet," hopped about the table with forced elasticity, and serving the wine or the salted cheese she would exclaim smilingly: "Well, well, so alone? Lively, lively, you gentlemen!" And some more of such nonsense she would whisper in a stilted way, for the trouble was that although usually she could talk glibly about almost anything with her cronies from the village, she felt somewhat embarrassed with these city people, not being acquainted with the subjects of conversation they liked to touch on. The Seldwyla people of the roughest type who had dropped in for something to laugh at, put their hands before their mouths to prevent bursting out in her face, nearly suffocated with suppressed merriment, trod upon each other's feet under the table, and afterwards, in relating the matter, would say: "Zounds, that is a woman among a thousand, a paragon!" Another one said: "A heavenly creature, by the gods. It is worth while coming here just to watch her antics. Such a funny one we haven't had here for a long while."

Her husband noticed these goings on, with a mien of thunder, and he would perhaps punch her in the ribs and say: "You old cow, what is the matter with you?"

But then she gave him a superior glance, and would murmur: "Don't disturb me! You stupid old fool, don't you see how hard I am trying to please people? Those over there, of course, are only low fellows from among your own acquaintance, but if you don't interfere with me I shall soon have much more fashionable guests here, as you'll see."

These illusions of hers were illuminated in a room with but two tallow dips, but Sali, her son, went out into the dark kitchen, sat down at the hearth and wept about father and mother.

However, these first guests had soon their fill of this kind of sport, and began to stay away, and then went back to their old haunts where they got better drink and more rational conversation, and there they would laughingly comment on the queer peasant innkeepers. Only once in a while now a single guest of this type would drop in, usually to verify previous reports

heard by him, and such a one found as a rule nothing more exciting to do than to yawn and gaze at the wall. Or perhaps a band of roystering blades, having heard the place spoken of by others, would wind up a jolly evening by a brief visit, and then there would be noise enough, but not much else, and the old couple could often not even thus be roused from their melancholy. For by that time both wife and husband had grown heartily sick of their bargain. The new style of living felt to him almost as lonesome and cold as the grave. For he who as a lifelong farmer had been used to see the sun rise, to hear and feel the wind blow, to breathe the pure air of the country from morning till night, and to have the sunshine come and go, was now cooped up within these dingy, hopeless walls, had to draw in his lungs with every breath the contaminated atmosphere of this miserable neighborhood, and when he thus dreamed day-dreams of the wide expanse of the fields he once owned and tilled, a dull sort of despair settled down on him like a pall. For hours and hours every day he would stare in a dark humor at the smoke-begrimed ceiling of his inn, having mostly little else to do, and dull visions of a future unrelieved by a single ray of hope would float across his saturnine mind. Insupportable his present life seemed to him then. Then a purposeless restlessness would come over him, when he would get up from his seat a dozen times an hour, run to the housedoor and peer out, then run back and resume his watch. The neighbors had already given him a nickname. The "wicked landlord," they dubbed him, because his glance was troubled and fierce.

Not long and they were totally impoverished, had not even enough ready money left to put in the little in drink and provisions needed for chance customers, so that the sausages and bread, the wine and liquor that were ordered by guests had to be got on trust. Often they even lacked the wherewithal to make a meal of, and had to go hungry for a while. It was a curious tavern they were keeping. When somebody strolled in by accident and demanded refreshment they were forced to send to the nearest competitor, around the corner, and obtain a measure of wine and some food, paying for it an hour or so later when they themselves had been paid. And with all that, they were expected to play the cheerful host and to talk pleasantly when their own stomachs were empty. They were almost glad when nobody came; then each of them would cower in a dark corner by the chimney, too lethargic to stir.

When Mother Manz underwent these sad experiences she once more took off her green silk waist, and another metamorphosis was noticed. As formerly she had shown a number of feminine vices, so now she exhibited some feminine virtues, and these grew with the evil times. She began to practice patience and sought to cheer up her morose husband and to encourage her young son in trying for remunerative work. She sacrificed her own comfort and convenience even, went about like a happy busybody, and chattered incessantly merrily, all in an attempt to put some heart into the two men. In short, she exerted in her own queer way an undoubted beneficial influence on them, and while this did not lead to anything tangible it helped at least to make things bearable for the time being and was far better than the reverse would have been. She would rack her poor brains, and give this advice or that how to mend things, and if it miscarried she would have something fresh to propose. Mostly she proved in the wrong with her counsel, but now and then, in one of the many trivial ways that her petty mind was dwelling on she was successful. When the contrary resulted, she gaily took the blame, remained cheerful under discouragement, and, in short, did everything which, if she had only done it before things were past repair, might have really cured the desperate situation.

In order to have at least some food in the house and to pass the dull time, father and son now began to devote their leisure time to the sport of fishing, that is, with the angle, as far as it is permissible to everybody in Switzerland. This, be it said, was also one of the favorite pastimes of those decrepit Seldwylians who had come to grief in the world, most of them having failed in business. When the weather was favorable, namely, and when the fish took the bait most readily, one might see dozens of these gentry wander off provided with rod and pail, and on a walk along the shores of the river you might see one of them, every little distance, angling, the one in a long brown coat once of fashionable make, but with his bare feet in the water, the next attired in a tattered blue frock, astride an old willow tree, his ragged felt hat shoved over his left ear. Farther down even you might perceive a third whose meagre limbs were wrapped in a shabby old dressing gown, since that was the only article of clothing he had left, his long tobacco pipe in one hand, and an equally long fishing rod in the other. And in turning a bend of the river one was apt to encounter another queer customer who stood, quite nude, with his bald head and his fat paunch, on top of a flat rock in the river. This one had, though almost living in the water during the warm season, feet black as coal, so that it looked from a distance as if he had kept his boots on. Each of these worthies had a pot or a small box at his side, in which were swarming angle worms, and to obtain these they were industriously digging at all hours of the day not actually employed in fishing. Whenever the sky began to cloud up and the air became close and sultry, threatening rain, these quaint figures could be seen most numerously along the softly rolling stream, immovable like a congregation of ancient saints on their pillars. Without ever deigning to cast a glance in their direction, rustics from farm and forest used to pass them by, and the boatmen on the river did not even look their way, whereas these lone fishermen themselves used to curse in a forlorn way at these disturbers of their prey.

If Manz had been told twelve years before when he was still plowing with a fine team of horses across the hillock above the shore, that he, too, one day would join this strange brotherhood of the rod, he would probably have treated such a prophet rather roughly. But even to-day Manz hastened past those fishermen that were rather crowding one another, until he stood, upstream and alone, like a wrathful shadow of Hades, by himself, just as if he preferred even in the abode

of the damned a spot of his own choosing. But to stand thus with a rod, for hours and hours, neither he nor his son Sali had the patience, and they remembered the manner in which peasants in their own neighborhood used to catch fish, especially to grasp them with their hands in the purling brooks. Therefore, they had their rods with them only as a ruse, and they walked upstream further and further, following the tortuous windings of the water, where they knew from of old that trout, dainty and expensive trout, were to be had.

Meanwhile Marti, though he had still nominal possession of his farm, had likewise been drifting from bad to worse, without any gleam of hope.

And since all toil on his land could no more avert the final catastrophe, and time hung heavy on his hands, he also had taken to this sport of fishing. Instead of laboring in his neglected fields he often would fish for days and days at a time. Vreni at such times was not permitted to leave him, but had to follow him with pail and nets, through wet meadows and along brooks and waterholes, whether there was rain or shine, while neglecting her household labors at home. For at home not a soul had remained, neither was there any need, since Marti little by little had already lost nearly all his land, and now owned but a few more acres of it, and these he tilled either not at all or else, together with his daughter, in the slovenliest way.

Thus it came to pass that he, too, one early evening was walking along the borders of a rapid and deep brook, one in which trout were leaping plentifully, since the sky was overhung with dark and threatening clouds, when without any warning he encountered his enemy, Manz, who was coming along on the other side of it. As soon as he made him out a fearful anger began to gnaw at his very vitals. They had not been so near each other for years, except when in court facing the judge, and then they had not been permitted to vent their hatred and spite, and now Marti shouted full of venom: "What are you doing here, you dog? Can't you stay in your den in town? Oh, you Seldwylian loafer!"

"Don't talk as if you were something better, you scoundrel," growled Manz, "for I see you also catching fish, and thus it proves you have nothing better to do yourself!"

"Shut your evil mouth, you fiend," shrieked Marti, since to make himself heard above the rush of waters he had to strain his voice. "You it is who have driven me into misery and poverty."

And since the willows lining the brook now also were shaken by the gathering storm, Manz was forced to shout even louder: "If that is true, then I should feel glad, you woodenhead!"

And thus, a duel of the most cruel taunts went on from both borders of the brook, and finally, driven beyond endurance, each of the two half-crazed men ran along the steep path, trying to find a way across the deep water. Of the two Marti was the most envenomed because he believed that his foe, being a landlord and managing an inn, must at least have food enough to eat and liquor to drink, besides leading a jolly sort of life, while he was barely able to eke out a meal or two on the coarsest fare. Besides, the memory of his wasted farm stung him to violence. But Manz, too, now stepped along lively enough on his side of the water, and behind him his son, who, instead of sharing his father's grim interest in the quarrel, peeped curiously and amazedly at Vreni. She, the girl, followed closely behind her father, deeply ashamed at what she heard and looking at the ground, so that her curly brown hair fell over her flushed face. She carried in her hand a wooden fishpail, and in the other her shoes and stockings, and had shortened her skirt to avoid its dragging in the wet. But since Sali was walking on the other side and seemed to watch her, she had allowed her skirt to drop, out of modesty, and was now thrice embarrassed and annoyed, since she had not alone to carry all, pail, nets, shoes and stockings, but also to hold up her skirt and to feel humiliated because of this bitter and vulgar quarrel. If she had lifted her eyes and read Sali's face, she would have seen that he no longer looked either proud or elegant as hitherto his image had dwelt in her mind, but that, on the contrary, the young man also wore a distressed and humbled mien.

But while Vreni so entirely ashamed and disconcerted kept her eyes on the ground, and Sali stared in amazement at this dainty and graceful being that had so suddenly crossed his path, and who seemed so weighed down by the whole occurrence, they did not properly observe that their fathers by now had become silent but were both of them striving in increased rage to reach the small wooden bridge a short distance off and which led across to the other shore.

Just then the first forks of lightning were weirdly illuminating the scene. The thunder was rolling in the dun clouds, and heavy drops of rain were already falling singly, when these two men, almost driven out of their senses, simultaneously reached the tiny bridge with their hurried and determined tread, and as soon as near enough seized each other with the iron grip of the rustic, striking with all the power they could summon with clenched fists into the hateful face of the adversary. Blows rained fast and furious, and each of the combatants gnashed his teeth with rage.

It is not a becoming nor a handsome sight to see elderly men usually soberminded and slow to act in a personal encounter, no matter whether occasioned by anger, provocation or self-defense, but such a spectacle is harmless in comparison with that of two aged men who attack each other with uncontrolled fury because while knowing the other deeply and well, now out of the depths of

that very knowledge and out of a fixed belief that the other has destroyed his very life, seize each other with their naked fists and try to commit murder from unrequited revenge. But thus these two men now did, both with hair gray to the roots. More than fifty years ago they had last fought with each other as lads, merely out of a youthful spirit of rivalry, but during the half century succeeding they had never laid hands on each other, except when, as good neighbors and fellow-peasants, they had grasped each other's hand in peace and concord, but even that, with their rather dry and undemonstrative ways, but rarely. After the first two or three frenzied blows, they both became silent, and now they struggled and wrestled in all the agony of senile impotence, their stiffened muscles and tendons stretched with the tension, murder in their glaring eyes, each groaning with the supreme effort to master the other. They now attempted, both of them, to end the fearsome fight by pushing the other over into the rushing flood below, the slender supports of the rails creaking under the pressure. But now at last their children had reached the spot, and Sali, with a bound, came to his father's help, to enable the latter to make an end of the hated foe, Marti being just about spent and exhausted. But Vreni also sprang, dropping all her burdens, to the rescue, and after the manner of women in such cases, embracing her father tightly and really thus rendering him unable to move and defend himself. Tears streamed from her eyes, and she looked with silent appeal at Sali, just at the moment when he was about also to grasp old Marti by the throat. Involuntarily he laid his hand upon the arm of his father, thus restraining him, and next attempted to wrest his father loose. The combat thus grew into a mutual swaying back and forth, and the whole group was impotently straining and pushing, without either party coming to a rest.

But during this confused jumbling the two young people had, interfering between their elders, more and more approached each other, and just at this juncture a break in the dark bank of clouds overhead let the piercing rays of the setting sun reach the scene and illuminate it with a blinding flash, and then it was that Sali looked full into the countenance of the girl, rosy and embellished by the excitement. It was to Sali like a glimpse of another, a brighter and more heavenly world. And Vreni at the same instant, too, quickly observed the impression she had made on her onetime playmate, and she smiled for the fraction of a second at him, right in the midst of her tears and her fright. Sali, however, recovered himself instantly, warned by the energetic struggles of his father to shake off the restraining arm of his son. By holding him firmly and by speaking with authority to his father, he managed to calm him down at last and to push him out of the reach of the other. Both old fellows breathed hard at this outcome of their desperate fight, and began again to heap insults on one another, finally turning away, however. Their children, though, were now silent in the midst of their relief. But in turning away and separating they for a moment glanced once more at each other, and their two hands, cool and moist from the water and the rain, met and each noticed a slight pressure.

When the two old men turned from the scene, the clouds once more closed, darkness fell, and the rain now poured down in torrents. Manz preceded his son upon the obscured wet paths, bent to the cold rain, and the terrific excitement still trembled in his features. His teeth were chattering, and unseen tears of defeated hatred ran into his stubbly beard. He let them run, and did not even wipe them away, because he was ashamed of them, and had no wish for his son to see them.

But his son had seen nothing. He went through rain and storm in an ecstasy of happiness. He had forgotten all, his misery and the awful scene just witnessed, his poverty and the darkness around him. In his heart there was a happy song. Light and warm and full of joy everything within him was. He felt as rich and powerful as a king's son. He saw nothing but the smile of a second. He saw the beautiful face lit up by the miracle of love. And he returned that smile only now, a half hour later, and he laughed at the beautiful face and returned its gaze, looking into the night and storm as into a paradise, the face shining through the murk of rain like a guiding star. Indeed, he believed Vreni could not help noticing his answering smile miles away, and was smiling back at him.

Next day his father was stiff and sore and would not leave the house, and to him the whole wretched meeting with his foe and the whole development of the enmity between them, and the long years of misery that had grown out of it suddenly seemed to take on a new form and to become much plainer, while its influence spread around even in his dusky tavern. So much so that both Manz and his wife were moving about like ghosts, out of one room into another, into the cheerless kitchen and the bedchambers, and thence back again into the equally bare and dark guest room, where not a person was to be seen all day. At last they both began to grumble, one blaming the other for things that had gone wrong, dropping into an uneasy slumber from time to time from which a nightmare would waken them with a start, and in which their unquiet consciences upbraided them for past misdeeds. Only Sali heard and saw nothing of all this, for his mind was entirely engrossed with Vreni. Still the illusion was strong with him of being immeasurably wealthy, but beside that he had a hallucination that he was powerful and had learned how to conduct the most complicated and important affairs in the world. He felt as if he knew all the wisdom on earth, everything great and beautiful. And forever there stood before his dreamy soul, clear and distinct, that great happening of the night before, that wonderful creature with her enticing smile, that smile which had shed a blinding flash of happiness on his path. The consciousness of this great adventure dwelt with him like an unspeakable secret, of which he was the sole possessor and which had fallen to his share direct from heaven. It afforded him constant

food for thought and wonderment. And yet with all that it seemed also to him that he had always known this would happen to him, and as if what now filled him with such marvelous sweetness had always dwelt in his heart. For nothing is just like this happiness of love, this sharing of a mystery between two persons, which approaches human beings in the form of unspeakable bliss, yet in a form so clear and precise, sanctioned and sanctified by the priest, and endowed with a name so mellifluously fine that no other word sounds half so sweet as Love.

On that day Sali felt neither lonesome nor unhappy; where he went and stood Vreni's image followed him and glowed in his inner self; and this without a moment's respite, one hour after another. But while his whole being was engrossed with the lovely image of the girl at the same time its outlines constantly became blurred, so that, after all, he lost the faculty of reproducing it clearly. If he had been asked to describe her in detail he would have been unable to do it. Always he saw her standing near him, with that wizard smile; he felt her warm breath and the whole indefinable charm of her presence, but it was for all that like something which is seen but once and then vanishes forever. Like something the potency of which one cannot escape and yet which one never can know. In dreaming thus he was able to recall fully the features of her when still a tiny maiden, and to experience a most pronounced pleasure in doing so, but the one Vreni of yesterday he could not recall as plainly. If indeed he had never seen Vreni again it might be that his memory would have pieced her personality together, little by little, until not the slightest bit had been wanting. But now all the strength of his mind did not suffice to render him this service, and this was because his senses, his eyes, imperatively demanded their rights and their solace, and when in the afternoon the sun was shining brilliantly and warm, gilding the roofs of all these blackened housetops, Sali almost unconsciously found himself on the way towards his old home in the country, which now seemed to him a heavenly Jerusalem with twelve shining portals, and which set his heart to beating feverishly as he approached it.

While on his way, though, he met Vreni's father, who with hurried and disordered steps was going in the direction of the town. Marti looked wild and unkempt, his gray beard had not been shorn for many weeks, and altogether he presented indeed the picture of what he was: a wicked and lost peasant who had got rid of his land and who now was intent on doing evil to others. Nevertheless, Sali under these radically different circumstances did not regard the crazed old man with hatred but rather with fear and awe, as though his own life was in the hands of this man and as though it were better to obtain it by favor than by force. Marti, however, measured the young man with a black look, glancing at him from his feet upwards, and then he went his way silently. But this encounter came most opportunely to Sali. For seeing the old man leaving the village on an errand it for the first time became quite clear to him what his own object had been in coming. Thus he proceeded stealthily on by-paths towards the village, and when reaching it cautiously felt his way through the small lanes until he had Marti's house and outbuildings right in front of him.

For several years past he had not seen this spot so closely. For even while he still dwelt in the village itself he had been forbidden to approach the Marti farm, avoiding meeting the family with whom his father lived on terms of enmity. Therefore he was now full of wonder at what, just the same, he had had ample opportunity to observe in the case of his own father's property. Amazedly he stared at this once prosperous and well-cultivated farm now turned into a waste. For Marti had had one section after another of his property sequestrated by orders of the court, and now all that was left was the dwelling house itself and the space around it, with a bit of vegetable garden and a small field up above the river, which latter Marti had for some time been defending in a last desperate struggle with the judicial power.

There was, it is true, no longer any question of a rational cultivation of the soil which once had borne so plentifully and where the wheat had waved like a golden sea toward harvest time. Instead of that now there was a mixed crop sprouting: rye, turnips, wheat and potatoes, with some other "garden truck" intermingling, all from seed that had come from paper packages left over or purchased in small quantities at random, so that the whole cultivated space looked like a negligently tended vegetable bed, in which cabbage, parsley and turnips predominated. It was plainly to be seen that the owner of it, too lazy or indifferent to do his farmer's work properly, had mainly had in mind to raise such things as would enable him to live from day to day. Here a handful of carrots had been torn out, there a mess of cabbage or potatoes, and the rest had fared on for good or ill, and much of it lay rotting on the ground. Everybody, too, had been in the habit of treading around and in it all, just as he listed, and the one broad field now presented nearly the desolate appearance of the once ownerless field whence had grown all the mischief that had wrought havoc and brought the two neighbors of old down so low. About the house itself there was no visible sign at all of farm work. The stable stood vacant, its door hung loosely from the broken staples, and innumerable spider's webs, grown thick and large during the summer, were shimmering in the sunshine. Against the broad door of a barn, where once were housed the fruits of the field, hung untidy fishermen's nets and other sporting apparatus, in grim token of abandoned farming. In the farmyard was to be seen not a single chicken, pigeon or turkey, no dog or cat. The well only was the sole live thing. But even its clear water no longer flowed in a regular gush through the spout, but trickled through the broken tube, wasting itself on the ground and forming dark pools on the soggy earth, a perfect symbol of neglect. For while it would not have taken much time or trouble to mend the broken tube, now Vreni was forced to use the water she needed for her domestic tasks, for cooking and laundry work, from the tricklings that escaped. The house itself, too, was a sad thing to see. The window panes were all broken and pasted over with paper. Yet the windows, after all, were the most cheerful-looking

objects, for Vreni kept them clean and shiny with soap and water, as shiny, in fact, as her own eyes, and the latter, too, had to make up for all lack of finery. And as the curly hair and the bright kerchiefs made amends for much in her, so the wild growths stretching up toward windows and along the jamb of the doorsills, and almost covering the very broken panes on the windows, gave a charm to this tumbledown homestead. A wilderness of scarlet bean blossoms, of portulac and sweet-scented flowers ran riot along the house front, and these in their vivid colors clambered along anything that would give them a hold, such as the handle of a rake, a stake or broken rod. Vreni's grandfather had left behind a rusty halberd or spontoon, such as were weapons much in vogue in his days, for he had fought as a mercenary abroad. Now this rusty implement had been stuck into the ground, and the willowy tendrils of the beanstalk embraced it tightly. More bean plants groped their way up a shattered ladder which had leaned against the house for ages, and thence their blossoms hung into the windows as Vreni's curls hung into her pretty face.

This farmyard, so much more picturesque than prosperous, lay somewhat apart from its neighbors, and therefore was not exposed so much to their inspection. But for the moment as Sali stared and watched nothing human at all was visible. Sali thus was undisturbed in his reflections as he leaned with his back against the barndoor, about thirty paces away, and studied with attentive mien the deserted yard. He had been doing this for some time when Vreni at last appeared under the housedoor and gazed calmly and thoughtfully before her as if thinking deeply of only one matter. Sali himself did not stir but contemplated her as he would have done a fine painting. But after a brief while her eyes traveled towards him, and she perceived him. Then she and he stood without motion and looked, looked just as if they did not see living beings but aerial phenomena. But at last Sali slowly stood upright, and just as slowly went across the farmyard and towards Vreni. When he was but a step or so from her, she stretched out her hands toward him and pronounced only the one word: "Sali!"

He seized her hands speechlessly, and then continued gazing into her face which had suddenly grown pale. Tears filled her eyes, and gradually under his gaze she flushed painfully, and at last she said in a very low voice: "What do you want here, Sali?"

"Only to see you," he replied. "Will we not become good friends again?"

"And our fathers, Sali?" asked Vreni, turning her weeping face aside, since her hands had been imprisoned by him.

"Must we bear the burden of what they have done and have become?" answered Sali. "It may be that we ourselves can redeem the evil they have wrought, if we only love each other well enough and stand together against the future."

"No, Sali, no good will ever come of it all," replied Vreni sobbingly; "therefore better go your ways, Sali, in God's name."

"Are you alone, Vreni?" he asked. "May I come in a minute?"

"Father has gone to town for a spell, as he told me before leaving," remarked Vreni, "to do your father a bad turn. But I cannot let you in here, because it may be that later on you would not be able to leave again without attracting notice. As yet everything around here is still and nobody about. Therefore, I beg of you, go before it is too late."

"No, I could not leave you without speaking," was his answer, and his voice shook with emotion. "Since yesterday I have had to think of you constantly, and I cannot go. We must speak to each other, at least for half an hour or an hour; that will be a relief to both of us."

Vreni reflected a minute. Then she said thoughtfully: "Toward sundown I shall walk out toward our field. You know the one I mean--we have but the one left. I must pick some vegetables. I feel sure that nobody else will be there, because they are mowing all of them in a different direction. If you insist on coming, you may come there, but for the present go and take care nobody else sees you. Even if nobody at all bothers any longer about us, they would nevertheless gossip so much about it that father could not fail to hear it."

They now dropped their hands, but once more seized them, and both also asked: "How do you do?"

But instead of answering each other they repeated the same phrase over and over again, since they, after the manner of lovers, no longer were able to guide or control their words. Thus the only answer each received was given with the eyes, and without saying anything more to each other they finally separated, half sad, half joyful.

"Go there at once," she called after him; "I shall be there almost as soon as yourself."

Sali followed this advice, and went at once up the steep path that led to the hill where the busy world seemed so far away and where the soul expanded, to the undulating fields that stretched out far on both sides, where the brooding July sun shone and the drifting white clouds sailed overhead, where the ripe corn in the gentle breeze bobbed up and down, where the river below glinted blue, and all these scenes of past happiness filled his soul after a long dearth with peace and gentle joy, and his griefs and fears were left below. At full length he threw himself down amid the half-shade of the upstanding wheat, there where it marked the boundary of

Marti's waste acres, and peered with unblinking eyes into the gold-rimmed clouds.

Although scarcely a quarter hour elapsed until Vreni followed him, and although he had thought of nothing but his bliss and his love, dreaming of it and building castles in the air, he was yet surprised when Vreni suddenly stood at his side, smiling down at him, and with a start he rose.

"Vreni," he exclaimed in a voice that trembled with love, and she, still and smiling, tendered both her hands to him. Hand in hand they then paced along the whispering corn, slowly down towards the river, and then as slowly back again, with scarcely any words. This short walk they repeated twice or thrice, back and forth, still, blissful, and quiet, so that this young pair now resembled likewise a pair of stars, coming and going across the gentle curve of the hillock and adown the declivity beyond, just as had once, years and years ago, the accurately measuring plows of the two rustic neighbors. But as they once on this pilgrimage lifted their eyes from the blue cornflowers along the edge of the field where they had rested, they suddenly saw a swarthy fellow, like a darksome star, precede them on their path, a fellow of whom they could not tell whence he had appeared so entirely without warning. Probably he had been lying in the corn, and Vreni shuddered, while Sali murmured with affright: "It's the black fiddler!" And indeed, the fellow ambling along before them carried under his arm a violin, and truly, too, he looked swarthy enough. A black crushed felt hat, a black blouse and hair and beard pitchdark, even his unwashed hands of that hue, he made the impression of a man carrying along an evil omen. This man led a wandering life. He did all sorts of jobs: mended kettles and pans, helped charcoal burners, aided in pitching in the woods, and only used his fiddle and earned money that way when the peasants somewhere were celebrating a festival or holiday, a wedding or big dance, and such like. Sali and Vreni meant to leave the fiddler by himself. Quiet as mice they slowly walked behind him, thinking that he would probably turn off the road soon. He seemed to pay no attention to the two, never turning around and keeping perfect silence. With that they felt a weird influence coming from the fellow, so that they had not the courage to openly avoid him and turning aside unconsciously they followed in his tracks to the very end of the field, the spot where that unjust heap of stone and rock lay, the one that had started the two families on their downward road. Innumerable poppies and wild roses had grown there and were now in full bloom, wherefore this stony desert lay like an enormous splotch of blood along the road.

All at once the black fiddler sprang with one jump on top one of the irregular ramparts of stone, the rim of which was also scarlet with wild blossoms, then turned himself around, and threw a glance in every direction. The young couple stopped and looked up at him shamefaced. For turn they would not in face of him, and to proceed along on the same path would have taken them into the village, which they also wished to avoid.

He looked at them keenly, and then he shouted: "I know you two. You are the children of those who have stolen from me this soil. I am glad to see you here, and to notice how the theft has benefited you. Surely, I shall also live to see you two go before me the way of all flesh. Yes, look at me, you little fools. Do you like my nose, eh?"

And indeed, he had a terrible nose, one which broke forth from his emaciated swarthy face like a beak, or rather more like a good-sized club. As if it had been pasted on to his bony face it looked and below that the tiny mouth, in the shape of a small round hole, singularly contracted and expanded, and out of this hole his words constantly tumbled, whistling or buzzing or hissing. His small twisted felt hat, shapeless and shabby, pushed over his left ear, heightened the uncanny effect. This piece of his apparel seemed to change its form with every motion of the queer-looking head, although in reality it sat immovable on his pate. And of the eyes of this strange fellow nothing was to be noticed but their whites, since the pupils were flashing around all the time, just as though they were two hares jumping about to escape being seized.

"Look at me well," he then continued. "Your two fathers know all about me, and everybody in the village can identify me by my nose. Years ago they were spreading the rumor that a good piece of money was awaiting the heir to these fields here. I have called at court twenty times. But since I had no baptismal certificate and since my friends, the vagrants, who witnessed my birth, have no voice that the law will recognize, the time set has elapsed, and they have cheated me out of the little sum, large enough all the same to permit my emigrating to a better country. I have implored your fathers at that time, again and again, to testify for me to the effect that they at least believed me, according to their conscience, to be the rightful heir. But they drove me from their farms, and now, ha! ha! ha! they themselves have gone to the devil. Well and good, that is the way things turn out in this world, and I don't care a rap. And now I will just the same fiddle if you want to dance."

With that he was down again on the ground beside them, at a mighty bound, and seeing they did not want to dance he quickly disappeared in the direction of the village; there the crop was to be brought in towards nightfall, and there would be gay doings.

When he was gone the young couple sat down, discouraged and out of spirits, among the wilderness of stone. They let their hands drop and hung their poor heads too. For the sudden appearance of the vagrant fiddler had wiped out the happy memories of their childhood, and their joyous mood in which they, like they used in their younger days, had wandered about in the green and among the corn, had gone with him. They sat once more on the hard soil of their misery, and the happy gleam of childhood had vanished, and their minds were oppressed and

darkened.

But all at once Vreni remembered the fiddler's nose, and his whole odd figure, and she burst out laughing loud and merry. She exclaimed: "The poor fellow surely looks too queer. What a nose he had!" And with that a charmingly careless merriment flashed out of her brown eyes, just as though she had only been waiting for the fiddler's nose to chase away all the sad clouds from her mind. Sali, too, regarded the girl, and noticed this sunny gaiety. But by that time Vreni had already forgotten the immediate cause of her gleefulness, and now she laughed on her own account into Sali's face. Sali, dazed and astonished, involuntarily gazed at the girl with laughing mouth, like a hungry man who suddenly is offered sweetened wheat bread, and he said: "Heavens, Vreni, how pretty you are!"

And Vreni, for sole answer, laughed but the more, and out of the mere enjoyment of her sweet temper she gurgled a few melodious notes that sounded to the boy like the warblings of a nightingale.

"Oh, you little witch," he exclaimed enraptured, "where have you learned such tricks? What sorcery are you applying to me?"

"Sorcery?" she murmured astonished, in a voice of sweet enchantment, and she seized Sali's hand anew. "There's no sorcery about this. How gladly I should have laughed now and then, with reason or without. Now and then, indeed, all by myself, I have laughed a bit, because I couldn't help it, but my heart was not in it. But now it's different. Now I should like to laugh all the time, holding your hand and feeling happy. I should like to hold your hand forever, and look into your eyes. Do you too love me a little bit?"

"Ah, Vreni," he answered, and looked full and affectionately into her eyes, "I never cared for any girl before. And I have never until now taken a good look at another girl. It always seemed to me as though some time or other I should have to love you, and without knowing it, I think, you have always been in my thoughts."

"And so it was in my case," said Vreni, "only more so. For you never would look at me and did not know what had become of me and what I had grown into. But as for me, I have from time to time, secretly, of course, and from afar, cast a glance at you, and knew well enough what you were like. Do you still remember how often as children we used to come here? You know in the little baby cart? What small folk we were those days, and how long, long ago that all is! One would think we were old, real old now. Eh?"

Sali became thoughtful.

"How old are you, Vreni?" he asked. "I should think you must be about seventeen?"

"I am seventeen and a half," answered she. "And you?"

"Guess!"

"Oh, I know, you are going on twenty."

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I won't tell you," she laughed.

"Won't tell me?"

"No, no," and she giggled merrily.

"But I want to know."

"Will you compel me?"

"We'll see about that."

These silly remarks Sali made because he wanted to keep his hands busy and to have a pretext for the awkward caresses he attempted and which his love for the beautiful girl hungered for. But she continued the childish dialogue willingly enough for some time longer, showing plenty of patience the while, feeling instinctively her lover's mood. And the simple sallies on both sides seemed to them the height of wisdom, so soft and sweet and full of their mutual feelings they were. At last, however, Sali waxed bold and aggressive, and seized Vreni and pressed her down into the scarlet bed of poppies by main strength. There she lay panting, blinking at the sun with eyes half-closed. Her softly rounded cheeks glowed like ripe apples and her mouth was breathing hard so that the snow-white rows of teeth became visible. Daintily as if penciled her eyebrows were defined above those flashing eyes, and her young bosom rose and fell under the working four hands which mutually caressed and fought each other. Sali was beyond himself with delight, seeing this wonderful young creature before him, knowing her to be his own, and he deemed himself wealthier than a monarch.

"I see you still have all your teeth," he said. "Do you recall how often we tried to count them? Do you now know how to count?"

"Oh, you silly," smilingly rejoined Vreni, "these are not the same. Those I lost long ago."

So Sali in the simplicity of his soul wanted to renew the game, and prepared to count them over once more. But Vreni abruptly rose and closed her mouth. Then she began to form a wreath of poppies and to place it on her head. The wreath was broad and long, and on the brow of the nut-brown maid it was an ornament so bewitching as to lend her an enchanting air. Sali held in his arms what rich people would have dearly paid for if merely they had had it painted on their walls.

But at last she sprang up. "Goodness, how hot it is here! Here we remain like ninnies and allow ourselves to be roasted alive. Come, dear, and let us sit among the corn!"

And they got up and looked for a suitable hiding-place among the tall wheat. When they had found it, they slipped into the furrows of the field so that nobody would have discovered them without regular search, leaving no trace behind, and they built for themselves a narrow nest among the golden ears that topped their heads when they were seated, so that they only saw the deep azure of the sky above and nothing else in the world. They clung to each other tightly, and showered kisses on cheeks and hair and mouth, until at last they desisted from sheer exhaustion, or whatever one wishes to call it when the caresses of two lovers for one or two minutes cease and thus, right in the ecstasy of the blossom tide of life, there is the hint of the perishableness of everything mundane. They heard the larks singing high overhead, and sought them with their sharp young eyes, and when they thought they saw one flashing along in the sunlight like shooting stars along the firmament, they kissed again, in token of reward, and tried to cheat and to overreach each other at this game just as much as they could.

"Do you see, there is one flitting now," whispered Sali, and Vreni replied just as low: "I can hear it, but I do not see it."

"Oh, but watch now," breathed Sali, "right there, where the small white cloud is floating, a hand's breadth to the right."

And then both stared with all their might, and meanwhile opened their lips, thirsty and hungry for more nourishment, like young birds in their nest, in order to fasten these same lips upon the other if perchance they both felt convinced of the existence of that lark.

But now Vreni made a stop, in order to say, very seriously and importantly: "Let us not forget; this, then, is agreed, that each of us loves the other. Now, I wish to know, what do you have to say about your sweetheart?"

"This," said Sali, as though in a dream, "that it is a thing of beauty, with two brown eyes, a scarlet mouth, and with two swift feet. But how it really is thinking and believing I have no more idea than the Pope in Rome. And what can you tell me about your lover? What is he like?"

"That he has two blue eyes, a bold mouth and two stout arms which he is swift to use. But what his thoughts are I know no more than the Turkish sultan."

"True," said Sali, "it is singular, but we really do not know what either is thinking. We are less acquainted than if we had never seen each other before. So strange towards each other the long time between has made us. What really has happened during the long interval since we grew up in your dear little head, Vreni?"

"Not much," whispered Vreni, "a thousand foolish things, but my life has been so hard that none of them could stay there long."

"You poor little dear," said Sali in a very low voice, "but nevertheless, Vreni, I believe you are a sly little thing, are you not?"

"That you may learn, by and by, if you really are fond of me, as you say," the young girl murmured.

"You mean when you are my wife," whispered Sali.

At these last words Vreni trembled slightly, and pressed herself more tightly into his arms, kissing him anew long and tenderly. Tears gathered in her eyes, and both of them all at once became sad, since their future, so devoid of hope, came into their minds, and the enmity of their fathers.

Vreni now sighed deeply and murmured: "Come, Sali, I must be going now."

And both rose and left the cornfield hand in hand, but at the same instant they spied Vreni's father. With the idle curiosity of the person without useful employment he had been speculating, from the moment he had met Sali hours before, what the young man might be wanting all alone in the village. Remembering the occurrence of the previous day, he finally, strolling slowly towards the town, had hit upon the right cause, merely as the result of venom and suspicion. And no sooner had his suspicion taken on a definite shape, when he, in the middle of a Seldwyla street, turned back and reached the village. There he had vainly searched for Vreni everywhere, at home and in the meadow and all around in the hedges. With increasing restlessness he had

now sought her right near by in the cornfield, and when picking up there Vreni's small vegetable basket, he had felt sure of being on the right track, spying about, when suddenly he perceived the two children issuing from the corn itself.

They stood there as if turned to stone. Marti himself also for a moment did not move, and stared at them with evil looks, pale as lead. But then he started to curse them like a fiend, and used the vilest language toward the young man. He made a vicious grab at him, attempting to throttle him. Sali instantly wrested himself loose, and sprang back a few paces, so as to be out of the reach of the old man, who acted like one demented. But when he perceived that Marti instead of himself now took hold of the trembling girl, dealing her a violent blow in the face, then seizing her by the back of her hair, trying to drag her along and mistreat her further, he stepped up once more. Without reflecting at all he picked up a rock and struck the old man with it against the side of the head, half in fear of what the maniac meant to do to Vreni, and half in self-defense. Marti after the blow stumbled a step or two, and then fell in a heap on a pile of stones, pulling his daughter down with him in so doing. Sali freed her hair from the rough grasp of the unconscious man, and helped the girl to her feet. But then he stood lifeless, not knowing what to say or do.

The girl seeing her father lying prone on the ground like dead, put her hands to her face, shuddered and whispered: "Have you killed him?"

Sali silently nodded his head, and Vreni shrieked: "Oh, God, oh, God! It is my father! The poor man!"

And quite out of her senses she knelt down alongside of him, lifted up his head and began to examine his hurt. But there was no flow of blood, nor any other trace of injury. She let the limp body drop to the ground again. Sali put himself on the other side of the unconscious old man, and both of them stared helplessly at the pale and motionless face of Marti. They were silent and their hands dropped.

At last Sali remarked: "Perhaps he is not dead at all. I don't think he is dead. That blow can never have killed him."

Vreni tore a leaf off one of the wild roses near her, and held it before the mouth of her father. The leaf fluttered a little.

"He is still alive," she cried, "Run to the village, Sali, and get assistance."

When Sali sprang up and was about to run off, she stretched out her hand towards him, and cried: "Don't come back with the others and say nothing as to how he came by his injury. I shall keep silent and betray nothing."

In saying which the poor girl showed him a face streaming with tears of distress, and she looked at her lover as though parting from him forever.

"Come and kiss me once more," she murmured. "But no, get along with you. Everything is over between us. We can never belong to each other." And she gave him a gentle push, and he ran with a heavy heart down the path to the village.

On his way he met a small boy, one he did not know, and him he bade to get some people and described in detail where and what assistance was required. Then he drifted off in despair, wandering at random all night about the woods near the village.

In the early morning he cautiously crept forth, in order to spy out how things had gone during the night. From several persons early astir he heard the news. Marti was alive, but out of his senses, and nobody, it seemed, knew what really had happened to him. And only after learning this his mind was so far at ease that he found the way back to town and to his father's tavern, where he buried himself in the family misery.

Vreni had kept her word. Nothing could be learned of her but that she had found her father in this condition, and as he on the next day became again quite active, breathed normally and began to move about, although still without his full senses, and since, besides, there was no one to frame a complaint, it was assumed that he had met with some accident while under the influence of drink, probably had had a bad fall on the stones, and matters were left as they were.

Vreni nursed him very carefully, never left his side, except to get medicine and remedies from the shop of the village doctor, and also to pick in the vegetable patch something wherewith to cook him and herself a simple stew or soup. Those days she lived almost on air, although she had to be about and busy day and night and nobody came to help her. Thus nearly six weeks elapsed until the old man recovered sufficiently to take care of himself, though long before that he had been sitting up in bed and had babbled about one thing or another. But he had not recovered his mind, and the things he was now saying and doing seemed to show plainly that he had become weak-minded, and this in the strangest manner. He could recall what had happened but darkly, and to him it seemed something very enjoyable and laughable. Something, too, which did not touch him in any way, and he laughed and laughed all day long, and was in the best of humor, very different from what he had been before his accident. While still abed he had a hundred

foolish, senseless ideas, cut capers and made faces, pulled his black peaked woollen cap over his ears, down to his nose and his mouth, and then he would mumble something which seemed to amuse him highly. Vreni, pale and sorrowful, listened patiently to all his stories, shedding tears about his idiotic behavior, which grieved her even more than his former malicious and wicked tricks had. But it would nevertheless happen now and then, that the old man would perform some particularly ludicrous antics, and then Vreni, tortured as she was by all these scenes, would be unable to help bursting into laughter, as her joyous disposition, suppressed by all these sad events, would sometimes rend the bounds which confined her, just like a bow too tightly strung that would break.

But as soon as the old man could once more get out of bed, there was nothing more to be done. All day long he did nothing but silly things, was grinning, smirking and laughing to himself constantly, turned everything in the house topsy-turvy, sat down in the sunshine and blared at the world, put out his tongue at everybody that passed, and made long monologues while standing in the midst of the bean field.

Simultaneous with all this there came also the end of his ownership in the farm. Everything upon it had, of course, gone to wrack and ruin, and disorder reigned supreme. Not only his house, but also the last bit of land left him, pledged in court some time before, were now seized and the day of forced sale was named. For the peasant who had claims to these pieces of property, very naturally made use of the opportunities now afforded him by the illness and the failing powers of Marti to bring about a quick decision. These last proceedings in court used up the bit of cash still left to Marti, and all this was done while he in his weakness of mind had not even a notion what it was all about.

The forced sale took place, and at its close, Marti being penniless and bereft of sense, by the action of the village council, it was decided to make him an inmate of the community asylum that had been founded many years before for the precise benefit of just such poor devils as himself. This asylum was located in the cantonal capital. Before he started for his destination he was well fed for a day or two, to the eminent satisfaction of the idiot, who had developed an enormous appetite of late, and then was put on a cart drawn by a phlegmatic ox and driven by a poor peasant who besides attending to this community errand wanted to sell also a sack of potatoes at the town. Vreni sat down on the same vehicle alongside of her father in order to accompany him on this day of his being buried alive, so to speak.

It was a sad and bitter drive, but Vreni watched lovingly over her father, and let him want for nothing; neither did she grow impatient when passers-by, attracted by the ridiculous behavior of the old man, would follow the cart and make all sorts of audible remarks on its inmates. Finally they did reach the asylum, a complex of buildings connected by courts and corridors, and where a big garden was seen alive with similarly unfortunate beings as Marti himself, all dressed in a sort of uniform consisting of white coarse linen blouses and vests, with stiff caps of leather on their foolish old heads. Marti, too, was put into such a uniform, even before Vreni's departure, and her father evinced a childish joy at his new clothes, dancing about in them and singing snatches of wicked drinking songs.

"God be with you, my lords and honored fellow-inmates," he harangued a knot of them, "you surely have a palace-like home here. Go away, Vreni, and tell mother that I won't come home any more. I like it here splendidly. Goodness me, what a palace! There runs a spider across the road, and I have heard him barking! Oh, maiden mine, oh, maiden mine, don't kiss the old, kiss but the young! All the waters in the world are running into the Rhine! She with the darkest eye, she is not mine. Already going, little Vreni? Why, thou lookest as though death were in thy pot. And yet things are looking up with me. I am doing fine. Am getting wealthy in my old days. The she-fox cries with him: Halloo! Halloo! Her heart pains her. Why--oh, why? Halloo! Halloo!"

An official of the institution bade him hold his infernal noise, and then he led him away to do some easy work. Vreni took her leave sadly and then began to look up her ox cart with the peasant. When she had found it she climbed in and sat down and ate a slice of bread she had brought with her. Then she lay down and fell asleep, and a couple of hours later the peasant came and woke her, and then they drove home to the village. They arrived there in the middle of the night. Vreni went to her father's house, the one where she had been born and had spent all her days. For the first time she was all alone in it. Two days' grace she had to get out and find some other shelter. She made a fire and prepared a cup of coffee for herself, using the last remnants she still had. Then she sat down on the edge of the hearth, and wept bitterly. She was longing with all her soul to see and talk once more to Sali, and she was thinking and thinking of him. But mingling with these desires of hers were her anxieties and her fears of the future. Thus sat the poor thing, holding her head in her hand, when somebody entered at the door.

"Sali!" cried Vreni, when she looked up and saw the face dearest to her in the world. And she fell on his neck, but then they both looked at one another, and they shouted: "How poorly you look!" For Sali was as pale and sorrowful as the girl herself. Forgetting everything she drew him to her on the hearth, and questioned him: "Have you been ill, or have you also fared badly?"

"No, not ill," said Sali, "but longing for you. At home things are going fine. My father now has rare guests, and as I believe, he has become a receiver of stolen goods. And that is why there are big doings at our place, both day and night, until, I suppose, there will come a bad end to it all. Mother is helping along, eager to have guests of any kind at all, guests that fetch money into the

house, and she tries to bring some order out of all this disorder, and also to make it profitable. I am not questioned about the matter at all, neither do I care. For I have only been thinking of you all along. Since all sorts of vagrants come and go in our place, we have heard of everything concerning you, and my father is beside himself with joy, and that your father has been taken to-day to the asylum has delighted him immensely. Since he has now left you I have come, thinking you might be lonesome, and maybe in trouble."

Then Vreni told him all her sorrows in detail, but she did this with such fluency and described the intimate details in such an almost happy tone of voice as if what she was saying did not disturb her in the least. All this because the presence of her lover and his solicitude about her really rendered her happy and minimized her anxieties. She had Sali at her side. And what more did she want? Soon she had a vessel with the steaming coffee which she forced Sali to share with her.

"Day after to-morrow, then, you must leave here?" said Sali. "What is to become of you now?"

"I don't know," answered Vreni. "I suppose I shall have to seek some service and go away from here, somewhere in the wide world. But I know I won't be able to endure that without you, Sali, and yet we cannot come together. If there were no other reason it would not do because you hurt my father and made him lose his mind. That would always be a bad foundation for our wedded state, would it not? And neither of us would ever be able to forget that, never!"

Sali sighed deeply, and rejoined: "I myself wanted a hundred times to become a soldier or else go far away and hire out on a farm, but I cannot do it, I cannot leave you here, and after we are separated it will kill me, I feel sure of it, for longing for you will not let me rest day or night. I really believe, Vreni, that all this misery makes my love for you only the stronger and the more painful, so that it becomes a matter of life or death. Never did I dream that this should ever be my end."

But Vreni, while he was thus pouring out his burdened mind, gazed at him smilingly and with a face that shone with joy. They were leaning against the chimney corner, and silently they felt to the full the intense ecstasy of communion of spirits. Over and above all their troubles, high above them all, there was hovering the genius of their love, that each felt loving and beloved. And in this beatitude they both fell asleep on this cold hearth with its feathery ashes, without cover or pillow, and slept just as peacefully and softly as two little children in their cradle.

Dawn was breaking in the eastern sky when Sali awoke the first. Gently he woke Vreni, but she again and again snuggled near to him and would not rouse herself. At last he kissed her with vehemence on her mouth, and then Vreni did awaken, opened her eyes wide, and when she saw Sali she exclaimed: "Zounds, I've just been dreaming of you. I was dreaming I danced on our wedding-day, many, many hours, and we were both so happy, both so finely dressed, and nothing was lacking to our joy. And then we wanted to kiss each other, and we both longed for it, oh, so much, but always something was dragging us apart, and now it appears that it was you yourself that was interfering, that it was you who disturbed and hindered us. But how nice, how nice, that you are at least close by now."

And she fell around his neck and kissed him wildly, kissed him as if there were to be no end to it.

"And now confess, my dear, what have you been dreaming?" and she tenderly caressed his cheeks and chin.

"I was dreaming," he said, "that I was walking endlessly along a lengthy street, and through a forest, and you in the distance always ahead of me. Off and on you turned around for me, and were beckoning and smiling at me, and then it seemed to me I were in heaven. And that is all."

They stepped on the threshold of the kitchen door left open the whole night and which led direct into the open, and they had to laugh as they now saw each other plainly. For the right cheek of Vreni and the left one of Sali, which in their sleep had been resting against each other, were both quite red from the pressure, while the pallor of the opposite cheeks was engrossed by the coolth of early morning. So then they rubbed vigorously the pale cheeks to bring them into consonance with the others, each performing that service for the other. The fresh morning air, the dewy peace lying over the whole landscape, and the ruddy tints of coming sunrise, all this together made them forget their griefs and made them merry and playful, and into Vreni especially a gay spirit of carelessness seemed to have passed.

"To-morrow night then, I must leave this house," she said, "and find some other shelter. But before that happens I should love to be merry, real merry, just once, only once. And it is with thee, dear, that I want to enjoy myself. I should like to dance with you, really and truly, for a long, long time, till I could no longer move a foot. For it is that dance in my dream that I have to think of steadily. That dream was too fine, let us realize it."

"At all events I must be present when you dance," said Sali, "and see what becomes of you, and to dance with you as long as you like is just what I myself would love to do, you charming wild thing. But where?"

"Ah, Sali, to-morrow there will be kermess in a number of places near by. Of two of these I

know. On such occasions we should not be spied upon and could enjoy ourselves to our heart's content. Below at the river front I could await you, and then we can go wherever we like, to laugh and be merry--just once, only once. But stop--we have no money." And Vreni's face clouded with the sad thought, and she added blankly: "What a pity! Nothing can come of it."

"Let be," smilingly said Sali, "I shall have money enough when I meet you."

But Vreni flushed and said haltingly: "But how--not from your father, not stolen money?"

"No, Vreni. I still have my silver watch, and I will sell that."

"Then that is arranged," said Vreni, and she flushed once more. "In fact, I think I should die if I could not dance with you to-morrow."

"Probably the best for us," said Sali, "if we both could die."

They embraced with tearful smiles, and bade each other good-by, but at the moment of parting they again laughed at each other, in the sure hope of meeting again next day.

"But when shall we meet?" asked Vreni.

"At eleven at latest," answered Sali. "Then we can eat a good noon meal together somewhere."

"Fine, fine," Vreni cried after him, "come half an hour earlier then."

But the very moment of their parting Vreni summoned him back once more, and she showed suddenly a wholly changed and despairing face: "Nothing, after all, can come of our plans," she then said, weeping hard, "because I had forgotten I had no Sunday shoes any more. Even yesterday I had to put on these clumsy ones going to town, and I don't know where to find a pair I could wear."

Sali stood undecided and amazed.

"No shoes?" he repeated after her. "In that case you'll have to go in these."

"But no, no," she remonstrated. "In these I should never be able to dance."

"Well, all we can do then is to buy new ones," said Sali in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Where and what with?" asked Vreni.

"Why, in Seldwyla, where they have shoe stores enough. And money I shall have in less than two hours."

"But, Sali, I cannot accompany you to all these shoe stores, and then there will not be money enough for all the other things as well."

"It must. And I will buy the shoes for you and bring them along to-morrow."

"Oh, but, you silly, they would not fit me."

"Then give me an old shoe of yours to take along, or, stop, better still, I will take your measure. Surely that will not be very difficult."

"Take my measure, of course. I never thought of that. Come, come, I will find you a bit of tape."

Then she sat down once more on the hearth, turned her skirt somewhat up and slipped her shoe off, and the little foot showed, from yesterday's excursion to town, yet covered with a white stocking. Sali knelt down, and then took, as well as he was able, the measure, using the tape daintily in encompassing the length and width with great care, and tying knots where wanted.

"You shoemaker," said Vreni, bending down to him and laughingly flushing in embarrassment. But Sali also reddened, and he held the little foot firmly in the palm of his hand, really longer than was necessary, so that Vreni at last, blushing still a deeper red, withdrew it, embracing, however, Sali once more stormily and kissing him with ardor, but then telling him hastily to go.

As soon as Sali arrived in town he took his watch to a jeweler and received six or seven florins for it. For his silver watch chain he also got some money, and now he thought himself rich as Croesus, for since he had grown up he had never had as large a sum at once. If only the day were over, he was saying to himself, and Sunday come, so that he could purchase with his riches all the happiness which Vreni and himself were dreaming of. For though the awful day after seemed to loom darker and darker in comparison, the heavenly pleasures anticipated for Sunday shone with all the greater lustre. However, some of his remaining leisure time was spent agreeably by him in choosing the desired pair of shoes for Vreni. In fact this job to him was a most joyous diversion. He went from one shoestore to another, had them show him all the women's footwear they had in stock, and finally bought the prettiest pair he could find. They were of a finer quality and more ornate than any Vreni had ever owned. He hid them under his vest, and throughout the

rest of the day did not leave them out of his sight; he even put them under his pillow at night when he went to bed. Since he had seen the girl that day and was to meet her again next day, he slept soundly and well, but was up early, and then began to pick out his Sunday finery, dressing with greater care than ever before in his life. When he was done he looked with satisfaction at his own image in his little broken mirror. And indeed it presented an enticing picture of youth and good looks. His mother was astonished when she saw him thus attired as though for his wedding, and she asked him the meaning of it. The son replied, with a mien of indifference, that he wanted to take a long stroll into the country, adding that he felt the effects of his constant confinement in the close house.

"Queer doings, all the time," grumbled his father with ill-humor, "and forever skirmishing about."

"Let him have his way," said the mother. "Perhaps a change of air and surroundings will do him good. I'm sure to look at him he needs it. He is as pale as a ghost."

"Have you some money to spend for your outing?" now asked his father. "Where did you get it from?"

"I don't need any," said Sali.

"There is a florin for you," replied the old man, and threw him the coin. "You can turn in at the village and visit the tavern, so that they don't think we're so badly off."

"I don't intend to go to the village, and I have no use for the money. You may keep it," replied Sali, with a show of indignation.

"Well, you've had it, at any rate, and so I'll keep the money, you ill-conditioned fellow," muttered the father, and put the coin back in his pocket.

But his wife who for some reason unknown to herself felt that day particularly distressed on account of her son, brought down for him a large handkerchief of Milan silk, with scarlet edges, which she herself had worn a few odd times before and of which she knew that he liked it. He wound it about his neck, and left the long ends of it dangling. And the flaps of his shirt collar, usually worn by him turned down, he this time let stand on end, in a fit of rustic coquetry, so that he offered altogether the appearance of a well-to-do young man. Then at last, Vreni's little shoes hid below his vest, he left the house at near seven in the morning. In leaving the room a singularly powerful sentiment urged him to shake hands once more with his parents, and having reached the street, he was impelled to turn and take a last glance at the house.

"I almost believe," said Manz sententiously, "that the young fool is smitten with some woman. Nothing but that would be lacking in our present circumstances indeed."

And the mother replied: "Would to God it were so. Perhaps the poor fellow might yet be happy in life."

"Just so," growled the father. "That's it. What a heavenly lot you are picking for him. To fall in love and to have to take care of some penniless woman--yes indeed, that would be a great thing for him, would it not?"

But Mother Manz only smiled slightly, and said never another word.

Sali at first directed his steps toward the shore of the river, to that trysting-place where he was to meet Vreni. But on the way he changed his mind and steered straight for the village itself, hoping to meet her there awaiting him, since the time till noon otherwise seemed lost to him.

"What do we have to care about gossips now?" he said to himself. "And they dare not say anything against her anyway, nor am I afraid of anyone."

So he stepped into Vreni's room without any ceremony, and to his delight found her already completely dressed and bedecked, seated patiently on a stool, and awaiting her lover's coming. Nothing but the shoes was lacking.

But Sali stopped right in the centre of the room and stood like one nailed to the spot, so beautiful and alluring Vreni looked in her holiday attire. Yet it was simple enough. She wore a plain skirt of blue linen, and above that a snow-white muslin kerchief. The dress fitted her slender body wonderfully, and the brown hair with its pretty curls had been well arranged, and the usually obstinate curls lay fine and dainty about head and neck. Since Vreni had scarcely left the house for so many weeks, her complexion had grown more delicate and almost transparent; her griefs also had contributed toward that result. But at that instant a rush of sudden joy and love poured over that pallor one scarlet layer after another, and on her bosom she wore a fine nosegay of roses, asters and rosemary. She was seated at the window, and was breathing still and quiet the fresh morning air perfumed by the sun. But when she saw Sali she at once stretched out her pretty arms, bare from the elbow. And with a voice melodious and tender she exclaimed: "How nice of you and how right to come already. But have you really brought me the shoes? Surely? Well, then I won't get up until I have them on."

Sali without further ado produced the shoes and handed them to the eager maiden. Vreni instantly cast her old ones aside, slipped the new ones on, and indeed, they fitted excellently. Only now she rose quickly from her seat, dandled herself in the shoes, and walked up and down the room a few times, to be sure of their fit. She pulled up a bit her blue dress in order to admire them the better, and with extreme pleasure she examined the red loops in front, while Sali could not get his fill of the charming picture the girl presented--the lovely excitement that beautified her the more, the willowy shape, the gently heaving bosom, the delicate oval of the face with its pretty features, animated with feminine enjoyment of the moment, eager with the mere joy of living, grateful to the giver of this last bit of finery that her childish soul had longed for.

"You are looking at my posy," she said. "Have I not managed to pick a nice one? You must know these are the last ones I have managed to find in this wasted place. But there was, after all, still left a rosebud, over at the hedge in a sheltered spot a few of them and some other flowers, and the way they are now gathered up and arranged one would never think they came from a house decayed and fallen. But now it is high time for me to leave here, for not a single flower is there, and the whole house is bare."

Then only Sali noticed that all the few movables still left were gone.

"You poor little Vreni," he deplored, "have they already taken everything from you?"

"Yes," she said with a ludicrous attempt to be tragic, "yesterday, after you had left, they came and took everything of mine away that could be moved at all, and left me nothing but my bed. But that I have also sold at once, and here is the money for it--see!" And she hauled forth from the depths of an inside pocket a handful of bright new silver coins.

"With this," she continued, "the orphan patron said to me, I was to find another service in town somewhere, and that I was to start out to-day."

"Really," said Sali, after glancing about in the kitchen and the other rooms, "there is nothing at all left, no furniture, no sliver of fuel, no pot or kettle, no knife or fork. And have you had nothing to eat this morning?"

"Nothing at all," answered Vreni, with a happy laugh. "I might have gone out and got myself something for breakfast, but I preferred to remain hungry, so I could eat a lot with you, for you cannot think how much I am going to enjoy my first meal with you--how awfully much I am going to eat with you present. I am almost dying with impatience for it." And she showed him a row of pearly teeth and a little red tongue to emphasize what she said.

Sali stood like one enchanted.

"If I only might touch you," murmured Sali, "I should soon show you how much I love you, you pretty, pretty thing."

"No, no, you are right," quickly rejoined Vreni, "you would ruin all my finery, and if we also handle my flowers with some care my head and hair will profit from it, because ordinarily you disarrange all my curls."

"Well, then," grumbled Sali, "let us go."

"Not quite yet; we must wait till my bed has been fetched away. For as soon as that is gone I am going to lock up the house, and I am never to return to it. My little bundle I am going to give to the woman to keep, to the one who has bought my bed."

So they sat down together and waited until the woman showed up, a peasant woman of squat shape and robust habit, one who loved to talk, who had a stout boy with her that was to carry the bedstead. When this woman got sight of Vreni's lover and of the girl herself in all her finery, she opened mouth and eyes to their fullest, squared herself and put her arms akimbo, shouting: "Why, look only, you're starting well, Vreni. With a lover and yourself dressed up like a princess."

"Don't I?" laughed Vreni, in a friendly way. "And do you know who that is?"

"I should think so," said the woman. "That is Sali Manz, or I am much mistaken. Mountains and valleys, they say, do not meet, but people most certainly do. But, child, let me warn you. Think how your parents have fared."

"Ah, that is all changed now," smilingly replied Vreni. "Everything has been adjusted, and now things are smoothed out. See here, Sali is my promised husband." And the girl told this bit of news in a manner almost condescending, and bent toward the woman one of her bewitching glances.

"Your promised husband, is he? Well, well, who would have thought it?" chattered the peasant woman, feeling highly honored at being the recipient of this interesting intelligence.

"Yes, and he is now a wealthy gentleman," went on Vreni, "for he has just won a hundred thousand dollars in the lottery. Just think!"

The woman gave a jump of surprise, threw up her hands, and shouted: "Hund--hundred

thousand--Hund--"

Vreni repeated it with a serious face.

The woman grew still more excited.

"Hundred thousand--well, well. But you are making fun of me, child. Hund--Is it possible?"

"All right, as you choose," went on Vreni, still smiling.

"But if it is true, and he gets all that money, what are you two going to do with it? Are you to become a stylish lady, or what?"

"Of course, within three weeks our wedding takes place--such a wedding."

"Oh, my goodness, is it possible? But no, you are telling me stories, I know."

"Well, he has already bought the finest house in Seldwyla, with a fine vineyard and the biggest garden attached. And you must come and pay us a visit, after we're there--I count on it."

"Why, what a witch you are," the woman went on between belief and unbelief.

"You will see how nice it is there," continued Vreni unabashed. "A cup of coffee you'll get, such as you never drank before, and plenty of cake with it, of butter and honey."

"Oh, you lucky duck!" shrieked the woman, "depend upon my coming, of course." And she made an eager face, as though she already saw spread before her all these dainties.

"But if you should happen to come at noontime," went on Vreni in her fanciful tale, "and you would be tired from marketing, you shall have a bowl of strong broth and a bottle of our extra wine, the one with the blue seal."

"That will certainly do me good," said the woman.

"And there shall be no lack of some candy and white wheaten rolls, for your little ones at home."

"I think I can taste it already," answered the woman, and she turned her eyes heavenwards.

"Perhaps a pretty kerchief, or the remnant of a bolt of extra fine silk, or a costly ribbon or two for your skirts, or enough for an apron I suppose will be found, if we rummage in my drawers and trunks together sometime when we are talking things over."

The woman turned completely on her heels and shook her skirts with a jubilant yodel.

"And in case your husband could start in the cattle dealing way, and needed a bit of capital for it, you would know where to apply, would you not? My dear Sali will always be glad to invest some of his superfluous money in such a manner. And I myself might add a few pennies from my savings to help out a good and intimate gossip, you may be certain."

By this time the last faint doubts had vanished. The woman wrung her uncouth hands, and said, with a great deal of sentiment: "That's what I have always been saying, you are a square and honest and beautiful girl! May the Lord always be good to you and reward you for what you are going to do for me!"

"But on my part, I must insist that you, too, treat me well."

"Surely you have a right to expect that," said the woman.

"And that you at all times offer me first all your produce, be it fruit or potatoes, or vegetables, and to do this before you take them to the public market, so that I may always be sure of having a real peasant woman on hand, one upon whom I may rely. Whatever anybody else is willing to pay you for your produce, I will also be willing to give. You know me. Why, there is nothing nicer than a wealthy city lady, one who sits within town walls and cannot know prices and conditions there, and yet needs so many things in her household, and an honest and well-posted woman from the country, experienced in all that concerns her, who are bound together by durable friendship and a community of interests. The city lady profits from it at all sorts of occasions, as for example at weddings and baptisms, at seasons of illness or crop failure, at holidays and famine time, or inundations, from which the Lord preserve us!"

"From which the Lord preserve us!" repeated the woman solemnly, sobbing and wiping her wet face on her ample apron. "But what a sensible and well-informed little wife you'll make, to be sure! Without doubt you will live as happily as a mouse in the cheese, or there is no justice in this world. Handsome, clean, smart and wise, fit for and willing to tackle all work at any time. None is as good-looking and as fine as thou art, no, not in the whole village, and even some distance further away. And who has got you for wife can congratulate himself; he is bound to be in paradise, or he is a scoundrel, and he will have me to deal with. Listen, Sali, do not fail to be nice to Vreni, or you will hear a word from me, you lucky devil, to break such a rose without thorns as

this one here!"

"For to-day, my dear woman," concluded Vreni, "take this bundle along, as we agreed yesterday, and keep it till I send for it. But it may be that I myself come for it, in my own carriage, and get it, if you have no objection. A drink of milk you will not refuse me in that case, and a nice cake, such as perhaps an almond tart, I shall probably bring along myself."

"You blessed child, give it here, your bundle," the peasant woman quavered, still completely under the influence of Vreni's eloquence.

Vreni therefore deposited on top of the bedding which the woman had already tied up, a huge bag containing all the girl's belongings, so that the stout-limbed woman was bearing a perfect tower of shaking and trembling baggage on her head.

"It is almost too much for me to carry at once," she complained. "Could I not come again and divide the load in halves?" she wanted to know.

"No, no," answered Vreni, "we must leave here at once, for we have to visit a whole number of wealthy relatives, and some of these are far away, the kind, you know, who have now recognized us since we have become rich ourselves. You know how the world wags."

"Yes, indeed," said the woman, "I do know, and so God keep you, and think of me now and then in your glorious new state."

Then the peasant woman trundled off with her monstrously high tower of bundles, preserving its equilibrium by skillfully balancing the weight, and behind her trudged her boy, who stood up in the center of Vreni's gaily painted bedstead, his hard head braced against the baldaquin of it in which the eye beheld stars and suns in a firmament of multicolored muslin, and like another Samson, grasping with his red fists the two prettily carved slender pillars in front which supported the whole. As Vreni, leaning against Sali, watched the procession meandering down between the gardens of the nearer houses, and the aforesaid little temple forming part of her whilom bedstead, she remarked: "That would still make a fine little arbor or garden pavilion if placed in the midst of a sunny garden, with a small table and a bench inside, and quickly growing vines planted around. Eh, Sali, wouldn't you like to sit there with me in the shade?"

"Why, yes, Vreni," said he, smiling, "especially if the vines once had grown to a size."

"But why not go now?" continued she. "Nothing more is holding us here."

"True," he assented. "Come, then, and lock up the house. But to whom will you deliver up the key?"

Vreni looked around. "Here to this halberd let us hang it. For more than a century it has been in our house, as I've often heard father say. Now it stands at the door as the last sentinel."

So they hung the rusty key of the housedoor to one of the rustier curves of the stout weapon, which was fairly overgrown with bean vines, and sallied forth.

But after all Vreni grew faint, and Sali had to support her the first score steps, the parting with the place where her cradle had stood making her sad. But she did not look back.

"Where are we bound for first?" she wanted to know.

"Let us make a regular excursion across the country," said Sali, "and stop at a spot where we shall be comfortable all day long. And don't let us hurry. Towards evening we shall easily be able to find a dance going on."

"Good," answered Vreni. "Thus we shall be together the whole day, and go where we like. But above all, I feel quite faint. Let us stop in the next village and get some coffee."

"Of course," said the young man. "But let us first get away from here."

Soon they were in the open, fields of ripe, waving corn or else of fresh stubble around them, and went along, quietly and full of deep contentment, close to each other, breathing the pure air as though freed from prison walls. It was a delicious Sunday morning in September. There was not a cloud to be seen in the sky of deep azure, and in the distance the hills and woods were enwrapped in a delicate haze, so that the whole landscape looked more solemn and mysterious. From everywhere the tolling of the church bells was heard, the harmonious deep tones of a big swinging bell belonging to a wealthy congregation, or the talkative two small bells of a poor village that made fast time to create any impression at all. The lovers forgot completely as to what was to become of them at the end of this rare day, forgot the disturbing uncertainties of their young lives, and gave themselves up completely to the intoxicating delights of the moment, sank their very souls in a calm joy that knew no words and no fears. Neatly clothed, free to come or go, like two happy ones who before God and men belong to each other by all rights, they went forth into the still Sunday country side. Each slight sound or call, reverberating and finally losing itself in the general silence, shook their hearts as though the strings of a harp had been touched by divine fingers. For Love is a musical instrument which makes resound the farthest and the

most indifferent subjects and changes them into a music all its own.

Though both were hungry and faint, the half hour's walk to the next village seemed to them but a step, and they entered slowly the little inn that stood at the entrance to the place.

Sali ordered a substantial and appetizing breakfast, and while it was being prepared they observed, quiet as two mice, the interior of this homely place of entertainment, everything in it being scrupulously clean and orderly, from the walls and tables and napkins to the hearth and floor. The guest room itself was large and airy, and the window panes glittered in the furtive rays of the sun. The host of the inn was at the same time a baker, and his last baking, just out of the oven, spread a delicious odor through the whole house. Stacks of fresh loaves were carried past them in clean baskets, since after church service the members of the congregation were in the habit of getting here their white bread or to drink their noon shoppen. The hostess, a rather handsome and neat woman, dressed in their Sunday finery all her little brood of children, leisurely and pleasantly, and as she was done with one more of the little ones, the latter, proud and glad, would come running to Vreni, showing her all their finery, and innocently boasting and bragging of their belongings and of all else they held precious.

When at last the fragrant coffee was brought and served for them, together with other good things, at a convenient table, the two young people sat down somewhat embarrassed, just as if they had been invited as honored guests to do so. But they got over this mood, and whispered to each other modestly but happily, feeling the joy of each other's presence. And oh, how Vreni enjoyed her breakfast, the strong coffee, the cream, the fresh rolls still warm from the oven, the rich butter and the honey, the omelet, and all the other splendid things dished up for them. Delicious it all tasted, not only because she had been really hungry, but because she could look all the while at Sali, and she ate and ate, as if she had been fasting for a whole year.

With that she also took pleasure in the pretty service, the fine cups and saucers and dishes, the dainty silver spoons, and the snowy linen. For the hostess seemed to have made up her mind about these two, and she evidently regarded them as young people of good family, who were to be waited upon in proper style, and several times she came and sat down by them, chatting most agreeably, and both Sali and Vreni answered her sensibly, whereat the woman became still more affable. And Vreni felt the wholesome influence of all this so strongly, and a sense of snug comfort coursed so pleasantly through her veins that she in her mind found it hard to choose between the delights of wandering about in the woods and fields, hand in hand with her lover, or remaining for some time longer here in this inn, in this haven of rest and creature comfort, honored and respected and dreaming herself into the illusion of owning such a nice home as this herself.

But Sali himself rendered the choice easier, for in a perfectly proper and rather husbandlike manner he urged departure, just as though they had duties to fulfil elsewhere. Both host and hostess saw the young couple to the door, and bade them good-by in the most orthodox and well-meaning way, and Vreni, too, showed her manners and reciprocated their courtesy like one to the manner born, then following Sali in most decent and moral style. But even after reaching the open country once more and entering an oak forest a couple of miles long, both of them were still under the influence of the spell, and they went along in a dreamy mood, just as though they both did not come from homes destroyed and filled with hatred and discord, but from happy and harmonious homes, expecting from life the near fulfilment of all their rosy hopes.

Vreni bent her pretty head down on her flower-bedecked bosom, deep in thought, and went along the smooth, damp woodpath with hands carefully held along her sides, while Sali stepped along elastic and upright, quick and thoughtful, his eyes fastened to the oak trunks ahead of him, like a well-to-do peasant reflecting on the problem which of these trees it would best pay to cut down and which to leave. But at last they awoke from these vain dreams, glanced at each other and discovered that they were still maintaining the attitude with which they had left the inn. Then they both blushed and their heads drooped in melancholy fashion. Youth, however, soon reasserted itself. The woods were green, the sky overhead faultlessly blue, and they were alone by themselves in the world, and thus they soon drifted back into that train of thought. But they did not long remain by themselves, since this attractive forest road began to be alive with groups and couples out for a bracing walk in the cool shade, most of them returning from service in church, and nearly all of these were singing gay worldly tunes, trifling and joking with each other. For in these parts it so happens that the rustics have their customary walks and promenades as well as the city dwellers, to which they resort at leisure, only with this great difference that their pleasure grounds cost nothing to maintain and that these are finer in every way, since Nature alone has made them. Not alone do they stroll about on Sundays through fields and meadows and woods with a peculiar sense of freedom and recreation, taking stock of their ripening crops and the prospects of the harvest to come, but they also choose with unerring taste excursions along the edge of forest or meadow, hill or dale, sit down for a brief rest on the summit of a height, whence they enjoy a fine view, or sing in chorus at another suitable spot, and certainly obtain fully as much, if not more, pleasure out of all this as town folk do. And since they do all this, not as labor but diversion, one must conclude that these rustics, despite of what has often been claimed to the contrary, are lovers of nature, aside from the strictly utilitarian view of it. And always they break off something green and living, young and old, even weak and decrepit women, when they revisit the scenes of long ago, and the same spirit is seen in the habit that these country people have, including sedate men of business, of cutting for themselves a slender rod of hazel, or a snappy cane, whenever they walk through woods or forest, and these they will

peel all but a small bunch of green leaves at the point. Such rods or twigs they will bear as though it were a sceptre, and when they enter an office or public place they will put them in a corner of the room, and never forget to get them again, even after the most serious and important matters have been discussed, and to take them along with them home. And it is then only the privilege of the youngest of their boys to seize it, break it, play with it, in fine, destroy it.

When Sali and Vreni noticed these many couples out for a holiday stroll, they laughed to themselves, and rejoiced that they, too, were such a happy pair; they lost themselves on side paths that led away from every noise, and there they felt protected by the green solitude. They remained where they liked, went on or rested again for a spell, and in unison with the sky overhead which was cloudless, no carking care came to disturb their serenity. This state of perfect, unalloyed bliss lasted for them for hours, and they for the time forgot wholly whence they came and whither they were going, and behaved with such a degree of decorum that Vreni's little posy actually remained as fresh and intact as it had been early in the morning, and her plain Sunday dress showed neither crease nor stain. As to Sali, he behaved all this time not like a youthful rustic of less than twenty, nor like the son of a broken-down tavern keeper, but rather like a youth a couple of years younger and quite innocent, withal of the best education. It was almost comical to observe his conduct towards his merry Vreni, looking at her with a touching mixture of tenderness, respect and care. For these two lovers, so unsophisticated and so entirely without guile, somehow understood how to run in the course of this one day of perfect joy vouchsafed them through all the gamut of love, and to make up not alone for the earlier and more poetic stages of it but also to taste its bitter and ultimate end with its passionate sacrifice of life itself.

Thus they thoroughly tired themselves running about part of the day, and hunger had come a second time that day when, from the crest of a shady mountain, they at last perceived, far down at their feet, a village of some size lying there in the glow of the westering sun. Rapidly they made the descent, and entered the village just as decorously as they had done the other earlier in the day. Nobody was about that knew them even by sight, for Vreni particularly had scarcely at all mingled with people during the last few years, nor had she been off on visits to other villages. Therefore they presented entirely the appearance of a decent young couple out on an errand of importance.

They went to the best inn of the place, and there Sali at once ordered a good and substantial meal. A table was specially reserved for them, and everything needful was there laid out and they sat down again demurely in the corner and eyed the trappings and furniture of the handsome room, with its wainscoted walls of polished walnut, the well-appointed sideboard of the same wood, and the filmy window curtains of white lace. The hostess stepped up to them in a sociable manner, and set a vase full of fresh flowers on the table.

"Until the soup is ready," she said pleasantly, "you may like to feast your eyes on these flowers from our garden. From all appearance, if you don't mind my curiosity, you are a young couple on their way to town to get married to-morrow?"

Vreni blushed furiously, and did not dare raise her head. Nor did Sali say anything in reply, and the hostess continued: "Well, of course, you are both still very young. But young love, long life, as the saying is, and at least you are both good-looking enough and need not hide yourselves from people. If you will but work and strive together like sensible folk, you may succeed in life before you know it, for youth is a good thing, and so are diligence and faith in one another. But that, of course, is necessary, for there will come also days you will not like, many days, many days. But after all, life is pleasant enough, if one but understands how to make a proper use of it. And don't mind my chatter, you young people, but it does me good to look at you two, so handsome and young."

Just then the waitress brought in the soup, and since she had overheard the concluding phrases, and would herself have liked to get married, she regarded Vreni with envious eyes, for she begrudged her what she assumed was so soon in store for this young girl. She retired precipitately into the adjoining room, and there she let her tongue go clacking. To the hostess who was busy there with some household task, she said, so loud as to be distinctly heard by the young people: "Yes, these are indeed the right kind of people to go to town and hurry up marrying, without a penny, without friends, without dowry, and with nothing in view but misery and beggary! What in the world is to become of such people if the girl is still so young that she does not even know how to put on her frock or jacket, nor how to cook a plate of soup! Oh, what fools! But I feel sorry for the young fellow, such a good-looking fellow he is, and then to get a little ignorant doll like that!"

"Sh-sh--will you keep your mouth shut, you evil-mouthed slut," broke in the indignant hostess. "Don't you dare say anything against them. I am pretty sure that is a deserving young couple, and I will not hear them wronged. Probably they are from the mountains where the factories are, and while they are not dressed richly they look neat and cleanly, and if only they are fond of each other and not afraid of work, they will get along better than you with your bitter tongue. And that I will tell you--you'll have to wait a long while before anybody will take you, unless you change considerably, you vinegary old thing!"

Thus it was that Vreni tasted all the delights of a bride on her wedding trip: the well-meaning conversation of an experienced and sensible woman, the jealousy of a wicked and man-crazy

person, one who from anger at the bride praises and sympathizes with the lover, and an appetizing meal at the side of this same lover. She glowed in the face like a carnation, her heart beat like a trip hammer, but she ate and drank nevertheless with a perfectly normal appetite, and was all the more amiable with the waitress who served them, but could not help on such occasions looking tenderly at Sali, and whispering to him, so that he also began to feel rather amorous. However, they sat a long time over their meal, delaying its end, as though they were both unwilling to destroy the lovely deception. The hostess came and brought them for dessert all sorts of sweet cakes and other dainties, and Sali ordered rarer and more fiery wine, so that the choice liquor ran through Vreni's veins like a flame, albeit she was cautious and sipped it but sparingly and kept up the semblance of a chaste and prudent young bride. Half of this was natural cunning on her part; but as for the other half, she felt indeed as if the rôle were reality, and what with anxiety and what with ardent love for Sali she thought her little heart would burst, so that the walls seemed to her too narrow, and she begged him to go. And they went off. It was now as if they were afraid to turn aside from the main road and into side paths, where they would be by themselves, for they continued on the highway, right through the throng of pleasure seekers, not looking to right or left. But when they had left the village behind them and were on their way towards the next, where kermess was being celebrated, Vreni linked her arm in his and whispered: "Sali, why not belong altogether one to the other and be happy!"

And Sali answered, fastening his dreamy eyes upon the sun-flooded valley below where the meadows showed like a purple carpet of wildflowers, "Ah, why not?"

And they instantly stopped in the road, and wanted to kiss each other. But suddenly a group of passers-by broke out of the near woods, and then they felt shy and desisted. On they went towards the big village in which the bustle of kermess was already noticeable from afar. The lanes were crowded, and before the most considerable tavern of the place a multitude of noisy, shouting people were assembled. From inside the tavern the strains of a lively, gay tune were heard. For the young villagers had begun dancing shortly after the noon hour, and on an open square in front of the tavern a market had been established where all sorts of sweets were for sale, and in another couple of booths could be seen flimsy bits of finery, ornaments, silk kerchiefs and the like, and around these were to be seen children and some others who for the moment were content to be mere observers.

Sali and Vreni also stepped up to these booths, and they let their eyes travel over all these things. For both had instantly put their hands in their pockets and each wanted to present the other with a little gift, since that was the first and only time they had been together at a fair. Sali, therefore, bought a big house of gingerbread, the walls of which were calsomined with a mixture of butter and melted sugar, and on the green roof of which were perching snow-white pigeons, while from the chimney a small cupid was peeping forth clad as a chimney sweep. At the open windows of this wonderful house plump-cheeked persons with diminutive red mouths were embracing each other most affectionately, the kissing process being represented by the gingerbread artist by a sort of double mouth, or twins, one melting into the other. Black points meant eyes, and on the pinky-red housedoor there could be read the following touching stanzas:

Enter my house, beloved,
Yet do not thou forget
That all the coin accepted
Is kisses sweet, you bet.

His sweetheart said: "Oh, dear one,
This threat does not deter!
My love for thee is greater
Than any kind of fare.

"And come to think it over,
'Twas kisses I did seek."
Well, then, step in, my lady,
And let thy lips now speak.

A gentleman in a blue frock coat and a lady with an expansive bosom thus complimented each other by these rhymes into the house; both were painted to right and left of the wall. Vreni on her part presented Sali with a gingerbread heart, on which on either side these verses were pasted:

A sweet, sweet almond pierces my heart, as you see,
But sweeter far than almonds is my love for thee.

When thou my heart hast eaten,
Oh, let me not disguise
That sooner than my love can break
Will break my nutbrown eyes.

Both of them eagerly read these verses, and never had rhymes, never had any kind of poetry,

been more deeply felt and appreciated than were these gingerbread stanzas. They could not help fancying that they had been specially written for them, for they fitted so marvelously their requirements.

"Ah, you give me a house," sighed Vreni. "But I have first made thee a gift of one myself, and of the real one. For our hearts are now our sole dwellings, and within them we live, and we carry our houses about with us wherever we may go, just like the snail. Other abode we have none left now."

"But then we are snails really, of which each carries the house of the other," replied Sali.

"Then we must never leave each other, for fear that we lose the other's house," answered Vreni.

They did not notice that they themselves were perpetrating the same species of humor as was spread out on the printed pasters of the gingerbread literature. So they continued to study the latter with deep interest. The most pathetic sentiments, both agreed, were found on the heartshaped cakes, whereof there was a great choice, both plain and ornamental, small and large. All the verses they read seemed to them wonderfully apt and appropriate to the occasion. When Vreni read on a gilt heart which like a lyre bore strings:

> My heart is like a fiddlestring,
> Touch gently it and it will sing,

she could not refrain from remarking: "How true that is! Why, I can hear my own heart making music!"

An image of Napoleon in gingerbread was also there, and even this, instead of speaking in heroic measure, symbolized a love-smitten swain, for it declared in wretched rhyme:

> Terrific was Napoleon's might,
> His sword of steel, his heart was light;
> My love is sweet like any rose,
> Yet is she faithful, goodness knows.

But while both seemed busy sounding all the depths of these appeals to the muses, they secretly made a purchase. Sali bought for Vreni a small gift ring, with a stone of green glass, and Vreni a ring fashioned out of chamois horn, in which a gold forget-me-not was cleverly inlaid. Probably both were moved with the same idea, that of a farewell gift.

However, while they thus were entirely engrossed with these things they had not remarked that a wide ring was forming gradually around them made up of people who watched them closely and curiously. For as quite a number of lads and lasses from their own village had come to the kermess, they had been recognized, and these all now stood at some little distance away from them, regarding with astonishment this neatly dressed couple that in their intense preoccupation had eyes for nothing else in the world.

"Just look," the murmuring went round; "why, that is Vreni Marti and Sali from town. They surely have met and made up. And what tenderness, what friendship for one another! Only notice!"

The amazement of these onlookers was strangely mingled of pity with the ill-fortune of the young couple, of disdain for the wickedness and poverty of their parents, and of envy for the happiness and deep affection of these two. For it struck these coarse materialistic rustics that the couple were fond of each other in a manner most unusual in their own circles, excited to an uncommon degree and so taken up with one another and indifferent to all else, as to make them almost appear to belong to a more aristocratic sphere, so that altogether they seemed singular and strange to these gross villagers.

When therefore Sali and Vreni finally awoke from their dreams and threw a glance around, they saw nothing but staring faces. Nobody greeted them; and they themselves knew not whether to salute anyone of these former acquaintances, whose show of unfriendliness was, just the same, not so much design as astonishment. Vreni became afraid and blushed from sheer embarrassment, but Sali took her hand and led her away. And the poor girl followed him willingly, bearing in her hand the huge gingerbread cottage, although the trumpets and horns from inside the inn sounded so invitingly, and although she was most anxious and eager to dance.

"We cannot dance here," said Sali, when they had been going some little distance aside, "for there would not be any amusement in it under the circumstances."

"You are right," Vreni said sadly, "and I really think now we had better drop the whole idea and I will try and find a place for me to stay overnight."

"No," Sali cried, "you must have a chance to dance for once. For that, too, I brought you the

shoes. Let us go where the poor folks are having a good time, since we, too, belong to them. They will not look down on us. At every kermess here there is also dancing at the Paradise Garden, since it belongs to this parish, and we are going there, and you can, if it comes to the worst, also find a bed to sleep there."

Vreni shuddered at the thought of having to sleep for the first time of her young life in a place where nobody knew her. But she followed without a murmur where Sali led her. Was he not everything in the world to her now? The so-called Paradise Garden was a house of entertainment situated in a beautiful spot, lying all by itself at the side of a mountain from which one had a view far over the whole country. But on holidays like this only the poorer classes, the children of small farmers and of day laborers, even vagrants, used to resort to it. A hundred years before a wealthy man of queer habits had built it as a summer villa for himself, and nobody had succeeded him as tenant, and since the house could not be used for anything else, the whole place after a while began to decay, and so finally it got into the hands of an innkeeper who managed it in his own peculiar way.

The name alone and the style of architecture had remained. The house itself consisted of but one story, and on top of that an open loggia had been erected, the roof of which was borne on the four corners by statues of sandstone. These were meant for the four archangels and were wholly defaced. At the edge of the roof could be seen all about small angels carved of the same material and all of them playing some musical instrument, the angels themselves showing monstrous heads and big paunches, fiddling, touching the triangle, blowing the flute, striking the cymbal or the tambourine; these instruments had originally been gilt. The ceiling inside and the low sidewalls, as well as all the rest of the house were still covered with rather dingy fresco paintings, and these represented dancing and singing saints. But all of it had suffered from the weather and the rain, and was now as indistinct and chaotic as a dream itself. And besides, all over the walls clambered grapevines, and at this time of year purplish ripening grapes peeped forth from between the foliage. All about the house itself there stood chestnut trees, and gnarled big rosebushes, growing wildly after a fashion of their own, just as lilac bushes would grow elsewhere.

The loggia served as dance hall, and as Vreni and Sali came in sight of the building they could notice the dancing couples turning around and around under the open roof, and outside, under the trees, drinking, shouting and noisy men and women were disporting themselves. It was a merry throng.

Vreni, who was carrying in her hand, demurely and almost piously, her wonderful gingerbread palace, resembled one of those ancient and sainted church patronesses sometimes seen in missals, with a model of the cathedral or other devout foundation displayed which would earn her the Church's benediction. But as soon as she heard the wild music that came down in a tumbling stream from the loggia, the poor thing forgot her grief. Suddenly all alive she demanded rapturously that Sali should dance with her. They pushed their way through all these people that were crowding the environs of the house and the lower floor, these being mostly ragged people from Seldwyla, with some who had been making a cheap excursion into the country, and all sorts of homeless vagrants. Then they ascended the stairs and at once after arriving on top they seized each other and were whirling away in a lively waltz. Not an eye did they give to their surroundings until the music came to a temporary halt. Then they stopped and turned around. Vreni had crushed her gingerbread house, and was just going to shed a few tears on that account when she noticed the black fiddler, and now felt a veritable terror.

He was seated near them, upon a bench which itself stood upon a big table, and he looked just as black and tawny as ever. But to-day he wore a bunch of green holly and pine in his funny little hat, and at his feet there stood a big bottle of claret and a tumbler, and he did not in the least touch either of these with his feet, although he was forever kicking up his legs to keep the tune while fiddling. Next to him sat a handsome young man with a French horn, but the young man looked melancholy, and a hunchback there also was, standing next a bass viol. Sali also had a fright in seeing the black fiddler, but the latter greeted them both in the friendliest manner and called out to them: "You see I knew that some day I should play to your dancing, just as I said when I last met you. And now, you darlings, I trust you'll have a good time, and take a drink with me."

He offered the full glass to Sali, who accepted it, emptied it and thanked the fiddler. And when he saw that Vreni was badly scared at seeing him, he did his best to reassure her, and jested with her in a rather nice way, until he had made her laugh. Thereupon Vreni recovered her courage, and both of them felt rather glad that they had an acquaintance there and were in a certain sense standing under the special protection of the black fellow. Then they danced steadily, forgetting themselves and the whole world in the constant twirling, singing, shouting and general noise, a noise which rolled down the hill and over the whole landscape which gradually began to be shrouded in a silvery autumn haze. They danced until twilight, when most of the merry guests disappeared, unsteady on their feet and shouting at the top of their voices. Those still remaining were the vagrants and stragglers, houseless and strongly inclined to turn night into day. Amongst these there were some who seemed on very friendly terms with the black fiddler and who for the most part looked outlandish because of oddities of costume. There was, for instance, a young man in a green corduroy jacket and a tattered straw hat, who wore around the crown of the latter a wreath of wild scarlet berries. He again had with him a savage sort of female who wore a skirt of cherry-red chintz and had a hoop made of young grapevine tied around her temples, so that at

each side of her face hung a bunch of grapes. This couple was the jolliest of all, to be met with everywhere, and was dancing and singing without a stop. Then there was a slender, graceful girl there, wearing a thin silk dress and a white cloth on her head, the ends of which fell on her shoulders. The cloth had evidently once been a napkin or towel. But below this doubtful cloth there glowed a pair of magnificent eyes of deep violet hue. Around her neck this extravagant person wore a sixfold chain of the same autumnal berries, and this ornament suited her complexion marvelously well. This strange woman was dancing perpetually with none but herself, whirling almost unintermittently, with great grace and a very light step, refusing every partner that offered himself. Every time she passed in her dancing the sad hornblower she smiled, and the musician turned away his head.

Some other gay women or girls there were, together with their escorts, all of them poorly or fantastically clad, but with all that they assuredly enjoyed themselves greatly, and there seemed to be perfect accord among them all. When it had turned completely dark the host refused to furnish light for illumination, since the wind would blow the candles out anyway, and besides the full-moon would be out in a short spell, and for the present company, he claimed, the moonlight was ample. This declaration, instead of being opposed, caused general satisfaction among this mongrel crowd; they all stood up at the open sides of the dance hall and watched the moon rise in her full splendor, and when the new golden light flooded the wide hall, dancing was resumed with great earnestness. And so quiet, good-natured and well-mannered was it done as if they were turning under the light of a hundred wax candles. This singular light, too, made them all more intimately acquainted with each other, as though they had known them for years, and thus it was that Sali and Vreni could not very well avoid mingling with the rest and dancing with other partners. But whenever they had been separated for just a short while they flew and rejoined the other without delay, and felt delighted thereat. Sali made a sad face at this, and when dancing with another person would turn toward Vreni. But she would not notice that, but would glide along like a fairy, her features transfigured with pleasure, and her whole soul enraptured with the swaying motions of the dance, no matter who her partner.

"Are you jealous, Sali?" she asked smilingly, when the musicians took a longer rest.

"Not the least," he replied.

"Then why are you so angry when I'm dancing with somebody else?" she wanted to know.

"I am not angry because of that," he said, "but only because I am forced to dance with another person but you. I cannot feel pleasant towards another girl. In fact, I feel just as though I had a block of wood in my arms if it is anybody but you. And you? How do you feel about that?"

"Oh, I feel as though I were in heaven so long as I merely can dance and know that you are present," replied Vreni. "But I believe I should at once fall down dead if you went and left me here by myself."

They had gone down from the dance hall and were now standing in the grounds before the house. Vreni put both her arms around his neck, pressed her slender trembling body against him, and put her burning cheek, wet from hot tears, to his, sobbing out: "We cannot marry, and yet I cannot leave you, not for a moment, not for a minute."

Sali embraced the girl, pressed her ardently against his heart, and covered her with kisses. His confused thoughts were struggling for some way out of the labyrinth that encompassed them both, but he saw none. Even if the blot of his family misery and his neglected education were not weighing against him, his extreme youth and his ardent passion would have prevented a long period of patience and self-denial, and then there would still have been his misfortune in having injured Vreni's father for life. The consciousness that happiness for himself and her was, after all, to be found only in a union honest, blameless and approved by the whole world, was just as much alive in him as in Vreni. In her case as in his, two beings ostracized by all, these reflections were like the last flaring up of their lost family honor, an honor that had been blazing for centuries in their respectable houses like a living flame, and which their fathers had involuntarily extinguished and destroyed by a misdeed which at the time had been committed more in thoughtlessness than with malice aforethought. For when they, in the attempt to enlarge their holdings by a piece of dishonesty that seemed at the time wholly without risk and not likely to entail serious consequences, had been guilty of a wrong to a person that had been universally given up as lost, they had done something which many of their otherwise correct neighbors would, under the same circumstances, likewise have done.

Such wrongs as that are indeed perpetrated every day in the year, on a large or a small scale. But once in a while Fate furnishes an example of how two such transgressors against the honor of their houses and against the property of another may oppose each other, and then these will unfailingly fight to the death and devour one the other like two savage beasts. For those who furtively or forcibly increase their estate may commit such fateful blunders not only when they are seated on thrones and then apply a high-sounding name to their lust and their misdeed, but the same in substance is often done as well in the humblest hut, and both categories of sinners frequently accomplish the very reverse of what they aimed at, and their shield of honor then becomes overnight a tablet of shame. But Sali and Vreni had both of them, when still children, seen and cherished the honor of their families, and well remembered how well they themselves were taken care of and how respected and highly considered their fathers had been in those

days.

Later they had been separated for long years, and when they met again they saw in each other also the lost honor and luck of their houses, and that instinctive feeling had helped to make them cling to each other all the more tenaciously. They longed indeed, both of them, for happiness and joy, but only if it might be done legitimately and in the sight of all; yet at the same time their ardent affection for each other could not be suppressed and their senses, their bounding blood, called loudly for the consummation of their desires.

"Now it is night," said Vreni in a low tone of voice, "and we will have to part."

"What, I am to go home now and leave you alone?" retorted Sali. "No, that can never be."

"But what then?" said Vreni, plaintively. "Tomorrow morning by daylight things will look no better."

"Let me give you a piece of advice," a shrill voice suddenly was heard behind them. It was the black fiddler, who now came up to them. "You foolish young things! There you are now, and you know not what to do with yourselves, although you are fond of each other. Yet nothing easier than that. I advise you to delay no more. Let one take the other, just as you are. Come along with me and my good friends here, right into the mountains, for there you need no priest, no money, no documents, no honor, no dowry, no bed and no wedding--nothing but your mutual good will. Don't get frightened. Things are not at all so bad with us. Pure air and enough to eat, provided one is not afraid to work. The green woods are our home, and there we love and keep house just as we wish. During the winter we lie snug in some warm, cosy den of our own contriving, or else we creep into the warm hay of the peasants. Therefore, lose no time. Keep your wedding right now and here, and then come along with us, and you are rid of all your cares, and may belong to each other forever and aye, or at least as long as you want to. For have no fear--you'll grow old with us; our style of life procures good strong health, you may well believe me. And don't think, you silly young folk, that I am bearing you a grudge because of what your fathers have done to me. No indeed. Of course, it gives me pleasure to see you arrived there where you now are. But with that I rest content, and I promise you to help and aid you in all sorts of ways if you will only be guided by me."

He said all this in a sincere and well-meaning tone. "Well, think it over, if you wish, for a spell," he encouraged them still further, "but follow my counsel if you are wise. Let the world go, and belong to each other and ask nobody's consent. Think of the gay bridal bed in the deep forest glade, and of the comfortable hay barn in winter." And saying which he disappeared again in the house.

But Vreni was trembling like aspen in Sali's arms, and he asked her: "What do you think of all that? To me it seems indeed it would be best to let the whole world go hang, and to love each other without hindrance and fear."

But Sali said this more jokingly than in earnest. Vreni, on the other hand, took it all seriously, kissed him and replied: "No, I should not like that. These people do not act according to my notions. That young man with the French horn, for instance, and the girl in the silk skirt also belong together in that way, and are said to have been very much in love. But last week, it seems, she has been, for the first time, unfaithful to her lover, and he grieves greatly on that account, and he is angry at her and at the others, but they merely ridicule him. And she is imposing a kind of self-inflicted and ludicrous penance on herself by dancing all alone, without any partner, and without speaking to anyone, but that, too, is only making a fool of him. However, one may see that the poor musician is going to make up with her this very night. But I must say, I should not like to be with a company where such doings are common, for I never could be unfaithful to you, although I would not mind undergoing all else for the sake of possessing you."

For all that, poor Vreni, being held in Sali's arms, became more and more feverish, for ever since noon when that hostess at the inn had mistaken her for a bride, and she herself had not contradicted, this alluring prospect had been burning in her veins, and the less hopeful things seemed to turn for a realization of this idea, the more relentlessly her pulses were hammering with expectation and desire. And Sali was experiencing similar hallucinations, since the fiddler's enticing remarks, while he meant not to listen to them, had also been fuel to his passion. So he said in embarrassment to Vreni: "Let us go inside for a spell. At least we must eat and drink something."

They were greeted in entering the guest room where nobody had remained but the fiddler's friends, the vagrants, which latter were seated about a poor meal at table, by a merry chorus: "There comes our bridal pair!" "Yes," added the fiddler, "now be friendly and comfortable, and we will see you married."

Urged to join the company the two young lovers did so rather shamefacedly. But after a moment they began to brighten, and were glad to be at least rid for the moment of the darker problem that was yet to be solved. Sali ordered wine and some choicer dishes, and soon general merriment spread among them all. The heretofore implacable lover had become reconciled to his unfaithful one, and the couple now fondled and caressed each other in reestablished ecstasy, while the giddy other pair ceaselessly yodled, sang and guzzled, but they also did not forget to

give plain evidences of their amatory disposition. The fiddler and the hunchback accompanied all this with a great deal of cheerful noise. Sali and Vreni kept very close to each other, tightly holding hands, and all at once the fiddler bade all the company be quiet, and a jocular ceremony was performed signifying the union of the two young people. They had to clasp hands, and the whole audience rose and, one by one, stepped up to congratulate them and to bid them welcome within their fraternity. They placidly submitted to it all, but said never a word, and regarded the whole as a jest, while all the while a shudder of voluptuous feeling ran through them.

The merry company now became louder and more excited, the fiery wine spurring them on, until at last the black fiddler urged departure.

"We have a long way before us," he cried, "and it is past midnight. Up, all of you! Let us solemnly escort the young bridal couple, and I myself will open the procession. You will hear me fiddling as never before."

Since Sali and Vreni felt perfectly dazed, and scarcely knew what they were doing in this hurly-burly around them, they did not protest when they were made to head the file, the other two couples following, and the hunchback, with his huge bass viol on his shoulder, being at its tail end. The black fiddler, though, strode in advance, playing like a man possessed, skipping down the steep hill path like a chamois, and the others laughed, singing in chorus, and jumping from rock to rock. Thus this nocturnal procession hastened on and on, through the quiet fields and at last through the home village of Sali and Vreni, now sunk in deep slumber.

When they two came through the still lanes and past their abandoned homes, a painfully savage mood seized them, and they danced and whirled along with the others behind the fiddler, kissed, laughed and wept. They also danced up the hill with the three fields that had tempted their fathers to their ruin, the fiddler all the time leading, and on its crest the dusky fiddler fell into a frenzy of fantastic melody, and his train of followers jumped about like veritable demons. Even the poor hunchback acted like demented. This quiet hill resounded with the infernal noise of the whole crew, and it was a perfect witches' Sabbath for a short while. The hunchback breathed hard and in a muffled voice squeaked with delight, swinging his heavy instrument like a baton. In their paroxysm none saw or heard the next.

But Sali seized Vreni and thus forced her to halt. He imprinted a kiss on her mouth, thus stopping her shouts of joy. At last she gathered his meaning, and ceased struggling. They stood there, right on the spot where they first had encountered the black fiddler, listening to the wild music and to the singing and shrieking of the demoniac cortège, as the sounds gradually swept onwards down the hill towards the river below. Nobody evidently had missed them in the midst of the whole spook. The shrill tones of the fiddle, the laughter of the girls, and the yodels of the men resounded for another spell through the night, fainter and fainter, until at last the noise died away down by the shores of the river.

"We have escaped those," now said Sali, "but how are we going to escape from ourselves? How shall we separate, and how keep apart?"

Vreni was not able to answer him. Breathing hard she lay on his breast.

"Had I not better take you back to the village, and wake some family in order to make them take you in for the night? To-morrow you can leave and look for some work. You'll be able to get along anywhere."

"But without you? Get along without you?" said the girl.

"You must forget me."

"Never," she murmured sadly. "Never in my life." And she added, glancing sternly at him: "Could you do that?"

"That is not the point, dear heart," answered Sali, slow and distinct. He caressed her feverish cheeks, while she kept pressing herself against his bosom. "Let us only consider your own case. You, Vreni, are still so very young, and quite likely you will fare well enough after a short while."

"And you also--you ancient man," she said, smiling wistfully.

"Come!" now said Sali, and dragged her along. But they only went on a few steps, and then they halted once more, the better to embrace and kiss. The deep quiet of the world ran like music through their souls, and the only sound to be heard around them was the gentle rush and swish of the waves as they slowly went on further down the valley below.

"How beautiful it is around here! Listen! It seems to me there is somebody far away singing in a low voice."

"No, sweetheart; it is only the water softly flowing."

"And yet it seems there is some music--way out there, everywhere."

"I think it is our own blood coursing that is deceiving our ears."

But though they hearkened again and again, the solemn stillness remained unbroken. The magic effect of the light of a resplendent full moon was visible in the whole landscape, as the autumnal veil of fog that rose in semi-transparent layers from the river shore mingled with the silvery sheen, waving in grayish or bluish bands.

Suddenly Vreni recalled something, and said: "Here, I have bought you something to remember me by."

And she gave him the plain little ring, and placed it on his finger. Sali, too, found the little ring he had meant for her, and while he put it on her hand, he said: "Thus we have had the same thought, you and I."

Vreni held up her hand into the silvery light of the moon and examined the little token curiously.

"Oh, what a fine ring," she then said, laughing. "Now we are both betrothed and wedded. You are my husband, and I'm your wife. Let us imagine so, just long enough until that small cloud has passed the moon, or else until we have counted twelve. You must kiss me twelve times."

Sali was surely fully as much in love as was Vreni, but the marriage problem was, after all, not of such intense interest to him, not such a question of Either--Or, of an immediate To Be or Not To Be, as it was in the case of the girl. For Vreni could feel just then only that one problem, saw in it with passionate energy life or death itself. But now at last he began to see clearly into the very soul of his companion, and the feminine desire in her became instantly with him a wild and ardent longing, and his senses reeled under its potency. And while he had previously caressed and embraced her with the strength and fervor of a devoted lover, he did so now with an incomparably greater abandonment to his passion. He held Vreni tightly to his beating heart, and fairly overwhelmed her with endearments. In spite of her own love fever, the girl with true feminine instinct at once became aware of this change, and she began to tremble as with fear of the unknown. But this feeling passed almost in a moment, and before even the cloud had flitted over the moon's face her whole being was seized by the whirlwind of his ardor, and engulfed in its depths. While both struggled with and at the same time fondled the other, their beringed hands met and seized the other as though at that supreme moment their union was consummated without the consent of their will power. Sali's heart knocked against its prison door like a living being; anon it stood still, and he breathed with difficulty and said slow and in a whisper: "There is one thing, only one thing, we can do, Vreni; we keep our wedding this hour, and then we leave this world forever--there below is the deep water--there is everlasting peace and fulfilment of all our hopes--there nobody will divorce us again--and we have had our dearest wish--have lived and died together--whether for long, whether for short--we need not care--we are rid of all care--"

And Vreni instantly responded. "Yes, Sali--what you say I also have thought to myself--not once but constantly these days--I have dreamed of it with my whole soul--we can die together, and then all this torment is over--Swear to me, Sali, that you will do it with me!"

"Yes, dearest, it is as good as done--nobody shall take you from me now but Death alone!" Thus the young man in his exaltation. But Vreni's breath came quick and as if freed from an intolerable burden. Tears of sweetest joy came to her eyes, and she rose with spontaneous alacrity and, light as a bird, flew down towards the river side. Sali followed her, thinking for a moment she wanted to escape him, while she fancied he would wish to prevent her. Thus they both sprang down the steep path, and Vreni laughed happily like a child that will not allow her playmate to catch her.

"Are you sorry for it already?" Thus they both apostrophized the other, as they in a twinkling had reached the river shore and seized hold of each other. And both answered: "No, indeed, how can you think so?"

And carefree they now walked briskly along the river bank, and they outdistanced the hastening waves, for thus keenly they sought a spot where they could stay for a while. For in the trance of their enthusiasm they knew of nothing but the bliss awaiting them in the full possession of each other. The whole worth and meaning of their lives just then condensed itself into that one supreme desire. What was to follow it, death, eternal oblivion, was to them a mere nothing, a puff of air, and they thought less of it than does the spendthrift think of the morrow when wasting his last substance.

"My flowers shall precede me," cried Vreni, "only look! They are quite withered and dusty!" And she plucked them from her bosom, cast them into the water, and sang aloud: "But sweeter far than almonds is my love for thee!"

"Stop!" called out Sali. "Here is our bridal chamber!"

They had reached a road for vehicles which led from the village to the river, and here there was a landing, and a big boat, laden high with hay, was tied to an iron ring in the bank. In a reckless mood Sali instantly set to freeing the ship from the strong ropes that held it to the landing. But Vreni grasped his arm, and she shouted laughing: "What are you about? Are we to wind up by stealing from the peasants their haycock?"

"That is to be the dowry they give us," replied Sali with humor. "See! A swimming bedstead

and a couch softer than any royal couple ever had. Besides, they will recover their property unharmed somewhere near the goal whither it was to travel anyway, and they will hardly trouble their hard heads with the question how it got there. Do you notice, dear, how the boat is swaying and rocking? It is impatient to start on the journey."

The ship lay a few paces off the shore in deeper water. Sali lifted Vreni in his arms high up, and began to wade through the water towards the boat. But she caressed him so fervently and wriggled like a fish on the angle, that Sali was losing his footing in the rather strong current. She strained her hands and arms in order to plunge them in the water, crying: "I also want to try the cool water. Do you remember how cold and moist our hands were when we first met? That time we had been catching fish. Now we ourselves will be fish, and two big and handsome ones to boot."

"Keep still, you wriggling darling," said Sali, scarcely able to stand up in the water, with his sweetheart tossing in his arms and the current pulling at him, "or it will drag me under!"

But now he lifted his pretty burden into the boat, and scrambled up its side himself. Then he hoisted her up to the hay, packed in orderly fashion in the middle, sweet-scented and downy like a vast pillow, and next he swung himself up to her. When they both were thus enthroned on their bridal bed the ship drifted gently into the middle of the stream, and then, turning slowly, it headed sluggishly in an easterly direction.

The river flowed through dark woods, shadowing it; it flowed through the fruitful plain, past quiet villages and hamlets and single homesteads; there it broadened out like a still lake and the ship moved but slightly downwards, and here it turned tall rocks and left the slumbering landscape quickly behind. And when dawn broke there was in sight at some distance a town rising with its age-worn towers and steeples above the silver-gray river. The setting moon, red as gold, cast a quivering track of light upstream towards the dim outlines of the ancient city, and into this luminous bed the ship finally turned its prow. When the houses of the town at last approached closely two pale shapes, locked in a tight embrace, glided in the autumnal frost of early morn from off the dark mass of the ship into the silent waters.

The ship itself shortly after fetched up near a bridge, unharmed, and remained there. When sometime later the two bodies, still locked in each others' arms, were found, and details about the young man and his sweetheart were learned, one might have read in the newspapers that these two, the children of two ruined and impoverished families that had lived in bitter enmity, had sought death in the water together after dancing with great animation at a kermess. This event probably was connected with the other fact that a boat laden with hay had landed in town without anyone on board. It was supposed that the young couple had cut loose the boat somewhere in order to hold their godforsaken wedding on it. "Once again a proof of the spread of lawless and impious passion among the lower classes." That was the concluding paragraph in the newspaper report.

FOOTNOTE:

Footnote 1: Vreni, Vreneli, Vreeli; Swiss diminutive forms of Veronica.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SELDWYLA FOLKS: THREE SINGULAR TALES ***

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