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D a n i r a

By
E. Werner.

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Danira

DANIRA.

I.

The storm had lasted all night. Not until early dawn did the gale lessen and the towering billows of the sea begin to subside.

The steamer, which had undergone a tolerably severe conflict with wind and waves, was just running into the sheltering harbor, at whose end appeared her destined port, a picturesquely situated town, dominated by a strong citadel on a rocky height.

In the bow stood a young officer in the uniform of the Austrian Imperial Chasseurs, who, spy-glass in hand, was scanning the scene. The light fatigue cap covering his thick, fair hair, shaded a face that harmonized perfectly with his manly bearing. Every feature was grave, firm, resolute, and the clear light-brown eyes, with their quiet, searching gaze, suited the countenance. Yet one might have desired a little more life and animation; the grave, passionless repose of a face so youthful produced an almost chilling impression. A heavy step was heard on the cabin stairs, and directly after a young soldier, who wore the same uniform, approached. The steamer still rocked so much that he had some difficulty in crossing the deck to his officer, who now closed the glass and turned toward him.

"Well, George, what are the men doing?" he asked. "How are things going down below?"

"It's awful, lieutenant," was the reply. "They are still so sea-sick that they can neither hear nor see. You and I are the only ones who have kept up."

"I suppose you are very proud that we two are the only ones who have proved ourselves good sailors?" said the officer, with a flitting smile.

"I should think so," answered George. "When a man has seen nothing but mountains all his life, it's no small matter to toss about on this confounded glittering blue sea, as we have done for three days and nights. This Cattaro is surely almost at the end of the world."

He spoke in the purest Tyrolese dialect, and now stationed himself close behind the officer with a familiarity that implied some closer relation than the tie between a subaltern and his commander.

George was a handsome, sturdy fellow, with curly black hair and a fresh, sun-burnt face, in

which a pair of black eyes sparkled boldly and merrily. At present, however, they were scanning with evident curiosity the goal of the journey which the steamer was now approaching.

The open sea had already disappeared, and nearer and darker towered the gigantic peaks which had been visible in the distance since early dawn. They seemed to rise from the water in every direction and bar the ship's way, but a narrow passage between the cliffs opened like a huge gloomy gate, and the whole extent of the harbor appeared before the vessel as she steered in.

The foaming, surging waves had been left outside, and the water lay almost motionless, encircled by the chain of mountains surrounding it.

The sun was already struggling with the dispersing storm-clouds; ever and anon golden shafts darted through them and danced upon the waves, and broad, shimmering rays of light gleamed through the mist, but the fog still rested in dense masses over the city, and the citadel was scarcely visible in the shadow of the clouds gathered around it.

"A magnificent view!" said the young officer in a low tone, more to himself than to his companion, but the latter assumed a very contemptuous air.

"Pshaw, they're not like our Tyrolese mountains! No forests, no streams, not a human habitation up there! This is surely the beginning of the wilderness, and if we once get in there we'll never come out alive."

He sighed so heavily that the lieutenant frowned and glanced angrily at him.

"What does this mean, George? Are you losing heart? You were no peace-maker at home. Wherever there was a brawl, George Moosbach was sure to be in it."

"Yes, that he was!" George assented with great satisfaction. "But it was only sport! Still, if we were going to fight honest Christians I should have no objection to doing it in earnest. We should at least be among our own people, and if a man were killed he would have Christian burial, but fighting these savages is no joke. I've been told that they cut off the noses of their enemies--if they have them, of course--and both ears to boot, and that's certainly a very disagreeable custom."

"Nonsense! You and your comrades have imposed upon each other by all sorts of stories, and now swear to them as is your custom."

"But Baroness von Steinach was terribly frightened when the marching orders came. She sent for me to come to the castle and made me promise never to leave your side, Herr Gerald--beg pardon, Herr Lieutenant, I meant to say."

"Oh! use the old name, we are not on duty now," replied Gerald; "respect for your lieutenant doesn't agree with the memories of our boyhood, when we were playfellows. So my mother sent for you? Yes, she is always anxious about the life of her only son, and can never accustom herself to the thought that danger is part of the soldier's trade. But there is the port in sight! Go to your comrades, they have probably nearly recovered, the water is smooth here."

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant!" replied George, drawing himself up with a military salute and marching off, while Gerald von Steinbach again raised his spy-glass.

Meantime the steamer had been sighted from the shore, and its appearance caused an eager stir near the harbor. True, ships bringing troops to this distant frontier of the empire were now daily arriving; still it was an event, and a motley crowd in which, however, uniforms predominated, thronged the landing-place to greet the new arrivals.

Not far from the shore was a fine residence overlooking the bay. It was the home of the commander of the garrison, and at the window stood a young lady, gazing intently through the gradually dispersing fog at the approaching ship.

The graceful figure framed by the window looked like a picture against the dark background of the room, a picture in which everything was bright and sunny, the rosy, laughing face, the fair curling locks, the blue eyes radiant with mirth.

There was a great deal of arrogance and self-will in the charming little face, and the extremely elegant attire which, in this out-of-the-way place, displayed the very latest fashion prevailing in the capital, showed that vanity was not a total stranger to the young lady. Yet there was something bewitching in the little elfin figure that leaned so gracefully out of the window, and now turned with every sign of impatience.

"The steamer hardly moves to-day," she said, angrily. "It has been in sight for more than half an hour. It ought to have reached the landing-place long ago, and is still floating on the waves yonder. Danira, for heaven's sake, put down that book! I can't bear to see you reading so indifferently, while I am almost dying with curiosity."

The person addressed laid the book aside and glanced hastily out of the window. She was

probably about the same age--neither of the girls could have been more than seventeen--but it would have been hard to find a greater contrast than the pair presented.

There was something foreign in Danira's appearance which did not seem to suit either her fashionable dress or her surroundings. Her face was dark as if burned by a scorching sun, and yet pale, for the cheeks showed scarcely a tinge of color. The luxuriant braids, blue-black in hue, seemed to yield reluctantly to the constraint of being fastened on the head; they looked as though they must fall by their own weight and float unconfined.

Her long dark lashes were usually lowered, but when raised, revealed a pair of large dark eyes, full of dewy radiance. Their expression was cold and careless, yet their depths concealed a light ardent and glowing as the rays of the Southern sun, which had evidently kissed them.

The girl's voice too had a peculiar tone, deep yet musical, and the German words, though spoken with perfect fluency, had a slight trace of the foreign air which characterized her whole appearance.

"The steamer will be here in fifteen minutes," she said. "It is coming at the usual time. Are you so impatient to see your betrothed bridegroom, Edith?"

Edith tossed her little head. "Well, what if I am! We have become almost strangers to each other. I was a child when we left home, and Gerald only came from the military school to bid us good-bye. He was a handsome fellow then--I remember him perfectly--but a little priggish, rather stupid, and possessed of a horrible talent for lecturing. But I'll cure him of that most thoroughly."

"Do you intend to 'cure' your future husband before you have ever seen him?" asked Danira, with a tinge of sarcasm. "Perhaps he isn't so yielding as your father."

Edith laughed. "Oh! Papa is sometimes stern enough to other people--yet I do as I please with him, and it will be the same with Gerald. Do you like his picture?"

She took a large photograph from the writing-table and held it toward Danira, who, with a hasty glance at it, answered in a curt, positive tone, "No."

Edith's blue eyes opened wide in amazement.

"What, you don't like this picture? This face with its handsome, regular features----"

"And eyes as cold as ice! That man has never loved, his glance says so."

"Well, he must learn then! That shall be my task. Of course I shall see little enough at first of this lieutenant, who has been sent campaigning and courting at the same time. He must go and fight your countrymen for weeks up in the mountains before he can pay proper attention to me. I hope it won't be long ere the bands of insurgents are scattered and destroyed. I shall tell Gerald that he must hasten the victory and his return on pain of my displeasure."

There was only saucy mirth in the words, nothing more, but Danira seemed to find a different meaning. Her eyes flashed, and in a voice that sounded almost cutting, she replied:

"Better tell him to take care that he does not lose up yonder all hope of return and marriage--forever!"

Edith gazed at her a few seconds, perplexed and startled, then indignantly exclaimed:

"I believe you are quite capable of wishing it. Is it possible that you still care for those savages, who have not troubled themselves about you since your childhood? Papa is perfectly right when he says you have no affection, no gratitude, in spite of all he has done for you."

A half bitter, half grieved expression hovered around Danira's lips as she heard these reproaches. "Gratitude!" she repeated, in a low tone. "You do not know how hard a duty gratitude is, when it is required."

Spite of the sharp tone there was something in the words which disarmed Edith's anger. Stealing to her companion's side, she laid her hand on her arm.

"And I?" she asked in a voice of mingled reproach and entreaty, "am I nothing to you?"

Danira looked down at the rosy blooming face, and her tone involuntarily softened.

"You are much to me, Edith. But--we do not understand each other and never shall."

"Because you are inaccessible and self-contained as a book with seven seals. I have always been a friend, a sister to you. You would never be the same to me."

The reproach must have struck home, for Danira's head drooped as if she were conscious of guilt.

"You are right," she said in a troubled tone, "it is all my fault. But you do not, cannot know----"

"What is it I don't know?" asked Edith, curiously. Danira made no reply, but passed her hand lightly over the curly head resting on her shoulder and gazed into the blue eyes, now glittering with tears. Perhaps the young girl's feelings were deeper, more earnest than she had believed.

Just at that moment they heard the signal announcing that the steamer had reached the landing. Edith started, her tears vanished as quickly as they had come, anger and reproaches were alike forgotten and the young girl rushed to the window with the eagerness and curiosity of a child that has been promised a new toy and cannot wait for the moment of seeing it.

The scornful expression again hovered around Danira's lips. She pushed aside, with a gesture of repugnance, the photograph which still stood on the table, and, taking up her book again, turned her back to the window.

Yet the young fiancée's impatience was very excusable, for her remembrance of her betrothed husband dated from her earliest childhood. Her father, Colonel Arlow, before being transferred to the distant Dalmatian fortress, had been stationed with his regiment in the capital of Southern Tyrol, only a few hours ride from Castle Steinach, and the matrimonial plan had been arranged at that time. Gerald's father, on his death-bed, had told his son of this darling wish, and Edith had been educated expressly for him. While the young officer was preparing for his military career, his betrothed bride, who had lost her mother when very young, had grown up in the house of a father who spoiled and idolized her. Distance had hitherto prevented a meeting between the young couple, but at the outbreak of the insurrection Gerald's regiment was unexpectedly ordered to Cattaro, and thus chance ordained that his first campaign should also be a courtship.

Meantime the disembarkation had already begun, but amid the confusion of arrivals and greetings it was scarcely possible to distinguish individuals. At last, a group of officers separated from the throng and walked toward the city, and but half an hour elapsed ere the commandant entered the room with his guest.

Colonel Arlow, a fine-looking, soldierly man in the prime of life, led the young officer to his daughter, saying, in a jesting tone:

"Herr Gerald von Steinach, lieutenant in the Imperial Chasseurs, desires an introduction to you, my child. See whether you can recognize in this young warrior the features of your former playfellow. Of course, Gerald, you will not remember the child of those days; she has altered considerably in the course of the years."

The last words and the look that rested on his daughter expressed joyous paternal pride, a pride certainly justifiable. Edith was wonderfully charming at that moment.

Gerald approached her with perfect ease, and, holding out his hand, said cordially:

"How are you, Edith?" The words from his lips, with their native accent, sounded as familiar as if he had taken leave of his little *fiancée* only the day before.

Edith looked up at the tall figure, met the eyes resting gravely but kindly upon her, and suddenly lost her composure entirely. A burning blush crimsoned her face, the words of greeting died upon her lips, and she stood silent and confused, perfectly unconscious how bewitching she looked in her embarrassment.

Gerald gallantly kissed the little hand that rested in his own, but only held it a moment ere he relaxed it.

He had evidently received a pleasant impression of his young *fiancée*, but his nature was apparently incapable of deep or passionate emotion.

He now saw for the first time that another lady was standing at the back of the room, and turned with a gesture of inquiry to the colonel.

"My adopted daughter, Danira," said the latter carelessly. He seemed to consider any further introduction unnecessary, and there was even a tone of negligence in his voice.

The young officer bowed, casting a somewhat puzzled glance at the girl's sullen face. Danira returned the salute without raising her eyes.

Gerald brought messages and letters from his mother, and these afforded subjects for a conversation which soon became extremely animated, and in a few moments dispelled the last remnants of constraint still existing between the young pair.

Edith had conquered her momentary embarrassment, and now resumed the familiar tone of her childhood. She fairly sparkled with gayety and jest, as was her nature, but all her vivacity failed to infect Gerald. He was courteous, gallant, even cordial, and readily answered all her questions about his journey, his home and his mother, but he did so with the grave, quiet composure that seemed an inseparable part of his character.

At last the conversation turned upon the approaching campaign. The colonel did not consider the insurrection so trivial a matter as many of the officers. He spoke of it earnestly, even

anxiously, and, for the first time, Gerald appeared really interested. He was evidently a thorough soldier, and Edith noticed with a surprise equal to her displeasure that the campaign lay far nearer to her lover's heart than the courtship of his bride. With all her charms she had failed to rouse one spark of feeling from the unvarying calmness of his manner, but now, while talking of mountain passes, fortifications, attacks and similar uninteresting things, his eyes brightened and his face began to flush with eagerness.

The young lady was accustomed to be the principal object of attention, and felt offended to have a man absorbed in such subjects while in her presence. Her lips pouted more and more angrily, and the lines on her smooth brow indicated an extremely wrathful mood. Unluckily Gerald did not even notice it, he was plunging deeper and deeper into military matters with the commandant.

Once, however, he faltered in the midst of a sentence. He had addressed a question to the colonel, and pointing to the mountains, turned toward the window, when he suddenly saw Danira, of whom no one had taken any further notice. She was standing, half concealed by the curtain, apparently uninterested, yet her face betrayed feverish suspense, breathless attention, she was fairly reading the words from the speaker's lips.

For a moment her gaze met the young officer's. It was the first time he had seen her eyes, but a menacing, mysterious look flashed from their depths. He could not understand its meaning, for it was only a moment--then the lashes drooped and the girl's features regained their usual rigid, icy immobility.

The colonel answered the question with great minuteness, and the discussion between the two gentlemen became more and more animated. Edith listened a few moments longer but, as the pair did not seem disposed to leave their mountain passes and fortifications, her patience became exhausted. Rising with the freedom and rudeness of a child she said, in a tone intended to be sarcastic, but which sounded extremely angry:

"Come, Danira, we will leave the gentlemen to their conversation on military affairs. We are only interrupting these interesting discussions."

With these words she unceremoniously seized her adopted sister's arm and drew her into the adjoining room. Gerald looked after her in great astonishment; he evidently had no suspicion of the crime he had committed. The colonel laughed.

"Ah! yes, we had forgotten the presence of the ladies! They take the liberty of showing us how greatly our war stories bore them, and after all they are right. You have lost Ethel's favor, Gerald, and must seek forgiveness."

Gerald seemed in no haste to do so, he answered with perfect composure:

"I am sorry, but I really supposed Edith might be expected to take some interest in a campaign where I am to win my spurs."

"Perhaps she is afraid it will make you forget her," said the colonel with a shade of reproof. "It really almost seemed so. My little Edith is spoiled in that respect. Perhaps I have indulged her too much, we are always weak toward an only child. I am glad that you are so devoted to your profession, but young girls desire first of all to see a lover in a betrothed husband. The military hero occupies a secondary place. Note that, my boy, and govern yourself accordingly in future."

Gerald smiled. "You are right, perhaps, I am too thorough a soldier, but ought Edith to reproach me for it? She is a soldier's daughter, a soldier's promised bride, and is living here amid all the excitement and preparations for the campaign. Her companion seemed far more interested in it."

"Danira? Possibly. I have not noticed."

"Who is this Danira? There is something peculiar, foreign in her appearance. She cannot be a German. Every feature betrays Slavonic origin."

"Yes, that blood does not belie itself," said Arlow indignantly. "You are perfectly right, the girl belongs to the race that is giving us so much trouble, and you have before your eyes a type of the whole people. When Danira came to my house she was a child, who could have received no very deep impressions of her home. She has had the same education as Edith, has been reared like a daughter of the family, has lived exclusively in our circle, yet the fierce, defiant Slav nature has remained unchanged. Neither kindness nor harshness can influence it."

"But how came this adopted daughter into your house? Did you receive her voluntarily?"

"Yes and no, as you choose to regard it. When I was ordered to my present post, the insurrection, which was then supposed to be finally suppressed and is now again glimmering like a spark under ashes, had just been put down. Yet there were still daily skirmishes in the mountains. During one of these, a leader of the insurgents fell into our hands severely wounded, and was brought here as a prisoner. After a few days his wife appeared with her two children, and asked permission to see and nurse him, which was granted. The man succumbed to his

wounds; the wife, who had caught a dangerous fever prevailing at that time in our hospital, soon followed him to the grave, and the children, Danira and her brother, were orphaned."

Gerald listened with increasing interest; the young Slav girl would probably have been indifferent to him, but her origin aroused his sympathy and he listened attentively to the story of the commandant, who now continued:

"My officers and I agreed that it was both a humane duty and a point of honor to adopt the orphans, and we knew, also, that persons in high places would be pleased to have the children of one of the most dreaded insurgent chiefs under our charge and training. Conciliation was then the watchword. I took the little ones into my own house, but after a few weeks the boy vanished.

"Had he fled?"

"We thought so at first, but it soon appeared that he had been carried off by his countrymen. Danira escaped the same fate only because she was sleeping in the room with Edith. Besides, women are little valued by this people. To leave their chiefs son in our hands seemed to them a disgrace, but they did not care about the girl."

"So she remained in your house?"

"Yes, by my dead wife's express desire. I at first opposed it, and the result proves that I was right. Every care and kindness was lavished on this girl, who even now, after so many years, is still as alien, I might almost say as hostile to us, as on the first day of her arrival. If I did not know that my Edith's bright, sunny temperament instinctively repels such influences, I should be anxious about this companionship and should have put an end to it long ago."

"Such mysterious natures are unsympathetic to me also," replied Gerald hastily, with an expression that almost betrayed repugnance. "There is something uncanny in her appearance. I met her eyes a moment a short time ago, and it seemed as if I were gazing into a dark, tempestuous night. Edith, on the contrary, seems like a bright spring day, though with somewhat April weather."

The colonel laughed heartily at the comparison.

"Have you discovered that already? Yes, she is as capricious as an April day. Rain and sunshine in the same moment. But I can give you the consolation that the sunshine predominates, only you must understand how to call it forth. Now go to her, that your first meeting may not end in discord. You will come to an understanding better if you are alone."

He waved his hand kindly to his future son-in-law and left the room.

Gerald did not seem to have thought of a reconciliation, but he could not disregard this hint; and, besides, the father was right, this first hour of their intercourse ought not to end in discord. The young man, therefore, went to the adjoining room, where the girls probably still remained. His coming had doubtless been expected, for at his entrance something fluttered away like a frightened bird, and he saw Edith's light summer dress vanish behind the door of the adjacent apartment. But the concealment did not seem to be very seriously meant--besides the dress a little foot was visible, betraying the listener's presence.

Gerald turned to Danira, who had not left her seat.

"I wished to have a few minutes' conversation with Edith. I expected to find her here."

"Edith has a headache, and will not make her appearance again until dinner time; she does not wish to be disturbed now."

While Danira carelessly delivered the message she stepped back a little, as if expecting that the young officer would not heed the command but enter in spite of it. He could not help seeing his *fiancée* in her hiding place, or fail to understand that she was merely making it a little difficult for him to obtain forgiveness. Gerald really did cast a glance in that direction, but instantly drew himself up and with a military salute, and said:

"Then please give my regards to her." And he left the room without even glancing back.

He had scarcely gone when Edith appeared from behind the door. She looked more astonished than indignant, and evidently could not understand the rebuff she had received.

"He is really going!" she angrily exclaimed. "Yet he must have seen that I was in the room, that I expected him--he probably did not wish to find me."

Danira shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid it won't be so easy for you to 'cure' this man. He has just showed you that he does not allow himself to be trifled with."

Edith stamped her little foot on the ground like a naughty child.

"I told you he had a horrible leaven of the schoolmaster, but his very defiance pleased me. He really looked like a hero when he drew himself up in that soldierly way and stalked off with his

spurs clanking."

She saucily tried to imitate Gerald's gait and bearing, but Danira did not even smile. Her tone was cold and grave as she replied:

"Beware of that obstinacy; it will give you trouble."

II.

Nearly three weeks had passed since the arrival of the regiment. The larger part of it had already gone to the scene of the insurrection, but Gerald's division still remained in Cattaro, thereby subjecting his patience to a severe trial. He and his men had been ordered to the citadel overlooking the city, now used only for keeping prisoners. The service was therefore very easy, and the young officer could spend several hours daily with his fiancée, which was regularly done.

It was very early in the morning. A dense fog rested on the bay and mountains, and there was less bustle than usual in the port.

Among the sailors and laborers already on the spot appeared the figure of George Moosbach, walking up and down in full uniform, but evidently much bored.

He had tried to enter into conversation with one of the sailors, but the latter understood nothing but Slavonic, and pantomime was not sufficient to enable them to comprehend each other, so the attempt ceased. George was strolling discontentedly on, muttering something about ignorant people who did not even understand Tyrolese German, when a voice behind him said:

"Surely that's George from the Moosbach Farm."

The young soldier started and turned. Before him stood a priest in the dress of the Franciscan Order, a tall figure with grave, deeply-lined features which, however, expressed no sternness; the eyes, on the contrary, had an unmistakable look of kindness and benevolence, and the same traits were noticeable in his voice as he now added:

"How are you, George, here in this foreign land?"

George had been on the point of jumping for joy in a most disrespectful way, but instead of doing so he stooped and reverently kissed the priest's hand.

"His Reverence, Father Leonhard! I didn't think you would come here to the world's end too. I supposed you were at home in beautiful Tyrol among Christians!"

"Well, I don't seem to have fallen among Pagans, for the first person I have met in Cattaro proves to be one of my own parish," replied the priest, smiling. "I arrived yesterday and was sent to take the place of Father Antonius, who cannot bear the climate. I shall accompany the regiment instead."

The young soldier's face fairly beamed with delight.

"You are going with us, your reverence? God be praised! Then we shall have one blessing in the wilderness--Krivoscia, they call the place! It's such a barbarous name that an honest Tyrolese tongue can't pronounce it. There is nothing except stones, robbers and goats, one can scarcely get anything to eat and still less to drink"--George sighed heavily--"and when a man lies down to sleep at night he may happen to wake with his head split open."

"Those are certainly unpleasant circumstances! But I hear that the regiment left Cattaro long ago. Why are you still in this city?"

"We have stayed here, the lieutenant, I, myself, and fifty men. We are up in yonder old walls--the citadel, they call it--guarding a few of the rascals we've been lucky enough to catch. Herr Gerald, of course, is furious about it, but that does him no good."

"Gerald von Steinach?" asked the priest. "I don't believe he finds it so hard to bear the delay, since Colonel Arlow commands this garrison."

"I believe he would far rather be up among the savages," said George, laconically.

"Why? Isn't his future wife in the city?"

"Yes. And he's a betrothed husband, too, that's certain, but--I don't like the business."

Father Leonhard looked surprised. "What is it you don't like? Herr von Steinach's future wife?"

"The young lady!" cried George enthusiastically. "With all due respect, she's a splendid girl! She looks like the sunshine itself, and she can laugh and play pranks like an elf. I'm high in her favor, and am constantly obliged to tell her about our Tyrol, where she was born. No, I like her very much, your reverence."

"Then what did you mean by your remark?"

The young soldier, much embarrassed, thrust his hand through his curly black hair.

"I don't know--Herr Gerald always kisses her hand and brings her flowers, and rides and drives with her--but I should treat my sweetheart differently."

"I believe so," said the priest, with a furtive smile. "But in Baron von Steinach's circle people conduct courtships in another fashion from the wooing at the Moosbach Farm."

"Very true. I know that the manners of the nobility are entirely different from ours, but when a man is in love it's all the same whether he's a count or a peasant, and Herr Gerald isn't in love a bit. In short--there's a hitch in the affair, and some reverend priest must interfere and set it to rights again."

He looked at Father Leonhard with such honest, beseeching eyes, that it was evident he firmly believed that a priest could set to rights anything he undertook. But Father Leonhard replied:

"No, George, the young couple must arrange such things themselves; there can be no interference. They will learn to know and love each other better. Gerald von Steinach is a man of excellent character."

"Yes, unluckily, rather too excellent!" George exclaimed. "I believe he never committed a folly in his life, and people must do foolish things, your reverence, otherwise men wouldn't be men; it can't be helped."

"You have certainly given sufficient proof of that. Your father and mother are anxious about how their reckless and somewhat quarrelsome son may fare in a foreign land. I promised to have an eye on you, but I think you have kept the promise you made me when you left. Where did you get that bump on your forehead?"

George hastily raised his hand to his head and drew down his cap so that the suspicious spot was covered.

"It isn't worth mentioning. It was only in sport, that we might not get entirely out of practice. Besides Bartel began; he gave me one blow, but only one, and I dealt him six in return. He won't come near me again very soon."

"George, you are incorrigible!" said the priest, gravely, but this time the sinner was to escape the punishment he deserved. Just at that moment Gerald appeared on his way from the citadel, and, with much surprise and pleasure, greeted Father Leonhard, of whose arrival he had also been ignorant.

Again messages and questions about home were exchanged, and when Father Leonhard said that he was going to call on the commandant, the young officer offered to accompany him. But he turned back to ask the question:

"Are the mules ordered, George?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant, they'll be at the colonel's house in half an hour."

"Very well, I think the ladies will be ready by that time. Let me know when the animals are there."

He walked on, conversing with the priest, and George followed, greatly delighted that a reverend ecclesiastic was going with the regiment into the "wilderness," as he persisted in calling Krivoscia.

Spite of the early hour the inmates of the colonel's household were awake and ready for the excursion, which had been planned the day before, except Edith, who, at the last moment, had taken a dislike to the expedition. She thought the weather too uncertain, the road too long, the ride too fatiguing--she wanted to stay at home, and her father, instead of opposing this capriciousness by a word of authority, was trying remonstrances.

"Why, child, do listen to reason," he said. "What will Gerald think if you stay at home? How can he help believing that his society has no attraction for you?"

"Perhaps it has as much as mine for him," was the defiant retort. "Well, then, we shall be quits."

"You had a little dispute yesterday. I saw it by your faces when I entered the room, and now the poor fellow is to suffer for it. Take care, Edith, don't strain the cord too tight, he is not overyielding."

"Papa, you love me, don't you?" The young girl's voice had an unusually bitter tone. "You would even sacrifice a favorite plan for my sake, you would never force me into a marriage which----"

"For heaven's sake, what does this mean?" cried the colonel, now really alarmed. "What has occurred between you?"

Instead of answering, Edith began to weep so bitterly that her father became seriously troubled.

"But, my child, what is your objection to Gerald? Is he not an attentive, gallant lover? Doesn't he gratify all your wishes? I don't understand you."

"Oh! yes, he's attentive and gallant, and--so icy, that I sometimes feel as if a cold wind was blowing upon me. Danira was right when, looking at his picture, she told me that he could not love and would never learn. I have never yet heard one warm, tender word from his lips, but, on the contrary, he plays the tutor on every occasion, and, if I don't submit patiently, shrugs his shoulders and smiles compassionately, as we smile at a child--I'll bear it no longer."

The colonel took the excited girl's hand and drew her toward him.

"Edith, you know how much Gerald's mother and I desire this marriage, but you also know that I will never force you into it. Be frank, does no voice in your heart plead for your old playfellow?"

A traitorous blush crimsoned Edith's face and, nestling in her father's arms, she laid her head on his breast.

"He doesn't love me!" she sobbed. "He thinks of nothing but the campaign. He is impatient to get away, fairly longs to go, the sooner the better; he doesn't care in the least that I am to remain behind."

"You are mistaken," replied Colonel Arlow gravely, but with perfect sincerity. "Gerald might be a little less of a soldier and more of a lover, I admit, but you ought not to doubt his affection. Passionate impetuosity is not one of his traits of character, but the better I know his character, the more security it affords for your future happiness. Have you ever really tried to win him? I do not think so."

Edith raised her head--she was evidently very willing to be persuaded--and asked in a low tone:

"You mean, papa?"

"I mean that Gerald has hitherto known much more of your caprices than of your attractions. Can not my little Edith succeed in striking a spark from the flint if she tries the other method? She always knows how to get her own way. Now go, my child, and dress for the ride; meantime I'll have a word to say to the lieutenant; he has no suspicion of your interpretation of his military zeal."

This time the young lady found it advisable to obey the request. A smile was already breaking through her tears, for Gerald's voice was heard in the ante-room.

"There he is," she whispered. "Don't tell him I've been crying, papa," and without waiting for a reply she glided out of the room.

The colonel smilingly shook his head; his mind was now relieved concerning his daughter's aversion to her proposed bridegroom, but he could find no opportunity to "say his word" to the latter, for Gerald entered with Father Leonhard, whom he introduced to the commandant.

The fog was beginning to scatter when the little party of riders left the city. They passed the fortification walls and the citadel frowning on its cliff, and entered the open country. The object of the day's excursion was a visit to a fort situated on a steep mountain several hours' journey away, whose commanding position afforded a wide and magnificent view. They intended to avail themselves of the opportunity to pay the commanding officer a short call, for the order excluding strangers, of course, did not apply to Colonel Arlow's prospective son-in-law. The colonel himself was detained in the city by his military duties, so Gerald accompanied the two ladies.

The mountain road, used principally for military purposes, and therefore extremely well kept, began just outside of the city. At first trees and bushes appeared on both sides, but soon everything green vanished, and the road led upward in countless windings through desolate, rocky heights.

The dense, heavy curtain of clouds, which at dawn had concealed the whole landscape, began to grow thinner and thinner till it became a transparent veil, and finally melted away in blue

vapor. The bay and its shores sank lower and lower, and the mountains seemed higher and more rugged, the nearer the party approached them. Edith's moods that day perfectly justified the term "April weather." The shower of the morning was followed by bright sunshine. No one would have supposed that the sparkling, laughing eyes had shed tears an hour before. The dainty figure in the dark-blue riding habit sat the mule lightly and gracefully, and looked as fresh and sunny as the day struggling victoriously through the mists.

Edith had either taken her father's admonition to heart or actually determined to strike fire from the flint, for she was so bewitchingly engaging that even Gerald's cool composure was not proof against it. He must indeed have been stone to remain unmoved by such a sparkling flow of jests and witticisms. The smile that so well suited his grave features, yet so rarely visited them, became more and more frequent, and, contrary to his usual custom, he allowed himself to be completely enthralled by the gay spirits of his *fiancée*.

While the young couple rode forward on the best terms with each other, Danira followed more slowly. As if by accident, she kept her mule a few steps behind, and the distance between her and the two others imperceptibly increased. The rear of the little cavalcade was closed by George, who trotted comfortably along, thinking how foolish his lieutenant was to long to be in the midst of the campaign, where they would be obliged to march in the dust and heat, instead of riding at their ease on mules.

They had gone about half way when they met a solitary horseman. He wore the picturesque dress of the mountain tribes of the country, a costume admirably suited to the vigorous frame and dark complexion of a man already past his youth. His rich garments and the small but spirited mountain horse, with its shining brown coat and gay trappings, showed that he was a rich and distinguished person in his tribe, and moreover he was attended by a servant or subaltern, who also wore the costume of the country, but was on foot.

The two men had come down a steep path which met the mountain road at this point, and in a narrow curve of the latter encountered Gerald and Edith. The stranger stopped his horse to let them pass, and made a haughty, dignified bow, though his eyes rested with a hostile gaze on the young officer. Gerald returned it with a military salute, and Edith, pleased with the stately mountaineer, bent her head courteously.

They were some distance in advance when Danira passed the spot. The stranger still sat motionless on his horse, but the young girl's mule suddenly stumbled, then reared and made a spring toward the cliffs. It was a perilous moment, but the horseman seized the animal's bridle with a firm grasp. While doing so he murmured a few words in the Slavonic tongue. Danira answered in the same language, probably an expression of thanks for the service rendered. The animals remained side by side a short time, while the stranger continued talking--not until George came up did he release the bridle with a brief farewell, and Danira then rode on.

Gerald and Edith had turned and watched the scene. There was no occasion for anxiety, as the rider kept a firm seat in the saddle, yet they waited.

"See, Danira has found a cavalier on the high-road!" said Edith, laughing. "Her countrymen are not usually ready to pay polite attentions to ladies; this seems to be an exceptional case."

"It is unusual, too, for a quiet, steady mule to stumble on a smooth road," replied Gerald, without averting his eyes from the group. "I don't understand how it could have occurred. The animal must have been irritated."

"Here you are! What has happened?" Edith called to her foster sister, who had remained perfectly undisturbed by the little incident, and now answered quietly:

"I don't know; something must have frightened the beast."

"Did you know that man, Fräulein Danira?" asked Gerald.

"No; I was merely thanking him for his assistance."

The answered sound positive and repellent, as though she wished to prevent any more questions. The young officer remained silent, but cast a keen glance at the spot where the stranger was just disappearing around a curve in the road. Edith, however, asked with curiosity:

"Did you know him, Gerald?"

"Certainly. It was Joan Obrevic, the chief of one of the principal mountain tribes, who, though he has not yet openly declared war against us, is only waiting for the signal to join the insurrection. He has been in Cattaro several days, ostensibly to make negotiations, and, unfortunately, has not been sent off without ceremony."

"Unfortunately?" Danira repeated. "You seem to regret it, Baron von Steinach."

"Certainly, for I believe the whole affair is merely a pretext to gain time or conceal efforts in another direction. Joan Obrevic has reason to remain passive for the present--his son is a prisoner in our hands. This son was one of the first to resist the attempt to force him into the military

service, and unceremoniously shot the officer who commanded the detachment. This was the beginning of the bloody scenes which have since been so frequently repeated, but we at last succeeded in securing the assassin."

"The assassin--because he defended his liberty?"

"Because he treacherously shot the officer who stood quietly talking with him, expecting no attack--in civilized nations that is called assassination, Fräulein!"

Question and answer were equally sharp in tone, but Edith, who had been listening impatiently, now interposed.

"Dear me, do stop these political and military discussions! I'll make George my cavalier; he will at least try to entertain me, and not bore me with accounts of the insurrection."

The threat was probably not seriously meant, but Gerald seemed to understand it so, for he answered coldly:

"If you prefer George's company to mine I must of course submit."

Again that shrug of the shoulders and compassionate smile, which always enraged her. They did not fail to produce their effect to-day. She hastily drew bridle, turned, and called loudly:

"George, come here! We'll ride on before."

With these words she turned into a steep path that saved a long bend of the mountain road.

George did not wait to be asked twice. He quickly put his mule into a trot and overtook her the next instant.

A very familiar relation had already been formed between him and the young lady. Edith liked the somewhat rough but comical and zealous fellow, saw in him her lover's former play-fellow rather than his subaltern, and had instantly granted his entreaty that she would address him with the "Du" used in his native Tyrol. George, on his side, was not a little proud of this confidential position, and felt an even more enthusiastic admiration for his lieutenant's *fiancée* than for the lieutenant himself.

They rode up the mountain for about ten minutes, then reached the main road again, and were now far ahead of the others. Edith stopped her mule, and George did the same.

"I suppose we are to wait here for the lieutenant?" he asked.

The young lady cast a glance backward. Her anger had already vanished, but she wanted to punish Gerald for his lack of gallantry by compelling him to ride with Danira.

She knew that he had a positive aversion to her foster sister and that the feeling was mutual, for he and Danira avoided each other whenever they could. So Edith found much amusement in the idea of the vexation of both, if they were condemned to a longer *tête-à-tête*.

"No, George," she said. "As we are in advance, we'll get to the fort first--that is, if you'll go with me."

"I, Fräulein--to Krivoscia, if you order me!" exclaimed George, whose tongue always seemed to have an attack of cramp whenever he uttered the ominous word.

"Well, we won't go quite so far to-day, but I know how to appreciate this proof of your devotion. In your eyes, Krivoscia is the incarnation of everything horrible. So much the better. You won't run the risk of carrying home one of the Krivoscian girls and making her the future mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

The young Tyrolese, in his horror, dropped the mule's bridle and crossed himself.

"St. George forbid! I should first have to lose my senses and my head to boot. I believe my father would leave the whole farm to the monastery if I should bring home such a savage, and he would do right."

"Your father of course expects you to bring him one of the Tyrolese girls for a daughter-in-law?"

"No one else would ever suit!" replied George solemnly, "No other girls can compare with those in the Tyrol. They are better than all the rest in the world put together."

"I'm quite of your opinion, especially as I'm a Tyrolese lass myself, and who knows--if I were not already betrothed, I might have a chance of being mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

"Yes, that might do!" said George, honestly. "I should have no objection, I'd take you on the spot, Fräulein--but it can't be."

Edith burst into a merry laugh. "No, it certainly can't be, but your offer is very flattering to

me, and I will consider it seriously. Now let us ride on, the animals have rested long enough." She urged her mule forward and George followed. He respectfully remained a few paces behind the young lady, but could not help feeling a little regret that "it couldn't be."

Meantime Gerald and Danira pursued their way alone. The latter, it is true, had paused a moment and asked: "Shall not we follow?"

"I think not," replied Gerald, so coolly that it was evident he did not feel at all inclined to submit to his *fiancée's* whim. "The path is steep and stony. I at least prefer to ride along the comfortable road."

"And give Edith a lesson," Danira added in a low tone.

"Edith must learn to take more interest in my profession; that is essential in a soldier's wife."

"Certainly. I only fear that, with this mode of teaching, you will accomplish nothing."

"Why not? Edith is still half a child, and children must be taught. Yet, if you desire to give me any advice on this point, I shall be grateful." There was unconcealed mockery in this appeal for counsel to the girl of seventeen, but the cold, sullen glance that answered the scoff showed that it had failed to reach its mark. The young Slav was no longer a child; the dark shadow on her brow betrayed how far she had already advanced into womanhood.

"Edith can be influenced in only one way," she replied. "Then she can be swayed completely--but the appeal must be made to her heart."

"And you think I have not understood that?"

"You have apparently not desired to do so. The tutor will gain nothing from this spoiled child--the lover everything."

Gerald bit his lips; he felt the justice of this reproach, but he also felt a touch of Edith's irritability when she was reprov'd. Now it was his turn, and he could not even find a fitting answer.

As they approached the summit of the mountain the road began to ascend in steeper curves. Danira rode close to the edge; though her mule had just shown its untrustworthiness, she seemed perfectly fearless. Gerald could not help noticing how steadily the animal now trod upon the loose stones, and how firmly the slender hand held the bridle; she evidently had perfect control of the beast, so the incident appeared all the more incomprehensible.

They had just reached a broader, rocky projection, when Danira suddenly drew rein and bent down to her saddle.

"Has anything happened?" asked Gerald, whose attention was attracted.

"Nothing of any importance. Something about the saddle must have been disarranged by the mule's sudden jump. I did not notice it until now."

The young officer instantly stopped and dismounted, but his companion swung herself out of the saddle so quickly that she was already standing on the ground when he approached. He saw that she wished to avoid his assistance, and therefore, without a word, instantly turned to the animal. The damage was trifling; the saddle-girth had loosened. Gerald tightened it again, and then straightening himself, said:

"I think we will let the mules rest a little. They have had a sharp climb, and the fort is still some distance off."

He knotted the bridles loosely together, and then stepped out upon the point, where Danira was already standing, gazing into the distance.

The landscape they beheld was both magnificent and peculiar, a picture whose wide frame contained the most abrupt contrasts. Desolate rocky wastes, and green, smiling shores, white hamlets glimmering in the brightest sunshine, and gloomy ravines where scarcely a ray of light penetrated, the luxuriance of the south and the rude solitude of the north, but all lay as if transfigured in the clear, golden radiance of the morning.

Yonder appeared the city, with its harbor and citadel, picturesquely located on the coast, and beyond the rocks, bare dark-gray stone, towering higher and higher, growing more and more desolate, till they at last ended in jagged, riven peaks. Far below gleamed the bay in its strange, curving outlines, which sometimes seemed to seek and meet each other, then to recede far asunder. The surface of the water flashed under the rays of the sun like a glittering metal mirror, and the same tide lay black and motionless in the shadow of the lofty cliffs, which actually rose out of it, and whose steep sides were washed by the waves.

But the eye roved over rocks and waters to the open sea. Yonder on the horizon it gleamed, mist-veiled, sun-illumin'd, the blue expanse seeming to stretch into infinite distance, for at the point where sea and sky met it blended with the deep azure hue of the heavens, arching above

the earth in all the radiant, glittering splendor of the south.

Gerald's gaze rested fixedly on this magnificent view, whose varied charms enthralled him. At last he turned to his companion, but she did not notice it. Her eyes, looking dreamily into the distance, were now fixed on the mountain peaks of her home, looming dimly through the mists. The girl herself stood like a dark enigma amid the surroundings into which fate had cast her. The cold, expressionless face, and the fire lurking in the depths of her dark eyes, the delicate, youthful features, and the stern aspect that robbed them of all youth, were as contradictory as the country of her birth.

Perhaps this very contrast attracted the young officer. This girl was certainly a different creature from the blonde Edith, with her rosy, laughing face, around which the blue veil fluttered so coquettishly. Danira's black habit was wholly devoid of ornament, and the little black hat, which did not half cover the heavy braids was equally simple. The slender yet vigorous figure, it is true, showed perfect symmetry of outline, and the regular features seemed chiselled in marble, but the sunshine flooding the girlish form appeared to be repelled; she had something of shadow in her nature which only became more conspicuous in a bright light.

Danira must have felt the searching glance resting upon her, for she suddenly turned, and pointing to the distant landscape, said:

"There is a symbol of our country! I think it can bear comparison even with your home."

"Certainly, and it has an added charm--the superb background of the sea. The country is beautiful, if only it did not contain so many enigmas."

"Why, you are just on the verge of solving them all. There is not a ravine, not a rock-bound province which has not been penetrated by your troops; the people know how to tell them."

"At least we shall know our friends from our foes, and I think we have a right to ask that question."

The words sounded so significant that Danira's attention was attracted. She cast a quick, inquiring glance at the young officer's face, and replied curtly and coldly:

"Ask, then."

"Suppose I should be obliged to commence here with the query: 'Where did you make Joan Obrevic's acquaintance?'"

"I have already told you that he is a stranger to me."

"Yes, you said so, but I don't believe it."

Danira drew herself up proudly. "Baron von Steinach, I must beg you not to extend your educational efforts to me; I am not Edith."

"But you are the commandant's adopted daughter and enjoy the rights of a child in his household. I must remind you of the fact, since you seem to have forgotten it."

The young girl turned pale and was in the act of making a hasty reply, but, as though warned by some sudden recollection, controlled herself. Yet a contemptuous expression hovered around her lips as she replied:

"At least, until now, the commandant's house has been free from--spies."

Gerald started as if he had received a blow, his face flushed crimson and his hand involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword. No one would have supposed that his clear eyes could blaze with so fierce a fire as at that moment, and his voice, usually so calm, sounded hollow and half stifled.

"That word came from a woman's lips. Had a man dared to so insult me, I should have had but one answer for him."

Probably Danira had not expected her thoughtless words to produce such an effect, but she was evidently more surprised than alarmed by the sudden outbreak. So this man must be irritated, stung to the quick, ere sparks would flash from the flint. She almost felt a secret satisfaction in having accomplished this, but now also realized the full force of the offence. Her eyes dropped, and she answered in a low tone:

"I was insulted first--I have no weapon of defence except my tongue."

Gerald had already recovered his composure. He seemed to repent the ebullition of rage and resumed his usual quiet manner, though with a shade of icy reserve.

"I fear I shall be obliged to give you back the evil name. Listen to me quietly, Fräulein," he added, as she made an angry gesture. "The subject must be mentioned between us. I prefer to apply first to you and, as we are alone here, it can be done at once."

The words sounded somewhat mysterious, but Danira seemed to understand them, for she requested no explanation. Yet her eyes no longer avoided the gaze of her foe, but met it firmly and fearlessly; she was ready for battle.

"A week ago I was obliged to take to the commandant in person a report that admitted no delay," Gerald continued. "Leaving the citadel at a very early hour in the morning, I went to the city alone on foot. I suppose you know the little house, occupied by Slavonic fishermen, which stands somewhat off the road; I need not describe it to you. Day had not quite dawned when I reached the spot. Just at that moment the door opened and two persons came out. A man--not Joan Obrevic, but a slender youth, who, like him, wore the costume of the country--and a lady whom, in spite of the gray dusk, I distinctly recognized. How she had succeeded in passing through the city gates, which at night open only to the watchword, I do not know, nor how she returned again. The pair took a very familiar leave of each other, then one walked in the direction of the city, the other went toward the mountains, and in a few minutes both vanished in the fog. But no one had passed through the gates that night, I was the first person for whom they were opened."

He paused as if for an answer; but none came. The girl remained silent and did not even attempt to defend herself. The young officer had probably expected something of the sort. His face darkened still more and there was an accent of scorn in his voice as he continued:

"Of course I have no right to meddle with love affairs, but I have every reason to suppose that the relation is here abused to forward very different plans. A few days after this incident, Joan Obrevic appeared in the city. He, too, frequents that house, and probably also receives reports there from persons most closely associated with the commandant. His younger comrade doubtless merely opened the path he is now following. I, at least, do not believe in the farce of negotiations which he alleges as the motive for his stay."

Again a pause ensued. Danira still persisted in her silence, though evidently most deeply wounded by the speaker's glance and tone. Her face seemed to grow actually livid in its pallor, and her bosom heaved with her gasping breath, but her lips were firmly closed as if to force back any words.

"So you refuse me any explanation," Gerald began again. "Then of course I see my fears confirmed. You can understand that I cannot take delicacy into account where our safety is at stake. I shall inform the colonel that he is being betrayed by a member of his own household, and at the same time beg him if possible to keep the matter from Edith. I should not like to have my young *fiancée* learn at what an hour and place her adopted sister receives a stranger who----"

He did not finish the sentence, for Danira interrupted him. Now she at last found words, but they sounded like the outcry of a tortured prisoner who can no longer endure the rack.

"No more! Spare your insults. You are speaking of--my brother."

She hurled the word at him so passionately, yet with such convincing truth that doubt was impossible. Nor did Gerald doubt, but he seemed fairly stunned by the unexpected disclosure, and almost mechanically repeated:

"Your brother?"

"Stephan Hersovac--yes! I saw and talked with him that night; with him and no one else."

Gerald involuntarily uttered a sigh of relief. He did not know himself why a load suddenly seemed to fall from his breast. The worst fact, the treachery still existed; but he had a vague feeling that he could forgive even this sooner than the other, which had aroused his contempt.

"Then, of course, I beg your pardon," he said. "I could not possibly suspect that a brother and sister would surround their meetings with such secrecy."

"Is it my fault that my brother dares not venture to approach me openly?" asked Danira sullenly. "He was implicated in the affair which delivered young Obrevic into your hands; the same fate threatens him if he shows himself here."

"Yet he ventures into the immediate vicinity of the city. Was that really done only to see a sister who has become so much a stranger to him, for whom he has never inquired, about whom he has never troubled himself?"

Gerald's tone was very different from before, but he had retained the same earnestness, and the look which strove to read the young girl's features was so grave and searching that she shrank from it.

"Baron von Steinach," she said, in a hurried, anxious tone, "I have betrayed my secret to you against my will; you understood how to drive me to extremities, but you will take no unfair advantage of a confession wrung from me in a moment of excitement. You will say nothing?"

"First convince me that I can keep silence without violating my duty. We stand on the brink of a volcano; hatred and hostility everywhere confront us; we must be watchful. I have done you

injustice once, Fräulein, and should not like to do so a second time, but--can you answer to the man to whom you owe so much for what was agreed upon that night between you and your brother?"

"To whom I owe the slavery of my whole youth? I suppose you are speaking of Colonel Arlow?"

The words sounded so cutting that the young officer frowned angrily, and his voice regained its former harsh tone as he replied:

"Though Colonel Arlow feels your coldness to him and Edith, he probably never suspected the existence of such an idea in the mind of his adopted daughter, nor has he deserved such a return for his kindness in giving a shelter to two deserted orphans."

The reproach only seemed to irritate Danira still more. A threatening light flashed in her eyes.

"And who made us orphans? Who killed our father? He was dragged here mortally wounded, to die in prison; my mother caught her death in the fever-laden air of the hospital, and the children were to be reared and educated by those who had robbed them of their parents. We were not consulted when we were torn from our people, our home; we were disposed of like soulless brutes. My brother was spared this fate; he was carried back to our native mountains. I remained among strangers, as a stranger, whose presence was tolerated beside the beloved and idolized child of the household. They robbed me of everything--country, parents, friends and gave me in return the wretched alms of an education which only made me miserable, for it never filled the deep gulf that separated me from them in every thought and feeling, never let me forget that I am of a different race. I remained in chains, because I was forced to do so, yet I felt them when still a child, hated them from the moment I first waked to the consciousness of their existence. Now my own kindred summon me, I cannot, will not wear the fetters longer. I throw them at your feet. I will be free at last."

She had at first spoken with repressed bitterness, but soon her language rose to a passionate vehemence that forgot every precaution, swept away every barrier. Her pallid face flushed crimson as the hot blood suffused her temples; her whole frame trembled with her terrible excitement; a demon seemed to have suddenly taken possession of the young girl.

But there was also a demoniac charm surrounding her which was felt even by Gerald, whose eyes rested upon this apparition as if spell-bound. Hitherto he had only known her cold, reserved, mysterious; now the veil was rent asunder, and he saw the real person--the free daughter of the mountains, in her primal fierceness, which no education, no habit had curbed.

In a single moment she had flung; aside the fetters worn for years, and risen triumphant and threatening against her former benefactor. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the girl was beautiful, bewitchingly beautiful in this storm of passion. She stood proudly erect, with flaming eyes; doubtless they still contained the gloom of tempestuous nights, but now this darkness was filled with darting flashes of lightning.

Just at that moment, from the heights above, a shout echoed distinctly through the clear, still air. There stood Edith, who had already reached the end of their ride, and her companion. She waved her handkerchief and called merrily to the laggards.

Gerald started as if waking from a dream, and hastily passed his hand over his forehead, as though trying to efface some mark there.

"Edith is reminding us to start," he said, in a strangely tremulous tone. "It is really time for us to continue our ride, we had almost--forgotten it."

Danira made no reply, her dark lashes had already drooped again, and with them the veil seemed to fall once more over her whole nature; her face was as cold and rigid as before.

Gerald went to the mules, which had profited by the rest allowed them to browse on the puny plants growing here and there between the boulders. Loosing the bridles he again turned to his companion.

"One word more, while we are alone. You were very frank to me, perhaps too much so. Can you, dare you, tell me the subject of that nocturnal conversation in the fisherman's hut?"

"No," was the curt, resolute answer.

"Then I must speak, at the peril of seeming to you an informer. When treachery is in question--"

"Treachery!" interrupted the young girl with quivering lips. "I am no traitress."

"Well, what do you call it, then, when hostile plans are woven against those under whose roof, in whose protection you live? How you reconcile your residence under that roof with what I was forced to hear just now is your own affair; it is my duty to warn the colonel, and I shall do so this very day."

With distant courtesy he offered his hand to help her mount, but she silently declined his

assistance, and, with a single effort, sprung unaided into the saddle. The next instant Gerald was also ready and they pursued their way without exchanging another word.

On the height above Edith met them, radiant with delight at the advantage she had gained and maliciously enjoying the vexation inflicted upon her lover. She read plainly enough in his face and Danira's the annoyance they had endured during their ride.

"There come the loiterers!" she cried. "Why did you dismount on the way? You spent half an eternity on the rock down below."

"It was on account of the view," replied Gerald laconically. "You were far ahead. Did George take proper care when he went up the steep bridle-path with you?"

The young lady laughed--it was the merry, bell-like laugh ever at her command.

"Oh! yes; but you will be obliged to challenge George, Gerald. He has made me a proposal in all due form, and I requested time for consideration--the heir of the Moosbach Farm is a good match. What do you think of it?"

The young officer laughed very little at the joke. He had already joined his *fiancée* and was riding close beside her. He felt as if he must seek in her sunny eyes protection from some unknown power that was shading him with its dark wings.

They now reached the last bend in the road, and here the whole view opened before them, still wider and more magnificent than below. At their feet lay the country with its rocks and waters, its dreary, barren wastes and luxuriant shores. The fervid rays of the southern sun were shining upon it, and far away in the distance glimmered the boundless expanse of the sea.

Yes, it was a strange country. Repellant, yet bewitching, like the people who belonged to it, and whoever had once taken a long look at it understood its mysterious spell.

III.

Clear and sparkling the starry night brooded over the dark, quiet earth. The jagged mountain-peaks were but dimly outlined against the sky, and the black masses of the cliffs blended with the sable shadow resting upon the bay.

The city was already wrapped in slumber, and the members of the commandant's household had retired to rest. Colonel Arlow himself had not returned until late from a neighboring village, where a detachment of troops was also stationed, and on his arrival did not find Gerald. The latter had waited vainly for his superior officer, who had been unusually delayed, and as the lieutenant was obliged to be at his post on the citadel at nightfall, he left a few lines, urging strict watchfulness as there were indications that Joan Obrevic's presence in the city was connected with secret plots. He promised to make a full report the following day, but mentioned no other names.

The colonel shook his head over the note, but he was too thoroughly acquainted with Gerald's quiet, penetrating mind, which did not allow itself to be influenced by mere conjectures, not to heed the warning. He gave the necessary orders, directed that any unusual occurrence should be instantly and directly reported to him, and then also went to rest.

Deep silence reigned in the sleeping-rooms of the two young girls, which adjoined each other. Edith, wearied by the long and fatiguing ride, had instantly lost herself in slumber and was living over in her dreams the last few hours that had been at once so pleasant and so strange. True, Gerald had unaccountably insisted upon shortening the visit to the fort, and avoided entering even one of the inner fortifications with the ladies. He seemed still graver than usual, but, on the other hand, had treated his young *fiancée* with a tenderness never before displayed. He had not quitted her side once all the way home, and had devoted himself to her so entirely that she did not even find time to notice how carefully he avoided addressing a word to Danira, and how completely the latter held aloof from him; it had been a delightful excursion.

The lamp which lighted the chamber threw a dim ray on the bed where the young girl lay, presenting a lovely picture in her slumber. The fair little head, turned somewhat on one side, nestled among the pillows, the smile evoked by a pleasant dream hovered around her lips, and her bosom rose and fell in deep, regular breathing; it was the sleep of a child still untroubled by care or sorrow.

Midnight had already come, when the door of the next room gently opened, and Danira appeared on the threshold. She was fully dressed and had thrown on a dark cloak, which enveloped her from head to foot. Gliding noiselessly across the carpet, she approached the bed. There was something ghostly in the tall, gloomy figure that bent over the young girl, so close that her breath almost fanned Edith's cheek. The latter started and opened her eyes.

"You--Danira?" she asked, still scarcely roused from her dream.

Danira hastily stood erect and turned as if to fly, but when Edith, yet half asleep, continued: "What do you want?" she stooped and said in a low, stifled voice:

"To bid you farewell."

Edith now seemed to wake fully and started up in alarm.

"Farewell? Now, in the middle of the night? Where are you going?"

"Away--forever! Do not be so startled, Edith; it must be! It was foolish, imprudent, to come to you, but I could not go without seeing you once more; I did not think you would wake."

Edith evidently did not comprehend what she heard, but gazed as if bewildered into the face of her adopted sister, who now continued more impetuously:

"I should have gone in a few days or weeks--now it must be to-night. He has left us no choice, and he is a watchful jailer."

"He? Who? For heaven's sake don't talk in such riddles. Where are you going? You see I am almost frightened to death."

Danira fell upon her knees and clasped the young girl's hands; it was a fierce, painful grasp.

"Do not ask, I dare not answer. Your father will tell you that I have been ungrateful, wicked; perhaps he is right, but my right is higher, for it is the claim of home and kindred, of which he deprived me. He has felt as little affection for me as I for him--let him condemn me! But you, Edith, have loved me, spite of all my failings. You never intentionally caused me pain, never turned coldly from me, even when you did not understand me. You must not believe that I have been unfeeling. I was only wretched, unutterably wretched! Remember this, when to-morrow they all pronounce sentence upon me, and then--forget me!"

She had uttered all this with breathless haste, and now tried to rise, but Edith, who at last understood that the farewell was seriously meant, flung both arms around her neck and began to weep aloud.

"Hush!" whispered Danira, half beseechingly, half imperatively.

"Don't detain me, do not try to prevent my escape, I will not be stopped, though it should cost my life. If you wake the others and put them on my track, it will perhaps cause my death--it will not bring me back!"

The last words expressed such terrible determination that Edith, in her alarm, let her arms fall, and Danira profited by the opportunity to release herself.

"And now one more request. Tell him--Gerald von Steinach--I am no traitress. I have made no hostile plots against those who call themselves my benefactors, they only concerned one man's escape--he will know the secret to-morrow."

Edith suddenly stopped crying and fixed her astonished eyes upon the speaker.

"A message from you to Gerald? And I am to tell him that?"

"Yes! I will not, cannot take this man's contempt with me. I have borne much of late, but I will not endure that scornful glance from his eyes. Promise to repeat to him, word for word, what I said. And now farewell--forever!"

She stooped again, Edith felt two hot, quivering lips press hers, felt herself strained to a heart throbbing with passionate emotion; but it was only for a moment, the next Danira had vanished. The door closed behind her, and the lamp diffused its soft light through the chamber as before, while the young girl pressed both hands upon her temples to convince herself that the scene through which she had just passed was no mere vision in a dream.

Everything had happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that it was some time before Edith recovered from her bewilderment. Then she rose hurriedly, threw on a dressing-gown and rushed into the adjoining room occupied by Danira. It was empty and deserted, the bed untouched, the door locked, the fugitive must have already left the house.

Edith's first thought was to wake her father and tell him what had occurred, but Danira's parting words echoed in her ears: "If you put them on my track, it may perhaps cause my death--it will not bring me back!" She knew her adopted sister, and was aware that she was capable of

executing the threat.

The young girl walked irresolutely to the window which overlooked a portion of the city. The houses lay dark and silent, the citadel towering above them into the starry sky. Yonder lived Gerald, for whom that strange message was left. Why was it addressed to him, who had always treated Danira so distantly, almost rudely, and why could she not endure his contempt, when she was so indifferent to her adopted father's sentence of condemnation? The young girl's childish face, usually so untroubled, assumed an expression of thought, she could not answer this "why."

Suddenly she started. Three shots rang on the air in quick succession, distant, it is true, but distinctly audible amid the stillness of the night. Deep silence followed for several minutes, then came a single sharp report. It echoed from the citadel, and directly after the garrison was astir; lights appeared and vanished, and the red glare of torches fell upon the rocky declivities, where a search seemed in progress. At last a heavy, dull sound roared through the city, the discharge of a cannon, which waked the echoes of the surrounding mountains and died away in the distance.

Under other circumstances Edith would merely have watched the incident with curiosity, for actual cowardice was not in her nature, but now, startled and excited by what had just happened, a strange anxiety oppressed her like a presentiment of misfortune.

She darted back into her chamber to dress, but it was several minutes before she was ready and hurrying toward the other part of the house to wake her father.

There was no occasion to do so, the colonel was already up and dressed. He too had been startled by the shots, and was in the act of buckling on his sword when his daughter entered and ran to him as though seeking protection.

"Are you awake, too, papa? What has happened? Up at the citadel---"

"A prisoner has escaped!" replied the colonel, finishing the sentence. "The alarm-shot gave the signal. Don't be frightened, child, there is no danger."

"But Gerald is there, and other shots were fired----"

"The sentinels discharged their guns; they have orders to fire upon a fugitive if he does not halt, but he must have escaped or the signal would not have been given. I shall send at once and get a report. But why are you up, Edith? Lie down again; the city is perfectly quiet, and I repeat that there is no occasion for alarm."

He spoke with a calmness that was partially assumed, for the incident harmonized too strangely with Gerald's warning, not to arouse grave anxiety. The young officer had mentioned treason, and something unusual was evidently occurring in the citadel. Who could tell what might happen in the city, at any rate the commandant wished to be at his post.

The Colonel's servant now entered with an orderly he had hurriedly summoned by his master's command.

Arlow released himself from his daughter, who still clasped him in her arms, and said, kindly but firmly:

"Go now, my child, you see I am on duty and must think of nothing else. I must go at once. Try to sleep again, and don't allow yourself to be excited by things you do not understand."

Edith saw that she must obey this time and left the room, but the last words touched her like a reproach. True, she had never taken any interest in matters concerning her father's profession, so she was now sent to bed like a child that was only in the way, while the whole city was roused from slumber, while her father and lover were hurrying to their posts, and Danira--at the name a sudden perception of the truth flashed upon the young girl. She understood that Danira was connected with this event, and was playing some part in it, though the relation was still obscure.

Edith returned to her chamber, but sleep was out of the question. The night passed very uneasily; the colonel had hurried out to personally inspect the posts and sentinels, and assure himself that there were no suspicious appearances in the city. Two hours elapsed before his return. Orderlies came and went. At dawn a detachment of soldiers left Cattaro and marched toward the mountains. Most of the residents who had been roused by the signal-gun were also astir to learn what had happened. At that time every unusual event acquired extraordinary importance.

Toward morning the excitement began to subside. People learned that the matter really concerned nothing but the flight of a prisoner who had escaped during the night, and was now being pursued by the military. Lieutenant von Steinach, who had merely sent the most necessary information to the commandant, came at an early hour to make his report in person.

The interview had already lasted more than half an hour. The two men were alone in the colonel's private room, and both faces were so grave and gloomy that it was evident that the event was not quite so trivial as had been rumored in the city.

"I never believed from the first that Joan Obrevic was here for any friendly purpose," said Gerald. "I had been on his trail for several days, but this daring attempt at rescue was the last thing I expected. It has hitherto been considered impossible to scale the citadel from the cliff side."

"Nothing is impossible to these mountaineers," replied the colonel, "especially where rocks and cliffs are concerned. But how did it happen that you discovered the prisoner's escape in the middle of the night, when even the sentinels had not noticed it?"

"I could not sleep, and the discoveries made yesterday rendered me suspicious. Toward midnight I once more went the rounds of the fortification to reconnoitre, and saw by the starlight the prisoner let himself down the wall and reach the ground, where two persons were waiting for him. I instantly alarmed the sentinels, and hurried to the spot myself. The fugitives, finding themselves discovered, fired at me. Their bullets whistled close by my head; I returned the shots, and stretched one on the earth. The two others recklessly pursued the perilous way over the rocks, and vanished in the darkness. When my men hurried up and torches were brought, we saw that I had shot Joan Obrevic, who lay dead at the foot of the wall--he had purchased his son's liberty with his life."

Arlow had listened in silence, but the expression of his face became more and more anxious, and he now asked hastily:

"Did young Obrevic know you?"

"Certainly. I often saw him, as well as the other prisoners, while in command of the citadel."

"And do you think he recognized you last night?"

"Undoubtedly, for I shouted orders to my men. The bullets were meant for me; in a pursuit by the guards they probably would not have delayed their flight to fire; it was an act of revenge upon me personally."

The colonel rose and paced thoughtfully up and down the room several times; at last he paused, and said with deep earnestness:

"Gerald, I would give much if some other bullet than yours had killed Joan Obrevic."

"Why?" asked the young officer, looking up in surprise.

"You have shot the father, and the son has escaped into the mountains. He will carry the news of your deed there, and I have already told you that last evening orders arrived to detach you from your post, and send you and your men to your regiment."

"Which has long been my ardent desire! I am really tired of guarding prisoners while my comrades are fighting the insurgents."

The colonel shook his head, and the anxious expression of his features was still more apparent as he replied:

"You do not know this people as I do; the vendetta exists among them in all its horrors. The chief has fallen by your hand, not even in battle, in a hand-to-hand conflict, but while flying, and it is known that you have killed him--you will be outlawed among the mountains."

Gerald shrugged his shoulders. "That can't be helped. Under the circumstances I could not, ought not to have acted otherwise. I was obliged to fire upon the fugitives when they did not halt at my shout, especially when they attacked me."

"You did perfectly right, but it is an unfortunate combination of circumstances. Obrevic's tribe undoubtedly only remained passive until their chief's son was released and in safety, now its members will instantly join the rebellion and you may be compelled to march against them at once. Promise me to be cautious, and above all things never to venture anywhere alone. Do you hear? Always take an escort."

The young officer drew back with a half indignant gesture. "Am I to set my men an example of timidity and cowardice? You are a soldier, like myself, and know that danger is a part of our profession."

"When treachery and cunning are at work caution is no disgrace, even to a soldier. You will do your whole duty--I expect nothing less from you, but do not go beyond it and allow yourself to be carried away by your zeal to defy a danger which, after last night's occurrence, threatens you and you alone. You owe that to yourself and your promised wife. I demand a pledge that you will be prudent."

"I will be on my guard and not expose my life recklessly. I can promise nothing more; anything beyond would be cowardice."

The colonel repressed a sigh. "You are right, Gerald, but I shall see you go with a heavy heart. Hush! here comes Edith. Do not let her know what we have been discussing; she must not be

needlessly alarmed. Well, my child, here you are! Have you slept off last night's excitement?"

Edith, who had just entered to give her father a morning greeting, did not look so bright and blooming as usual. Her features had a weary, worn expression, and even her voice lacked its customary blitheness, as she replied:

"I could not go to sleep again; every one in the house was awake and moving; besides, I did not know how Gerald had fared."

Gerald, who was advancing to meet his *fiancée*, felt the reproach contained in her words. He had not even thought of sending her a message, yet he might have supposed that she would be anxious about him.

"Pardon me," he answered, quickly. "I imagined you had already learned from your father that the nocturnal event was a matter of no consequence."

"It is rumored that the fugitives fired at you, that you returned the fire, and----"

"People exaggerate, as usual," interrupted the colonel. "Of course, Gerald was on the spot, and has done his duty; but you see he is safe and sound. Unfortunately, he has brought news which will compel me to discuss very serious matters in my own household. Where is Danira?"

Edith looked up, but not at her father; she turned her face toward Gerald.

"Danira has gone."

The young officer started; it was but a moment ere the passing emotion was repressed, but Edith had seen it. The colonel exclaimed:

"Gone! Where?"

"I don't know. She came to my room last night to bid me farewell, in a wild, passionate manner, that frightened me even more than her words. She forbade me to awake you or betray her flight, and was gone ere I could fairly collect my senses. I understood nothing about the whole affair, nothing except--the message she gave me for Gerald."

"For Gerald?" repeated Arlow, whose amazement at first exceeded his indignation.

"Yes, for him."

The young girl, while repeating Danira's words, fixed her eyes upon her lover's face with a half timid, half questioning expression. She saw the flush that crimsoned his brow for an instant, and the light which leaped into his eyes at the vindication the message contained.

"I suspected that she would not be here this morning," he said, at last. "After what had happened she could not stay, and would undoubtedly have gone sooner or later, but I had anticipated something worse than an attempt at rescue."

"I should think that was bad enough!" cried the colonel, furiously. "The thankless, treacherous creature, who has lived with us for years and been treated like a child of the house! To repay the benefits she has received in this way--it is disgraceful."

This indignation was certainly pardonable in a man who, with the best intentions and the most benevolent designs, had endeavored to curb an alien, refractory element, but anger made him unjust. All the secret aversion cherished against his adopted daughter now burst forth unrestrained; he heaped the most violent invectives upon the fugitive, and could not find words enough to condemn her.

Gerald listened for a time in silence, but the flush on his face deepened and his brow grew darker and darker. When the colonel again repeated the expression, "base treachery," the young man's eyes suddenly flashed with a light as fierce as at the time the insult had been hurled into his face.

"Danira is no traitress--that is now proved," he said, in a sharp, positive tone, "and her aiding in the rescue of one of her own race is no disgrace to her in my eyes."

"Do you want to take her part?" cried Arlow, angrily. "Do you want to make excuses for a vagabond who leaves the house in the darkness of night to wander about the mountains with an escaped prisoner, and--"

"Under the protection of her brother, who has summoned her, and is now taking her back to her home. It was a mistake to tear this girl from her birthplace, a mistake by which she has been the greatest sufferer. She has done wrong, it is true, but the voice of blood has proved stronger than that of gratitude; perhaps, in her place, I might have done the same."

The colonel gazed in speechless astonishment at his future son-in-law, whom he saw in this state of excitement for the first time.

"Well, you are the last person from whom I expected such opinions!" he burst forth. "You are actually constituting yourself the knight and defender of the runaway. Edith, what do you say to this affair? You don't utter a word."

Edith's eyes still rested on the young officer's face, and even now she did not avert her gaze.

"I think Gerald is right," she said, gently. "I felt the same when Danira bade me farewell last night."

"Yes, that's the way with young people; they always see the romantic side!" cried the colonel, angrily. "No unbiased opinion can be expected from you; we won't argue about it any farther. At any rate, I am glad the affair is ended in this way. I have always considered it a misfortune that my own undue haste compelled me to tolerate such an element in my household. This Danira's presence weighed like a nightmare upon us all."

"Yes, it was fortunate that she went--for us all!" said Gerald, with a long breath, as if a weight had been removed from his breast also.

Arlow paced up and down the room several times, as was his custom when struggling with any emotion; then he paused before his daughter.

"Amidst all these discussions we are forgetting the main thing. You don't yet know, my child, that Gerald must leave. The order came last evening, and he is to march with his men to-morrow to join the regiment."

"So soon?" asked Edith, but the tone was hollow, almost mechanical. Her father looked at her in surprise; he had expected that she would receive the news very differently. But Gerald advanced to the young girl's side and bent over her.

"Yes, I must go, and my little Edith must forgive my longing to share the perils and privations of my comrades. I am to show myself worthy of my *fiancée* in this campaign. If I return we will turn our backs upon this country and I will take my young wife home to beautiful, sunny Tyrol and my mother's arms. Believe me, Edith, we can be very happy there."

There was an unusual warmth and tenderness in the words, perhaps also a strange haste and uneasiness, while he grasped in a convulsive rather than fervent clasp the hand of his promised bride, who did not utter a syllable in reply. The colonel, however, now completely appeased, said:

"Well, that is talking sensibly! Edith will submit to the separation until your return; she is a soldier's daughter. But go now, my son. You must make the arrangements at the citadel which we have been discussing. We shall expect you here this afternoon, and I will see that you have leisure to devote yourself this last evening to your *fiancée*."

Gerald raised the little hand which lay in his to his lips, and this time really pressed a long, ardent kiss upon it. The caress seemed almost like a plea for pardon, and he looked up reproachfully when the hand was hastily withdrawn.

"You see the ice is breaking!" said the colonel, in a jesting tone, when the door had closed behind the young officer. "The parting appears to make Gerald realize what he possesses in his little *fiancée*. Do you still think he is incapable of loving?"

Edith slowly turned her face toward her father; it was startlingly pale, and the blue eyes were filled with scalding tears.

"Oh! yes, Gerald can love!" she said, with quivering lips. "I have learned that to-day--but he has never loved me!"

IV.

On a desolate, rocky mountain plateau, a most lonely and secluded location, was a fort, which, built many years before, had recently been greatly strengthened, and was now the centre of the military operations for the suppression of the rebellion.

Months had passed since the first outbreak, and the insurrection was not yet wholly subdued, though every indication betokened a speedy conquest. During this time the troops had endured all sorts of dangers and hardships, a series of fierce battles had been waged, and here they were compelled to fight, not only men, but the country, the climate, the immobility and barrenness of

this mountainous region, which proved themselves foes to the strangers, while they became so many allies to the natives of the land. Yet the greater part of the toilsome task was already accomplished and the fate of the insurrection decided.

The tribe of which Joan Obrevic had been chief was the only one that still opposed to the soldiery a tenacious and energetic resistance. Its members had joined the rebellion immediately after the death of their leader and the return of his son, and now this son occupied his father's place and carried on a fierce, desperate warfare, in which all the cruelty of his race was displayed. With proud defiance he rejected every overture relating to surrender or treaty, and woe betide all the wounded and prisoners who fell into his hands!

A number of wounded soldiers, whose condition did not permit them to be transported farther, had been brought to the fort, and Father Leonhard had come there to render them spiritual consolation and assistance. The sun shone hotly down upon the stone walls of the little fortress, but within their shelter it was comparatively cool. The priest was sitting in the tiny room assigned to him, and before him stood George Moosbach, covered with dust, flushed with heat, and bearing every token of a fatiguing march.

"Here we are, your reverence," he said. "At least, here I am for the present, half dead with thirst, three quarters worn out by fatigue, and entirely roasted by the heat of the sun. Well, when a fellow has the same sport every day he gets used to it in time."

"Yet you don't seem much the worse for your exertions," replied the priest, glancing at the young soldier's face--it was a little more sunburnt, it is true, but the black eyes sparkled as boldly and blithely as ever.

"They must be borne," he answered stolidly. "Besides, I knew beforehand that it was a God-forsaken country. There are no human beings here at all except His Majesty's faithful troops, who have to fight these savages. We march for hours without seeing tree or bush, nothing but sky, rocks and sunshine, and by way of variety sometimes encounter a *bora*, during which one can see and hear nothing. If you were not here, your reverence, there would be no Christianity; we've fallen among Turks and pagans. Oh, my beautiful, blessed Tyrol! The Lord created you specially for His own pleasure, but I should like to know what He could have been thinking of when He made Krivoscia."

George had not yet attained familiarity with the name, which fell in a perfectly barbarous accent from his lips, but the priest said reprovingly:

"Our Lord knows best why He has distributed His gifts in one way and not another-- So you have reported that Baron von Steinach and his men are coming to the fort?"

"Yes; they'll be here in half an hour, and I hope still alive."

"Why? Are there wounded soldiers with the troops?"

"No, when I left they were all well, but a man isn't sure of his life an hour here. How often, when we were marching merrily along, singing the songs of our beautiful Tyrol, those accursed savages have unexpectedly attacked us! One moment the wilderness is perfectly empty, and all at once there are the fellows, as if they had grown out of the rocks, and their bullets are whizzing around our heads. They never make a stand anywhere; if we try to catch them in a ravine they are on the heights, and when we climb up they are down below again. If it comes to a real attack, the whole troop vanishes in the twinkling of an eye, as if the cliffs had swallowed them up, and we halt, utterly bewildered, look at each other, and count our ears and noses to see whether we still have them all."

This vivid and exhaustive description of Krivoscian campaigning brought a passing smile to Father Leonhard's face.

"If any one should hear you, he would suppose you a bad soldier who only did your duty under compulsion," he replied. "Yet I was able to write to your parents a few days ago that their George distinguished himself on every occasion, and his superior officers gave him the highest praise for his fearlessness."

George looked very proud of the eulogy bestowed upon him, but modestly disclaimed it.

"I learned that by watching my lieutenant. Whenever he meets the insurgents he always sends them home with broken heads. Perhaps you have written to Baroness von Steinach, too, your reverence?"

"No, I had no occasion, and I think the lieutenant will do it himself."

"I ought to," said the young Tyrolese, with a very downcast air. "The Baroness charged me to protect Herr Gerald's life--but I can't bear to cause her the sorrow."

"Sorrow? Because her son has so greatly distinguished himself?"

"No, not that, it's a very different matter, your reverence." George clasped his hands devoutly.

"You have often reproved me for committing so many follies, and it's all true. But they do no harm, and they are far from being so bad as the one folly Herr Gerald has committed in his whole life. I can't look on any longer, I must tell you."

He uttered so heart-rending a sigh that the priest gazed at him with a startled, anxious glance.

"What do you mean? What is the matter with the lieutenant?"

"He's bewitched!" George despairingly exclaimed. "Completely bewitched!"

"George--are you in your senses?"

"I am, but unluckily he isn't. The poor young lady in Cattaro! So pretty, so bright, and merry that it cheers one's heart just to look at her, and now this Danira----"

"The commandant's adopted daughter, who ran away at night? What of her?"

"She's the witch who has done my lieutenant this mischief!" George cried indignantly. "She has brewed some witches' potion, these savages know how, and now the misfortune has come--he is in love with her."

Father Leonhard rose in utter consternation.

"Impossible? Gerald von Steinach, that quiet, thoughtful man, with his rigid sense of duty, possessed by such an infatuation--it can't be! What put the idea into your head?"

The young soldier advanced a step nearer and lowered his voice, though they were entirely alone.

"I knew it in Cattaro, but I did not want to believe it. The evening before our departure the lieutenant went once more to the commandant's and I was permitted to go with him to bid the young lady good-bye. But we did not see her at all, not even Herr Gerald; instead of that his future father-in-law and he were alone together in a room for an hour. I was standing in the dark ante-chamber when they at last came out; the colonel didn't see me, and I heard his farewell words:

"I will not wrong you, Gerald; I myself believe that the whole affair is merely a foolish fancy on the part of Edith, but what you say does not soothe me, for it shows that you are not perfectly clear in your own mind. We part now, and you are going to encounter serious things; you will have ample time to test yourself. You have given me your word of honor that you will not write to your promised wife until you can say to her with entire sincerity: I did not love Danira, my heart belongs solely to you. If you can do that your bride will not be lost, for I rely implicitly upon your honor, and so will Edith. Now, farewell, I hope you will write soon!"

Father Leonhard had listened in extreme suspense to this literal repetition of the conversation, now he asked hastily:

"Well, and--?"

"Well, your reverence, Herr Gerald has not written."

"Really? Are you sure?"

"Absolutely certain. I have to take all the letters to the messenger; there was not one to the young lady among them."

"That is certainly a bad sign," said the priest in a low tone, "very bad."

"It's witchcraft, abominable witchcraft!" George wrathfully exclaimed. "The blow will kill his mother when she discovers it. Castle Steinach will be completely upset, and Moosbach Farm too, and the whole Tyrol to boot--a reverend ecclesiastic must interfere, nothing else will do, only priests can oppose witchcraft."

Father Leonhard did not heed the last words, the news evidently affected him most painfully, and it was after a long pause that he said:

"Have you ever given the Lieutenant a hint that you knew the affair?"

"I tried it once," said George, mournfully. "But I got no further than the name Danira. Then he started up and looked at me with a pair of eyes--I didn't suppose Herr Gerald could glare so--I didn't attempt it a second time."

"Then I'll try whether he will talk with me. Meantime, keep silence about it in future to every one."

Here the conversation was interrupted; they heard outside words of command and the regular tramp of soldiers marching.

"There they are!" cried George, starting up. "Excuse me, your reverence, I must see whether

they have brought Jovica; the Lieutenant took charge of her when I was obliged to leave."

"Who is Jovica?" asked the priest, but he received no answer, the young soldier had already darted out of the door, and Father Leonhard went to the window.

It was really Lieutenant von Steinach, who had just arrived with his detachment, joyously welcomed by the garrison of the fort. The officers greeted each other, and the soldiers openly expressed their satisfaction in having reached the place where they expected rest and refreshment after the fatiguing march. There was a pleasant bustle going on when George suddenly appeared, hastily saluting his lieutenant, and then darted like a bird of prey into the midst of his comrades, where he seemed to be looking for something.

Father Leonhard now went down to welcome the young officer, whom he had not seen since his departure from Cattaro; for, owing to the peculiar method of warfare, the various detachments of the regiment were usually separated from each other. At the foot of the stairs Gerald came toward him, accompanied by the officer commanding the fort. The meeting was cordial, even affectionate, but necessarily brief. Gerald promised to seek the reverend gentleman as soon as possible, and then prepared to follow his comrade, but in the very act of departure he turned back and asked:

"Has George told you about his foundling?"

"What foundling? I don't know a word of the affair."

"George now has a new charge, which, to be sure is rather oddly suited to him. He has set up for an adopted father, and intends to bring his *protégée* to you. You will hear the particulars from him. *Au revoir*, your reverence."

The gentlemen went on, and Father Leonhard shook his head with a puzzled look. He could not imagine his quarrelsome parishioner in the position intimated, but he was not to remain in doubt long, for just at that moment George entered the corridor with a young girl whom he led by the hand like a child.

"The saints preserve me!" cried the priest, who was not at all prepared for this spectacle. "What is this you are bringing me?"

"A savage!" replied the young soldier with great solemnity. "But you needn't be frightened, your reverence, she is perfectly tame."

Father Leonhard gazed in astonishment at the delicate little creature, who scarcely reached to her companion's shoulder. She was a very young girl, hardly beyond childhood, slender and shy as a chamois. The dark, southern face, with its childish features and dark eyes, had an expression of timid submission and gentleness, while clothing so scanty and miserable was only found among the poorest shepherd tribes of the country.

"This is Jovica!" replied George, in a tone which seemed to imply that those few words told the whole story; but this explanation did not satisfy the priest, who desired to know who Jovica was and where she came from, so George was obliged to condescend to a longer narrative.

"Two days ago we had to capture a few of the mud and stone huts people here call a village. There was sharp fighting over it, but we finally got possession and the inhabitants fled. There I found the poor thing, who had been left behind alone, hidden in a corner, half starved and almost frightened to death. She probably expected me to spear her on the spot, for she was trembling from head to foot, but I've brought her to a better opinion of the Tyrolese imperial chasseurs, haven't I, Jovica?"

The young girl evidently did not understand one word of the whole speech; her large eyes rested timidly and anxiously on the priest, and she pressed closer, with unmistakable confidence, to her protector, who now continued:

"The lieutenant understands Slavonic, so we found out that she didn't belong to the village at all. She had come there with a party of fugitives from the frontier, and did not even know where her own home was. She made me comprehend: Father dead--mother dead--all dead! So there was nothing for me to do except fill the places of father and mother to her."

The words were uttered so sincerely and honestly that the priest could not repress a faint smile, but he said quietly:

"I think, George, it will be best for you to trust the child to me."

"Yes, Lieutenant von Steinach thinks so too, that's why I brought Jovica to you; but, your reverence, you'll have trouble with her, she is a terrible pagan. The very first day it came out that she was still in the midst of heathenism. She knows nothing about church nor crucifix, and calls God 'Allah.'"

"Then the girl probably belongs to one of the Mohammedan tribes that dwell on the frontier. If she is really an orphan and entirely deserted, we must, of course, take charge of her, the only

question is what we are to do with her."

"First of all, baptize her," said George, in a paternal tone. "That can be done at once here in the fort, and I'll stand god-father."

"It cannot be arranged so unceremoniously. The girl must first be instructed in the precepts of Christianity, and we must know whether she will prove susceptible to them."

George looked very much disappointed when the baptismal ceremony, in which he expected to play so important a part, receded into the dim distance, but he answered submissively:

"Well, you know best, your reverence, but the poor thing can't remain a pagan, that's clear."

"For the present she will stay here," the priest added. "I need help in caring for the wounded, and as one of them speaks Slavonic fluently, he can act as interpreter. We will try at once."

He was going to take the girl by the arm to lead her away, but Jovica resisted with all her strength this attempt to separate her from her protector. Clinging anxiously to him, she began to weep bitterly, saying in an imploring tone a few Slavonic words, which George understood no better than she comprehended his language, but he stepped back resolutely and drew her toward him.

"This won't do, your reverence," he said emphatically. "Jovica must be differently treated or she will cry, and I can't stand that. The poor thing is as timid as one of our chamois, and shrinks from every one except me. One must talk to her like a father, and I am the only person who understands it."

He stroked the girl's shining black hair with a soothing touch, and actually began a speech in which he arbitrarily mixed with his Tyrolese German a few Slavonic words he had picked up somewhere. It sounded more barbaric than fatherly, yet Jovica was evidently quieted. She no longer resisted when he at last led her to Father Leonhard, and by pantomime endeavored to make known his goodness, but her eyes were still wet with tears and rested with touching persistency on her protector.

The latter seemed to have several farewell ceremonies in view, but the priest put an end to them by taking his charge away. George looked after them very calmly. He had now placed both the affairs that lay near his heart in the hands of the priesthood, and was firmly convinced that Father Leonhard would deal with the "witchcraft" as well as the paganism.

He was just turning to go, when his comrade Bartel entered on his way to report to the lieutenant.

"Well, George, have you got rid of your foundling?" he asked, in a jeering tone. "What does Father Leonhard say to the pagan? Will he baptize her?"

"Take care, Bartel!" replied George. "You are my friend and countryman, but if you don't let me and Jovica alone, you'll fare badly."

Bartel did not heed the warning, but continued his taunts.

"A pretty adopted child you've chosen! A pagan witch, brown as a gypsy, and ragged as--"

He went no further, for his friend and countryman stretched out his arm and dealt the scoffer so violent a blow that he staggered back against the wall and held his head between both hands as though dazed.

"That's what happens to people who talk about Jovica!" said George with perfect composure. "Take notice and tell our comrades, that they may govern themselves accordingly. If necessary, I'll knock down the whole company," and conscious of having done a good act, he held his head very high as he walked away.

Lieutenant von Steinach had kept his promise and sought Father Leonhard in his room as soon as he found time to do so. He was now standing at the window of the small apartment gazing at the dreary dead mountain landscape, to which the sunset was lending a rather delusive semblance of life.

The young officer, too, had been little affected by the fatigues of the campaign. True, his features bore traces of the scorching heat of the sun, and his light brown hair lay in thicker, more dishevelled locks on his brow and temples, but otherwise he looked as fresh and vigorous as ever. The privations of the past few weeks seemed to have only strengthened him.

Yet the priest's watchful gaze discerned a change which, though only in the expression, was distinctly apparent.

This was not quiet, passionless Gerald von Steinach, whose cool circumspection had become proverbial among his comrades. There were new lines on his face, a half gloomy, half bitter expression, which told of secret conflicts concealed with difficulty, and a deep shadow lurked in the eyes formerly so clear. He had related his military experiences, discussed the chances of the

campaign, spoken of his home and his mother, but had never uttered a syllable in allusion to his promised bride, and had even avoided mentioning Cattaro, though the city was the real point of departure of all military operations. His manner of speaking was also changed, it had become hasty and abrupt, as though he wished to deaden some hidden anxiety and did not fix his thoughts upon the conversation. At last he stopped talking, and his eyes rested dreamily on the distant prospect. The rocks still gleamed redly in the last rays of the setting sun, and on the horizon appeared long, sharply outlined clouds, which also still glowed with rosy light.

The long silence which ensued roused Gerald from his reverie. He turned, and when he saw the priest's questioning gaze fixed upon him, an indignant expression flitted over his face.

"I was just watching the sky," he said, hastily. "We learn here to know the signs of the weather; it seems as if we were going to have a *bora*. I'm glad I have sheltered my men in the fort, and that there is a probability of our having a few days' rest."

"You all need it," replied Father Leonhard. "Especially you, Gerald; you have been almost continually on the move these last weeks."

"It was necessary; the insurgents don't give us much time to breathe. You know it is Joan Obrevic's son who is now causing us the most trouble."

"And this son is chief of the tribe, and is making every exertion to avenge his father. It often occasions me great anxiety, Gerald. You have told me your experiences, but you have not mentioned how often that vengeance has already threatened you. I learn from your comrades that you have hitherto escaped these open and secret snares as though by a miracle."

The young officer merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I am in the hands of a higher power, and--it is true--I have been of late so often and so wonderfully preserved that I have learned to trust this protection."

"But he who defies danger, as according to the other officers is your custom, also defies Providence. Your life does not belong only to yourself, others have a claim upon it."

"My mother--yes!" said Gerald slowly. "I sometimes forget that she is anxious about me."

"And your promised wife?"

The young man silently fixed his eyes upon the floor.

"I hope you have letters from her? Our mail communication with Cattaro is tolerably regular."

Gerald looked up, and doubtless read in the priest's glance that he knew more than he cared to show, for he said quickly:

"Has Colonel Arlow written to you?"

"No, but perhaps I have learned from another source what you are concealing from me."

Gerald made no reply, but again turned toward the window and seemed to wish to close the conversation. Father Leonhard went up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Gerald, you have spent little time at home during the last few years, but surely you know that I am no stranger there. Will you not speak freely to your parents' friend, to the priest?"

The question sounded gentle, yet grave and warning, and did not fail to produce an effect. Gerald passed his hand across his brow.

"What am I to say? Do I know myself what it is that oppresses me? I have been driven into doubts, discord with my own nature. Had Edith and her father trusted to my honor, they would not have repented it. The affair was over, and I should have crushed the memory of it like an evil dream--forever!"

"A young girl does not wish merely to trust to her lover's honor in keeping his troth," replied the priest earnestly. "She asks his love, and with perfect justice. Besides, as I understand, the colonel has permitted you to return as soon as you can do so, with a free heart. Have you written to Fräulein Allow?"

"No," said Gerald, in a slow, dreary tone.

"You could not?"

"No, I could not."

"Gerald--this is impossible--it cannot be."

"What is impossible?" asked the young man with intense bitterness, "that the somnambulist, who is suddenly waked to see the gulf at his feet, should be seized with giddiness? Had he been left undisturbed, he would have found the way back. I once thought it impossible that a feeling

could slumber for weeks in the depths of the soul, wholly unsuspected, till suddenly a flash of lightning came to illumine the darkness, that such a light could alter the whole nature until a man no longer recognized himself in his thoughts and feelings. In Cattaro I might still have conquered it; now that I have been alone for weeks I know I can no longer do so, and thereby am sundered from my whole past, involved in dissension with those who stand nearest to me, engaged in perpetual warfare with myself. Would it not be best if I should not return at all, and will you reproach me for seeking danger and longing for the bullet that will end this torture?"

He had spoken with increasing agitation. A terrible change had indeed taken place in the quiet man, and the priest was quite startled by this fierce, feverish impetuosity.

"I never expected to see you thus, Gerald," he said with mingled reproof and sorrow. "So it has already gone so far that you seek death, that---"

"We must all look death in the face here," Gerald interrupted. "To me he has lost his terrors, that is all. But we ought not to spoil our meeting by such discussions. I wanted to speak to you of other matters. George has already entrusted his charge to you, I hear. He would not rest till I gave him permission to take the girl to the fort. The only question is, what is to become of her now."

The sudden change of subject plainly showed that he wished to escape the former topic of conversation, and Father Leonhard made no attempt to keep to it, he had already learned too much.

The two men talked for several minutes longer about Jovica, but neither felt at ease, and Gerald seized the first opportunity to withdraw.

The priest sighed heavily as he looked after him.

"How will this end?" he murmured. "The story is true, incredible as it seems; one might almost, like George, believe in witchcraft. To be sure, when a spark of passion once kindles these calm, icy natures, the conflagration is terrible."

The night passed in the fort without incident; the new arrivals especially gave themselves up to their well deserved repose, but it was not to be long granted. Day was just beginning to dawn when the reveille suddenly sounded, and the whole garrison was speedily in motion.

Father Leonhard, who had been occupied with the wounded men until late at night, was also roused--it was needful here to be always prepared for the sudden outbreak of danger--and, rising, left his room. On the stairs he met George in full uniform, coming toward him in the greatest hurry.

"Here you are, your reverence! My lieutenant has sent me to tell you that we must be off at once. He hasn't any time, and I must be down below in five minutes. Didn't I say so! Scarcely do we expect to get a fair chance of sleep when these confounded savages are at us again."

"But what is the matter? Are the insurgents attacking the fort?"

"No; but our captain is fighting with them two leagues from here. They attacked him during the night; he can't hold out alone against the superior force, and has sent for reinforcements. We are to join him. I only wanted to ask you to take care of Jovica, your reverence. The poor thing will cry if she doesn't see me, and I now fill a father's place to her."

"Have no anxiety, the young girl is under my protection. Where is your captain?"

But George was far too much engrossed by his paternal duties to have any thought of anything else, he continued hastily in broken accents:

"And if I don't return at all, you must at least baptize the poor thing; she can't remain in paganism. Promise me that, your reverence. There's the signal again, and that confounded *bora* is beginning to whistle. But it makes no difference, out we must go! I wish I could wring the neck of this whole Krivoscia--no, not the whole, Jovica belongs to the country. No, no! Take care of Jovica for me, your reverence."

He rushed down the staircase to join his comrades. Father Leonhard followed, and was just in time to see the fortress gates opened. George was already standing in the ranks; Gerald, who was at the head of his men, waved a farewell to the priest with his sword, and the little band marched bravely out in the glimmering dusk of early morn.

V.

The *bora* had been blowing all day long with a violence that would have seemed dangerous to a dweller in the lowlands, but which attracted no special attention here. On the rocky heights of the Karst the mountaineers were familiar with tempests that brought destruction to every living thing in their path, and often hurled horse and rider over a precipice. To-day the wind had roared over the earth and howled fiercely above it, but it was at least possible to remain out of doors and even move forward. The air was dry, the sky clear, and the landscape was illumined by the bright moonlight.

In one of the funnel-shaped ravines that intersect the rocky ridges of the Karst in every direction, was a so-called "village," a mere handful of huts, rudely built of stone, which only afforded shelter from the weather, and scarcely resembled human habitations. Somewhat higher up, almost at the edge of the ravine, but still within the protection of the rocks, stood a somewhat larger building, the only one that deserved the name of house. It was firmly built, had a door and windows, and was divided inside into several separate rooms. The first and largest of these apartments seemed to be used as a common living-room by the occupants. A huge fire was blazing on the hearth and illumined the bare, smoke-blackened walls, whose sole ornaments, a crucifix and an image of a saint, showed that the inhabitants were Christians. The furniture, though clumsy and roughly made, was better than is usually found in this region, and several wooden chests in the corners, apparently well filled, also indicated that the owner of the dwelling was one of the rich and distinguished men in the tribe.

True, the weapons generally seen on the walls of every hut were absent, like the arms that wielded them. The men belonging to the village, who were capable of bearing arms, were now away at the scene of war or camped in inaccessible ravines and narrow passes. Sometimes they secretly returned to their homes, which stood open to the troops--they were well aware that the women and children left behind had nothing to fear from the soldiery.

Upon the wooden table stood the remnants of a simple meal, and a young woman was engaged in cleaning the pot in which she had prepared it. She did her work swiftly and silently, without joining even by a syllable in the conversation of the two men who stood by the hearth.

Both were young, and true sons of their country, slender, brown and supple, but their dress and whole appearance showed traces of the long months of conflict through which they had passed. The elder, who had sharp, eagle-like features, and a face as hard and rigid as the rocks of his home, was gazing gloomily with frowning brow into the fire. His companion, who was several years his junior, also looked grave and gloomy, but his face lacked the former's iron sternness. Neither had laid aside his weapons; they wore swords at their sides and knives thrust into their girdles, while their guns leaned against the wall close by within their reach.

"I expected to hear better news from you," said the elder, angrily. "Another defeat! Was not your force superior?"

"Only at first, the enemy received reinforcements, and my men have long been disheartened. You will not see, Marco, that we are constantly being forced back, more and more closely surrounded. We are the only ones who still hold out--for how long?"

"Do you want to sue for mercy?" cried Marco, furiously. "Will you give your hand to those who killed your father, as well as mine? If you can forget that you are Hersovac's son--my name is Obrevic. And the man to whom I owe my imprisonment and my father's death is still unharmed."

"It was he who brought the foe aid to-day," said young Hersovac. "I recognized him during the fight. You will not touch him, he has protected himself by witchcraft."

"One might believe so!" muttered Marco. "He is no coward, he is always in the front of the fray. How often I have sought him there, how often he was to have been betrayed into my hands by stratagem. Others, the wrong ones, were always struck and he escaped. But he is still within our frontiers, and I have set snares for him at every step. If he once separates from his comrades he is mine!"

He seized a log of wood from the pile and flung it on the fire so that the sparks flew in every direction; it was an expression of his suppressed fury. Then he asked in a curt, sharp tone:

"Where is Danira? Doesn't she know that I am here?"

"Yes, but she refuses to come in."

"Compel her, then!" said Marco, roughly.

"Compel Danira? You do not know my sister."

"I would compel her, and I will, as soon as she is mine; rely upon that. Call her in."

The command sounded very imperious, but Stephan Hersovac obeyed. He was still very young,

and apparently not equal to the position circumstances had forced upon him.

Only the elder of the sons of the two fallen leaders seemed capable of taking his father's place, yet they had grown up together like brothers in the house of Joan Obrevic after the latter brought his dead friend's son home. But, even in those days, the energetic Marco exerted authority over his younger and more yielding friend. Stephan was accustomed to submit to him, and did so absolutely, now that he stood at the head of the tribe.

After a few minutes Danira appeared. She, too, wore the costume of the country, yet even here in her home there was something foreign in her aspect. She had nothing at all in common with the women of her race, the timid, humble creatures born and reared to subjection. There was a cold pride in her bearing as she approached Marco and bent her head, as though his imperious summons had been a petition, and she had granted it.

Obrevic must have received this impression, for his eyes glowed with a fervent, passionate admiration, although his voice remained cold and harsh, as he asked:

"Can you not greet the guest who comes to your brother's hearth, or don't you wish to do so?"

"Did you miss my greeting?" was the cool reply. "You only came to hold a conference with Stephan, and your meal was already provided."

"No matter! It is seemly for you to welcome the man to whom your brother has promised your hand. You have long known that."

"And you know that I do not recognize this promise. I have never given you mine."

"Among us a woman has no will," replied Marco, imperiously. "Your brother is now the head of the house. He has a right to dispose of you, and will compel you to obey--he or I!"

"Try it!"

The two words were spoken with perfect calmness, but such unyielding resolution that Marco stamped his foot furiously.

"Have you learned defiance among the people down below? You have now returned to us, and none of the follies they taught you suit this place."

"You are mistaken. I have left everything there--." The girl's voice trembled for a moment. Then she repeated, with passionate, almost angry emphasis: "Everything. Ask my brother whether I shrink from the labor of which I was ignorant, whether I refuse to do what is imposed upon me. I ask only one thing--to be free! And I shall not be, if I belong to a husband. I did not fly from captivity to enter slavery, and with you a wife is a slave."

Her eyes wandered with a half pitying, half scornful glance toward her brother's wife, who, still busied with her work, crouched beside the hearth; spite of her youth and beauty the stamp of servitude was plainly visible. Scarcely as old as Danira, she was already worn by the hard burden of toil that rested almost entirely upon her shoulders. She had prepared the meal, and waited on the men without receiving the slightest notice from them. Even in her husband's presence she showed nothing but timid shyness and submission, and now gazed with actual horror at the girl who ventured to say such things to a man. Her whole appearance and bearing formed a convincing proof of the truth of Danira's words, and this exasperated the fierce Obrevic.

"Do you want to teach us foreign customs?" he furiously exclaimed. "With us the husband is the only person of importance, and what our wives have been they will remain."

Danira drew herself up proudly, her eyes flashed, and with passionate pride she retorted:

"But I am not like your women, and never will be--that is the very reason I will belong to none of you."

Her defiance irritated Marco, but at the same time produced an impression upon him, for it contained a shade of his own unbridled, unbending will. His hand was still clenched, but as his eyes rested on the beautiful face, glowing with excitement, he murmured:

"No, you are different--that is why I cannot give you up."

A pause ensued; Danira stooped and began to put fresh fuel on the dying fire. Her hands showed that she had learned to work and did not spare herself, but every movement was full of grace and power.

Marco silently watched her, and suddenly advancing a step nearer seized the girl's arm, asking in an abrupt, vehement tone:

"Why do you scorn my suit? I am the chief, the richest man in the tribe, even richer than your brother. You need not labor like the other women, you shall be no slave in my house--no, Danira, I promise you!"

There was a strange blending of sullen menace and ardent passion in the words, nay, even an accent of entreaty in the promise. It was evident that the rude son of the mountains was completely under the thrall of a feeling experienced for the first time, and which subdued his masculine obstinacy. He pleaded where, in his opinion, he was entitled to demand, but Danira with quiet decision released her arm.

"You cannot act contrary to your nature, Marco, even if you wished. You must rule and oppress, and when angered you know no limits. You bend even my brother absolutely to your will; what would be your wife's fate? And is this a time to think of marriage? Stephan has just told you what has happened; he has been defeated."

"For the third time! By all the saints, I would not have allowed myself to be routed, but Stephan is no leader--never has been."

"My brother is still very young," replied Danira. "He lacks experience, not courage, and can do nothing for a lost cause, for--whether you admit it or not--our cause is lost. You alone still hold out, but you cannot accomplish what is impossible."

"Silence!" cried Obrevic in a fierce outbreak of wrath. "What do you know about it? Has Stephan already infected you with his cowardice? He talks of submission, and you----"

"Not I!" Danira interrupted. "I can understand that you must conquer or fall. I wish I could die with you, if it comes to that. Destruction is no disgrace--but there is shame in submission."

The words had a ring of iron resolution which showed that the girl was quite capable of verifying them if matters proceeded to extremes. Marco felt this, for without averting his gaze from her face he said slowly:

"You ought to have been the man and Stephan the woman. You have inherited your father's blood--he did not."

He held out his hand and clasped hers with a firm pressure, such as was usually exchanged only between men. Danira had compelled him to recognize her as his equal. The clasp of the hand acknowledged it.

"You are right," he continued. "This is no time to think of marriage, we have better things to do. But when the time comes--and come it will--you shall be mine, Danira, I have sworn it and will keep my vow."

The light of passion again glowed in his eyes, but the young girl was spared a reply, for Stephan entered and the two men began to equip themselves for departure. The farewell was brief and laconic. These rude sons of the mountains were fully capable of passions but mere emotions were wholly alien to their natures.

Even Stephan did not think of taking any warmer leave of his young wife, who approached to hand him his gun, yet they had been only a few months wedded, and the two men might expect death at any hour. Marco, in the act of departure, turned once more to Danira with the question:

"Were there any soldiers in the village this morning?"

"Yes, but they only rested a short time, and marched on scarcely an hour after."

"Others will probably come to-night or early tomorrow. They are seeking us, as they have so often done, and will not find us unless we wish to be found. If they ask, put them on a false trail."

The young girl shook her head. "You know I cannot lie. And they never ask, they know we will not betray our people--Stephan is to join you with his men?"

"Yes, at once, that we may be united in the next attack. Farewell!"

The two men went out and ascended to the top of the ravine. Their dark figures were visible for a time, making their way vigorously against the gale, then they vanished and the village lay silent and desolate, apparently wrapped in slumber, as before.

Stephan Hersovac's house was also silent, but Danira still sat by the hearth, constantly putting fresh logs upon the dying fire, as if she dreaded darkness and sleep. Her sister-in-law had already gone to rest. She did not understand how any one could shorten or wholly resign the only solace of a toilsome life, slumber, and had nothing to think about, so she was sound asleep in the dark room adjoining.

The young girl had closed the door leading to it, in order to be entirely alone, and was now gazing fixedly into the flames. Without the tempest raved, and within the fire snapped and crackled, but Danira saw and heard nothing. She was dreaming, dreaming with her burning eyes wide open, and from the floating smoke appeared visions far, far removed from the darkness and solitude of the hour--a wide, wide landscape, flooded with golden sunshine, and overarched by a deep-blue sky, towering mountain peaks, shimmering waves, and in the distance a surging sea, veiled by the mists of morning!

Above the whole scene hovered a face, looking down upon her with stern severity, bitter reproach, as in that hour on the rocky height, that hour which had decided the fate of two human beings.

They had not seen each other since, and to separation was added enmity, for the two parties to which they belonged now confronted each other in mortal strife. And yet--the visionary face began to lose its harsh expression, softened more and more, until finally it disappeared, and only two clear eyes gazed forth from the drifting wreaths of smoke, the bright, clear eyes of Gerald von Steinach, no longer full of hate and enmity, but instinct with that one emotion which had awaked in that hour never to die again.

Just at that moment one of the glowing logs broke and others fell, sending out a shower of sparks. Danira started and looked up. The dream still absorbed her so completely that she needed several seconds to recall where she was, but her surroundings soon brought her back to reality. Yes, this close, gloomy room, with its bare walls and wretched household furniture, its smoky, stifling atmosphere--this was the home for which she had longed since childhood, and this life, spent day after day in hard, common toil, destitute of every intellectual element, was the freedom of which she had dreamed.

The commandant's adopted daughter, who had been surrounded in his house with all the requisites of luxury and culture, now learned to know what she had given up and what she had obtained in exchange. Obrevic had told the truth. Here the man was the only person of importance, and the idea of freedom, fierce and unbridled as it might be, existed for him alone; the wife was merely the best piece of furniture in the house, the beast of burden who bore the labors of the home, and always trembled in slavish fear of her stern master. So the custom of the tribe required, and to this custom all who belonged to it must bow.

No matter, she had chosen her own fate, and Danira's resolute will repressed the loathing she felt for these surroundings and this treatment, which she had endured without complaint; but now the worst came. She was sought in marriage by a man with whose rudeness and fierceness she was sufficiently familiar, and thereby the last remnant of independence was lost. Marco's ardent passion still gave her power over him. He still yielded to the influence of a higher nature, and was charmed and allured by what was refused, but only so long as it continued to be denied. When once his property, the old tyranny would assert its rights, and his wife would have no better lot than the other women of her race. Sooner or later she would be forced to choose between accepting him for her husband or quitting her brother's house, for the latter, incited and irritated by his friend, would undoubtedly try this means of subduing her will. Then she would be thrust out by her kindred, for whom she had sacrificed everything, homeless here as well as there!

Danira had started up, and was pacing to and fro in the narrow space, as though pursued by torturing thoughts. Her movements grew more and more impetuous, her bosom heaved passionately, and she suddenly sank down before the crucifix and pressed her burning brow against the cold wall. The prayer that rose to heaven was fervent and despairing, though silent; a prayer for deliverance, for release from the fetters that constantly encircled her more closely. She must sink under them, unless rescue came.

Meantime, the *bora* was blowing outside with undiminished violence, and the two figures that now appeared on the edge of the ravine had great difficulty in making a stand against it. The moonlight showed that both men wore the Austrian uniform. They had moved forward as fast as the gale permitted, but now stopped, and were evidently trying to examine their surroundings.

"I don't know, Herr Lieutenant--the story doesn't seem to me exactly straight," said one. "The place down yonder is as dark and silent as if every human being in it were dead. Are you really going into it?"

It was George Moosbach's voice, and the reply came from the lips of Gerald von Steinach, who, in his usual quiet, resolute manner, said:

"Of course I am, for this is evidently the right place. It is the village our troops entered this morning. I recognize it distinctly from the description."

"But there isn't a mouse moving below, far less an Imperial Chasseur. We must have been already seen, yet no one has challenged us."

"I, too, noticed the absence of sentinels. I fear our men must have been forced to retreat, leaving the wounded officer in charge of the necessary escort. The message to me was all right at any rate, for the shepherd had brought, as his credentials, Salten's portfolio containing his notes."

"But it's queer that he wanted to speak to you in particular," George persisted. "I stick to it, I don't like the looks of the business, still less those of the ragged lad who acted as messenger. He had the face of a knave. If only there isn't some piece of deviltry in it!"

"You see mischief and snares everywhere," replied Gerald, impatiently, as he prepared to descend into the ravine. "Am I to refuse the request of a severely wounded comrade, who wants to see me and perhaps has a last commission to give? To be sure it would have been more

agreeable to me to have taken the peril as well as the responsibility of this errand on myself alone."

"But not to me," replied George. "If our lives are at stake I would far rather be here, and it will come to that. That confounded boy has vanished as though the earth had swallowed him. It's the way with all these savages! The whole tribe is in league with witches."

"The lad has run on before to announce our arrival," said the young officer, who appeared to have no thought of danger. "He forgot to tell us the direction, so we must find the way ourselves. Yonder house seems to me to be the only one at all suitable for the reception of a wounded officer. We will go there first."

"Thank God, a man can at least breathe here!" muttered George, who had just gained the shelter of the rocks. "If they call this a 'little' *bora*, I'd like to see a big one. I wish it would sweep this Krivoscia off the face of the earth and us back to Tyrol."

Meantime Gerald had approached the house, through whose closed shutters a faint ray of light was shining. The gale which had prevented his footsteps from being heard also drowned his knock, and as no answer came from within, the officer pushed the door open and entered.

The fire, still blazing brightly on the hearth, threw its glare full upon the newcomers, clearly revealing their figures, but at the same time dazzled them so that, for a moment, they could see nothing distinctly and did not even notice the woman kneeling in the shadow of the wall.

Danira started and tried to rise, but her limbs seemed to refuse their service. Motionless, she gazed with dilated eyes upon the vision which appeared before her from the storm and darkness outside, as though her own thoughts had assumed form and substance. Not until Gerald advanced did she become conscious of the reality of his presence. A half stifled cry escaped her lips. This sudden, unexpected meeting tore the veil from the girl's soul, and she called the name never before uttered:

"Gerald!"

"Danira!" came the answer in a tone of such passionate joy that George, who had entered behind his lieutenant, hastened to his side, murmuring under his breath in an accent of horror:

"May all good spirits guard us! There's the witch!"

An instant's pause followed. Danira was the first who tried to regain her self-command, though it was only an attempt.

"Herr von Steinach! I thought--I did not expect to see you again."

"And I did not suspect that you lived in this house," said Gerald, to whom George's movement had also restored composure, for it reminded him that this interview must have no witnesses. He therefore turned, saying with forced calmness:

"This young lady will be the best person to give me the information we desire. Wait outside the door till I call you."

George knew the meaning of subordination and was accustomed to obey his lieutenant implicitly, but this time every fibre of his being rebelled against discipline. In his eyes Gerald was bewitched; and therefore wholly incapable of sound judgment as soon as the witchcraft came into play. To leave him with the cause of all the mischief was resigning him to destruction.

As a Christian and a Tyrolese George felt it his duty to protect him from a danger far worse than those which imperilled life and limb, for here the soul's salvation was at stake. So he drew himself up, raised his hand to his cap and said respectfully:

"By your leave, Herr Lieutenant, I will stay."

Gerald frowned and looked at him--it was only one glance, but the young Tyrolese had remembered the threatening flash from the hour he had attempted to obtain an insight into the affair of mingled love and witchcraft, and all inclination for further resistance instantly vanished. As Gerald, without a word, pointed with a quiet, imperious wave of the hand to the door, George, though still far from having conquered his alarm, found it advisable to obey, but once outside he clasped his hands in a hurried prayer.

"Saint George and all the saints aid him! She has got him now--may the Lord have mercy upon him!"

The two who remained behind were alone--they still confronted each other in silence, but Gerald's eyes rested as if spellbound upon the young girl, who had slowly risen and advanced into the circle of light cast by the fire. The ruddy glow made her figure stand out in relief against the dark background like a picture, a picture that certainly did not suit the frame of this small, gloomy room.

Danira's beauty was fully displayed for the first time, now that she wore the costume of the

country, whose picturesque cut and coloring seemed to have been created especially for her. The braids of black hair fell unconfined in all their weight and luxuriance, and her whole bearing was free, fetterless and haughty, as though relieved from the burden of a dependence that had oppressed her for years, released from the bonds of the gratitude reason imposed upon her, but against which her heart continually rebelled. It was the daughter of the fallen chief who had already conquered a moment's self-forgetfulness, and now, with all the pride of her blood and lineage, faced the man whom she again regarded as the enemy of her people.

"I believe, Herr von Steinach, that the circumstances of our parting were too peculiar for us to greet this meeting with pleasure," she said at last. It was the old icy tone, specially intended to efface that one unguarded moment, and it partially accomplished its purpose.

The young officer's manner also grew colder and more formal as he replied:

"Then you must reproach accident, not me, for this interview. I repeat I had no suspicion who lived in this house. Only duty called me here."

"I do not doubt it. We are accustomed to see troops in our homes, though they find only women and children to combat."

"Who are fearlessly left behind because it is well known that we do not attack the defenseless. True, we have the men to deal with only when they assail us from some safe ambush."

"We are at war," said Danira curtly. "Any advantage is allowable in warfare."

"And who forced this war upon us? We did not seek it, but the enforcement of a law was at stake, a law we could not resign and which is recognized throughout the whole vast empire. Your tribe is the only one that refuses to obey it."

"Because the free sons of the mountains cannot and will not bow to the yoke. You will try in vain to subdue them."

The words had a sharper sting than was necessary, for a dark flush, the token of ill-repressed excitement, had long since crimsoned the young officer's brow, and his answer was cutting in its sharpness.

"We regard military service as an honor, not a yoke. At least it is a duty. Of course the idea of duty does not enter into the unbridled caprice your people call liberty; it must first be taught. But, rely upon it, Fräulein, we shall teach it yet. I may be permitted to suppose that you are informed of the last events of the campaign, and know that the fate of the insurrection is already decided."

Danira, of course, knew this, she had even spoken of it to Marco an hour before, but nothing in the world would have induced her to admit it to this man, so with the courage of despair she answered:

"Do not triumph too soon! Marco Obrevic still holds out, and with him the bravest of our people. They can die, but they will not surrender."

Gerald started at the name; a strangely gloomy, searching glance rested on the young girl.

"Marco Obrevic!" he repeated. "So you know him--very well?"

"He is my brother's friend."

"And owes you his freedom--for the plan of escape was doubtless your work?"

"At least I had a share in it. True, Marco's liberty was purchased at a high price, it cost him his father and our tribe a chief. Joan Obrevic fell by your bullet."

"I did my duty, and besides, the fugitives fired at me first. I will repeat the words you just uttered: we are at war."

Reproach and retort sounded equally bitter and hostile, and the manner of both was as rigid and implacable as if they were really mortal foes, yet their eyes spoke a very different language from that of hate. Gerald could not avert his gaze from the beautiful, hostile face; he had forgotten everything else, even the summons of his wounded comrade, and only sought the eyes which shunned his, yet as though attracted by some magnetic power, constantly returned to them.

"I do not reproach you for that accident," said Danira, and for the first time her tone sounded more gentle. "But you too have doubtless now recalled the charge you hurled at me then with such scathing fury. The purpose for which I used my knowledge of the place and circumstances was only to effect Obrevic's escape. My people called upon me to do it, and summoned me to return to them--they had a right to ask both."

"If you admit the right--certainly. Only it is strange that your kindred left you so long in the home and under the charge of an alien, that they did not inquire about you once during all those

years. Not until they needed you did they find the way to reach you, though, according to appearances, it was so easily discovered. Up to that time your relatives had forgotten you and did not know whether you were alive or dead."

The taunt struck home; Danira's haughty head drooped. It was needless to tell her that she had been only a means to an end--she had known it long before. Gerald advanced a step nearer, and his voice also lost its icy tone as he continued:

"No matter, you have made your choice and returned to your home--are you happy?"

"I am free! That is all I ask."

"And how long will you remain so? During our expeditions I have gained an insight into the customs of the country and know the fate to which they condemn women. As soon as you marry, this lot will be yours. Is it possible that a high-spirited girl, with this energetic will and ardent desire for freedom, can endure to be, not the companion, but the slave of a rough, fierce man, who does not even know the name of intellectual needs and will pitilessly trample upon every higher emotion, because he values only the capacity for work she shares with his domestic animals, who daily----"

"Stop--that is not true!" Danira vehemently interrupted, for she felt whom he was describing, though no name was spoken. But the young officer did not allow himself to be checked, and added with marked emphasis:

"It is true, and of this truth you will perish. Deny it as you will, the charm with which your imagination invested your home has vanished, must have vanished at the moment when you beheld the reality, and the chasm which formerly apparently divided you from us, yawned a gigantic abyss on the other side. You can no longer descend to these people with their brutal customs. You are ours; in every thought and feeling you belong to us, but you have all the defiance of your race, which will bleed and die rather than submit to a higher law."

He had spoken with increasing excitement, and Danira no longer tried to interrupt him; these were her own thoughts, her own dread which had just forced themselves upon her with such annihilating power. Word after word fell from his lips as if he had been listening to her; she could no longer deny their truth, nay, did not wish to do so.

She slowly raised her head, but a dark fire was glowing in her eyes. Gerald could not help thinking again of the tempestuous night illumined by flashes of lightning. His pitiless words had, roused, with the young girl's pride, all her former energy; she drew herself up to her full height.

"Perhaps you are right! Well, then, I am a daughter of my race and can bleed and die--I cannot submit. If my birth and my education brought me into perpetual conflict with myself, I have solved it by returning here, and this decision is to me irrevocable. I cannot have only half my heart here as well as there; I have made my choice, and if it costs me happiness and life, be it so, I will die by it."

There was such unyielding resolution in the words that Gerald did not even attempt a reply. He gazed silently at the young girl, who stood before him so pale and gloomy; then his eyes wandered slowly around the squalid room, with its smoking fire and smoke-blackened walls, and a vague presentiment stole over him that this external and internal conflict could end only with life.

"So I am to part from you as a foe, for I still remain one in your eyes," he said at last. "Danira, have you really no other word of farewell for me?"

An expression of passionate grief flashed into the girl's face for one moment, but she quickly repressed the gentler emotion, and the next moment her features revealed nothing but iron harshness and cold aversion.

"I fear, Herr von Steinach, that I have already detained you too long from your 'duty.' I must remind you of it, apparently. You have doubtless come to occupy the village with your men. We have no arms against superior numbers; the house is open!"

Gerald stepped back. The sharp admonition showed him that any attempt at conciliation would be vain, and he, too, could be proud to sternness.

"You are mistaken, Fräulein," he replied. "I do not come on military duty. I am in search of a wounded comrade here in the hamlet, whom I expected to find in this house. At any rate, I beg you to give me news of him."

"A wounded officer? There is some misunderstanding. No Austrian is here."

"But our troops occupied the village this morning. We have positive news of that."

"Yes, but in less than an hour they left it and marched on."

"And the wounded man?"

"They left no one behind, and had no wounded with them. See for yourself; there are none of your men in the village."

At this moment the door opened and George appeared, but, mindful of the rebuff just received, he paused on the threshold, saying:

"Herr Lieutenant, I only wanted to report that this business looks worse and worse. There is not a sentinel, not a comrade to be seen in the whole accursed den. Our rascally guide has made off, and here in this house"--he darted an extremely hostile glance at Danira--"here the witchcraft is doubtless in full swing. Don't send me away again, Herr Lieutenant; it is better for us two to keep together if trouble comes."

Danira suddenly started, and a look of mortal terror rested on Gerald as she repeated:

"Us two? For Heaven's sake! Herr von Steinach, you are here at the head of your men, or at least you have a sufficient escort?"

"No; I am alone with George, as you see."

The girl turned deadly pale.

"And you venture thus into a hostile place? At night? This is more than foolhardy."

"I expected to find our men here, and the message was so positive, so unequivocal----"

"Who brought it? Were you the only person summoned? Where is the guide? Did you notice nothing suspicious on the way?"

The questions succeeded each other in such breathless, anxious haste that Gerald at last began to understand the gravity of the situation. His hand involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword more firmly as he replied:

"The summons was to me only, and I should have obeyed it alone had not George insisted upon accompanying me. We were not attacked on the way. Nothing occurred to rouse our suspicions except the mysterious disappearance of our guide, but he brought me trustworthy credentials, my comrade's portfolio and notes."

"That proves nothing. They may have been stolen, taken from a dead body. The whole story is a falsehood, a device to lure you here."

"But who can have any interest in bringing me----" Gerald began, but Danira passionately interrupted:--

"Do you ask that question? Marco Obrevic has sworn vengeance upon you! He will keep his vow--you are lost!"

The young officer turned pale. The words suddenly revealed the terrible danger impending. But George, with a sort of agreeable horror, remarked:--

"Didn't I say so? Now we're in the trap."

Gerald needed but an instant to regain his composure. He drew himself up to his full height, and the red flush of anger crimsoned his face.

"A shameful plot! Well, then, we must defend ourselves to the last breath. We will sell our lives dearly, George. The assassins won't find it so easy to destroy us."

"I'll take care of a few of them!" cried George, in whom wrath had now gained the upper hand. "Just let the murderous rabble come! My lieutenant and I will fight the whole band."

"No, no; here any resistance would be vain," replied Danira. "If Marco comes he will come with ten times your number, and fighting would be impossible. You would be dragged down, overpowered, and then the living----"

She did not finish the sentence, but paused with a shudder, which the two men, who knew how the war was conducted on the part of the natives, could easily interpret.

"No matter, we will fight," said Gerald, resolutely. "Let us get out of doors, George. There will be more chance there, and perhaps we may be able to force our way back."

He turned toward the door, but Danira barred his way.

"Impossible! You will go to certain death. Marco does nothing by halves. He already knows that you have obeyed the summons, and has barricaded your way in every direction. There is but one path of escape, at least for the moment."

She hurried through the room, hastily and softly opened the door of the dark ante-chamber where her sister-in-law slept, and listened a few moments to the deep, regular breathing of the young wife, who had not been roused by the strangers' arrival. The whistling and howling of the

bora had completely drowned the conversation.

Danira softly closed the door, and returned to Gerald's side.

"Will you follow me and trust me--trust me absolutely?"

Gerald's eyes met those of the young girl who, but a few minutes before, had confronted him with such rigid, unyielding sternness, yet had seemed completely transformed from the instant that danger threatened him. He saw the entreaty in the large dark eyes, and in the midst of hostility and mortal peril the glance fell like a ray of sunshine on the young man's soul. He knew now for whom she was anxious.

"I will follow you, though it should be to death!" he said, extending his hand.

"Herr Lieutenant!" cried George, fairly frantic with fear, for he was firmly convinced that this blind confidence would lead Gerald straight to destruction.

"Be silent and obey," Gerald ordered. "Yet I will not force you to follow. Stay behind, if you choose."

"I'll go with you," said the brave fellow, whose love for his officer was even greater than his superstition. "Where you are, I'll be also, and if you can't help it and must go straight into the witches' caldron--why, go, in God's name, and I'll go too."

Gerald loosed his sword in its sheath and examined his pistols; then they left the house and the young officer unconsciously drew a long, deep breath as they emerged from the small, close room, with its smoking fire and stifling atmosphere. Outside, storm, darkness and mortal peril surrounded his every step, but for the first time he felt Danira's hand in his, and climbed by her side to the edge of the ravine.

VI.

For nearly half an hour the little group pressed forward in a direction exactly opposite to the one by which Gerald had come to the village. Danira led the way and the others followed, but scarcely a word was exchanged, for all three had great difficulty in breasting the storm, which grew more violent every moment.

Yet this tempest was not like those that raged in the mountains of their native Tyrol, with hurrying clouds, mists, and showers of rain that wrapped the earth in their veil, where the forests shuddered and trembled, and the uproar of the elements seemed to transform all nature into chaos. Here no cloud dimmed the clear azure of the sky, in which the stars were shining brightly, and the moonlight rested clear and radiant on the rocky heights, stretching into infinite distance, rugged and cleft into a thousand rifts that intersected them in every direction; but the white moonbeams and the deep black shadows of the chasms everywhere revealed the same desolation.

Here no forest rustled, no reed quivered in the wind. The hurricane roared over the earth as if the spirits of destruction had been let loose and were now sweeping on in search of their prey, but its might was baffled by the cold, lifeless stone that could neither be stirred nor shaken.

There was something uncanny and terrible in this rigid repose amidst the fierce raging of the tempest, it seemed as though all nature was spell-bound in a death-slumber which nothing could break. Wildly as the *bora* raved, the earth made no response, it remained under the icy ban.

Again the trio pressed on through hurricane and moonlight, still farther into the wilderness. It seemed to the men as though they must long since have lost their way and there was no escape from this desert where one ridge rose beyond another in perpetual, horrible monotony, but Danira walked on undisturbed without once hesitating. At last she stopped and turned.

"We have reached our goal," she said, pointing down into the depths below. "There is the Vila spring."

Gerald paused to take breath, and his eyes wandered in the direction indicated. The ground suddenly sloped sheer down and he saw at his feet a chasm, close by a huge, projecting rock. It was a strange formation of stone, towering upward in broad massive outlines, curiously jagged at the top, the peak inclined so far forward that it looked as if it must break off and fall. Beyond this gateway the ravine appeared to widen, for they saw the moonlight glitter on some rippling water.

"Must we go down there?" George asked his lieutenant, doubtfully, in a low tone. "The rock hangs over like one of our bunches of ripe grapes at home. I believe it will drop on our heads as soon as we come near it. Everything in Krivoscia is spiteful, even the stones."

"The rock will not fall," replied Danira, who had heard the words, "it has hung so for centuries, and no storm has ever shaken it. Follow us."

She had already descended and Gerald followed without hesitation. They both passed the rock gateway and George could not help joining them. He cast one more suspicious glance upward; for he had become accustomed to regard everything in this country as a personal foe, but the rocky peak, by way of exception, showed no disposition to molest him, and remained quietly in its threatening attitude.

The distance was not very great. In a few minutes both reached the bottom of the cliffs and stood in a ravine which widened rapidly above, but was accessible only through the rock gateway. Here too flowed the water they had seen above, one of the little streams which often burst suddenly out of the rocky soil of the Karst and in a short time as suddenly vanish again. Even here the water preserved its beneficent power, for fresh grass was growing around it, thin and scanty, it is true, but a sign of life amid this petrified nature, and there was life also in the clear waves which, with a low ripple and murmur, made a channel down the ravine.

Danira, with a sigh of relief, leaned against the cliff. The exhaustion of the rapid walk or excitement had made the girl tremble from head to foot, and she really seemed to need the support.

"We have reached the spot," she said, softly. "Here you are safe."

Gerald, who meantime had scanned the surroundings, shook his head doubtfully.

"The safety will last only until our place of refuge is discovered, and that will soon be done. Obrevic knows every defile as well as you, as soon as he has searched the village he will follow on our track without delay."

"Certainly. But he will halt before that rock gateway, he will not enter the precincts of the Vila spring, for then he would be obliged to give you his hand in friendship; that hand cannot be raised against you here. Fierce and revengeful as Marco may be, even he will not dare to break the spell of peace that rests upon this spot."

The young officer started and again cast a searching glance around the ravine.

"So that is why you brought us here? But what protects this place which is to shield us?"

"I do not know. Legend, tradition, superstition probably wove the spell centuries ago--enough that the charm still exists in all its ancient power. Even in my childhood I knew of the Vila spring and its spell of peace. Afterward, when far away, the memory sometimes came back to me like a half-forgotten legend that belonged to the realm of fairy-land. Since my return I have known that the tale contains a saving truth. The spring is more sacred than the threshold of any church. Here even the murderer, the betrayer is safe. Here, the vendetta itself, that terrible family law of our people, must pause. No one has yet dared to violate the charm, and if any one tried it, he would be outlawed by all the members of the tribe."

"And you believe that this spell will guard even the foreigner, the foe?"

"Yes."

The answer was so firm that Gerald made no objection, though he doubted it.

"One mystery more in this mysterious land!" he said, slowly. "We will wait to see how it will be solved for us. We were treacherously lured into an ambush, and stand alone against a horde of enemies, so it will be no cowardice to trust ourselves to such protection."

He looked around him for George, who had instantly taken the practical side of the affair, and carefully and thoroughly searched the whole ravine. Finding nothing suspicious, he had climbed a large boulder, and stationed himself at a point from which he could watch at the same time the entrance and his lieutenant, for he still dreaded some piece of witchcraft from Danira. Unfortunately, he could not hear what was passing between the pair. The wind was blowing too violently; but he could at least keep them in view. So he stood at his post firm and fearless, ready to defend himself like a man and a soldier against any intruding foe, and at the same time come to his lieutenant's aid with his whole stock of Christianity in case the latter should be treacherously seized by the Evil One from behind--the brave fellow feared neither death nor devil.

Gerald had approached Danira, who still leaned against the cliff, but she drew back. The mute gesture was so resolute in its denial that he dared not advance nearer. The deliverance she had bestowed only seemed to have raised one more barrier between them. He felt this, and fixed a reproachful glance upon her as he retired.

Danira either did not or would not see it, although the moonlight clearly illumined the features

of both. Hastily, as though to anticipate any warmer words, she asked:

"Where are your men?"

"At the fort. We returned there after the expedition of the morning, and the troops to whom we brought assistance with us."

"And nothing is known of your danger?"

"On the contrary, I am supposed to be in perfect safety. The shameful plot was so cleverly devised. A dying comrade, who wished to place a last commission in my hands, his portfolio as a credential. The village we all thought still occupied by our men named. Obrevic was cautious enough, though it would have been more manly to have sought me in open battle, I certainly did not shun him. He preferred to act like an assassin, though he calls himself a warrior and a chief."

Danira's brow darkened, but she gently shook her head.

"You reckon with your ideas of honor. Here it is different, only the act is important; no account is taken of the means. Joan Obrevic fell by your hand, and his son must avenge him; that is the law of the race. How, Marco does not ask; he knows but one purpose, the destruction of his foe; and, if he cannot accomplish it in open warfare, he resorts to stratagem. I heard the vow he made when we entered our native mountains on the morning after his escape, and he will fulfil it, though it should bring destruction on his own head. That is why you are safe here only for the time. I know Marco, and while he will not dare to approach the Vila spring, he will guard the entrance, actually besiege you here until desperation urges you to some reckless step by which you will fall into his hands. Your comrades must be informed at any cost."

"That is impossible! Who should, who could carry such a message?"

"I!"

"What, you would----"

"I will do nothing by halves, and your rescue is but half accomplished if no aid comes from without. But I must wait till Marco has reached the village; he will search every hut, examine every stone in it, and meanwhile I shall gain time to go."

"Never!" cried Gerald. "I will not permit it. You might meet Obrevic, and I, too, know him. If he should guess--nay, even suspect, your design, he would kill you."

"Certainly he would!" said Danira, coldly. "And he would do right."

"Danira!"

"If Marco punished treason with death he would be in the right, and I should not flinch from the blow. I am calling the foe to the aid of a foe; that is treason; I know it."

"Then why do you save me at such a price?" asked the young officer, fixing his eyes intently upon her.

"Because I must."

The words did not sound submissive but harsh. They contained a sullen rebellion against the power which had fettered not only the girl's will but her whole nature, and which enraged her even while she yielded to it. She had brought the foreigner, the foe, to the sacred spring, although she knew that such a rescue would be considered treachery and desecration; she was ready to sacrifice everything for him, yet at the same moment turned almost with hatred from him and his love.

The *bora* could not penetrate the depths of the ravine, but it raged all the more fiercely on the upper heights, roaring around the peaks as if it would hurl them downward. Old legends relate that, on such tempestuous nights, the spirits of all the murdered men whose blood has ever reddened the earth are abroad, and it really seemed as though spectral armies were fighting in the air and sweeping madly onward. Sometimes it sounded as if thousands of voices, jeering, threatening, hissing, blended in one confused medley, till at last all united with the raving and howling into a fierce melody, a song of triumph, which celebrated only destruction and ruin.

What else could have been its theme in this land where the people were as rigid and pitiless as the nature that surrounded them? Here conflict was the sole deliverance. A fierce defiance of all control, even that of law and morals, a bloody strife, and humiliating defeat. So it had been from the beginning, so it was now, and if the legendary ghosts were really sweeping by on the wings of the blast, they were still fighting, even in death.

Yet amid this world of battle, the Vila spring cast its spell of peace. Whence it came, who had uttered it, no one knew. The origin was lost in the dim shadows of the past, but the pledge was kept with the inviolable fidelity with which all uncultured races cling to their traditions. Perhaps it was an instinct of the people that had formerly erected this barrier against their own arbitrary will and fierceness, and guarded at least one spot of peace--be that as it may, the place was

guarded, and the rude sons of the mountains bowed reverently to the enchanted precinct, whose spell no hostile deed had ever violated.

The moon was now high in the heavens, and her light poured full into the ravine.

The bluish, spectral radiance streamed upon the dark cliffs and wove a silvery veil upon the clear waters of the spring, which flowed on untroubled by all the raging of the tempest. Above were storm and strife, and here below, under the shelter of the towering rocks, naught save a faint murmuring and rippling that seemed to whisper a warning to give up conflict and make peace beside the spring of peace.

"You must!" said Gerald, repeating Danira's last words. "And I too must. I too have struggled and striven against a power that fettered my will, but I no longer hate that power as you do. Why should we keep this useless barrier of hostility between us; we both know that it will not stand; we have tried it long enough. I heard the cry that escaped your lips when I so unexpectedly crossed the threshold of your house. It was my own name, and the tone was very different from that hard, stern, 'I must.'"

Danira made no reply; she had turned away, yet could not escape his voice, his eyes. The low, half choked utterance forced a way to her heart; in vain she pressed both hands upon it. That voice found admittance, and she heard it amid all the raging of the storm.

"From the day I entered your mountain home one image stood before my soul, one thought filled it--to see you again, Danira! I knew we must meet some day. Why did you leave me that message? You would not take my contempt with you, though you defied the opinion of every one else. The words haunted me day and night! I could not forget them, they decided my destiny."

"It was a message of farewell," the young girl murmured in a half stifled tone. "I never expected to see you again, and I gave it to your promised wife."

"Edith is no longer betrothed to me," said the young officer, in a hollow tone.

Danira started in sudden, terror-stricken surprise.

"No longer betrothed to you? For heaven's sake, what has happened? You have severed the tie."

"No, Edith did it, and for the first time I realize how entirely she was in the right. Those laughing, untroubled, childish eyes gazed deep into my heart; they guessed what at that time I myself did not, or would not know. True, her father left me the option of returning if I could conquer the 'dream.' I could not, and now--by all that is sacred to me--I no longer wish to do so. What is the reality, the happiness of a whole life, compared with the dream of this moment, for which, perhaps, I must sacrifice existence? But I no longer complain of the stratagem that lured me here; it gave me this meeting, a meeting not too dearly purchased by the mortal peril that now surrounds me, nay, by death itself."

It was really Gerald von Steinach whose lips uttered these words, Gerald von Steinach, the cool, circumspect man with the icy eyes, who could not love.

They now flowed in a fiery stream from his lips and kindled a responsive flame in Danira's soul. Her strength could no longer hold out against this language of passion, and when Gerald approached her a second time, she did not shrink from him, though the hand he clasped trembled in his.

"Perhaps I may bring you death!" she said softly, but with deep sorrow. "It is my destiny to cause misfortune everywhere. Had I left Cattaro even a few weeks earlier, we should never have seen each other and you would have been happy by Edith's side. I know she merely entrenched herself behind caprices and obstinacy; her heart belongs to the man who was destined to be her husband. It is the first true, deep feeling of her life, the awakening from the dream of childhood. She is now experiencing her first bitter grief--through me. And yet she is the only creature I have ever loved."

She tried to withdraw her hand, but in vain. He would not release it, and only bent toward her, so close that his breath fanned her cheek.

"The only creature? Danira, shall not even this hour bring us truth? Who knows how short may be the span of life allotted to me? I do not believe Obrevic's fierceness and thirst for vengeance will be stayed by this spot, and am prepared to fall a victim to his fury. But I must once more hear my name from your lips as you uttered it just now. You must not refuse that request. If, even now, in the presence of death, they sternly withhold the confession of love, be it so, I will not ask it--but you must call me what my mother calls me--you must say this once: 'Gerald.'"

His voice trembled with passionate entreaty. It seemed vain, for Danira remained silent and motionless a few seconds longer. At last she slowly turned her face to his, and gazing deep into his eyes, said:

"Gerald!"

It was only one word, yet it contained all--the confession so ardently desired, the most absolute devotion, the cry of happiness, and with an exclamation of rapturous joy Gerald clasped the woman he loved to his breast.

The storm raged above them, and mortal peril waved dark wings over their heads; but amid the tempest and the shadow of death a happiness was unfolded which swallowed up every memory of the past, every thought of the future. Gerald and Danira no longer heeded life or death, and had a bloody end confronted them at that moment they would have faced it with radiant joy in their hearts.

"I thank you!" said Gerald, fervently, but without releasing the girl from his embrace. "Now, come what may, I am prepared."

The words recalled Danira to the reality of their situation; she started.

"You are right, we must meet what is coming; I must go."

"Go! At the moment we have found each other? And am I to let you face a peril I cannot share?"

Danira gently but firmly released herself from his arms.

"You are in danger, Gerald, not I, for I know every path of my 'mountain home,' and shall avoid Marco, who has now had time to reach the village. Have no fear, your safety is at stake, I will be cautious. Yet, before I go, promise me not to leave the Vila spring; let no stratagem, no threat lure you away. Here alone can you and your companion find safety and deliverance, one step beyond that rock gateway and you will be lost."

The young officer gazed anxiously and irresolutely at the speaker. True, he told himself that she would be safe; even if she met his pursuers no one would suspect whence she came or where she was going, and a pretext was easily found. If she remained with him she must share his fate and perhaps be the first victim of her tribe's revenge, yet it was unspeakably difficult for him to part from the happiness he had scarcely won.

"I will not leave the spring," he answered. "Do you think I want to die now? I never so loved life as at this moment when my Danira is its prize, and I am ready to fight for it--I shall be fighting for my happiness and future."

His glance again sought hers, which no longer shunned it, but the large dark eyes rested on his features with a strange expression--a look at once gentle, yet gloomy and fraught with pain; it had not a ray of the happiness so brightly evident in his words.

"The price^[1] of your life!" she repeated. "Yes, Gerald, I will be that with my whole heart, and now--farewell!"

"Farewell! God grant that you may reach the fort safely; once there my comrades will know how to protect my preserver from the vengeance of her people."

He spoke unsuspectingly and tenderly, but he must have unwittingly stirred those dark depths in the girl's nature, which were mysterious even to him. Danira started as though an insult had been hurled in her face; the old fierceness seemed about to break forth again, but it was only a moment ere the emotion was suppressed.

"I need their protection as little as I fear the vengeance directed against myself alone! Farewell, Gerald; once more--farewell!"

The young officer again clasped her in his arms. He did not hear the pain of parting in the words, only the deep, devoted love, still so new to him from Danira. But she scarcely allowed him a moment for his leave-taking, but tore herself away, as if she feared to prolong it.

He saw her bend over the spring, while her lips moved as though she were commending her lover to its protection. Then she hastily climbed the cliff, and vanished through the dark rock gateway.

At the top of the height Danira paused. Only one moment's rest after this mute, torturing conflict! She alone knew what this parting meant. Gerald did not suspect that it was an eternal farewell, or he never would have permitted her to quit his side.

In spite of all, he did not know Danira Hersovac. She had, it is true, become a stranger to her people, out of harmony with all their customs and opinions, while her own thoughts and feelings were in the camp of the foe from whom she had once so defiantly fled, but the mighty, viewless tie of blood still asserted its power, and called what she was in the act of doing by the terrible name, treason.

She was going to summon the foreign troops to Gerald's aid, and if Marco held out--and hold out he would--blood would be shed for the sake of one who should not, must not die, though his rescue should cost the highest price.

From the moment Danira knew that this rescue was solely in her hands she no longer had a choice. Save him she must! It was a necessity to which she helplessly bowed, but to live on with the memory of what had happened and be happy by her lover's side--the thought did not enter the girl's mind.

The dead chief's daughter might commit the treason, but she could also expiate it. When Gerald was once rescued and in safety, she would go back to her brother and Marco, the head of the tribe, and confess what she had done. The traitress would meet death, she knew--so much the better. Then the perpetual discord between her birth and her education would be forever ended.

She cast one more glance into the ravine, where the water of the Vila spring was shimmering in the moonlight. Mysteriously born of the rocky soil, it appeared but once, gazed but once at the light to vanish again in subterranean chasms, yet its short course was a blessing to every one who approached it. Here, too, it had bestowed a brief, momentary happiness, which had only glittered once and must now end in separation and death; yet it outweighed a whole existence.

The invisible hosts were still contending in the air, their jeering, threatening voices still blended in the fierce chant of destruction and ruin. Danira was familiar with the legends of her home, and understood the menace of the tempest. She raised her head haughtily as if in answer.

"Vain! I will not let myself be stopped! If I commit the treason, I have pronounced my own doom, and Marco will pitilessly execute it. God himself would need to descend from heaven to secure my pardon. You shall be saved, Gerald; I will be what I promised--the price of your life!"

She hurried onward through the storm-swept, moonlit waste of rocks--to the rescue.

VII.

The two men were now alone in the ravine, but the young officer's gaze still rested on the spot where Danira had vanished. He did not notice that George had climbed down from his boulder and approached him, until the worthy fellow made his presence known by a heavy sigh which attracted his attention, and he asked:

"What ails you?"

George made the regulation military salute.

"Herr Lieutenant, I wanted to respectfully report--I couldn't hear anything up there, but I saw the whole affair."

"Indeed? Well, that alters nothing, though I did not particularly desire your presence. To be sure, I had entirely forgotten you."

"I believe so!" said George, sighing a second time, and even more piteously. "You had forgotten everything. If all Krivoscia had come up and made an end of us I don't think you would have even noticed it. But I at least kept watch and prayed constantly for the salvation of your soul, but it did no good."

"That was very kind of you!" replied Gerald, who was completely possessed by the arrogance of happiness which raised him far above all anxiety or thought of peril. "I certainly had no time for that, since, as you saw, I was pledging my troth."

"Herr Gerald!" In his despair George forgot respect and used the old familiar name. "Herr Gerald--by all the saints--this is awful!"

"To betroth one's self in the presence of mortal danger? It is certainly unusual, but the time and place cannot always be chosen."

This had not been George's meaning. He thought the fact terrible in itself, and with a face better suited to funereal condolence than congratulation he said:

"I've long known it! I said day before yesterday to Father Leonhard: 'Take heed, your reverence, some misfortune will happen! And if it does all Tyrol will be turned topsy-turvy and Castle Steinach to boot---'"

"Let them! then."

"And the blow will kill his mother," George continued, pursuing the current of his mournful prophecies.

"My mother!" said Gerald, who had suddenly grown grave. "Yes, I shall have a hard struggle with her. No matter! The battle must be fought. Not a word more, George!" he cried, interrupting the young soldier, who was about to speak. "You know I submit to many liberties of speech from you where the matter concerns only myself, but there my indulgence ends. From this moment you must respect in Danira Hersovac my future wife: remember it and govern yourself accordingly."

"Perhaps we shall both be killed first!" said George, in a tone which seemed to imply that it would afford him special consolation. "I don't believe this bewitched spring is a protection against murder, and if the enemy doesn't finish us, the confounded rock hanging in the air yonder will. It moved when the *bora* just blew so madly. I saw it distinctly. It actually nodded to me, as if it wanted to say: 'Just wait, I'll drop down on your heads!'"

He pointed upward and Gerald's eyes followed the direction indicated. The white moonbeams flooded the dark stone without being able to lend it any light. Gloomy and threatening, like a gigantic shadow, the rock overhung the entrance of the ravine, and the shimmering moon-rays produced such an illusion that it seemed to the young officer as though the summit had actually sunk lower and the opening had grown smaller, but he shook his head in denial.

"Nonsense! Surely you heard that the rock had leaned so for centuries. It has endured far different storms from this one; even the fiercest *bora* can do nothing against this unyielding stone. At any rate this is our best position for defense. Our backs are protected, and we can watch the approach of the enemy--hark! What was that? Did you hear nothing?"

The two men listened intently. George too had started, for he also had heard a strange noise, but the wind drowned it entirely. A long time passed, then the *bora* lulled a few minutes, and now they distinctly heard, at no very great distance, the sound of footsteps and voices, which, judging by the echo, belonged to a large body of men.

"There they are!" said Gerald, who, in the presence of danger, had completely regained his coolness; his voice scarcely betrayed a trace of excitement. "Come here by my side, George! We'll keep together so long as we can hold out. They shall at least see that they have to deal with men who will not let themselves be slaughtered without resistance."

George accepted the invitation and stationed himself by his lieutenant's side, but could not help in this critical moment uttering a last hurried prayer to his patron saint.

"Saint George! I've never bothered you much with petitions, and always helped myself wherever it was possible, but there's no chance here. You know I haven't been a bad fellow, except for my love of brawling and fighting, but you liked it too, Saint George! You always struck about with your sword and hewed down the dragon, so that it could only writhe. So help us fight, or rather fight with us, for we can never conquer alone. And if you will not do that, at least grant us a blessed end, and take the poor little pagan, Jovica, under your protection, so that she can be baptized and meet us some day in heaven--Amen!"

Jovica! That was the last thought of the young Tyrolese, even later than his soul's salvation; he wanted at least to have the satisfaction of seeing her again in heaven.

"Are you ready?" asked Gerald, who had not lost sight of the entrance a moment, though he heard the murmuring of his companion. George drew himself up resolutely.

"Ready, Herr Lieutenant! The praying is finished, now it's time for the fighting, and I don't think I shall disgrace my patron saint."

The men stood side by side, grasping their weapons firmly in their hands ready for an attack, which, it is true, merely afforded them the hope of an honorable death, for if it once came to fighting they were lost, but minute after minute passed, and the assault was not made.

The entrance to the ravine was open and unguarded, and the pursuers had now reached it.

Their voices, raised in loud, angry tones, were distinctly heard in the pauses of the storm, but no one appeared, no one crossed the threshold of the rock gateway; an invisible barrier kept them back.

An anxious quarter of an hour, which seemed endless, passed in this perplexing quiet. Sometimes, single figures, standing in dark, sharp relief against the starry sky, appeared high up on the edge of the ravine, evidently trying to obtain a view of the bottom. Their weapons glittered in the moonlight, but not a shot was fired. At last they vanished again, while the confused roar of the tempest grew still louder and fiercer than before.

"Strange! They really do not dare to approach the spring!" said Gerald in a low tone. "Danira is right, the tradition will be respected, even against the enemy--I would not have believed it."

"This is getting tiresome, Herr Lieutenant," replied George. "Here we've been standing for

more than half an hour, perfectly resigned to our fate and ready to be murdered--of course, after we've killed half a dozen of the enemy--and now nothing happens! This is evidently witchcraft. These people fear neither death nor devil, and yet are afraid of water."

"Then we will remain under the protection of this water. You heard the caution; not a step beyond that rock! Whatever they try, whatever happens, we will not quit the spring until help comes--if it comes at all."

The last words sounded gloomy and despairing, the young officer was thinking of all the possibilities that might detain Danira on her way to the fort, but George said confidently:

"Our comrades won't leave us in the lurch, nor Saint George either. He will have some consideration and help an honest Tyrolese against this band of murderers. It would have been a pity about us both, Herr Lieutenant. I'm in no hurry to die yet. I think there will be plenty of time for that, fifty years hence, and it would be too bad to have the Moosbach Farm go to strangers."

With these words George leaned comfortably against the cliff, and began to imagine the fifty years and picture Jovica's delight when he entered the fort alive and well. He finally came to the conclusion that an earthly meeting of this sort would be preferable to a union in heaven, especially as, owing to his founding's paganism, the latter was somewhat doubtful.

Hour after hour elapsed; the night began to wane, the stars shone less brightly, then one by one vanished, and the cold, gray dawn, rested on the earth. The *bora*, too, had almost ceased. It only blew occasionally in violent gusts that raged with redoubled power, but the pauses between constantly lengthened, the storm was evidently nearly over.

Outside the ravine containing the Vila spring was the band of pursuers who, with dogged, tireless endurance, had waited there for hours. Danira knew her race and especially Marco Obrevic. She was well aware that he would not leave the track of his foe, though he would not dare to approach the spring. In fact he had not yet ventured to do so, but now his unruly nature seemed to triumph over the barrier that restrained it.

A dispute had evidently broken out among the men; their voices rose in loud altercation, Marco's loudest of all. He was standing in the midst of his companions, towering in height above them all, but his bearing was menacing and defiant, as if he were in the act of carrying out his will by force.

Stephan Hersovac was vainly trying to restore peace.

"Let him go; he only threatens; he will not do it," he called to the others.

"You will not violate the spring, Marco; the two men in the ravine cannot escape us, but we must wait till--"

"Wait!" interrupted Marco, whose voice betrayed the fury that seethed in his heart. "Haven't we waited here since midnight? Hell may have revealed the secret to them--they know it, they must know it! No wile, no threat will induce them to come forth; they will not quit the spring. Shall we camp here, perhaps for days, till hunger drives them out or until they are missed at the fort and troops come to rescue them. What then?"

"Then the Vila spring will have protected them, and we must submit," said one of the men, an old mountaineer with iron-gray hair, but a form still vigorous and unbent.

"Never!" cried Marco, furiously "Rather will I strike him down on this spot, though it should cause my own destruction. For months I have sought him and he has ever escaped me. At last I have him in my grasp, and I will not withdraw my hand till it is red with his blood. I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath. No spell protects the man who killed my father and your chief."

"The Vila spring protects all!" said the same old man with marked emphasis. "Back, Marco! Madman! You will bring misfortune on yourself and on us all, if you break the peace."

"Do you suppose I am not man enough to fight those two men alone?" sneered Obrevic. "Stay behind! I'll take the consequences upon myself. Make way, Stephan, I am going into the ravine."

A threatening murmur rose on all sides against the young chief. The men had followed with eager, passionate approval when he set out to crush his foe. The foreign officer had slain the head of the tribe, they were all summoned to avenge the fallen man--first of all, his son. That was a thing imperative, inevitable, which according to their ideas of justice must be done. Each man was ready to aid, and no one scrupled because the victim had been treacherously lured into a trap and was now assailed by greatly superior numbers.

Danira had told the truth; here only the deed was important; how it was accomplished no one cared.

But now the point in question was the violation of an old and sacred tradition, which no one had yet ventured to assail, and superstition, which among uncultured races is even more powerful than religion, stood with threatening aspect between Gerald and his pursuers. The Vila

spring was mysteriously associated with all the legends of the country to which it belonged; to violate it was to bring misfortune upon land and people. Only a nature like that of Marco, who knew no law save his own will, could have attempted to rebel against it, and when he did so his comrades seemed on the verge of preventing him by force. Surrounding him they barred his way to the ravine. Weapons flashed and it seemed as though the conflict might end in bloodshed, when Stephan Hersovac again interposed.

"Let us have peace," he said, placing himself by his friend's side. "Shall our own blood flow for the sake of an enemy, a stranger? Keep back, Marco, you don't know what you are doing," and, lowering his voice so that no one save Obrevic could hear, he added:

"You want to lead us to the attack again to-morrow. Not a man will follow you if you shed blood in this place, you will be outlawed and all will turn from you."

He had taken the right way to restrain the fierce Obrevic. The latter uttered a suppressed exclamation of fury and clenched his teeth, but he made no further effort to break through the circle that surrounded him. He knew only too well that his disheartened, diminished band followed him reluctantly to the combat in which he meant to deal the enemy one last, desperate blow; that the men saw safety only in surrender. The power of his personal influence still induced them to obey him, but this power would be ended if he actually entered the magic circle with uplifted weapon.

Just at this moment a single figure, apparently a boy, came toward them from the village. It was the shepherd lad who had been sent to carry Gerald the false message, who had served as guide, and then hurried to Marco with the tidings. He ran at full speed to the men, whom he at last reached, panting and breathless.

"Beware, Marco Obrevic!" he gasped, "the soldiers are coming--twice your number--they are searching for him, the foreign officer--and you!"

All started at the unexpected news, but Marco vehemently exclaimed:

"You lie! They cannot have heard yet; they think the village is occupied by their own men. Are they there?"

"No, they passed by without stopping, without asking a question. They are marching to the Vila spring, I heard the name."

"This is treason. How do they know he is there? They ought to think he is in the village. Who was it took the message to them?"

"Never mind that now," interrupted Stephan. "You hear that there are twice our number. We cannot fight here, it would be certain destruction. Let us go while we have time."

"And let him down yonder be free again? I'll first settle with him and know who is the traitor. Speak, knave, was it you? Did you allow yourself to be bribed and bring the foe upon us? Answer, or you die!"

He had seized the messenger with a rude grasp and was shaking him as if he wished to verify his threat; the boy fell upon his knees.

"I only did what you ordered, nothing more. I waited till I saw the strangers enter Stephan Hersovac's house. There was no one in it except his wife and Danira."

"Danira!" repeated Marco, in a hollow, thoughtful tone. "She had disappeared when we came--where can she be?"

"Marco, decide!" urged Stephan, impatiently. "The troops are in the village; they may be here in half an hour. Let us go."

Obrevic did not hear. He was standing motionless with his eyes bent on the ground, as if brooding over some monstrous thought. The instinct of jealousy guided him into the right track, and suddenly, like a flash of lightning, an idea pierced the gloom--he guessed the truth.

"Now I know, I know the traitor!" he cried in terrible excitement. "Danira--that's why she trembled and turned pale when I vowed vendetta against this Gerald von Steinach. She wants to save him, even at the cost of treason, but she shall not succeed. He shall fall first by my hand, and then she who is leading the foe upon us. No departure! No retreat! We will stay and await the enemy."

It was a mad design to enter with his little band upon a conflict with a force double its number, and no prospect existed except certain defeat. All the men felt this, and therefore refused to obey. Impatiently and angrily they clamored for departure, the cry rose on all sides, but in vain.

Since Obrevic had recognized in Gerald his rival, he no longer asked whether he was delivering himself and all his companions to destruction; his hate, inflamed to madness, knew but one thought: revenge.

"Do you not dare hold out?" he shouted. "Cowards! I have long known what was in your minds. If it leads to defeat, to surrender, I shall stay. Out of my path, Stephan! Out of my path, I say--do not prevent me, or you shall be the first to fall!"

He swung his sabre threateningly. Stephan drew back. He knew the blind rage that no longer distinguished between friend and foe, and the others, too, knew their leader. No one made any farther opposition, only the old gray-haired mountaineer with the flashing eyes called after him in warning tones:

"Marco Obrevic, beware. The Vila spring allows no vengeance and no blood."

Marco laughed scornfully.

"Let it prevent me then! If God above should descend from heaven Himself, He will not stay me; I will keep my vow."

They were almost the same words Danira had uttered in this very spot a few hours before. But what was then a cry of mortal anguish now became a fierce, scornful challenge.

Marco raised his head toward the brightening morning sky as though to hurl the defiance into its face, and with uplifted weapon entered the rocky gateway, the precinct protected by the spell.

Just at that moment the *bora* again blew one last violent blast, raging over the earth as if all the spirits of evil were abroad. The men had flung themselves on the ground to escape the force of the gale, and the boy did the same.

Then the earth beneath them trembled and shook, while above echoed a sound like thunder. There was a crashing, rumbling, deafening noise as though the whole ravine was falling into ruins--then a deep, horrible silence.

Stephan was the first to rise, but his dark face grew ashy pale as he looked around him. The huge gateway created by Nature herself for the ravine, had vanished, and in its place a heap of broken rocks and boulders barred the entrance. The peak which for centuries had hung down threateningly, had fallen, The Vila spring had guarded its inviolability.

The others also rose, but no one uttered a word. Silent and awe-stricken, they gazed at the mass of ruins and the body of their chief who had been killed by the falling rock. Marco Obrevic lay buried under it. Only a portion of his face was visible, but it was the face of a corpse.

The fierce sons of the mountains were familiar with all the horrors of battle. They looked death in the face daily and hourly, but in the presence of this sign they trembled and the fearful answer their leader's scoff had received was spoken to them also. All crowded around Stephan Hersovac, the younger and now the only chief of the tribe, and a low, eager consultation took place. But it did not last long, and seemed to end in the most perfect unanimity of opinion. After a few minutes Stephan separated from his companions and approached the edge of the ravine from a different direction.

Here he shouted a few Slavonic words. Gerald, who thoroughly understood the language, answered in the same tongue. Then the leader gave the signal for departure, and the little band marched silently and gloomily away. They could not take Marco's body with them. It would have required hours to remove the mass of rock that covered the corpse.

Through the pale, gray light of morning appeared the party sent to secure Gerald and George, accompanied by Father Leonhard, who had joined the expedition when he learned its object, and had bravely endured the toilsome march through the night and tempest.

It had gradually grown light, so that everything could be distinctly seen, and the troops perceived Stephan and his men vanish in the distance.

"I hope we have not come too late," said the officer in command. "There is the enemy. If only they have not done their bloody work."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the priest. "We have reached the spot, but I don't see the rock gateway Danira described, there is nothing but a heap of stones. Can we have made a mistake?"

"We shall know immediately. Forward! Let us search the ravine. We must find them, alive or dead."

The men marched rapidly on, but before it was possible to obtain a glimpse of the ravine, the names of the missing comrades were shouted.

"Herr von Steinach--Gerald!" rang at the same instant from the lips of officer and priest, while Bartel, who was also present and had completely forgotten the affectionate admonition of his friend and countryman, called in a most piteous tone:

"George! George Moosbach!"

"Here's George!" replied the voice of the incorrigible Tyrolese, who had just emerged from the

ravine. "And here's my lieutenant, too, safe and sound. How are you, comrades? I knew it! I knew you wouldn't leave us in the lurch! And Father Leonhard too! Good-morning, your reverence!"

He climbed on top of the cliff and Gerald appeared behind him. Both received an eager, joyous greeting, and then followed a perfect cross-fire of questions, explanations and reports, but while Gerald was giving his comrade and Father Leonhard a minute description of what had occurred, George seized his countryman by the sleeve and asked excitedly: "Bartel, you've come from the fort--how is Jovica?"

Father Leonhard also had a similar question to answer. Gerald took the first opportunity to draw him aside and inquire anxiously:

"Where is Danira? Has she returned to the fort?"

"No; after pointing out the way so that we could not miss it, she went back to the village. She did not wish to witness the probable conflict. Gerald, it seems to me that the young girl has a dangerous resolve. Not a word could be won from her about it, but I fear she means to tell her countrymen what she has done, and then she is lost!"

"Not now!" said the young officer, with suppressed emotion. "The war is over, we shall conclude peace. Stephan Herso vac as he marched away called to me that he would come to the fort to-morrow with some of his followers to conduct negotiations. I think he has long desired to do so, but Obrevic's influence deterred him.

"Thank God! Then he will not avenge on his sister the step he will himself take to-morrow; she could not be induced to remain under our protection."

"I think she will now confide herself to mine," said Gerald, with a joyous light sparkling in his eyes. "She must learn this very hour that no blood has flowed here save that of the unhappy man who lies lifeless yonder, and that was shed by no human hand; it was a judgment of God Himself, whom he defied. Your reverence, you have come too late to give the dead chief the last consolations of the church. He died unreconciled to himself and to his God."

They turned toward the pile of shattered rocks, around which the others had already gathered, but all made way for Father Leonhard.

The priest slowly advanced and gazed down a few seconds at the rigid, blood-stained face, then raising the cross he wore in his girdle and holding it above the dead man he said, with deep solemnity:

"Vengeance is mine! I will repay, saith the Lord."

VIII.

The insurrection was over, the last desperate resistance made by Marco Obrevic at the head of his tribe ceased with his death. Stephan Herso vac was not a man to uphold a lost cause to his own destruction; he lacked both the obstinacy and the energy of his predecessor. He had really appeared at the fort and accepted the conditions offered; so the revolt, so far as this mountain province was concerned, was ended.

True, weeks and months elapsed before the troops returned home, and Gerald's regiment was one of the last to leave. It remained some time in Cattaro before the embarkation, but fate spared the young officer an unpleasant meeting. Colonel Arlow and his daughter were no longer in the city.

During the whole rebellion the commandant had displayed so much discretion and energy in his difficult and responsible position that due recognition of his services was not delayed. He was recalled from his post to receive a fitting promotion, and assigned to the command of a garrison in one of the Austrian capitals.

It had long been his desire to exchange the distant Dalmatian fortress for garrison duty at home, and it was doubtless owing to this fact that the transfer was made so speedily.

The new commandant arrived much earlier than he was expected, and directly after his predecessor quitted the city and was already in his home when Gerald's regiment entered Cattaro.

The young officer had passed through a season of severe trial, months of conflict with all the obstacles that warred against his love. He had been compelled, in the fullest sense of the word, to fight, but he knew how to assert the claim that hour of mortal peril had given him.

He had seen Danira again when the troops from the Vila ravine returned to the village to take a short rest after their hurried march, and here a final struggle occurred to induce the young girl to keep silence. She was firmly resolved to tell her countrymen what she had done and who had brought the relief.

Although peace and reconciliation were close at hand, she would not have been sure of her life a single hour after such a confession, but the terrible event which ended Marco's life uttered its decisive word here also, and bowed the girl's stubborn will. And it was her lover who pleaded, who with all the influence of his devotion persuaded her that here, where no blood had flowed by her fault, no atonement was required. Obstacles and barriers of every kind barred the possibility of a union--the tie still existing in name between Gerald and his former *fiancée*, the probable opposition from his mother, the conflict with Stephan, who certainly would not quietly permit his sister to wed a foreigner; but none of these things could shake the young officer's courage and confidence since he had Danira's promise to be his, though he left her with a heavy heart in her brother's house, which for the present was her only refuge.

In the fierce altercation, when, at the approach of the troops, all crowded around their reluctant chief to urge retreat, and every one shouted and screamed at the same moment, Marco's last words, in which he uttered his suspicion of Danira, had either been unheard or not fully understood--except by Stephan, and the latter preferred to keep silence. He did not wish to know what he no longer possessed the right to punish, since he had himself gone to the enemy and submitted to his terms.

Marco Obrevic, with iron consistency, would have sacrificed his love, his wife, at such a discovery. Stephan was differently constituted. He did not wish to see his sister die by the hands of his countrymen, and he knew that she was lost if even a suspicion arose against her. He therefore pretended to believe what was told him and his companions at the fort--to protect Danira from any act of vengeance--that the troops, without any suspicion of Gerald's fate, had set out for the purpose of seeking the enemy whom they believed to be in that direction, and were greatly surprised when, on the way, they found their officer.

This explanation satisfied the mountaineers, who were not in the habit of pondering over anything irrevocable. The apparent accident seemed to them only a confirmation of the judgment which had overtaken their leader because he had ventured to defy the ancient, time-hallowed tradition of his people. No suspicion was aroused against Danira. Not until the hour of parting did Stephan learn from her lips what to him was no secret.

George Moosbach, whose time of service would expire in a few weeks, was very proud of returning home decked with a medal for bravery as one of the conquerors of Krivoscia, but he was much out of humor and greatly offended because Father Leonhard would not permit him to practice his paternal duties to the degree he thought necessary.

The meeting at the fort when Jovica, with enthusiastic joy, flew to greet her protector, and George could find no end to his words of welcome, had made the priest very uneasy, and he afterward restricted their intercourse as far as possible. Besides, he was seriously embarrassed to decide how to dispose of the young girl. Jovica had neither home nor relatives, and though it was Father Leonhard's intention to make her a Christian, his official duties gave him little time to act the part of teacher.

The girl had not learned much German and was just beginning to understand the precepts of Christianity when the order arrived for the regiment to march to Cattaro, and thus the question what was to become of the "little Pagan" had to be seriously considered. George wanted to take her to the Moosbach Farm and formally present her to his parents as his adopted child, but Father Leonhard, who knew the characters of the farmer and his wife better, opposed this plan, until at last Gerald made a suggestion which was adopted by both parties.

He proposed that Jovica, who had proved very capable and obliging, should accompany Danira, with whom she had the tie of a common country and language, as a sort of maid, and remain under her protection until her future was finally decided. True, George was only half satisfied with this arrangement, which in his opinion did not give sufficient importance to his paternal rights, but as it afforded him the opportunity to see his *protégée* daily he submitted.

The hour of embarkation had come, and the steamer which conveyed the officers and a small detachment of the men steered out into the bay.

On the guards of the vessel, a little apart from his comrades, stood Gerald, and by his side Danira, who, since the day before, had borne his name. Father Leonhard had privately married them on the day previous to their departure.

The young wife wore a simple travelling dress, yet there was a peculiar charm in her appearance which it had lacked even when the picturesque costume of her country had lent her beauty so effective a setting. The gloomy, defiant expression that had formerly marred this

loveliness had passed away. In the bright sunshine that flooded the deck the youthful figure no longer stood like a dark shadow; the radiance rested on her face also, a reflection of the happiness that so vividly illumined her husband's features.

The shore already began to recede, and the steamer was just passing the commandant's house, from whose windows Danira had watched the approach of the vessel which brought, with Gerald, her fate and future.

The window, from which Edith's light figure had leaned while her laughing, happy eyes sought her lover, was now closed. The memory of the price her happiness had cost suddenly overwhelmed the young wife, and she turned away to hide her tears. Gerald noticed it.

"It is hard for you to leave your home, I know!" he said, bending toward her. But she shook her head.

"It is only hard because I must go thus, without one farewell, without a parting word from my brother. Peace is now restored, and as chief of a tribe he often comes to Cattaro; but on my wedding day he did not appear, I was obliged to go to the altar without my only living relative."

"Did you expect anything different after the manner in which Stephan received my suit? He seemed to consider it almost an insult, and made it hard enough for me to win you; I was forced to fairly wrest you from him. You do not imagine how painful it has been for me to know that you were surrounded by those who were daily and hourly striving to tear you from me, while I was still absent in the field."

"Was not the same attempt made to influence you? And you suffered more keenly under it than I, for in your case the opposition came from the person who was dearest to you on earth. Our marriage also lacks your mother's blessing."

"Not by any fault of mine!" replied Gerald. "I tried every possible means of obtaining her consent. For months, in my letters to her, I have entreated, pleaded, raged--all in vain. Her sole answer was the stern 'no,' the obstinate prohibition, till I was at last forced to remember that I am no longer a child, but a man who knows what he desires in life, and will not suffer his happiness to be destroyed by prejudices. You are right, we have purchased this happiness dearly; it will cost us both home and the love of our nearest relatives--do you think the price too high for what we have obtained?"

There was passionate tenderness in the question, and his young wife's look gave him a fitting answer.

After a pause she said gently:

"Then you will not enter your home again, will not even try to personally induce your mother--"

"No," Gerald resolutely interrupted. "She refuses to see you, so I shall not go to her. I know what I owe my wife; either Castle Steinach will receive you as its future mistress, or it will never see me within its walls. I know the hostile influence acting against us; my mother may be stern and proud, but this boundless harshness to her only son is no part of her character; it is Arlow's work! You know that after our betrothal, I wrote to him frankly and unreservedly, but with the respect of a son; he vouchsafed no reply, but instantly wrote to my mother, representing the affair to her from his point of view. She received the first news from him before my letter reached her hands, and how the tidings were conveyed I perceived from her reply. Since his return home he has constantly fanned the flames, and at last made an open breach."

"I can endure his hatred," said Danira, whose eyes were still fixed upon the house. "I have unintentionally thwarted his favorite wish, and he always cherished an aversion towards me, but to have Edith turn from me in persistent resentment was at first more than I could bear. She knows from my letter how and where we met, knows that mortal peril first brought me to your arms. I concealed nothing, and, with all the ardent love of the friend, the sister, implored her forgiveness if I had caused her pain--she has not sent even one line in answer."

"Her father would not have allowed it, his command----"

"Edith never lets herself be denied anything. She is accustomed to obey the voice of her heart, and is all-powerful with her father. Had she wished to write me she would have done so, in spite of any opposing influence; but she cannot pardon me for robbing her of your love--I understand that."

Gerald was silent; he would not own how heavily this unforgiving resentment on the part of his mother and Edith weighed upon him. It cast a dark shadow on the happiness of the newly-wedded pair.

Meantime the conversation between the officers had grown louder and more animated, and Lieutenant Salten now said:

"Gerald has been the wisest of us all. He is taking away an enviable souvenir of the campaign, and will make a sensation in the garrison with his beautiful trophy of the war. When people learn

the romance associated with it---"

"You were somewhat involved in the romance too," interrupted another of the group laughing. "Your stolen portfolio, at any rate, played an important part in the affair."

"Yes, that confounded boy who made himself so officious and was sent off on suspicions of being a spy, robbed me of it and instantly carried it to his master. Of course they could do nothing with the notes and letters, but the portfolio itself served as a means of luring Gerald into the trap. Had the plot succeeded we should have had one brave comrade the less, and--ah, there comes the young couple! See how lovely Frau von Steinach looks in the full glare of the sunlight! I stick to it, Gerald is bringing home the best prize of the whole campaign."

The other officers seemed to be of the same opinion, for when Gerald now approached with his wife, they vied with each other in attentions to the latter, and the young pair instantly became the centre of the circle, from which they could not escape for some time.

Meanwhile George came out of the cabin with Jovica, whom he had succeeded in finding, and took her to a part of the deck at some little distance from his companions, who made no attempt to interrupt them, for it was well known that George was very sensitive about his *protégée*, and really would not hesitate to fight half the company if he were irritated. But just now he looked as dignified as though he was Father Leonhard himself, and his tone was equally grave as he began:

"Look at your home once more, Jovica, you are seeing it for the last time! True, this Krivoscia is a God-forsaken country, and we thank all the saints that we are safe out of it again, but it is your native land, and that must be respected."

Jovica glanced toward the mountains because her companion was pointing to them, but she understood very little of his speech, and the parting from her home did not appear to trouble her much, for she looked extremely happy, though she knew the ship was bearing her to a distant country.

"Now we are going to Tyrol," George continued. "To the beautiful land of the Tyrol, a very different place from your mountain wildernesses. There are forests, rivers, vineyards and castles, and there's not another place in the whole world equal to the Moosbach Farm. Some day it will belong to me. Do you understand, Jovica? I'm no poor vagabond like Bartel, who, when he takes off his uniform, must enter somebody's service. I'm the only son and heir of farmer Moosbach, and in our country that means something."

Jovica listened attentively, but her knowledge of German was not yet sufficiently comprehensive for her to understand these boasted advantages. George saw that she did not perceive his meaning and tried to enlarge her ideas by seizing both her hands and drawing her toward him, when Father Leonhard suddenly emerged from the cabin and stood directly behind the pair.

"What are you doing on this deck among the men, Jovica?" he asked, with unwonted sternness. "Your place is over yonder with Frau von Steinach."

"Why, I was with her, your reverence, and none of the others would dare come near her!" replied George, instantly taking up his *protégée's* cause. "I wouldn't advise them to try it. If any one does, he'll go heels over head into the water the very next minute."

Father Leonhard's face showed that he was not particularly edified by this protection, but he merely turned to Jovica and repeated:

"Go to Frau von Steinach!" When she had retired he approached his parishioner, who wore a very belligerent expression.

"What does this mean, George? I have forbidden you, once for all, to take such familiarities with the young girl, but you don't seem to heed my command. I am very much displeased with you."

"Well, your reverence, I'm not pleased either!" said George, defiantly. "I found Jovica and adopted her as a child, but no one respects my paternal rights. If I even look at the girl your reverence appears and gives me a lecture, and then the lieutenant comes and unceremoniously takes her away as his wife's maid. I'm not consulted at all. I have nothing whatever to say about the matter--I won't bear it any longer."

"I have already explained to you several times that you are far too young to fill such a position. Things can't go on in this way."

"You are perfectly right, there, your reverence!" assented the young Tyrolese, so emphatically that the priest looked at him in surprise. "I have longed seen that, and was just going to speak to you about it. The place of a father doesn't suit me, I find no pleasure in it, so I'll begin the business from the other end. In short, I will marry Jovica."

Father Leonhard did not look much astonished by this declaration which he had long dreaded, but a frown darkened his brow and his voice sounded very grave:

"You will do nothing of the sort! The girl is scarcely beyond childhood, and--not at all--why, you can't even understand each other yet."

"No, we don't understand each other, but we're tremendously in love with each other," said George, earnestly, "so the best thing we can do is to get married."

"And your parents! Have you thought what they will say to such a choice?"

"Yes, my parents! Of course they'll make a row that can be heard all over Tyrol, so I'll follow Herr Gerald's example and get married on the way. We shall stay a week in Trieste, your reverence, you can unite us there. Of course you must first baptize my future wife, for she can't remain a pagan, and then marry her directly after. So, when I get home the whole affair will be settled, and let my parents and the Moosbach Farm be as much upset as they please, I shall have Jovica!"

The plan flowed so glibly from the lips of the young Tyrolese that it was evident he had pondered over it a long time, but unluckily Father Leonhard did not seem inclined to adopt this admirable suggestion, for he answered sternly:

"Put this nonsense out of your head; it can't be thought of under any circumstances."

"I'm only following my lieutenant's example," George persisted. "Heaven and earth were moved to prevent his marriage; his mother and Colonel Arlow, the brother-in-law and the whole people of Krivoscia cried out against it. He didn't mind it in the least, but had his own way, and I mean to do the same."

"But Herr von Steinach's case is entirely different. He has been of age several years, and besides, before taking the decisive step, he made every effort in his power to obtain his mother's consent. It was hard enough for me to bless a marriage which lacked the mother's benediction, and I finally yielded only to the force of circumstances. Stephan Hersovac's opposition to the marriage rendered it impossible for his sister to remain longer in his house, and it was equally impossible for her to accompany her lover as his affianced wife. So I performed the wedding ceremony in the hope that I should yet succeed in reconciling the mother. But you cannot yet marry without your parents' consent and you know as well as I do that you will never obtain it. They will simply believe that you are out of your senses."

"Yes, I once thought so myself," replied George with the utmost composure, "but people change their minds. I told you, your reverence, that the whole race up yonder practice witchcraft, especially the women. Dani--the young baroness, I mean--tried it on my lieutenant, and Jovica has used hers on me; I'm just as far gone as he is. But this witchcraft isn't at all disagreeable and does not imperil the salvation of the soul, if a priest gives it his blessing as I saw yesterday in church."

"But I repeat that the case is totally different. Gerald's wife belongs to a foreign people, it is true, but she is descended from one of the most distinguished families of the race, and the education she received in the commandant's house, with her own personal qualities, fit her for the position in life she will henceforth occupy. Jovica is the child of poor shepherds, she is not even a Christian, understands neither our language nor customs, and perhaps will never learn to accommodate herself to them. You must see yourself that such a girl can never make a suitable mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

"I see nothing at all except that I must have Jovica. Nothing else will do, and I'll get her too, so I have no anxiety on that score."

"And suppose your parents disinherit the disobedient son? Gerald von Steinach, under any circumstances, is the heir of his father's property, and has already taken possession of it, but farmer Moosbach can deprive you of the farm at any time, and from what I know of him he will do so if you persist in your own way. What then?"

"Then I'll let the farm go to the deuce!" George obstinately declared. "Jovica is worth more to me than all the Moosbach property. The lieutenant will not object to keeping me with him, I know, and his wife will have a countrywoman in mine. I'm in earnest, your reverence. I'll give up my inheritance if it costs me Jovica."

Father Leonhard saw that he was in earnest, and knew the young fellow's obstinacy sufficiently well to dread a serious family quarrel. For the present, however, the conversation was interrupted by an officer, who approached the priest and requested him to accompany him to the forward deck.

Father Leonhard consented, after saying gravely to George: "We will discuss this matter further," but the latter leaned defiantly against the side of the cabin, folded his arms, and gazed around the decks to discover Jovica.

The young Slav was with Danira, who, after some time, sent her down to the cabin again on some errand. She obediently avoided the stern of the ship and sorrowfully descended the stairs, but had scarcely entered the saloon, which for the moment chanced to be empty, when there was a clattering noise on the steps and George himself stood in the doorway.

Jovica's whole face brightened, but she glanced anxiously toward the stairs, and said timidly:

"Father Leonhard!"

"He's up on deck," replied George. "Yet even if he should come, no matter: I've just told him how we both feel, but I happened to think that I haven't spoken of it to you, Jovica. You must be asked, so I want to marry you! Will you have me?"

The abrupt, laconic proposal met with an unexpected obstacle. Jovica had no idea what the strange word meant. She repeated it with a foreign accent, but in a tone that plainly showed she associated no meaning with it.

"Oh, yes, she doesn't understand," said George, somewhat perplexed, realizing for the first time his future wife's education. "Well, then, she must learn. Come here, Jovica, and listen to me. Yesterday we went to church and saw the lieutenant and his bride married. We will go to church, too, and Father Leonhard will marry us in the same way. Do you understand that?"

He tried to speak distinctly, and occasionally introduced a Slavonic word, which had some success, for the young girl nodded eagerly and answered in broken German:

"I know--baptize--become a Christian."

"Yes, and then directly after--marry!" said George, emphasizing the word energetically, as if he hoped in this way to make her understand its meaning, but Jovica's knowledge of the language had not yet extended to the idea of marriage, and she only repeated inquiringly:

"Become a Christian?"

"That's only a minor affair, the main thing is the marriage!" cried the impatient suitor, whose piety deserted him on this point. "Girl, for heaven's sake, you must understand! why, it's what you were born for! Marry--have a wedding--get married!"

But no matter how vehemently and almost angrily he emphasized the words, it was all in vain, the young girl looked helplessly at him, and was apparently on the verge of tears.

"She really doesn't understand," said George, in sheer despair. "I must make it plainer to her," and as though an inspiration had suddenly come he embraced his *protégée*, pressing a hearty kiss on her lips.

Strangely enough his meaning now seemed to dawn on Jovica. True, she started at the kiss, but instead of making the slightest resistance she nestled closer to the young soldier, gazing at him with sparkling eyes, while in a low, but infinitely sweet tone, she repeated the word George had taught her with so much difficulty.

"Thank Heaven, she has understood it at last; I ought to have tried that first!" he said, with great satisfaction, and while repeating several times the new method of instruction which had succeeded so admirably, added, by way of explanation:

"That's the way people do when they marry, and before, too. The only difference is that before a priest interferes and forbids, and afterwards he has nothing to forbid, but gives it his blessing. Now come to the lieutenant and his wife. They must be the first to know that we have settled the matter and are going to be married. Jovica--say the word once more! It sounds so pretty when you bring it out so clumsily."

And Jovica, whose faculty of comprehension had wonderfully increased, uttered the newly-learned word to the entire satisfaction of her tutor and future husband.

Meantime the steamer had continued her course, and was now approaching the outlet of the bay. Gerald and Danira looked back at the slowly disappearing scene.

The waves rippled and flashed in the sunlight. Far away on the shore lay Cattaro with its white houses and towering citadel, and directly above it towered the dark mountains, their rugged, riven peaks bathed in the full radiance of morning. The ship now passed through the straits at the end of the harbor. The gloomy, threatening cliffs rose on either side as if to bar the way. Then the blue, heaving sea opened before them, as it had looked from the rocky height on that memorable day--a mist-veiled, sun-illuminated waste of waters.

The voyage had been a swift and pleasant one, and after a short stay in Trieste the train conveyed the regiment to its native mountains and former garrison, the capital of southern Tyrol.

The city was all astir, for every one had hurried to welcome the returning soldiers who had endured so many a hard fight on the farthest frontier of the empire, and now, after dangers and privations of every kind, were coming home in peace.

At the railway station and immediately around it a joyous throng waited for the train; the country people especially had flocked there in crowds. There was scarcely a peasant family in the neighborhood that did not have son, brother or some other relative in the Imperial Chasseurs to whom they now wished to give the first welcome home.

At last the thunder of cannon far and near among the mountains announced the approach of the train, which, amid loud cheers and waving banners, ran into the station. The cars were opened and the whole regiment poured out upon the platform, to which only the magistrates and a few of the most distinguished citizens had been admitted.

After the first flood of official and friendly greetings was over, Gerald von Steinach, who had his young wife leaning on his arm, attempted to make his way through the throng, he too had seen many a familiar face, pressed many a hand, and received numerous congratulations, for through his comrades' letters his marriage was already known in the garrison; but they were only the greetings of strangers.

The arms which at his departure had clasped him with such anxious love were not outstretched to him on his return; no mother waited to welcome him home, and yet his whole heart was devoted to his mother and hitherto he had been her all.

In this hour of universal joyous meeting the young officer felt, with infinite grief, what he had lost. The parental home, which now opened to every one, was closed to him and his young wife, and perhaps would remain so forever. Much as he strove to conceal his depression he could not entirely banish the cloud that rested on his brow, and Danira guessed what he was missing; she best knew what his choice of a wife had cost him. She instantly assented when he proposed withdrawing from the crowd as soon as possible and driving to his lodgings in the city, where the young couple intended to remain until the arrangements for the future home had been made.

Behind them walked Jovica, who had travelled in the same compartment, and George, who, though obliged to ride with his comrades, had shot through the crowd like a rocket as soon as he arrived, to take the place he considered his rightful property.

The young Slav now wore the Tyrolese peasant costume, which had been obtained for her on the way, and in which she looked extremely pretty. Her shining black hair was carefully arranged in braids, and her large black eyes gazed curiously and joyously at the throng. But her appearance was still extremely childish and entirely foreign; one could see at the first glance that she belonged to a different race.

George walked with great importance by her side. He had not entrusted his love affair to his lieutenant in vain, the latter's advocacy proved very effective. Gerald and Danira had warmly espoused his cause, and, during the journey, even won over Father Leonhard.

The priest, it is true, had no objection to Jovica personally; he had himself become fond of his gentle, modest, docile pupil; but he still shook his head doubtfully at the idea of seeing the "little pagan" the mistress of the Moosbach Farm, and declared it to be impossible to obtain the consent of George's parents, though he had promised his mediation.

For the present the priest's attention was claimed by some ecclesiastical brothers who had also been present at the reception of the regiment in the station.

Gerald had just escaped from the throng, and was walking with Danira toward the door, when both stopped as though rooted to the floor at the sight of the young lady who was waiting there to meet them. The dainty, graceful figure in the elegant travelling dress, the fair hair whose curls escaped from beneath the little hat, the sparkling blue eyes--the whole vision was so familiar and so dear. Gerald dropped the arm of his wife, who stood pale and speechless. He intended to face the painful meeting alone, but the young girl had already rushed to Danira and flung both arms round her neck.

"Danira, you naughty runaway! So I am to find you again in the Tyrol."

"Edith, how came you here?" cried the young wife, in half-joyous, half-startled tones. "Is it an accident?"

"Oh! no. I came especially to receive you. I wanted to bring you the first greeting," replied Edith. She hesitated a few seconds, then hastily turned and held out her hand to her former lover. "How do you do, Gerald? Welcome home with your wife!"

Gerald bowed silently over the little hand that lay in his. He did not feel its slight quiver when

his lips pressed it. He only saw Edith's blooming face, her smile, and a deep sigh of relief escaped him. Thank God! Here at least he had caused no suffering as he had feared; here at least forgiveness was proffered.

"Did you really come on our account?" cried Danira, with eager joy. "Oh, you do not suspect what this welcome from your lips is to me--to us both."

The young lady drew back a step, with a comic assumption of formality.

"Don't be so impetuous, madame! I have another important mission to discharge, and must maintain my dignity as official ambassador. Castle Steinach sends a greeting to its young master and mistress, and is ready to receive them. They will find open hearts and arms there. Here is a letter from your mother, Gerald; only a few lines, in which she calls her son and daughter to her."

"Edith--this is impossible--is it your work?" cried Gerald, still doubting as he took the note which bore his mother's handwriting.

"My first essay in diplomacy! I think it hasn't resulted so badly, and it wasn't very easy either; for both aunt and papa were united against me. But now you must let me have Danira to myself for half an hour, Gerald. We must part again immediately, and I want to have her alone at least once more."

"Part! Why, surely you will go with us?"

"No, I shall take the next express train and join my father in G. But your mother expects you at Steinach this very day, and you ought not to keep her waiting; great preparations have been made for your reception."

Meanwhile Gerald had hastily torn open and glanced through the letter, which he now handed to his wife. It really contained only a few lines, but they confirmed Edith's words. It was the greeting of a mother calling her children to her.

"How do you do, Fräulein? I'm here again, too!" said George, taking advantage of the momentary pause to introduce himself, and he saw with satisfaction that he was not forgotten.

The old mischievous smile hovered round the young lady's lips as she turned toward him.

"George Moosbach! Have you got safe back from Krivoscia? After all it isn't quite so bad as you represented it, for I see you wear the medal for courage. Listen, George, you make a great impression upon me as a returning conqueror! What of the offer with which you once honored me? I am now free again, and should not be wholly disinclined to become the mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

"I thank you very kindly," stammered George, intensely confused. "I'm very sorry, but--I'm already engaged."

With these words he pulled Jovica forward and presented her; but Edith now burst into a merry laugh.

"Another Krivoscian? For Heaven's sake, did all the Imperial Chasseurs get betrothed and married there? There will be a rebellion among the Tyrolese girls. I think you are very inconsistent, George. You protested that day, by everything you held dear, that you would marry nobody but a Tyrolese, and made the sign of the cross as if you saw Satan himself when I suggested the daughters of that country, whom you preferred to dub 'savages.'"

"Fräulein," replied George, solemnly, "there is nothing, not even in this world, so bad that it has not one good thing. The only good thing Krivoscia had was Jovica--and that I brought away with me."

"Well, I wish you and your Jovica every possible happiness. But now come, Danira, that we may have at least half an hour's chat. Gerald must give you up for that time. Come, we shall not be interrupted in the waiting-room to-day."

She drew Danira away, while Gerald, who saw Father Leonhard coming hastily went to him to tell him his unexpected and joyful news.

The little waiting-room was, in truth, perfectly empty; every one was pressing toward the door of the station.

The two young ladies sat close together. Edith had put her arm around her adopted sister in the old familiar way, and was laughing and chatting continuously; but Danira could not be so easily deceived in this respect as Gerald.

She herself loved, and knew that a love which had once taken root in the heart cannot be so speedily forgotten. She said little, but her eyes rested steadily on Edith's features.

The pretty face still seemed unchanged in bloom and brightness, but it was only seeming. Around the little mouth was an expression all its smiles were powerless to banish; an expression

that told of secret sorrow; and any one gazing deep into the blue eyes could see the shadow in them. The vivacious gaiety still remained, but it was no longer the mirth of a glad careless child who had known no grief. In the midst of all the jesting there sometimes echoed a tone which sounded as if the speaker were striving to repress tears.

At such a moment Danira suddenly clasped both the young girl's hands and said softly:

"Cease jesting, Edith. I have caused you pain. I could not help doing so; but, believe me, I have myself suffered most. I felt so deeply wounded when you sent me no answer.

"Are you angry about it? I could not----"

"No, you could not answer then--I ought to have understood."

A burning blush suddenly crimsoned Edith's face, and she tried to avoid the gaze whose secret scrutiny she felt.

"At first papa would not allow it," she said hastily. "He wanted to forbid my writing to you at all and I yielded; but before we left Cattaro I was firmly resolved to bring you the answer in this form. True, my courage fell when we accepted Baroness von Steinach's pressing invitation to spend a few days with her, for matters looked very badly at the castle. Gerald was under a ban, and you, too. No one was permitted to mention your names, and papa fanned the fire. So long as he remained I could do nothing, but I managed to have him go to his garrison alone and leave me behind."

"And then you interceded for us?"

"Fairly intrigued, according to the very best rules of diplomacy. I was myself amazed at the talent I suddenly developed. The baroness tried to console me for my lost lover, but I turned the tables by energetically taking her to task for her hard-heartedness. I tried to put the affair in the right light by making her consider that you are really a Krivoscian princess."

"Oh, Edith!"

"Well, isn't it true? Your father was chief of his tribe, your brother is its head now. Chief, prince, king--it all comes to the same thing in the end. I made this clear to the baroness, and would have traced your lineage back to Mahomet--oh dear, no, that wouldn't do, you are a Christian--or to Saint George himself. I told her so much about your father's heroic deeds that she became filled with reverence, and then I gave her your letter to me and made her admire your own courage and Gerald's rescue at the Vila spring. That shook the fortress, and when I stormed it with an appeal to her maternal love and Gerald's letters were produced again, it yielded. You see I am not a degenerate daughter of my father; my first campaign ended with victory along the whole line."

The young wife sat silently with down-cast eyes. She felt the generosity of this conduct and at the same time realized how greatly she had formerly undervalued Edith.

"And I must not even thank you!" she said with passionate fervor. "You want to escape our gratitude and leave us this very hour. Must it be?"

"I must go to papa, who expects me. Don't prevent me, Danira, I--cannot stay."

She tried to smile again, but this time she did not succeed, her lips only quivered and she was obliged to turn away to force back the rising tears. Then she felt Danira's arms clasp her, and her lips pressed to hers.

"Edith, don't try to deceive me like the others. I know what your brave championship of our happiness has cost you, and how you have suffered. You may surely confess it to me."

Edith did not contradict her. She only hid her face on Danira's shoulder, but how the tears streamed from her eyes!

"It was nothing," she sobbed. "A child's foolish dream--nothing more. Don't tell Gerald I have been crying--promise to say nothing to him--he ought not, must not know."

"Be calm, he shall learn nothing. It is enough for me to endure the grief of having robbed you of your happiness."

"No!" Edith's tears suddenly ceased as she started up. "No, Danira, I should not have been happy with him. I felt from the first moment that he did not love me, and knew it the instant he flamed into such passionate defence of you. He never had that look and tone for me; you first taught them to him. Is it not true that he can love ardently and make his wife infinitely happy?"

"Yes," replied Danira, softly, but the one word told enough.

Edith turned hastily away toward the window.

"There is the signal for the train! We have only a few minutes; let us bid each other farewell!"

Don't look so mournful, Danira, and don't grieve about me. I have no intention of going into a convent or sorrowing all my life. It must be delightful to devote your heart and soul to the man of your choice, but that destiny isn't allotted to everybody. It can't be done, as George says."

Just at that moment Gerald entered to tell them that the train was coming. He saw a bright face and heard only gay, cordial parting words. A few minutes after, Edith was seated in the car, nodding one more farewell through the window; then the train rolled on again and instantly disappeared from the gaze of those left behind.

George had quitted the station with Jovica to take her to his lieutenant's lodgings, where she was to wait for Danira.

There was an immense throng in the great open square outside. All the country people had flocked thither, each one trying to find his or her relatives among the returning soldiers. Everywhere were joyous meetings, shouts of delight, claspings of hands, and embracing, and whoever got into the midst of the residents of his native village, who usually went in troops, was almost stifled with tokens of friendship.

George had hitherto escaped this fate, but now a portly farmer and his equally corpulent wife, worked their way through the throng straight toward him, shouting his name while still a long distance off.

"By all the saints! there are my parents!" cried the young Tyrolese, joyously. "Did you really take the long journey here? Yes, here I am, alive and kicking, and have brought my whole head back with me! That's saying something, when a fellow returns from Krivoscia."

The farmer and his wife instantly seized upon their son and wanted him to walk between them, but Jovica, who, during the exchange of greetings, had remained behind him, now suddenly appeared. She had been frightened by the noise and crowd that surrounded her on all sides, and when she saw that her George was to be taken away she clung to his arm, beseeching him in the Slavonic tongue not to leave her.

The parents looked greatly surprised at the sudden appearance of the young girl who clung so confidently to their son. Luckily Jovica's extremely childish figure prevented them from suspecting the real relation between the pair.

Yet the farmer frowned, and his wife said slowly: "What does this mean?"

"This means--this is what I've brought back from my journey," replied George, who saw a storm rising which he wished for the present to avoid. Yet he did not release "what he had brought," but held her firmly by the hand.

"What does this mean? How came you by the child?" cried the farmer angrily, and his wife sharply added:

"The girl looks like a gipsy! Where did you pick her up! Out with the whole story."

Jovica, who during the journey had greatly enlarged her knowledge of the language, understood that the people before her were George's parents, but she also perceived their unkind reception. Tears filled her dark eyes, and she timidly repeated the words of greeting she had been taught "How do you do?" But the foreign accent completely enraged the mother.

"She can't even speak German," she cried furiously. "That's a pretty thing! Do you mean to bring her to us at the Moosbach Farm?"

"I won't have it!" said the farmer emphatically. "We want no foreign gipsies in the house. Let the girl go, and come with us; we're going home."

But George was not the man to leave his Jovica in the lurch. He only drew her closer to his side and answered with resolute defiance:

"Where the girl stays I shall stay, and if she cannot come to the farm I'll never return home. You must not scold me about Jovica, my dear parents, for, to tell the truth, I have chosen her for my wife."

His parents stood as if they had been struck by a thunderbolt, staring at their son as though they thought people might lose not only their heads but their wits in Krivoscia. Then a storm burst forth on both sides; it was fortunate that, in the general rejoicing, each person was absorbed in his own friends, and everybody was shouting and talking as loud in delight as Farmer Moosbach and his wife in their wrath, or there would have been a great excitement.

At last George, by dint of his powerful lungs, succeeded in obtaining a hearing.

"Give me a chance to speak for once!" he cried. "You don't know Jovica at all; she's a splendid girl, and even if she is still a pagan--"

He went no further. The thoughtless fellow had used the worst possible expedient. His mother fairly shrieked aloud in horror at the fatal word, and the farmer crossed himself in the face of his

future daughter-in-law.

"A pagan! Heaven help us! He wants to bring a pagan into the house. George, you are possessed by the devil!"

Jovica was trembling from head to foot. She saw only too plainly that she was the object of this aversion and began to weep bitterly, which destroyed the last remnant of George's patience.

"My dear parents," he shouted, with a furious gesture, as if he longed to knock the "dear parents" down, "I've always been an obedient son, but if you receive my future wife so, may a million--"

"George!" cried Jovica, anxiously seizing his uplifted arm with both hands. "George!"

"Yes, indeed--with all filial respect of course," growled George, instantly controlling himself when he heard her voice; but his parents were not soothed, and the quarrel was just kindling anew when Father Leonhard appeared, the crowd reverently making way for him. He hurriedly answered the joyous greetings proffered to him on all sides, and walked hastily up to the disputing family; for he saw that his presence was most needed there.

"God be with you. Farmer Moosbach," he said. "You and your wife are doubtless rejoicing to have your son back again. He has done well and fought bravely in the campaign, as you see by the medal on his breast."

"Help us, your reverence!" said the mother piteously. "Our boy is bewitched. He has brought home a pagan, a Turk, a witch, and wants to marry her."

"Look at the brown-skinned creature yonder, your reverence," the farmer chimed in with a wrathful laugh. "That's the future mistress of the Moosbach Farm. Say yourself whether George hasn't lost his senses. That is--"

"My pupil, to whom I taught the Christian religion, and who in a short time will receive the holy rite of baptism," said Father Leonhard with marked emphasis, laying his hand kindly with a protecting gesture, on the head of the weeping girl. "You need not reproach your son so harshly; it is principally due to him that this young soul has been won over to Christianity."

George's mother listened intently to the last words. She was a pious woman and perceived that, if George had such praiseworthy designs, he certainly could not be possessed by the devil. The farmer too was somewhat softened, and muttered:

"That's a different matter! But the girl doesn't come into my house."

"Then I'll take Jovica and go straight back with her to Krivoscia among the savages!" cried George with desperate energy. "I'd rather keep goats with her all my life than live at Moosbach Farm without her. True, they'll cut off my nose up there and both ears to boot, that's the custom among these barbarians when a new member is admitted, but no matter--I'll bear it for Jovica's sake."

The threat made some impression, especially on the mother, who now heard of this terrible custom for the first time. She clasped her hands in horror and looked at her George's nose, which suited his face so well, but the father angrily exclaimed:

"You'll do no such thing! You'll stay here in Tyrol among Christian people."

"Silence, George!" said Father Leonhard to the young soldier, who was about to make a defiant answer. "Do you want at the first moment of meeting to irritate your parents against you? Let me talk with them. Come, Farmer Moosbach, and you, too, dame, we will discuss the matter quietly; you have been speaking so loud that everybody is listening."

The attention of the bystanders had indeed been attracted, and George's last words were heard by a large circle of listeners, in whose minds they inspired positive terror. Father Leonhard now drew the parents aside with him and thus the dispute ended, but the report ran like wildfire from lip to lip that George Moosbach had brought home a Turkish girl, whom he wanted to marry, and he intended to have his nose and ears cut off directly after, because that was the custom at pagan weddings.

George did not trouble himself about all this, for Jovica was still weeping, and he at present was trying to comfort her.

"You and no one else will be the mistress of Moosbach Farm," he protested. "Don't cry, Jovica; you see Father Leonhard has taken the matter in hand, so it is half accomplished. A priest can manage everything in our country."

And the priest did not disappoint the confidence reposed in him. True, Father Leonhard had a hard struggle with the angry parents, and it required all their respect for his office to induce them to permit his mediation at all, but he knew how to strike the right chord at once. He explained to them that the object here was to save a soul for heaven, that it was really very meritorious in George to desire to transform the poor pagan girl whom he had found into a

Christian wife, and that a share in this blessed work was allotted to them, the parents.

This produced an effect first on the mother, who was really in mortal terror lest her son might fall into paganism if he returned to the wilderness.

Farmer Moosbach and his wife were pious Tyrolese, and the priest's interposition in behalf of the young lovers had great weight with them.

To have their heir woo a young foreign orphan, a poor girl, seemed to them something unprecedented, impossible. But since he desired at the same time to convert a pagan to Christianity and save a soul for heaven, the whole affair assumed a different shape. That would be talked of far and wide, and surround the Moosbach Farm with an actual halo of sanctity.

When, in conclusion, Father Leonhard spoke of Gerald's marriage and his mother's consent--wisely maintaining silence about her previous opposition--both his hearers became very thoughtful. If the proud Baroness von Steinach made no objection to a Krivoscian daughter-in-law, plain peasant-folk might surely agree to it.

After repeated and eager discussions they finally sent for their refractory son and heir, who speedily appeared before the tribunal.

"George, you will now go home with your parents and behave like an obedient son," said Father Leonhard, gravely. "When you have taken off your uniform you must prove yourself to be a capable farmer. Meanwhile Jovica will stay with young Frau von Steinach in order to learn German and become familiar with the customs of our country. Next month I intend to confer upon her the holy rite of baptism--your parents have promised to act as god-father and god-mother."

"Yes, your reverence, but you must make it a very grand affair, so that it will be talked of throughout the country," said farmer Moosbach, and his wife added:

"And all the priests in the neighborhood must be present,"

George expressed his joy in a jump that was sadly opposed to dignity and respect; then he eagerly kissed the priest's hand.

"Your reverence, I'll never forget this as long as I live! I said that a priest could set everything straight. Hurrah for the young mistress of Moosbach Farm!"

Half an hour later Gerald and his wife set out on their journey to Castle Steinach.

Jovica sat beside the coachman. Her tears were dried, and she looked extremely happy, for George had of course found time, before his departure, to come to her and tell the successful result of the dispute and the no less delightful fact that Moosbach Farm was only fifteen minutes' walk from Castle Steinach.

The carriage drove swiftly through the sunny valley of the Adige, which to-day seemed to have decked itself in the full radiance of its beauty to greet the returning son and his young wife. The wide landscape was steeped in golden sunlight, one vast vineyard, which was surrounded by a chain of villages like a garland, stretching upward even to the castles everywhere visible on the heights. The river, sparkling and glittering, also rippled a welcome, mountains towered aloft, the distant peaks veiled in blue mist, the nearer ones clothed with dark forests, while from the highest summits the gleam of snow was seen from the valley, to which the warm, soft south wind lent all the splendor of a southern clime.

"Is not my native land beautiful?" asked Gerald, with sparkling eyes. "Shall you miss your home here?"

"I shall miss nothing--with you," said the young wife, looking up at him with a smile.

"It shall be my care to make the new home dear to you. Yet I sometimes feel a secret dread that the old conflict may be renewed. You made me realize so long and so painfully, my Danira, that your people were hostile to mine."

"They have now concluded a treaty of peace, like ourselves. No, Gerald, you need not fear. All that I had to conquer and subdue was vanquished on that night of storm when I went from the Vila spring to the fort. The hardest choice was placed before me, a choice far more difficult than the decision between life and death. I chose your rescue--was not that enough?"

"Yet, even after that rescue, you intended to sacrifice your life and our happiness to an illusion. You would have been lost had that confession escaped your lips--and you were going to speak."

"It was no illusion, it would have been only an atonement," said Danira, with deep emotion. "I knew that Marco would resist any attack, and if a battle had ensued, if the blood of my people had been shed by you--I had summoned the enemy, the guilt would have been mine. That blood would have separated us forever. I could not have lived with such a memory. Then a higher power uttered Marco's doom and my pardon. No battle was fought; even the fierce sons of our

mountains saw in that sign what I recognized--a judgment of God."

FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): Preis means both prize and price, the play upon the word cannot be given in English.-
-Tr.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DANIRA ***

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