Danira

By

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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 over-yielding."

"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 repellant, 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 reproved. 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-illumined, 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 coarse 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

bowlders. 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 where 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 unsuspiciously 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 bowlder 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 foundling'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

bowlders 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 Hersovac 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

Hersovac 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 yon."

"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 many 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-illumined waste of waters.

IX.

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 yourself 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, clasping 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 confidingly 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.]